

ALASKA REPORT CARD

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

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

*ENGLISH—D

- *Reading & Writing Grade Level Expectations, 3-10, March 2004*
- *Alaska Benchmark Examination Booklet, June 1999*
- *Teacher's Guide to the Alaska Benchmark Examination, 3, 6, & 8, June 1999*
- *Benchmark Examination Test Item Map, 3, 6, & 8, June 1999*
- *Benchmark Practice Tests, 3, 6, & 8, June 1999*
- *Reading & Writing Performance Standards, Jan. 20, 1999*
- *Common Ground Suggested Literature, created between 1988-1991*
- *HSGQE Test Blueprint*

An army of documents were reviewed. Portions of the 2004 Grade Level Expectations are solid, but, on the whole, Alaska's English standards need lots of improvement. There are too many reading subcategories of different importance and relevance. Some, such as "colonialism" or "identity formation," seem better suited to history or sociology than English. Conspicuously missing are literary categories, which would, says the report's author, "outline substantive content of the secondary school English curriculum." Further, the high school standards that address literature content are too cursory to demand any real intellectual effort or contribute to deeper understanding and appreciation of the texts.

*MATH—D

- *Alaska Content Standards, 1999*
- *Alaska Performance Standards, January 20, 1999*
- *Math Grade Level Expectations for Grades 3-10, March 16, 2004*

Alaska's math standards have several problems. Although elementary students are wisely expected to memorize basic number facts, calculators are introduced into the curriculum in the third grade, which is far too early. The upper grades are prone to an overemphasis on the use of manipulatives—those are the pattern blocks, trays of tiles and cubes, and collections of geoboards, tangrams, counters, and such, favored by many teachers. Abstraction is a major part of mathematics and a curriculum that relies on manipulatives to demonstrate concepts to ninth graders "works against sound mathematical content and instruction." In the upper grades, "algebra and geometry standards are thin and some of the writing here is so poor that meaning is obscured. ... Probability and statistics are overemphasized at all grade levels." In the standards devoted to patterns—another overemphasized concept—there is little connection to mathematics.

*SCIENCE—F

- *Science Content Standard (A-D), 2000*
- *Alaska Department of Education & Development Framework Project, 2000*

These documents (new standards were being written at the time of our review) offer up little to nothing of scientific or academic value. They are, in a word, awful. Reviewers note that throughout Alaska's standards, "political correctness dominates content and manner of instruction. The impression is given of more seriousness about native Alaskan cultures than about the whole of natural science." The life sciences are treated in a trite manner and "the 'Forces of Nature' section has nothing to do with the forces of nature." There is a lack of substance and specificity throughout; and entire subject areas are explained through overweening generalities. That Alaska's science standards could be any worse is highly dubious.

*U.S. HISTORY—F

- *Content Standards for Alaska Students in History, Government, and Citizenship, 2002, Alaska Department of Education and Early Development*

In Alaska's U.S. history standards, "the rhetoric soars, but the substance is missing." Succumbing to an overemphasis on student-directed, activity-based learning, the document provides virtually no specific, content-based guidelines. In short, these standards are useless, because they provide no guidelines, roadmaps, or curricula for U.S. history education.

*WORLD HISTORY—F

■ *Alaska Content Standards: History*

A simple checklist of names and dates would be an improvement over the fatuous document Alaska provides its history educators: a list of concepts as broad and un-navigable as the state's vast wilderness. These standards are an utter failure. Students are asked only to comprehend several broad concepts, such as "the consequences of peace and violent conflict to societies and their cultures." How they are to do this is anybody's guess. An astute teacher in Juneau may understand this as an invitation to guide students through the intricacies of the two world wars or a teacher in Anchorage may hand out a simple worksheet on the differences between Athens and Sparta in ancient Greece. But, like the Northern Lights in the middle of summer, a useful guide to world history is nowhere to be found.