

Washington

(Source: *Essential Academic Learning Requirements: Social Studies*, 1998, Washington State Commission on Student Learning)

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? |
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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:

This 22-page document does not fully meet any the five criteria for judging the strength of civics/history standards for educating democratic citizens. On Criterion #1, it has almost no specific topics. On Criterion #2, honest answers to limitless general questions would take studies far beyond the time schools have. Criterion #3 is partly met. A “suggested” scope and sequence assigns state history to grade four; U.S. history to c. 1800 to fifth grade; ancient history to sixth; state history again to seventh; and U.S. history, 1800 to 1877, to eighth. Students in grades nine and ten take U.S. history since 1877 and “Modern World History” in either order. In grades eleven to twelve, Advanced Placement or International Baccalaureate courses, a document-based U.S. history/civics course, and a state-required “World Problems” course are offered. Criterion #4 on common requirements is not met. One year of high school U.S. history is required, along with world problems. But all else is optional and it is said that local districts decide the curriculum. Yet Washington is planning statewide testing of social studies by 2008. On Criterion #5, there is no explicit integration of the four strands of general topics under history, geography, civics, and economics.

Particulars:

Unless this document is totally revised or replaced, it is hard to see what a statewide assessment of student achievement could be based upon or could measure, other than general reading ability. It nowhere meets the promise of its introduction that “Essential Academic Learning Requirements in social studies give students the knowledge and skills they need to participate as responsible and effective citizens in an increasingly complex world.” All but a few topics are mere wish-lists of “skills” and analyses/evaluations of general themes.

The only specific terms (with no elaboration) here are Puritanism, the Civil War, Catholicism, and Protestantism in history; the Pacific Rim in geography; the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution in civics; and, as examples, the Pacific Rim, NAFTA, the European Union, and APEC in economics. A middle school U.S. history item asks “Identify and explain major issues, movements, people, and events in U.S. history from beginnings to 1877, with particular emphasis on change and continuity, for example, revolution, sectional differences, and the Civil War.” The same is asked for high school U.S. history, with “particu-

lar emphasis on growth and conflict, for example, industrialization, the civil rights movement, and the information age.” For world history in high school, students are asked to “analyze the historical development of civilizations drawn from different continents with regard to turning points, ideas, people, places, and patterns of life.” There is no sign of what world history teachers are expected to teach between ancient history in grade six and “modern” world history in high school.

In short, this document gives little help to teachers in the design or presentation of their courses. Its vastly sweeping generalities may only distract them from whatever important, teachable content most of them probably already offer. However, the state says it is planning to develop grade-level content expectations “linked to assessment items.”