

Review of The Minnesota Social Studies Standards first draft, by Joseph Onosko

My reactions/suggestions below are presented as a set of bulleted items in no particular order or emphasis. If you'd like clarification on any points, please feel free to contact me at 603-862-3495 or my e-mail: jonosko@comcast.net . I hope you find some of my comments helpful as you continue with this most difficult task. A portion of Mr. Onosko's background is included here:

CURRICULUM VITAE

Joseph J. Onosko
Associate Professor

UNH ADDRESS:

University of New Hampshire
Department of Education
Morrill Hall
Durham, NH 03824
Telephone: (603)-862-3495
E-Mail: jonosko@comcast.net

EDUCATION:

1988	Ph.D.	University of Wisconsin Curriculum and Instruction
1984	M.A.	University of Wisconsin Social Studies Education
1979	B.S.	University of Wisconsin Broad Field Social Studies

TEACHING EXPERIENCE:

1989-present	University of New Hampshire Associate Professor in Master's & Doctoral Programs Education Department
1985-86	University of Wisconsin-Madison Social Studies Methods Instructor Department of Curriculum and Instruction
1984-85	University of Wisconsin, Madison Supervisor, Social Studies Teaching Program Department of Curriculum and Instruction
1983-85	Madison Public Schools, Long-Term Substitute Teacher, Social Studies, Mathematics and English Grades 9-12
1981-83 1981-84	Howards Grove High School, Social Studies Teacher, Grades 9-12

PROFESSIONAL RESEARCH:

2000-present	Research Evaluator, UNH Institute on Disabilities Research Project (Coordinator, Dr. Cheryl Jorgenson)
1998-2000	Research Evaluator, Institute for Responsive Education Boston, MA (Dr. Karen Mapp, President)
1992-97	Research Evaluator, The Scientist as Humanist Project, Concord, NH (Coordinator, Janet Ward)
1994	Research Evaluator, UNH Institute on Disabilities Research Project (Coordinator, Dr. Cheryl Jorgenson)
1989-1991	Research Evaluator, The New Futures Initiative (Lawrence, MA), The Casey Foundation, Greenwich, CT
1989-1991	Research Associate, Higher Order Thinking in the Humanities Project, National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin, Madison
1985-1989	Editor/Academic Staff/Research Assistant, Higher Order Thinking in the Humanities Project, National Center on Effective Secondary Schools, University of Wisconsin

BOARD MEMBER / CONSULTANT / REVIEWER:

Board Member: New Hampshire Historical Society's School Programs
Advisory Board (1999-present)
New Hampshire Mock Election Committee
Concord, NH (2000-present)
National Board for Professional Teaching Standards,
Adolescence and Young Adult/Social Studies -
History Committee (Assistant Chair), Wash., DC (1992-97)
New Hampshire Council for the Social Studies,
Concord, NH (1990-99)
Stanford-Schools Collaborative, Palo Alto, CA
(1990-93)

Consultant: The Buck Institute, Navato, CA
Institute for Responsive Education (IRE), Boston, MA
University of Hartford, Hartford, CT
Casey Foundation, Center for Social Policy, Wash., DC
Stanford Schools Collaborative, Palo Alto, CA
IBM EduQuest, Palisades, NY
Scientist as Humanist Project, NH
Institute on Disabilities, Durham, NH
Aragon High School, San Mateo, CA
Greenwich High School, Greenwich, CT
Cardozo High School, New York, NY
Numerous schools in New Hampshire and Maine

* For grades K-3 use the world history "sub-strand" wording instead of the current "famous Americans" wording for the "U.S. History" strand. Why? Columbus and many others weren't "Americans". In other words change to: "Famous People in American History".

* Also keep the sub-strand language regarding "events" consistent for U.S. and World History; that is, "Famous Events in American History".

* I'd take out all of the lettering ("A", "B", etc.) and the Roman numerals ("I", "II", etc.) in the strands and sub-strands as they serve no purpose and are confusing for teachers, curriculum coordinators and other administrators viewing the standards over a number of grades. For example, the U.S. History sub-strand "Famous Americans" is designated "A", however, in grade 3 "A" becomes "Era 1: Pre-Colonial America, prehistory through 1607" while in grade 7 "A" changes to "Era 3: Founding of the Nation and Westward Expansion, 1775-1860." In addition, the names of some of the "eras" change, for example:

Era 3: Growth and Westward Expansion, 1801-1861

Era 3: Political Unrest and the American Revolution 1763-mid-1791

Era 3: Political Growth in the Early Republic

Era 3: Founding of the Nation and Westward Expansion, 1775-1860

Era 6: World Wars and the Emergence of Modern America, 1900-1930s

Era 6: The Emergence of Modern America, 1896-1929

Era 7: The Great Depression and World War Two, 1929-1945

Era 7: A World at War, 1930s-1945

Era 8: Post WWII Era

Era 8: The Cold War and a changing America, 1945-1980's

Era 9: Contemporary America, 1980-present

Era 9: The United States in an unsettled world 1989-present

I'd drop the "era" (with number) designation so that teachers focus their attention on the broad topic/event and the time span. Also, keep the phrasing consistent; for example, compare the two era 8's above and the two era 9's. Confusing.

* Revisit the world history standards with the above comments in mind.

* Why are world history eras 1-4 given so much more emphasis than eras 5-9, especially given the fact that the content contained in 5-9 is much more relevant to current world issues and events? Stated another way, why do students experience eras 1-4 in the early grades and high school whereas 5-9 are experienced only in high school?

* "Band" grades K-8 as you did with 9-12; for example, make three bands of k-2; 3-5, and 6-8. No Child Left Behind doesn't require social studies to be assessed, as I'm sure you know. Instead, the high stakes subject areas in grades 3-8 are language arts and mathematics. (Beginning in 2008 science must be assessed at least twice between grades 3 and 8.) Teachers will inevitably (and wisely) focus their curriculum planning and instruction on these two subject areas. It is my belief that in most schools (especially in grades k through 5) social studies standards will be incorporated only to the extent that they can be feathered in or linked to language arts and math. Banding or clustering will allow districts greater flexibility in trying to find a home for each of the social studies standards.

* Given the mobility of America's labor force, our primary self-identification as "Americans" rather some state affiliation, the globalization of the economy and politics, and the galaxy of other information and ideas in this document, I might recommend dropping the Minnesota history standards or at least reducing their number and subsuming them within various U.S. History standards. (In grade 2 you actually do this by subsuming some Minnesota history under U.S. History.)

* Under "benchmarks" might you use the word "can" rather than "will"? "Benchmarks" implies that successful achievement has occurred, hence the word "can" do something. "Will", however, has a future connotation. (Interestingly, "can" appears very briefly in the benchmarks for a geography standard at grade 2.)

* What's the difference between "world regions" and "global regions" in the "sub-strand" category for geography? Is an important distinction being made between the word "world" and "global"? Confusing.

* Change the name of the sub-strand currently labeled "essential skills" in geography as each of the other sub-strands also develops "essential skills". We know that the word "skill" really means "skilled use of knowledge" as there are no skills without knowledge. Stated another way, I think you'll be hard pressed to explain/identify any qualitative differences between the benchmarks listed under "essential skills" compared to the benchmarks listed for any of the other geography sub-strands.

* The above comments regarding "essential skills" also applies to the economics strand.

* You may want to visit the Michigan standards

http://www.michigan.gov/documents/MichiganCurriculumFramework_8172_7.pdf

regarding Civics & Government, specifically benchmarks involving citizenship action skills and the exploration of public policy issues (see Sections VI and VII). If the fundamental purpose of social studies education is preparation for citizenship participation, the standards outlined in sections VI and VII of the Michigan framework need to be added.

* Finally, I worry about the sheer volume of information and ideas listed in this document--and please note that this concern/criticism applies to virtually all state frameworks, not just Minnesota's. I'm willing to bet that not a single "successful" person living in Minnesota possesses what is required in the benchmarks. For example, do 2nd graders (and adults for that matter) really need to know the following: "Students will recognize that productive resources are all natural resources, human resources, and human-made resources (capital) used in the production of goods and services"? I believe a state framework should demand student proficiency with respect to information and ideas that are deemed essential rather than essential OR "desirable." I also noticed that the 2002 report by Patricia Avery, Richard Beach and others (<http://www.education.umn.edu/media/ResponseToProfile.pdf>) regarding the "Impact of Minnesota's 'Profile of Learning'..." includes a frightening statistic: 53% of social studies teachers indicated a reduction in their "enjoyment of teaching"! I attribute this to the immense volume of information and ideas expected to be taught since English teachers with their less coverage-oriented standards do not also report significantly reduced enjoyment. In addition, rigor on paper can actually result in reduced rigor in the classroom as teachers frantically, superficially and mindlessly race their kids through the material.