

WYOMING • U.S. HISTORY

GRADE

F

SCORES

Content and Rigor 0/7
Clarity and Specificity 0/3

TOTAL SCORE

0/10

Overview

Despite much lofty rhetoric about the importance of knowing and understanding our common heritage, Wyoming's U.S. history standards are devoid of U.S. history. No course sequence is defined nor content laid out. In the name of educational freedom, the state offers teachers no guidance or requirements whatsoever. If Wyoming students achieve a shared core of historical knowledge, it will only be through their districts' and teachers' unassisted efforts.

Goals and Organization

Wyoming's social studies standards are divided first into five strands or "content standards": citizenship, government, and democracy; culture and cultural diversity; production, distribution, and consumption; time, continuity, and change; and people, places, and environments. The state then provides cumulative benchmarks which are designed to define "what students are expect [*sic*] to know and be able to do at the end of each of the benchmark grade levels," (which are fourth, eighth, and eleventh grades). Finally, the benchmarks are followed by "performance level descriptors," which ostensibly describe "how well students must perform" the benchmarks to be classified advanced, proficient, basic, and below basic. (In fact, these performance descriptors largely restate the benchmarks themselves.)

The benchmarks and performance descriptors are entirely general and conceptual. No specific content is assigned to any particular grade or grade block.

Evaluation

Wyoming's standards, the state informs us, "specify the essential learning that students must master." In actuality, however, the "essential learning" the state defines is general and wholly conceptual. Any specific course content is left to districts and teachers—or, perhaps, textbook publishers.

The closest we get to a true history category in the standards is the "time, continuity, and change" strand. According to the introductory material, it is meant to "provide for the study of ways human beings view themselves in and over time," thus developing students' "historical knowledge, skills, and values"—whatever that may mean. There is much talk of "historical perspectives," and "sophisticated analysis and reconstruction of the past"; students are to "integrate individual stories about people, events, and situations" into a "holistic conception," studying "important historical figures and events" at every grade level.

✓ DOCUMENTS REVIEWED

Wyoming Social Studies Content and Performance Standards, U.S. history segments (2008)

Accessed from:

<http://www.k12.wy.us/SA/standards/Standards%202008%20Social%20Studies.pdf>

But Wyoming’s standards do nothing to explain any such figures or events. They do not indicate that any particular material should be taught at any given grade—or, indeed, ever. The introduction notes that the standards of New York, California, and Massachusetts were consulted to “establish the rigor” of Wyoming’s curriculum, yet Wyoming seems to have learned nothing from those states’ comprehensive and sophisticated outlines. In Wyoming, we find no distinction between U.S. and world history, and no sequence at all—just exhortations to “understand” barely defined concepts.

The three fourth-grade benchmarks under “time, continuity, and change” invoke “state and national persons, holidays, and symbols,” “how current events influence individuals, communities, state, country, and/or world,” and “the chronology of exploration, immigration and settlement of Wyoming”—all without any examples. The performance descriptors inform us that advanced students “explain the roles of significant political leaders and the significance of various holidays,” “sequentially reconstruct the chronology of the major events and people during the exploration, immigration, and settlement of Wyoming,” and “support their opinions and give a rationale about current events.” Merely proficient students “identify” rather than “explain,” must be given data, and “express” rather than “support” opinions. Basic students identify only “some” leaders and holidays, must be given data and assistance, and “express some opinions” about current events. (Below-basic students simply fail to meet the standard.) These rhetorical guidelines are arbitrary, content-free, and impossible to measure; they offer little meaningful guidance to teachers.

By eighth grade, students are—in the citizenship strand—to “understand the historical perspective and issues involved in the development of the U.S. Constitution,” but again no context or explanation is supplied. Under “culture,” they are to “describe cultural diversity and the interdependence of cultures.” In the “time, continuity and change” benchmarks, they are to “identify people, events, problems, conflicts, and ideas and explain their historical significance,” “discuss current events to better understand the world in which they live,” and “analyze the impact of historical events and people on present conditions, situations, or circumstances.” Advanced students now “discuss and analyze,” while the proficient merely “understand.”

By eleventh grade, students—again under citizenship—are to understand the principles of democracy, and again “explain the historical development of the U.S. Constitution and how it has shaped the U.S. and Wyoming governmental systems.” And again, there are no details. Under the culture strand, they are to “explain how various cultural influences impact society,” and “how shared cultural experiences influence

peoples’ perceptions of prominent historical figures, groups, institutions, and world events.” Under “time, continuity and change”—now up to *four* benchmarks—students are to “analyze the interactions among individuals and groups and their impact on significant historical events,” “analyze current events,” “evaluate the impact of technology and how it has shaped history and influenced the modern world,” and “explain how past events impact the present and the future.” As always, they are to do so without any historical examples, specifics, or explanation.

Content and Rigor Conclusion

With the exception of the Constitution and Bill of Rights, *not a single name, event, date, or era in U.S. history is mentioned in Wyoming’s standards.* There is much rhetoric about the “formal study of history” and “sophisticated analysis and reconstruction of the past,” but no substantive curriculum is specified in any way, shape, or form. The introduction speaks of rigor, but how can a total lack of content be considered rigorous? Nothing is offered but sweeping generalities, enjoining students to “understand” and “analyze” an undefined past. If students are to have any historical knowledge to analyze, it will have to be defined by districts and teachers acting on their own initiative. This pattern is familiar: Under the guise of protecting teacher creativity and classroom freedom, Wyoming entirely abdicates *any* role in creating a usable curriculum. The state fully deserves its zero out of seven for Content and Rigor. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)

Clarity and Specificity Conclusion

Wyoming provides no sequence and no scope. No specific course is ever mentioned, let alone outlined, described, or assigned to a particular grade. Detail is nonexistent; students are only told to understand categories such as time, change, diversity, people, and places—generalizations that cannot be measured. If individual schools offer substantive U.S. history courses—or, indeed, *any* substantive courses within the web of social studies abstractions—the lucky students will have only their teachers and local officials to thank for it. Wyoming’s standards, long on theory and short on specifics, earn a zero out of three for Clarity and Specificity. (See *Common Grading Metric*, Appendix A.)