

Ohio

(Source: *Academic Content Standards for Social Studies, December 2002*, Ohio Department of Education)

The five criteria: An overview

Are the essentials of a civic core specified clearly?	Are the topics teachable within the allotted timeframe?	Do the documents provide a scope and sequence?	Is the essential content required of all students?	Are the important facts and ideas presented coherently across subjects?
★	☆	★	★	☆

Standards that largely meet the criteria are designated with a full star [★]; standards that partially meet the criteria are designated with a half star [☆]; and standards that do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

Summary:

This document replaces, and much improves upon, prior versions of Ohio’s social studies standards. It partly meets Criterion #1 with a good number of specific, key topics in U.S. studies, but is too light on world and Western civilization topics. It does not meet Criterion #2. Like other states with specific topics, it has many of them and too many expectations scattered among seven standards, given the amount of instructional time schools have at hand. It meets Criterion #3 in a strongly suggested scope and sequence for its upper elementary, middle, and high school courses. That is, in grade four, “Ohio, Its Past, Its Location, Its Government”; grade five, “Regions and People of North America”; grade six, “Regions and People of the World”; grade seven, “World Studies: Ancient Times to 1750”; grade eight, “U.S. Studies to 1877”; grade nine, “World Studies: 1750 to the Present”; grade ten, “U.S. Studies: 1877 to the Present”; grade eleven, “Political and Economic Decisions”; and grade twelve, “Preparing for Citizenship”. The document’s benchmarks are checkpoints at the end of each grade span (kindergarten to two, three to five, six to eight, nine to ten, and eleven to twelve). On Criterion #4, requirements, the grades five and eight benchmarks will be the bases for new Ohio achievement tests, and grade ten’s will be the basis for a new Ohio graduation test. The implication is that a common core of knowledge will be offered to all students, indicating that Criterion #4 is partially met. The document does not meet Criterion #5. The topics under its seven “standards” (or “strands” in many states) are not connected: history, government, people in societies, citizenship rights and responsibilities, geography, economics, social studies skills and methods.

Particulars:

The scope and sequence of courses is not ideal. Once again, geography and history are segregated into separate middle school courses, to the detriment of both. A majority of states begin integrated U.S. history and geography in grade five, demonstrating how they illuminate each other and lightening the load of topics for the grade eight course to 1877. The same is true for grades six and seven. The document says the grade six focus “is geographic rather than historic,” but it should not be a question of either/or. The two together strengthen each other, and teaching them in tandem over the two years of grades six and seven permits each course

to cover a much shorter era and increases the chances for both to study topics in some depth. The grade seven span of world history, from its origins to 1750, is too long even for high school. It does not allow for the memorable teaching of ideas, events, turning-points, and personalities from the ancient world to the eighteenth-century Enlightenment, and the eve of the American and French Revolutions. It is not likely to reach that crucial century, putting a burden on the high school world history course, which is supposed to begin in 1750. This, in turn, makes it difficult for ninth-grade teachers to reach the present.

As so often, U.S. history topics are more complete and better chosen than those for world history and Western civilization. Grade seven world studies does not carry the main beliefs and moral teachings of Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Judaism, Christianity, or Islam. It remains too general on Greek political ideas and institutions, and it skips the Roman Republic and the Empire itself. Most curiously, the grade seven standards have no topics after European exploration. World studies to 1750 must include at least the English Revolution contrasted to absolutism in France and Russia, the Scientific Revolution, and ideas of the Enlightenment. Except for “government and rights and responsibilities” (the latter mentions the English Bill of Rights), items under other standards in grades seven and eight remain abstract, but imply the need for a large share of teaching time in courses that are supposed to center on narrative history, government, geography, and economics. Grade nine world studies does pick up on Enlightenment ideas, the American and French Revolutions, and the Industrial Revolution, but leaves out nineteenth-century ideologies of liberalism, conservatism, radical republicanism, social democracy, and socialism (Adam Smith and Karl Marx are mentioned under the economics standard). These are all still debated today and students need to have clear views of them and their varied notions of human nature and possibilities.

In general, however, this new document is a major step forward for Ohio’s teachers and students. It provides a good base for later review, revision, addition, and careful selection of priorities by a team of veteran teachers and scholars. It could especially profit from a return to the four central subjects of history, geography, economics, and civics, and relate the scattered topics from people and societies to history, and rights and responsibilities to civics/government, and perhaps begin each grade level with social studies skills and methods.