

## ARKANSAS REPORT CARD

SUBJECT	2000	2006
English	D	C
History*	F	F
Geography**	F	F
Math	D	F
Science	F	D
<b>OVERALL GRADE</b>	<b>F</b>	<b>D-</b>

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

### ENGLISH—C

- *K–12 English Language Arts Curriculum Framework, revised 2003; Released Items for Grades 4, 6, 8, & 11, 2003*

Arkansas's Governor Mike Huckabee, once quite obese, recently lost more than 100 pounds. His state's English standards should do the same. Though clearly written, and presented grade by grade, the document is so large that English teachers who attempt to follow it will assuredly be overwhelmed. And trying to include too much within these standards is just one problem. Too many of them are immeasurable, and too many rely on process, i.e., they contain no academic content. And redundancy is ubiquitous; a reader—or teacher—would be hard pressed to discern a change in difficulty from grades 9 to 12. Arkansas could improve these standards by including some content-specific standards that identify authors, their works, and literary traditions that reflect classical traditions. And put this document on a diet!

### \*MATHEMATICS —F

- *Arkansas Course of Study: Mathematics, 2003*
- *Curriculum Frameworks: Mathematics, 1998*
- *Sample Curriculum Models, K-8, 1998*
- *Sample Grade Level Benchmarks, 1-4, 1998*
- *Sample Grade Level Benchmarks, 5-8, 1999*

Arkansas' math standards are as about as pretty as a razorback with a cold. The state has students using calculators as early as Kindergarten and manipulatives as late as the eighth grade: far too early and far too late to give students a solid grasp of important concepts such as comprehending basic number facts or learning to

deal with abstract concepts. Probability and statistics are overemphasized at every level. Coverage of algebra is spotty, and there are even a few glaring errors, such as one standard that asks fifth graders to find the perimeter of two and three dimensional objects (they don't have "perimeters," they have "surface areas"). Meanwhile, students are elsewhere asked to accomplish tasks that no K–12 student can do, such as demonstrating the irrationality of pi. But that's OK—we suspect that this standard amounts, as many of these standards do, to pushing buttons on a calculator.

### \*SCIENCE—D

- *Science Curriculum Framework, 1999*  
(*New standards were due out in January 2006*)

The Arkansas science standards come in two main portions: the 1999 Curriculum Framework, and the K–4 and 5–8 Benchmarks. Within the framework are three strands (physical, life, and Earth/space sciences), and within the strands are standards and learning expectations. Unfortunately, most of these standards and expectations are vague. A fact not helped by the authors' poor word choice. In physical science, for example, teachers are told to "Introduce the electromagnetic spectrum" and students are to "Investigate sound waves and gamma rays." [Emphasis added.] Even those most familiar with the intricacies of etiquette would stumble while attempting to "introduce" an electromagnetic spectrum. And for what crime, exactly, should we "investigate" the waves and rays? In a word: unclear. The life sciences also receive too little attention and grade progression in certain scientific subject areas is often inadequate. Arkansas should send these standards back to the lab.

### \*U.S. HISTORY—F

- *Arkansas Social Studies Curriculum Frameworks, 2000, Arkansas Department of Education*

Readers learn in the introduction to Arkansas's history standards that the documents are "intended to be broad and more general than specific," so that teachers can fit their respective content into the overall strands and concepts. The standards take their "broadness" mission seriously; they contain virtually no history content. Instead, U.S. history is presented through nondescript strands, such as "Time, Continuity, and Change," and "People, Places, and Environments." The outline for

grades 5-8 asks students to “explain the cause and effect of events throughout history,” but does not require the study of any specific historical event. These standards are empty, and their lack of substance guarantees them a spot among the nation’s worst.

### \***WORLD HISTORY—F**

- *Arkansas Social Studies Curriculum Frameworks, 2000, Arkansas Department of Education*

Arkansas provides those teaching world history “a broad conceptual framework” that is long on ambition and short on details. Objectives such as “evaluate major turning points in history” leave a teacher to wonder: Does that include the birth of Christ? The fall of the Soviet Union? Both? Neither? No answers will be found here. Nor is there guidance on how to cover the topic “probe the interdependencies of nations.” The state provides a few details in its supplemental section, but it’s too little too late. Natural State students are likely to leave high school with no factual understanding of world history.