

Florida

(Sources: *Social Studies: PreK-12 Sunshine State Standards, 1996*; *Grade Level Expectations: Social Studies K-8, 1999*, Florida 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?
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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 have not been developed* or do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

Summary:

Criterion #1 is not met. Almost all specifics appear as examples or are merely implied by broad headings. Criterion #2 is not met; the number of examples and breadth of general topics, particularly in U.S. and world history, cannot be taught in limited school time. *Grade Level Expectations* partly meets Criterion #3, providing a grade-by-grade scope and sequence for grades kindergarten to eight. But as elsewhere, high school standards appear only for the grade span from nine to twelve, not grade by grade. On Criterion #4, essentials as requirements, the “expectations” are not mandated, only recommended, and Florida has no current plan for social studies tests. On Criterion #5, there is no integration of strands: “Time, Continuity, and Change;” “People, Places, and Environments;” “Government and the Citizen;” “Production, Distribution, and Consumption.”

Particulars:

The standards document has two columns, “Benchmarks” and “Sample Performance Descriptions.” Only one of 44 civics benchmarks mentions history: “The student understands the history of the rights, liberties, and obligations of citizenship in the United States.” No benchmark in economics or geography does so. The only specific topics in the history benchmarks are the “significant ideas and texts of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism;” the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution, and Bill of Rights (as examples, followed by a general topic, “understands the political events that defined the Constitutional period”), and political causes of World Wars I and II. Benchmarks are mostly general (e.g., for grades six–eight: “knows the political, social, and economic institutions that characterized the significant aspects of Eastern and Western civilizations” and for grades nine–twelve: “understands significant political developments in Europe in the 19th century”). Specifics appear only under sample performance descriptions or as examples in the *Grade Level Expectations* document.

Grades five, eight, and high school U.S. history are three repeated survey courses, from exploration to the present. As usual, they overload each grade and minimize, when not precluding, studies in depth, links between social sciences and the humanities, varied pedagogy, and the study of recent times. The world history benchmarks and performance descriptions

run from ancient Egypt to the present, unteachable in one year. Florida joins other states in turning what were grades six and seven world history courses into amorphous Eastern and Western hemisphere studies. None of the 34 topics for the grade six “expectations” has a specific for civic learning. Relevant examples are limited to Confucius, Buddha, Gandhi, and Mao. In grade seven, which confuses Eastern and Western topics, none has specifics and the only relevant examples are Hammurabi, Moses, and Simon Bolivar. Neither grade list retains the few relevant specifics from the standards’ benchmark columns. Ancient religions and Greece disappear; Rome is remembered for its aqueducts. Expectations also dilute the standards by inserting the word “selected” before groups, cultures, civilizations, and “aspects.”

In short, the Florida documents need major revision by a team of expert teachers and scholars. At present, they offer no civic core of learning and no real safeguard against the unequal preparation of citizens.