

Review of History/Social Studies Standards Draft by Kermit Hall

Thanks for the opportunity to comment on your new standards. You should feel free to use any and all of the comments that follow:

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Dr. Hall's background:

President Hall has broad experience at two of the nation's finest land-grant research universities—North Carolina State University where he was chief academic officer, and Ohio State University, where he served as Dean of the College of Humanities and Executive Dean of the College of the Arts and Sciences. Dr. Hall has also held administrative posts and faculty appointments in history and law at the University of Tulsa, the University of Florida, Wayne State University, and Vanderbilt University.

A historian and legal scholar, Dr. Hall has written extensively on American legal history, including *The Magic Mirror: Law in American History*, published by the Oxford University Press, and editor of *The Oxford Companion to the Supreme Court of the United States*, an award-winning volume, and editor of the forthcoming *Oxford Companion to American Law*.

Dr. Hall has an MSL degree from Yale University Law School, a PhD in history from the University of Minnesota, an MA degree from Syracuse University, and a BA degree from the University of Akron. He also completed the program at Harvard University's Institute for Educational Management.

The new standards will delight teachers who believe students don't know enough and disappoint those who believe that they will turn classrooms into exercise machines for memory. But to put a bit more even interpretation on them, it is fair to say that they ask that students know more, certainly more in terms of detailed knowledge than does the current scheme, Profile of Learning. I am sympathetic to the new approach, largely because it does ask that students have some fact base upon which to frame their conceptual understanding. It is hard to argue, for example, about the correctness of civil disobedience, if you don't know something about the life and times of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The trend across the country, moreover, seems to be mostly in the direction you are headed, but not without controversy. Clearly, the struggle is not to let the standards debate be tyrannized by dichotomies, with facts vs. thinking.

In that regard, there are plenty of concepts and themes from history and geography that students will have to tackle. Sixth-graders must be able to identify characteristics of Indian tribes such as the Dakota and Ojibwe. High school students are asked to discuss the rise of Islam, the French Revolution and the influence of such philosophers as John Locke and Charles de Montesquieu. We would be delighted to have new college students able to do just that. And seventh-graders must learn about the role of pioneer women in the western expansion of the United States, not just to know who those women were. So, these standards do not look to me like a simple list of names, places, and dates and they do not look, at the same time, as bereft of conceptual learning challenges.

I especially like the attention given in the government and history sections to the founding era, to foundational ideas, and to the goals of the individuals who wrote the Declaration and the Constitution. But, having said that, I also think that a slightly sharper eye needs to be turned on the founding generation, especially in relation to its role with women,

African Americans, and Native peoples. Understanding that the generation that founded the nation did so through a series of compromises about, for example, slavery and race, helps to frame the later development of the nation without undermining the achievement of its chief architects. As survey after survey indicates, new college students have only a slight idea of what went on in Philadelphia and what its consequences were for all people. Such an approach also helps to make sense of why most of the generation that fought the Civil War could be simultaneously in favor of free soil, opposed to slavery, and racist to the core. At the same time, I am delighted to see the emphasis placed on the Civil War amendments and their impact. Of course, that impact was uneven, at least with regard to rights, for the first fifty years and only slightly more significant in the following thirty years.

Generally, the standards tend too much to showing historically under-represented groups as being acted on rather than being actors in the development of their own histories and that of the nation. We all know that the KKK rose, but we need to explain that there was also a reaction among the communities that it sought to terrorize and from others, like the ACLU and NAACP leaders, who sought action from an often reluctant government. An important part of the history of America is not just appreciating that oppression has taken place, but how those who were its targets have dealt with it.

The standards, at least in the area of U.S. History, World History, and Government and Citizenship require some greater attention to the following:

1. I cannot find the Constitution of the state of Minnesota anywhere, but more importantly there is little attention to the role that it and all state constitutions play in the day-to-day lives of citizens. As a result, there is an under emphasis on rights and privileges provided under the Minnesota constitution, often ones that exist at a higher level than under the federal document's Bill of Rights. There are passing references to knowing about federalism and state and local government, but no student will be able, based on what is in these standards, to come to terms with the legal/political/governmental universe of state and locality in which they will live as Minnesotans. One of the strengths of these new standards is their emphasis on rights, duties, and privileges, the political and legal ideas that inform them, and the historical events that shaped them. But it is important to value and teach about the rights, privileges, and duties of associated with living in Minnesota as well as the U. S. In fact, these standards, while in some sense demanded by the federal government, are in fact Minnesota's response and a perfect reminder of how important the states and localities remain in American life and, more generally, in the enjoyment of a distinctly American form of liberty.
2. There is surprisingly little attention to the Supreme Court of the United States and, even more so, to local and state courts in Minnesota. Certainly, there is attention to the Court on pages 38, 41, and elsewhere, but given the tremendous stress on the founding era and the Constitution, I believe that more could be done to explain the Court's development of the concepts of judicial review, judicial independence, and judicial supremacy, both in the history and the government and citizenship sections. Moreover, the role of local and state courts receives short shrift, but the vast majority of students leaving your schools will some day come to these bodies, certainly more than they will ever get to the nation's highest

court.

3. Finally, somewhere in the standards generally, I would encourage you to think about using comparisons and a comparative approach. Interestingly, the section dealing with economics offers several comparative approaches that stretch across national boundaries. I would urge the same elsewhere. Students should, it seems to me, be able to see the development of the nation and its politics, law, and government as our solutions, but not the only solutions to the major issues of public life. The emphasis on World History is excellent and to be applauded. But what I do not see is an effort, for example, to make the basic point that most of the world's democracies function on a parliamentary rather than a presidential system. Shouldn't a student by the time they leave high school understand that concept and its implications? The United States basically relies on a scheme of negatively stated rights; much of the rest of the world, and increasingly the developing democratic part of it, relies on positively stated rights. South Africa is a prime example. I am NOT recommending that everything be framed in comparative terms, but somewhere in the standards, especially in history and government, a directly comparative approach for current political, legal, and governmental issues would be a worthy addition, just as it is in the section on economics.

You have my very best wishes for the fuller discussion that will surely come in one of the most politically vexed areas of American life - what students should know through history and social studies. My best recommendation, again, is not to let that debate and these standards be tyrannized by dichotomies. On balance, I would give you high marks for having made real progress in that regard.