

ALABAMA REPORT CARD

SUBJECT	2000	2006
English	A	A
History*	A	A
Geography**	B	C
Math	B	B
Science	D	F
OVERALL GRADE	B-	B-

*U.S. History for 2006 **World History for 2006

*ENGLISH—A

- *Alabama Course of Study: English Language Arts, K-12, 1999*
- *Alabama English Language Arts Course of Study—Assessment Correlation, K-11, Summer 1999*
- *Pathways for Learning—Language & Reading, 1999*
- *Alabama Direct Assessment of Writing: Annotated Student Response Packet, 5, 7, & 10, 2003*

Clarity and comprehensiveness are the hallmarks of these standards. They cover language arts and reading exceptionally well. Of special note is the attention the state gives to beginning readers, who are introduced to word identification skills and comprehension strategies, as well as fine children's literature. Alabama also excels in its literary study standards, which outline American, British, and world literature programs for grades 9-12 and contain sample titles and recommended reading lists. One drawback: Alabama doesn't tie its admirable literary standards to its state exit exam in reading, and one wonders—why not?

MATH—B

- *Alabama Course of Study: Mathematics, 2003*

This thorough document provides grade-level standards for K-8, as well as subject-matter standards for courses ranging from Algebra I and Geometry to advanced courses, such as Algebra III with statistics and pre-calculus. The standards are clear and they address important topics. While they overemphasize the role of technology, it is heartening that calculators are not mentioned until the ninth grade. Unfortunately, the standards do not require memorization of basic num-

ber facts, and they give too much space to probability and data analysis. A third grader, for example, is expected to determine probability before gaining a working knowledge of fractions. The attention paid to data analysis and probability comes at the expense of other, more necessary topics, thereby weakening the standards overall. Nonetheless, Alabama's mathematics standards are solid and worthwhile.

SCIENCE—F

- *Alabama Course of Study: Science (Bulletin 2005, No. 20)*

The document is well organized, but its content is sparse. Earth and space sciences receive adequate treatment, as does chemistry; this is not so, however, with physics, which is not only insufficiently detailed but also inaccurate on occasion. The difference between transparent and translucent materials, for instance, is here said to be determined by the amount of light which passes through each. In reality, the difference between the two depends on whether or not the light is scattered as it moves through the material. Life sciences receive the worst treatment of all, as Alabama eschews science within its science standards by including a misguided political "disclaimer" that questions the validity of evolutionary theory. By casting doubt upon this basis for life science, the document effectively calls into question much of the information it goes on to present. This is not a good move, as it is one that only reminds us of the inadequacy of the state's science standards.

*U.S. HISTORY—A

- *Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies, (Bulletin 1998, No.18)*
- *Standards and Objectives (Social Studies) for the Alabama High School Graduation Exam, (Bulletin 1998, No. 13)*
- *Today's Students, Tomorrow's Citizens: Pathways for Learning, Social Studies, no date, Alabama High School Graduation Exam Task Force*

An encouraging sign, Alabama begins its social studies course standards by plainly affirming that history and geography are "the central disciplines." Students start their historical instruction in third grade with state history, skirting the issue of slavery (the word "slave" is never used). Standards for U.S. history become more comprehensive, however, as students age, and by fifth grade the curriculum is, according to the

report's author, "in virtually all respects, comprehensive, balanced, and coherent." After a five-year hiatus, Alabama students take up U.S. history again in grades 10 and 11, and twelfth grade students learn about U.S. government. These curricula are strong, and they are supplemented by "a comprehensive set of activities to help teachers and students prepare for the social studies portion of the required state exam." Alabama parents should be confident that their children have access to some of the most solid and comprehensive U.S. history standards in the nation.

WORLD HISTORY—C

- *Alabama Course of Study: Social Studies; Bulletin 2004, No. 18*

There is much detail to celebrate in this document, but not nearly enough time mandated to appreciate it all. Alabama compresses the whole of world history into two years (eighth and ninth grades). Subsequently, eighth grade students study not only Chinese and African civilization, but also the classical Greeks and Romans, the rise and fall of Islam, the rise of the Middle Ages, and the Renaissance, among other topics. The whirlwind tour continues the following year, with the Reformation, Hobbes and Locke, the commercial revolution in Europe, the French Revolution, and the revolutions in Latin America. Bravo for requiring the material, but the pace at which it's presented is sure to undermine the state's desire to empower students to "make logical decisions" as "responsible citizens." They'll be too busy just trying to learn enough to get through class.