

DELAWARE REPORT CARD

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

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

*ENGLISH—C

- *State of Delaware English Language Arts Curriculum Framework Content Standards, Volume One, K-10, June 1995*
- *English Language Arts Standard One End of Cluster Expectations and Performance Indicators, K-12, 1998*
- *Teacher's Desk Reference K-5, January 1998;*
- *Teacher's Desk Reference 6-8, May 1998*
- *Writing Companions for the Performance Indicators and the Textual Features, K-12*
- *Configuration of the Delaware Student Testing Program's Writing Test; Delaware Student Testing Program—General Rubric for Writing All Grades*
- *Delaware Student Testing Program—Sample Test Items*

For the most part, Delaware gets it right. It has crafted English standards that are clear, avoid vague language, and show an increase in intellectual challenge as the grades progress. A major flaw exists, however: literary study is given short shrift. Not only does Delaware fail to give specifics about literary theory, but the state never mentions American literature by name. Teachers searching for guidance for upper-level reading lists, or seeking to develop strong curricula based on authors and works of significance and merit, are on their own—these standards offer virtually no guidance. If not for the comprehensiveness with which Delaware tackled other important portions of its English standards, the state's grade would be much lower than the middling C it received.

*MATHEMATICS —F

- *Mathematics Curriculum Framework, 1995*

Delaware did a bad, bad thing when it jettisoned a 1996 revision to its Mathematics Curriculum Framework. In doing so it gutted these standards of much of its content. What remains is more a statement of aspirations than a set of standards per se, a collection of lofty goals with little of the specificity that makes a set of standards a useful guide for teaching and learning. Exhortations such as “Identify patterns for explaining the concepts of computation” make little sense, while the state undermines mathematical reasoning by allowing students to use calculators throughout the curriculum, even to accomplish such fundamental tasks as long division. The educational jargon becomes unbearable in the eleventh and twelfth grades, where the standards proclaim that, “An expanded symbol system extends and refines the student’s ability to express quantitative ideas concisely”—a statement whose meaning, much less its relevance to instruction, is almost unknowable.

*SCIENCE—C

- *State of Delaware Science Curriculum Framework, Volume 1, June 1995 (Delaware’s standards are being revised for release in 2007)*

The Blue Hen State organizes its science standards document around eight themes. Under each are numbered subsidiaries—the actual standards—accompanied by teaching suggestions and classroom activities. The first theme, “Nature and Application of Science and Technology,” is strong on content, but it suffers from the inclusion of insertions that may have political and social merit, yet are of little of scientific value. For example: “Explore the historical underrepresentation of women and minorities in many fields of science and engineering.” The strongest portion of Delaware’s standards covers life sciences. It is comprehensive without being too long and contains genuinely valuable laboratory activities. Physical science is not as good, and the physics section is rife with errors and impracticalities. In grades 6–8, students are asked to “Give examples which show how the relationships among force, mass, and acceleration are important in common situations (e.g., hammering a nail, comparing rates at which a car and a heavily loaded truck can pull away from a stop sign).” These are poor examples—hammering a nail is friction dominated, while a stop-sign getaway depends on power-to-weight ratios. Were Delaware a bit more conscientious, these standards could be better than passable.

*U.S. HISTORY—B

- *Social Studies Standards, End of Grade Cluster Benchmarks, Performance Indicators, Grades K-5, 6-8, 9-12, 2001, Department of Education*

This document does a good job, overall, of establishing meaningful and measurable criteria for students and teachers of U.S. history. Students learn about Delaware history in third grade and are introduced to U.S. history in grades 4 and 5. That span is repeated in grades 8-11. There are, however, some major omissions. The “Three Worlds Meet” section, for example, highlights relations between “European settlers and enslaved Africans,” but it nowhere mentions how those Africans became enslaved. The standards also do an inadequate job of explaining how democratic institutions grew in colonial America. Several topics—such as the Articles of Confederation—are also conspicuously absent. Nonetheless, Delaware’s standards are redeemed by their emphasis on accountability and by making progress toward “rigorous subject content.”

*WORLD HISTORY—D

- *Social Studies Content Standards, History, 2000*

Delaware’s world history standards are organized and well chosen, for the most part. When it comes to content, however, they could use more detail. The three-line outline for World War II, for example, asks teachers to teach the war’s “multiple consequences” and its “global scope and human cost,” giving them little guidance. And for high school students, world history doesn’t even begin until 1500 C.E. Sure, ancient history is taught in the early school years, but for high school students launching into the Reformation and Renaissance, what they learned in elementary school is ancient history! If the First State entertains any dreams of leading the rest of the union with its world history standards, it needs to inject a massive dose of historical content into its otherwise good standards.