

Tennessee

(Source: *Social Studies Curriculum Standards*, September 2001, Tennessee State 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 huge 216-page document has two parts. The first is “Standards, Learning Expectations, and Draft Performance Indicators” for grades kindergarten to three and four, five, six, seven, eight, and high school. The second is “Accomplishments,” grade by grade, kindergarten through grade eight. Both are arranged into six standards: “Culture; Economics; Geography; Government and Civics; History; and Individuals, Groups, and Interactions.” Criteria #1 and #2 are not fully met in either part. Learning expectations are general in content and wording, as are the performance indicators supposedly linked to state tests. “Accomplishments” are too many for a school year, and would need severe pruning to provide a common core of teachable material. Criteria #3, on course order, and #4, on required studies for all students, are met and partly met by the content and state testing listed for grades kindergarten to eight. For high school, the common pattern is said to be world geography in grade nine, world history in grade ten, and U.S. history in grade eleven, with grade twelve shared by government and economics. The state requires the last three for all students. World history is optional. Criterion #5, integration, is partly met; civics and economics topics contain historical content in kindergarten to eighth-grade U.S. history.

Particulars:

This is an over written document. Almost nothing is left out, whether in the general learning expectations or the grade kindergarten to twelve accomplishments. The latter has most of the specifics important for citizen education. But they are lost among crowds of other specific and/or general topics and often loosely worded (e.g., in grade six history, “Compare and contrast feudalism and manorialism,” without the origins of limited government, also absent in civics and history in grades four, five, eight, and high school). This item is but one of 116 topics, many sweeping, for grade six (e.g., “Describe the beliefs of the world [’s] major religions” and “Identify cause and effect of events leading to the rise and decline of civilizations.” Grade six history rushes from the “beginnings” to 1500 and grade seven is given over to the academic abstractions of world geography. As in other states, both history and geography are hurried and desiccated by dividing them in middle school. Grade ten world history, already only optional, covers seven eras from prehistory to the present. Under 31 broad learning expecta-

tions are 98 performance indicators (only 38 in history), most of them sweeping (e.g., “evaluate the idea that cultures both enhance and impede individuals and groups in societal and global interactions” and “test and critique various economic systems through simulations”). One item asks students to know the causes and effects of the Renaissance, Reformation, Scientific and Industrial Revolutions, the Enlightenment, and later political, commercial, communication, and transportation revolutions. To satisfy grade ten’s civics items alone would take the study of 100 separate topics, and for history, no fewer than 140. Grade eleven U.S. history is fully as overloaded; its indicators are abstract and arbitrarily scattered among the other five “standards,” so that history itself has only 37 out of a total of 230 topics.

Tennessee’s standards display an enormous amount of labor, but are only a first step toward setting clear priorities for a teachable, testable core of civic learning.