

Review of Minnesota Academic Standards Final Draft History and Social Studies by Harold (Hal) Balsiger

Thank you once again for involving me in your standards writing project. Let me first of all compliment you, your committee and the many participants who took advantage of the opportunity to discuss, in a very public forum, the content and processes of the *Minnesota Academic Standards for History and Social Studies*. Your second draft suggests a serious effort, studied discourse, and, I am sure, some healthy debate in your town hall sessions and follow-up committee meetings. I find your second draft to be very readable and much easier to understand (less list-like). The benchmarks in the second draft make significant progress in identifying essential content. I am especially pleased with the development of skills and processes as they relate to the inquiry/research process. You and your committee should be extremely proud of the work you have accomplished to date. It has been my experience that this is a never-ending process, and as you begin to review real student work in the light of your present expectations, you will wish to refine and refocus what it is that you would like students to know and be able to do.

Background:

My career has taken me to urban, suburban and rural schools: eight years as a high school Social Studies Instructor, seven years as a High School Principal, six years as a Middle School Principal and the last fourteen years as an Administrator in the Teaching and Learning Department of the Madison Metropolitan School District. I have taught in the associate degree programs of Wisconsin's technical schools and worked with undergraduate, graduate and doctoral candidates at the university level. I have served on numerous accreditation teams. I have served as an outside evaluator for grants and offered numerous reviews of school district K-12 curriculum guides. I was active in the creation of the Wisconsin Assessment Consortium. I have recently served on the Office of School Service Advisory Board of the Wisconsin State Historical Society. I have presented workshops and staff development at the local, state and national level. The two most recent successful grants I have authored and administered related to Social Studies were ***Beyond the Textbook*** (40 high school social studies instructors working to integrate technology and inquiry in the social studies classroom) and ***Internet Detectives*** (75 middle school instructors at 10 middle school sites working to assist students in searching and evaluating resources available electronically). My most recent publication was as co-author of The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction's ***Planning Curriculum in Social Studies***. In June of 2003 I retired from the Madison Metropolitan School District.

Review:

When I read the second draft, I identified some of my biases. I will share some of my observations and feedback with you, understanding that I am not fully aware of the political context in which you have arrived at your consensus document.

- In the sections that speak to exhibiting the behaviors of good citizens, the document often suggests compliant behaviors. What happened to asking questions and soliciting multiple points of view?

- In the benchmarks that focus on the role of the three branches of government, I am reminded that some of our founding fathers wrote about a fourth branch of government. Given the recent surge in propositions, recalls and petitions, the fourth branch, the people or the electorates role, may be worth inclusion.
- Every state teaches about their state's history and development. What is often missing in this discussion, and I believe important in a very mobile culture, is the similarities and differences, the ability to compare and contrast the story of state histories by region and time across the nation.
- Given the progress of technology, the events of 911 and the provisions of the recent Homeland Security Act, where is the discussion of the issues of privacy vs. security?
- I do not see the inclusion of Psychology, Sociology or Anthropology in the Social Studies Standards. Where do students obtain knowledge about learning theory, the nature of human behavior, group and individual relationships or the role of institutions (specifically international organizations) that are not governments?

Again, thank you for an opportunity to participate in this process.