

COLORADO REPORT CARD

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

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

ENGLISH—C

- *Colorado Model Content for Reading and Writing: Suggested Grade Level Expectations, K-12, February 9, 2000*
- *Reading & Writing Assessment Frameworks, 3-10*

Colorado's documents are short, to the point, and quite readable. English language conventions, writing, and research are all well covered and easily measured. Yet serious problems exist in the realms of reading and literary study. Most egregious is the standards' omission of historically or culturally significant texts and authors—any real examination of classical, British, and American literary tradition is conspicuously absent. Similarly weak is the document's vocabulary strand, which would benefit from expansion.

*MATHEMATICS —D

- *Colorado Model Content Standards for Mathematics, February 7, 2000*

Colorado has a hang-up when it comes to math, and that's the word "demonstrate." It's used 122 in these standards, in ways that often don't make any sense, such as the directive to "[p]ictorially demonstrate the meaning of commonly used irrational numbers." We have a bad feeling that means drawing pictures, a time-wasting activity that would be in keeping with a set of standards that directs fourth-grade students to collect "objects and pictures" to represent whole numbers. Fractions are introduced far too late, with a focus on using concrete materials and manipulatives that makes one suspect Colorado thinks its students can't handle numbers. (The state doesn't get to requiring hand calculations of the

four operations of arithmetic using fractions until the seventh grade, several years too late.) Though there is a good focus on memorizing the basic number facts at an early age, that doesn't outweigh the fact that Colorado too often has its students drawing pictures and collecting objects, rather than building key math skills.

SCIENCE—B

- *Colorado Model Content Standards for Science, 1995 (Colorado is revising its standards; a new document is scheduled for release September 2006)*

The Centennial State provides its schools six science standards; three are about content and three about process. Though the two groups are relatively well-integrated, a reader must look for something called "rationale"—in each of the six standards—to find actual content detail. Within the biology (ecology) section are some 20 standards related to environmental science; while each is worthy of inclusion, they suffer from too much qualitative information and not enough quantitative analysis. Physical science avoids blatant errors, but its standards leave out some important components. Life science is more comprehensive. Overall, Colorado presents its students with a worthwhile document.

U.S. HISTORY—D

- *Colorado Model Content Standards for History, 1995*
- *Suggested Grade Level Expectations for History, 2001, Colorado Department of Education*

These documents suffer from a condition we might call "creeping vagueness." Because the standards don't distinguish between historical inquiry and historical fact, students in Colorado may know, for instance, that "religious and philosophical ideas have been powerful forces throughout history," but have no clue about the topics or meanings of those ideas. When content is offered, the standards' authors are timid about making even the most basic historical judgments. Students in K-4 are asked to identify "historical figures from diverse backgrounds in the United States who have advanced the rights of individuals and promoted the common good," but not offered much advice on who exactly those figures might be. Besides, a far better exercise here would be to identify those individuals whose contributions have been most important and influential. In sum, the standards are weak tea, in need of some content infusion.

WORLD HISTORY—D

- *Colorado Model Content Standards for History, 1995*

Colorado's world history standards have some good things going for them, such as a passable treatment of economic, cultural, artistic, and religious topics. Had they only treated the rest of world history as well. Instead, when it comes to empire building, war and statecraft, or even literature, teachers face a rocky mountain as they try to "reconstruct the time structure and identify connections found in historical narrative," without any guidance as to what specific events and characters might be part of that narrative. These vagaries are most jarring in the standards' approach to some of the twentieth century's most important events. World Wars I and II, the Vietnam War, and the Russian invasion of Afghanistan, for example, are oddly crammed into an exercise analyzing "the causes and events of major wars of the contemporary era and the resulting changes in the distribution of power." Surely the world's wars deserve better attention—as does the word "contemporary." The documents aren't hopeless, but they do require more than minor surgery.