

CALIFORNIA REPORT CARD

SUBJECT	2000	2006
English	A	A
History*	A	A
Geography**	C	A
Math	A	A
Science	A	A
OVERALL GRADE	A-	A

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

ENGLISH—A

- *English-Language Development Standards for California Public Schools, K-12, July 1999*
- *English-Language Arts Content Standards for California Public Schools, K-12, December 1997*
- *Reading/Language Arts Framework for California Public Schools, K-12, 1999*
- *English-Language Development Standards for California Public Schools, K-12, July 1999*
- *California Standards Test Teacher Guide for the California Writing Standards Tests at Grades 4 and 7, May 2002*
- *Addendum to the May 2002 Teacher Guide for the California Writing Standards Tests at Grades 4 and 7, August 2003*
- *STAR California Standards Test and NCLB Blueprints for English Language Arts, 2-11, October 2002*

The Golden State puts forth golden English standards. Their balance and depth is impressive. The standards are clear, they are specific, they are measurable, and they address all areas fully. If there is a readily apparent flaw, it is that California includes too much information in the lower levels! Impressively, these English standards contain literature recommendations and note specific authors in their recommended reading lists, although it would be better if the documents narrowed the list to specific literary traditions and required study of American literature.

*MATHEMATICS —A

- *Mathematics Framework for California Public Schools, 2000 Revised Edition*

If any state has math standards right, it's California. The Golden State's standards avoid almost all the pitfalls of other states: they call for the use of calculators at the right time and in the right way (the standards do not "allow the use of calculators all through Kindergarten to grade eleven") and build students' skills in a logical progression that emphasizes computation, problem-solving, and mathematical reasoning all the way through. Elementary students are directed to memorize basic number facts and develop facility with addition and subtraction. High schoolers are given solid coverage of Algebra, Algebra II, and Geometry, and advanced courses in high school would challenge many college students. Nothing's perfect, and California does sometimes have a tendency to veer too close to social science in its standards, while probability gets a bit too much play throughout. But all in all, the state has a top-notch blueprint for mathematical excellence.

SCIENCE—A

- *Science Content Standards for California Public Schools and Science, 1998*
- *Framework for California Public Schools, 2004*

The home of Silicon Valley gives us a delightful pair of standards that are both brief and comprehensive. They use plain language and, unlike many of their peers, they avoid errors and ambiguity. Biology is detailed, and the seventh-grade standards sensibly integrate Earth sciences with evolution. When applicable, physical systems are presented in the context of living systems; e.g., they explore properties of light in relationship to the human eye. A fine job, all around.

*U.S. HISTORY—A

- *History-Social Science Framework for California Public Schools, 1997*
- *History-Social Science Content Standards for California Public Schools, 2000, California Department of Education and California State Board of Education*

California's history standards start strong by providing Kindergarteners with an initial understanding of the subject, teaching them "how people lived in earlier times and how their lives would be different today."

The state builds sequentially on this foundation until fifth grade when it presents a definitive timeline of events, starting with pre-Columbian history and working up to 1850. American history resumes in eighth grade, and U.S. history is presented in eleventh—and at each level, the standards offer a cornucopia of information. These documents have some flaws and political history is often given short shrift. “Jacksonian Democracy,” for instance, is presented outside a historical context and no mention is made of the emergence of American political parties. On balance, though, California’s standards are excellent and should serve as a model for other states.

WORLD HISTORY—A

■ *History-Social Science Content Standards, 2005*

A “story well told” is what California believes history should be, and its standards tell the world’s story very well. In a document thankfully free of bullet points, charts, grids, and rubrics, the state deftly guides educators through the material from world religions to modern world politics, and it never slips in providing in-depth information. Students are asked not just to understand Islam, for example, but “Islam’s continuity with Judaism and Christianity in its proclamation of belief in one God, [and] its belief that God’s will has been given final expression in the Koran.” If there’s a flaw, it’s that teachers may not read the longish 200-page document. If they don’t, it isn’t because the text is a bore. This document is the gold standard, and those looking for good standards to model may well shout “Eureka!” when they read it.