

# Vermont

(Source: *Vermont's Framework of Standards and Learning Opportunities, Fall 2000*, Vermont Department of Education)

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## The five criteria: An overview

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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?
☆	☆	★	☆	☆

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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:

The document does not meet Criteria #1 or #2. History items are lists of textbook-like headings, without priority or specific events, ideas, forces, or persons. The overall demands of the history/social sciences standards are also too heavy for the time schools have. Criterion #3 is partly met; as a local-control state, Vermont does not set an order of kindergarten to twelfth-grade courses, but topics indicate that the fifth- to eighth-grade span is to include Vermont history to c. 1860, U.S. history to c. 1890 (while leaving the Civil War and Reconstruction for high school), and world history to c. 1500. On Criterion #4, common learning, the state requires no particular courses, despite the introduction's promise of access to "essential knowledge" for all, and its claim that future statewide testing will be based on this document. On Criterion #5, there is no explicit linkage among the social studies disciplines.

### Particulars:

History and the social sciences have eight strands called standards: investigation and critical evaluation; history; geography; citizenship; diversity and unity; economics; conflicts and conflict resolution; and identity and independence. Teachers who read the introduction's stated purpose ("To make explicit what may be included in statewide assessments of student learning") are likely to be disappointed by the document's unrealistic demands. It would be impossible for them to cover all the listed items, even superficially. Should they choose some items to teach in depth and others to incorporate more briefly? If so, will state tests allow choices? Or will the state identify some items as "eligible" for testing, as a few states have chosen to do (albeit with problems)?

Broad history topics have examples that are hardly less broad. In the five to eight grade span, under "Rise of institutions and empires, 500 CE," students are to "analyze governments and religions (e.g., Greece and China)." In grades nine to twelve, in an elective world history course from 1450 to the present, under "Age of Revolution, 1689-1920," students are to "analyze the nature of political, economic, industrial, social revolutions (e.g., Glorious Revolution, American Revolution, French Revolution, Russian Revolution, Industrial Revolution)." Most other items are even less specific. They include, in grades five to eight, "Demonstrate understanding of the relationships among powerful people, important events, and the lives of com-

mon people.” Geography’s topics follow the inflated demands of national standards models, starting with pre-kindergarten to fourth grade (e.g., “Link the movement of material and non-material culture traits to specific cultural regions”). Economics follows suite. Even civics remains general: Students are to trace the influence of political ideas “from the following traditions: Greco-Roman, European Enlightenment, Eastern traditions, African traditions, Native American traditions.”

Topics under “Diversity and Unity”, “Conflicts and Conflict Resolution”, and “Identity and Interdependence” are wholly vague on issues much better taught in relation to specific times, places, and people. As in many other states, the raw material is here (or implied), but Vermont has yet to take the difficult step of defining what is most essential for its citizens to know, as well what is memorably teachable in the instructional time at hand.