

Massachusetts

(Source: *History and Social Science Curriculum Framework, October 2002*, Massachusetts Board 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 do not meet the criteria are designated with an empty star [☆].

Summary:

This 130-page document, written under direction from the State Board of Education, replaces the framework of 1997, which ranked among the country's best in two national surveys despite its confusing format. The new version represents a long step backward. Technically, it meets Criterion #1 by including most topics important to the education of citizens. But it fails Criterion #2. As in many detailed frameworks, key topics are buried under numberless required details, "concepts," and skills which cannot be taught, much less mastered, in the time schools have. Criterion #3 is largely met. Grades pre-kindergarten to seven have a mandated course order. Grade three is on Massachusetts history; grade four is on geography and people of the United States today; grade five is U. S. history through the formation of the national government under the Constitution; grade six is world geography; grade seven is world history, from origins to c. 500 AD. For grades eight-twelve, five different "pathways" are set for world history I and II (divided at c. 1750), U. S. history I and II (divided at 1877), and senior electives. The 2002 version does not meet Criterion #4. Its great failure is to have world history explicitly required and tested only through grade seven, to the fall of Rome. Only U. S. history is tested statewide at the high school level. Districts are told they may choose which and how much world history/Western civilization is taught between grades eight and twelve. Contrary to the state's Reform Act of 1993, no common core of knowledge of the world and the West will be offered to all students. Criterion #5 is largely met. Except for grades four and six, and senior electives, the four basic subjects are brought together in a chronological narrative.

Particulars:

Despite this document's overload of items, it nonetheless omits important topics. Grade six geography is an example. It requires sixteen "concepts and skills" embodying 40 separate chores. Its 27 main standards embody 90 required topics, but 47 other topics are left optional. These include ethnic and religious groups, obstacles to economic progress, the European Union, environmental issues, levels of schooling, the status of women, population growth rates, the situations of Korea and Taiwan, the partition of India, and the establishment of Israel. Grade seven world history to c. 500 AD has 43 standards with some 110 topics, each

needing at least one to three days simply to cover.

In grades eight through eleven, the overload is worse for both world and U. S. history. World history I from c.500 through the Enlightenment has 38 main standards with 145 subordinate topics, many highly complex in themselves. World history II, with 48 standards, has 230 separate topics, many demanding substantial time for effective teaching and student comprehension (e.g., the effect of Enlightenment political thought; the ideas of Adam Smith and Karl Marx; liberalism; Africa's interaction with imperialism; the Bolshevik Revolution; the policies and main ideas of Mussolini, Hitler, Lenin, and Stalin; the background, course, and consequences of the Holocaust; the Korean War; the Vietnam War; the computer revolution; the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks). School districts' freedom to teach as much or as little world and Western history as they choose, coupled with the impossibility of doing even half of these topics in the limited instructional time schools have, will mean great disparities in students' access to learning that is vital to them as citizens. The two high school level courses in U. S. history suffer the same problems of overstuffing. Much important learning cannot help but be skipped or diluted. U. S. history I has 40 standards with 190 topics, including such complexities as the compromise on slavery at the Constitutional Convention of 1787; the causes and impact of immigration; the Emancipation Proclamation, and the failure of Reconstruction. U. S. II has 33 main standards with 210 separate topics.

Revision of this document is called for, if only to align it with the promises of its opening pages. Its authors say it is not meant to be "the whole curriculum," and claim that in order to write "Learning Standards that can be reasonably taught in some depth within the time available," they have been "selective about topics for a basic core" of knowledge. They urge teachers to "elaborate" on what is here, to add topics they see as important, as well as to enliven classes with "current events and issues." The oddest feature of the document is, of course, dropping modern world history/Western civilization as required, tested subjects after the events of September 11, 2001, which appear twice in its standards. Ironically, the "Introduction" has adapted excerpts from the 1987 *Education for Democracy* booklet; including its plea for "the facts of modern history, dating back at least to the English Revolution, and forward to our own century's total wars; to the failure of the nascent liberal regimes of Russia, Italy, Germany, Spain, and Japan" and how "citizens in our society need to understand the current conditions of the world, and how it got that way" and "the roots of our present dangers." If this document's required topics were taken seriously, it is doubtful whether teachers of either U. S. or world history courses could possibly do this and still reach recent times.