

# West Virginia

(Source: *West Virginia Content Standards and Objectives*, 2001, West Virginia Department of Education)

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## 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:

West Virginia's lists of general objectives in civics and history are comprehensive, but fail to meet Criterion #1 by neglecting specific topics central to political education. On Criterion #2, as in other states with comprehensive lists, the implied content in these standards could not be covered even superficially within the available school time. A clear kindergarten to twelfth-grade scope and sequence of courses largely satisfies Criterion #3. Narrative history begins in grade four, on U.S. history to the Revolution. U.S. history to the present is surveyed in fifth grade; regional studies of the Americas, Western Europe, and the Middle East in sixth; world geography in seventh; West Virginia from pre-Columbus to the present in eighth; a survey of U.S. history to 1900 in ninth; regional world studies "from the dawn of civilization" to the present in tenth; and twentieth-century America and the world in the eleventh grade. On Criterion #4, the last three courses are state-required and commercial tests are given in grades three to eleven, implying common expectations for all students. On Criterion #5, there is moderate linkage of civics, economics, and geography topics with relevant historical eras.

### Particulars:

Courses ostensibly on history are crowded by the number and scope of topics on civics/government, economics, and geography. For example, grade five is called a history course, trying to cover the impossible span from the Constitution to the present. But it has only 21 history topics ("objectives") of a total of 51. For grade six's world regions, it has 20 of 52, with such items as "identify and evaluate contributions of classical world civilizations and cite reasons for their rise and fall" and "compare and contrast the worth of the individual in different societies over time." Grade seven does not follow up on regions outside those in grade six, but centers on 20 general geography "objectives," unrelated to specific places, people, or events, including "explain cooperation and conflict over control of the world's resources."

Such breadth marks all subjects at all grades, with topics unlinked to the relevant historical era and without specifics (e.g., in grade nine's nineteenth-century U.S. course, a civics item is "analyze how the world is organized politically and describe the role and relationship of the United States to other nations and to world affairs," an item both overbroad and out of place). In economics, we find "compare and contrast various economic systems and analyze

their impact on individual citizens.” In geography, students are asked to “explain and analyze the human impact on the environment throughout the American experience.” And in history, “explain major conflicts in terms of causes and consequences.” Vast surveys of U.S. and world history and affairs in grades ten and eleven are equally vague and sweeping.

As noted, the West Virginia headings are in one sense comprehensive and often repetitive, but real specifics are scarce. Where they exist, they, together with many examples of detail, follow no discernable patterns of relevance or importance. Teachers are not helped by such a document, overloaded even in kindergarten to third grade. These standards need to be pared down and prioritized by a single team of teachers and scholars attending to all the core subjects at once rather than in separate committees.