

CONNECTICUT REPORT CARD

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

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

*ENGLISH—F

- *Language Arts Framework, K-12, 2003*
- *Connecticut Mastery Test, Third Generation, Language Arts Handbook, 2001*
- *Connecticut Academic Performance Test, Second Generation, Reading and Writing Across the Disciplines, 2001*
- *Connecticut's Blueprint for Reading Achievement: The Report of the Early Reading Success Panel, K-3, 2000*
- *A Guide to Curriculum Development: Purposes, Practices, Procedures*
- *Suggested Resources for Reading Middle/High School*

Connecticut could get some points for arranging its English standards in a reasonably coherent format—reading and responding, exploring and responding to literature, communicating with others (writing, speaking, and research), and English language conventions. Yet, these standards suffer from systemic vagueness. For example, one standard asks students to “discuss, analyze, and evaluate how characters deal with the diversity of human experience and conflict.” Another suggests that students “maintain a multimedia portfolio that provides opportunities for reflection and dialogue regarding creative processes.” These are empty words, unwelcome anywhere, but are particularly insufferable in English standards. Vocabulary development is ignored, and the state fails to outline a core literature for its high school students. Connecticut recently updated its English standards and, from our perspective, managed to make them worse. Will subsequent efforts bring them around?

*MATHEMATICS—F

- *Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards—Mathematics, 1998*
- *Common Core of Learning—Mathematics, 1998*
- *Goals 2000, Mathematics Curriculum—PreK through Grade 12*

The “C” in Connecticut must stand for “constructivism”—or maybe it’s “content-lite?” Either way, the Constitution State gets not a C but an F for its math standards, which are a mishmash of trendiness and vacuity. Connecticut places on its students the burden of “constructing” the number system, eschewing memorization and mathematical reasoning for a reliance on technology, manipulatives, and “real life experiences.” When the standards do get to the task of defining skills to be learned, such as the K–4 directive to “develop proficiency with basic addition,” the state gives teachers and students little guidance as to how this amorphous goal is to be realized, and relies on calculator use throughout the grades as a crutch. And while long on classroom enrichment activities, these standards give little sense of how disconnected exercises are to be integrated into a whole curriculum that develops skills logically and over time.

*SCIENCE—C

- *Core Science Curriculum Framework, January 2005 (Connecticut's standards were updated in September 2005, too late for this review)*

These standards take much from the National Science Education Standards and the AAAS Project 2061 Benchmarks—the document is broken into categories Pre-K–2, 3–5, 6–8, and 9–10. The state does best in physical science, where the standards are free of errors and benefit from solid structure. Yet, even in this realm, Connecticut misses important topics, such as conservation of momentum, waves, modern physics, and fluid mechanics. Beyond physical science, the document often shows little or no relationship between overarching themes, standards, and expected performance. For example, under the Changing Earth theme the document asks, “How do materials cycle through the Earth’s systems?” Students are then expected to sort different soils by properties and to classify different soils by their abilities to retain water and support plant growth. There is little direct connection between each of these vague components. Life science is not presented thoroughly, and evolution doesn’t come on the radar until high school. A middling attempt, at best.

*U.S. HISTORY—D

- *Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards—History, 1998*

One finds it odd, and disheartening, that a state so rich in U.S. history would put forth offerings as bland as these. Facts are in short supply here; rhetoric soars. For example, the standards require students to “demonstrate knowledge of the structure of United States and world history to understand life and events in the past and how they relate to one’s own life experience.” But as the reviewers point out, Connecticut’s “framework provides no specific content to suggest, for example, how students would relate seventeenth-century indentured servitude or slavery to their own life experience.” The standards never adequately explain what teachers should teach and students should learn. And Connecticut’s U.S. history grade reflects that abdication of duty.

*WORLD HISTORY—D

- *Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards—History, 1998*

Connecticut’s standards frame the study of world history quite well. They’re chronologically sound, taking students from pastoral civilizations to Greece and Rome, then through the three ages they call “expanding zones of change [300-1000], intensified zones of interactions [1000-1500],” and “emergence of the first global age [1450-1770].” The standards conclude with Europe and the twentieth century. But sorely lacking are the facts that hold the framework together. Consequently, when students are asked to “describe, explain, and analyze political, economic, and social consequences that came about as the resolution of a conflict,” they have no idea which conflicts are meant. Put some historical meat on the standards’ bones and the state has a good document.