

MINNESOTA ACADEMIC STANDARDS FOR HISTORY & SOCIAL STUDIES: A REVIEW BY WARREN SOLOMON

A Word about the Reviewer

Warren Solomon is a former social studies teacher, who has taught in grades 5, 8, and 9 in two St. Louis County, MO, public school districts. He served as State Social Studies Curriculum Consultant for the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) from 1974 through July 2001, following which he has taught courses in social studies curriculum, instruction, and assessment at the University of Missouri-Columbia as Adjunct Assistant Professor of Education.

Of special relevance for this review, Dr. Solomon has played a leadership and editorial role in the development of *Missouri's Framework for Curriculum Development in Social Studies*¹ and *Content Specifications for Statewide Assessment: Social Studies, Grades 4, 8, & 11*² during the late 1990s. Earlier, he represented the Council of State Social Studies Specialists on the National Council for History Standards and played a role in the review of the national standards for civics and geography. In addition, while at DESE, Dr. Solomon was active in the Missouri Council on Economic Education, the Missouri Geographic Alliance, and the Missouri Bar Advisory Committee on Citizenship Education.

The Reviewer's Philosophy

It is important to understand the point of view of a reviewer of a publication in order to judge the appropriateness and fairness of his or her review and to decide how seriously to take his or her ideas. For that reason, Dr. Solomon will now lay his cards on the table for all who see this review. Dr. Solomon's assumptions are as follows:

1. This nation is a republic, which has been moving in the direction toward democracy. At the beginning of the republic, relatively few people could vote, and a significant portion of the population was enslaved. Now, just about everyone who is a citizen over age 18 may vote, provided that he or she makes the effort to register. In addition, there are countless ways citizens can have an impact on the laws and policies of their communities, states, and nations.
2. Decisions of political leaders set in policy and law may have profound effects (positive or negative) upon the lives and opportunities of the citizenry of this nation and, indeed, upon the lives and opportunities of people who live in other nations. (To give two current examples: The President's decision to take

¹ See <http://www.dese.state.mo.us/divimprove/curriculum/frameworks/ss.html>.

² See <http://www.dese.state.mo.us/divimprove/assess/annotations/ss/index.htm>.

action against Saddam Hussein has had a profound impact upon the lives of many Americans and Iraqis, and decisions of state universities to raise tuitions in times of economic stress may have a profound impact upon the future opportunities of those students who cannot afford the increased costs of higher education.)

3. Analysis of current issues and proposed policies and laws is not simple. There are conflicting values and issues of fact, definition, and law to consider in making such decisions, and different people, thinking rationally, may come up with different evaluations of those issues and proposed policies and laws.
4. For the good of the individual and nation, as well as world, citizens have a moral obligation to monitor the actions of their governments and to be analytic with regard to public policy questions.
5. Social studies programs have a major responsibility in helping students learn the skills involved in analyzing and debating issues and in making rational decisions so far as public policy questions are concerned. One cannot assume that people just learn how to do such thinking without instruction and coaching.
6. To develop such skills, social studies programs should engage students in the study of issues, as those students study history, geography, government, economics, and current events in their social studies courses.
7. Competent analysis of issues that confront the citizenry in this nation requires a strong knowledge base from the disciplines of history, geography, political science, economics, law, and other social sciences. It also requires a study of the media in order to obtain and learn to evaluate information. It also requires some reading of literature and participation in discussion in order to understand different perspectives with regard to current and past events.

This Review

This review is more limited than this reviewer considers to be desirable. He was contacted to conduct the review only one week before the review was due, and during that week he had several prior obligations to Missouri University and his family, which restricted the time available for this review.

The reviewer would like to have spent much time as a wordsmith, but he did not have the time to do so. He would, for example, change verbs like “will know,” “will understand,” and “become aware” to verbs that communicate more what students should be expected *to do* to demonstrate their knowledge, understanding, and awareness, for example. The reviewer also did not have sufficient time to trace the development of ideas within each sub-strand, which would have made it possible for him to offer specific suggestions for the revision of specific details within the standards and benchmarks.³

³ The reviewer did notice an example or two of benchmarks that seemed to be unrealistic for students at their particular age levels. For example, the benchmark “Students will demonstrate understanding of the interrelationship of supply, demand, markets, and prices” seems to the reviewer to be too advanced for fourth graders. In addition, there seems to be a need to give

Given the time constraints, the reviewer will limit himself to providing a brief description of the standards followed by general evaluative comments and suggestions.

Description of Minnesota's Standards for Social Studies

Standards specified by grade levels. Minnesota's standards, like those of other states, begin with the lowest grades and culminate with the highest grades. In the Minnesota case, standards are listed sequentially for each grade from Grade 1 through Grade 8, following which standards are listed in a single set for Grades 9-12.

Separate sets of strands for history and for social studies. The standards are divided into two sets within each grade: (a) a set for History and (b) a set for Social Studies. The History Standards are divided into strands of U.S. History, where standards are listed in all grades except for Grade 6; World History, where standards are listed in all grades except for Grades 7 and 8; and Minnesota History, where standards are listed for Grades 6, 7, and 8. The standards, as listed, do not inform readers about how they are to be addressed. For example, readers are not informed about whether Minnesota history is to be woven into world and U.S. history or whether it is to be taught in distinctly separate units. The Social Studies Standards are divided into three sets of strands: Government and Citizenship, Geography, and Economics. In the case of each of those sets of strands, specific standards are listed in all grade levels. Readers are not informed about whether those sets of standards are to be taught separately from each other or whether they are to be taught in an integrated manner within history or social studies units.⁴

Themes not specified for each grade level. The standards document does not specify a specific unifying content focus or theme for each grade level. For example, no specific focus or theme is identified for kindergarten, Grade 1, Grade 2, or Grade 3. Perhaps, the intent is to have the focus each year, K-8, focus on the history standards listed with the social studies strands taught in conjunction with the history content, or perhaps the intent is to allow local school districts to make their own decisions in such areas. Readers are also not informed about whether in Grades 9-12 the U.S. History, World History, Government and Citizenship, Geography, and Economics are to be taught as separate courses or whether the standards in those subject matter areas are to be taught in integrated

more consideration to understanding major religions as they are today. The last time they are examined in the standards and benchmarks appears to be in Era 2 (500-1000 A.D.), which in today's world seems inadequate, especially since 9/11 and given the problems in the Middle East. The fact is that all of the major religions have changed significantly since 1000.

⁴ This reader infers that they are to be taught in an integrated manner because in Grade 8 there are two sets of standards for geography, one of which is simply called "Geography," the other of which is called "Geography (Non-integrated)."

courses. Again, the intent might be to have local districts make their own decisions about how they will address the standards.

Strands divided into sub-strands. Each strand is divided into sub-strands. For example, the U.S. History Strand in kindergarten is divided into these sub-strands: “A. Famous Americans” and “B. Famous American Events”; the Government and Citizenship Strand in Grade 5 is divided into these sub-strands: “A. Character Traits of Good Citizens,” “B. Rights, Privileges and Responsibilities,” and “C. Patriotic Symbols, Songs, and Events” and the World History Strand in Grade 6 is divided into “A. Era 2. Classical Civilizations, 1000 B.C. to 500 A.D.,” “B. Era 3. Postclassical Civilizations, 500-1000 A.D., and C. Era 4. Regional Interactions, 1000-1500 A.D.” The number of sub-strands for a single strand varies from two (U.S. History in Kindergarten or World History in Kindergarten) to eight (World History in Grades 9-12) and nine (U.S. History in Grades 9-12).

Sub-strands divided into standards and benchmarks. Each sub-strand is further divided into standards and benchmarks. Here are two examples:

Grade Level: Kindergarten
Strand: U.S. History

Sub-Strand	Standard	Benchmarks
A. Famous Americans	The student will recognize people who contributed to U.S. history.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Students will know people associated with national holidays and figures from various cultural backgrounds, including, but not limited to, Christopher Columbus, Martin Luther King Jr., Abraham Lincoln, Pilgrims, Squanto, and George Washington. • Students will know how diverse native and immigrant peoples have contributed to American history.

Grade Level: 9-12
Strand: Economics

Sub-Strand	Standard	Benchmarks
A. The Market Economy	The student will understand the economic role of government in a market economy.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Students will identify that an important role for government in the economy is to define, establish, and enforce property rights. ▪ Students will analyze the appropriate role of government in cases where economic externalities—also known as spillover or third party effects—are known to exist. ▪ Students will identify circumstances in which it is appropriate for governments to provide public goods. ▪ Students will recognize that, in the U.S., the federal government enforces antitrust laws and regulations to try to maintain effective levels of competition in as many markets as possible. ▪ Students will recognize that many government policies attempt to redistribute income. ▪ Students will understand that a government policy

		to correct a market imperfection is not justified economically if its expected costs exceed its expected benefits.
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For the most part, the higher the grade level, the greater the number of benchmarks for students to master. For example, whereas in Grade 1 there were 41 benchmarks for all social studies strands, whereas in the Grades 9-12 U.S. History Strand there were 83 benchmarks and in the Grades 9-12 World History Strand there were 106 benchmarks. Hence, at the senior high level, a student would have to master on average one benchmark every one to two days of school attendance.

Types of thinking skills that are emphasized in the Minnesota standards.

Whether by conscious design or not, standards communicate a vision of what students are *or should be* like. For example, imagine a continuum, where on the left side we have the image of students as primarily recipients of information, which they are to recognize and understand, and on the right side we have students primarily as constructors of knowledge, where they make observations, apply concepts and principles, analyze and evaluate sources, and conduct research. Where do the Minnesota standards lie on that continuum? For the most part, they lie on the left side, because *most* of the standards call on students to recognize, understand, or demonstrate knowledge of information. Here are some examples of such standards:

- The student will recognize people who contributed to U.S. history. (Grade 1, U.S. History Strand, page 2)
- The student will understand the character traits of being a good citizen. (Grade 2, Government and Citizenship Strand, page 5)
- The student will demonstrate knowledge of ancient civilizations (Grade 3, World History Strand, page 7)
- The student will understand the concepts of markets and prices (Grade 4, Economics Strand, page 13)
- The student will identify and describe the symbols, icon, songs, and traditions of the United States that illustrate American ideals and provide a sense of community. (Grade 5, Government and Citizenship Strand, page 16)
- The student will be able to describe how humans influence the environment and in turn are influenced by it. (Grade 6, Geography Strand, page 21)
- The student will analyze and comprehend renewed westward expansion, reconstruction and their lasting consequences. (Grade 7, U.S. History Strand, page 26)
- The student will understand the economic, social, and political transformation of the United States and the world, from the stock market crash of 1929 to the early 1940s. (Grade 8, U.S. History Strand, page 30)
- The student will demonstrate knowledge of the Articles of Confederation and the creation of the Constitution and the resulting growth of political parties. (Grades 9-12. U.S. History Strand, page 37)
- The student will demonstrate knowledge of major events and outcomes of the Cold War. (Grades 9-12, World History Strand, page 48)

- The student will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the origins, characteristics, and development of different political systems. (Grades 9-12, Government and Citizenship Strand, page 50)
- The student will explain the pattern of economic activities and land use in the United States and the world. (Grades 9-12, Geography Strand, page 51)
- The student will understand how households, firms, and governments are interdependent and how their relationship is affected by trade, exchange, money and the economic system in which they are operating. (Grades 9-12, page 53)

So far as the benchmarks are concerned, most of them seem to fall in the same domain of students understanding taught content, with one typical example from the U.S. history Strand, Grades 9-12 shown below:

Standard: The student will understand the beginnings of the Cold War and how it shifted foreign and domestic policy.

Benchmarks for that Standard:

- Students will understand the rise of anti-communism and concerns over the influence of communists in American government and public life (including the role of Joseph McCarthy).
- Students will know and understand the key aspects and significance of the occupation of Japan and Germany, as well as the significance of the Marshall Plan.
- Students will understand the doctrine of containment between 1945 and 1975, including but not limited to, the Berlin airlift, NATO, the Warsaw Pact, the Korean War, the Truman Doctrine, and the Vietnam War.

There are some exceptions. For example, there are several benchmarks in the Geography Strand that engage students in interpreting and making maps and in making charts. Here is an example of such a set of benchmarks from Grade 8, Geography Strand (page 32):

- Students will create a map to scale.
- Students will be able to use maps and images to analyze interactions between people and their environment.
- Students will create a flow map to show movement of people.
- Students will use the concept of region and can distinguish common characteristics of regions within Minnesota, the United States and the World (landforms, climate, vegetation, farming, land use).

In a few cases, one finds students asked to use application, analytic, and evaluation modes of thinking, as in the case of this set of benchmarks from Grade 8, Geography Strand (page 32):

- Students will apply the concept of region by explaining how cultural characteristics link or divide regions.

- Students will compare the physical and human characteristics of places using observation data and geographic resources (examples: soils, landforms, vegetation, wildlife, religion, language, politics, population, land use).
- Students will use geographic tools and technologies to pose and answer questions about past and present spatial distributions and patterns on Earth (mountain ranges, river systems, field patterns, settlements, transportation routes).
- Students will be able to draw sketch maps from memory of major physical and cultural features of world regions and be able to compare the relative locations of these features (continents, oceans, mountains, deserts, languages, religions).
- Students will evaluate the impact of human activity on landscapes over time using maps, graphs and satellite-produced images (examples: agricultural patterns in different areas of the world, urban growth, land use change).
- Students will analyze the geographic aspects of current and historical issues or conflicts.

Students are also asked to use advanced citizenship and historical thinking skills in this set of benchmarks from the Grade 5 Government and Citizenship Strand (page 16):

- Students will be able to define bias and identify it in political cartoons, political advertisements, pictures, and other graphic media.
- Students will be able to find and identify primary and secondary source documents.
- Students will be able to distinguish between relevant and irrelevant information.
- Students will be able to evaluate information for accuracy, separating fact from opinion.
- Students will be able to select and defend positions in writing, discussion, and debate.

In addition, students are asked to use some economic reasoning and decision-making skills in this set of benchmarks from the Grades 9-12 Economic Strand (page 53)

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- Students will analyze how career choice, education, and skills affect future income.
- Students will be able to compute short and long term personal financial goals and plans by considering flows of income, spending and saving.
- Students will be able to compare and contrast the advantages and disadvantages of using consumer credit.
- Students will be able to analyze short and long term personal investment options such as stocks, bonds and mutual funds by comparing the risk, return, and liquidity of these options.
- Students will be able to describe how insurance and other risk management strategies protect against financial loss.

It is important, however, to understand that such examples are really exceptions in the Minnesota standards and benchmarks, for the dominant character of the

Minnesota standards and benchmarks is that they tend to emphasize students knowing, understanding, and being able to explain content they were taught.

How civic values are emphasized in the Minnesota standards.

The Minnesota standards and benchmarks emphasize civic, patriotic values, as the following examples make clear:

From Kindergarten, Government and Citizenship Strand:

Standard: The student will understand the character traits of being a good citizen.

Benchmarks:

- Students will recognize, from literature and real life examples, good citizen traits of honesty, courage, patriotism and individual responsibility.
- Students will give examples and exhibit good citizen behaviors such as respect, kindness, self-control, cooperation, and good manners.

From Grade 5, Government and Citizenship Strand:

Standard: The student will identify and describe the symbols, icon, songs, and traditions of the United States that illustrate American ideals and provide a sense of community.

Benchmarks:

- Students will identify and be able to discuss the concepts expressed in songs such as The Battle Hymn of the Republic and God Bless America.
- Students will identify significant themes and concepts in, and be able to explain, the Gettysburg Address.

From Grade 8, Government and Citizenship Strand:

Standard: The student will understand the success of the Framers of the Constitution in securing the equal rights of all citizens.

Benchmarks:

- Students will be familiar with constitutionalism, which makes it clear government was subordinated to a higher or supreme law.
- Students will understand the concept of federalism.
- Students will be familiar with the rule of law, that no one is above the law, and those who live under the law must be able to participate in making those laws, and those who make the laws must live under the laws they make.

From Grades 9-12, Government and Citizenship Strand:

Standard: The student will demonstrate knowledge and understanding of the rights and responsibilities of citizenship.

Benchmarks:

- Students will define the inherent rights of all Americans and explain how protecting individuals rights promotes the common good.
- Students will describe the processes by which an individual becomes a citizen of the United States.
- Students will explain the duties of citizenship, including but not limited to, protection of the inherent rights of all persons, obeying the laws, paying taxes, voting, defending the nation and serving in court.
- Students will describe the activities of civic life, including but not limited to, registering to vote and informed voting, participating in political campaigns, communicating with government officials, keeping informed about current issues, respecting diverse opinions in a diverse society, and setting an example of freedom in the world community.

This reader interprets standards and benchmarks, such as those above, which are typical in the Minnesota standards document, as implying that students are to assume the role of receiving what the state regards as “the right values” for citizens to have. This approach is very different from one which would have students apply values in the making of public policy decisions, where civic values are often in conflict. The Minnesota standards seem to steer away from having students study any controversial issues in their complexity, where they might need to decide what to choose in situations where intelligent adults debate what is best and vote on political leaders who take stands on such issues, whose stands, if implemented in law, will have profound implications for individuals and for society as a whole. For example, while the Minnesota standards ask students “to analyze and define the fundamental principles of the Constitution,” which includes “the purpose of the Constitution, as stated in the Preamble,” those standards do not reveal the fact that the purposes of government in the Preamble—union (unity), justice, domestic tranquility, defense, general welfare, and liberty—sometimes conflict in specific cases, as in the case of a religious conscientious objector who refuses to be drafted in a time of war (liberty vs. common defense). In addition, there are all sorts of debates about many other parts of the Constitution, which politicians, the Supreme Court, and citizens properly debate; yet the Minnesota standards do not emphasize having students roll up their sleeves and come to grips with such complex matters. Its emphasis is mainly on accepting as good the general values of our system without pointing out that those good values sometimes conflict in specific cases and that citizens need to be able to analyze and discuss such matters intelligently and use their good thinking to make decisions when they participate in the political marketplace.

Assessment of the Minnesota Standards

Following are suggestions for how the Minnesota standards might be improved from the perspective of this reviewer:

Reconsider Minnesota’s decision to split history from Social Studies.

It is not at all clear why Minnesota decided to have two sets of standards, one for history and the other for social studies. Why is history *not* regarded as part of social studies? Is not history a study of people’s lives in societies? To be sure, it emphasizes past events and developments and their interrelationships, but such a focus hardly makes history not part of the social studies. Social studies is defined by the National Council for the Social Studies as follows:

Social studies is the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world.

It is important to note that history is listed within that definition. Unfortunately, however, the definition does have a flaw: When it identified the social sciences that contribute to social studies, it lists those social sciences in alphabetical order, which implies that all of the disciplines listed in the definition are of equal importance; yet the fact is that in most social studies programs history has considerable emphasis—indeed, the most emphasis of all disciplines—which is very appropriate, because having an historical perspective is essential to the primary purpose of social studies listed in the NCSS definition.

Consider expanding upon the skills to be taught within the context of the history strands.

The Minnesota standards list as “Essential Skills” within the History Strand as only that of students acquiring “skills of chronological thinking,” which—although important—hardly encompasses all important skills students ought to learn when studying history. Take a look at the skills listed in the National History Standards.

For the elementary level, the following historical thinking skills standards and sub-standards were listed:

Standard 1
Chronological Thinking⁵

- A. Distinguish between past, present, and future time.
- B. Identify the temporal structure of a historical narrative or story.
- C. Establish temporal order in constructing students' own historical narratives.
- D. Measure and calculate calendar time.
- E. Interpret data presented in time lines.
- F. Create time lines.
- G. Explain change and continuity over time.

Standard 2
Historical Comprehension

- A. Identify the author or source of the historical document or narrative.
- B. Reconstruct the literal meaning of a historical passage.
- C. Identify the central question(s) the historical narrative addresses.
- D. Read historical narratives imaginatively.
- E. Appreciate historical perspectives.
- F. Draw upon data in historical maps.
- G. Draw upon visual and mathematical data presented in graphs.
- H. Draw upon the visual data presented in photographs, paintings, cartoons, and architectural drawings.

Standard 3
Historical Analysis and Interpretation

- A. Formulate questions to focus their inquiry or analysis.
- B. Compare and contrast differing sets of ideas, values, personalities, behaviors, and institutions.
- C. Analyze historical fiction.
- D. Distinguish between fact and fiction.
- E. Compare different stories about a historical figure, era, or event.
- F. Analyze illustrations in historical stories.
- G. Consider multiple perspectives.
- H. Explain causes in analyzing historical actions.
- I. Challenge arguments of historical inevitability.
- J. Hypothesize influences of the past.

Standard 4
Historical Research Capabilities

- A. Formulate historical questions.
- B. Obtain historical data.
- C. Interrogate historical data.
- D. Marshal needed knowledge of the time and place, and construct a story, explanation, or historical narrative.

⁵ This National History standard is the only one that the Minnesota standards emphasizes.

Standard 5
Historical Issues-Analysis and Decision-Making

- A. Identify problems and dilemmas in the past.
- B. Analyze the interests and values of the various people involved.
- C. Identify causes of the problem or dilemma.
- D. Propose alternative choices for addressing the problem.
- E. Formulate a position or course of action on an issue.
- F. Identify the solution chosen.
- G. Evaluate the consequences of a decision.

This reviewer urges the Minnesota standards writing team to examine these standards in more detail, as well as the thinking skills standards in the National History Standards for Grades 5-12.⁶

Central to the question of whether to accept the above suggestion is that of Minnesota's conception of "history." Is history a body of information assembled by scholars to be passed on to young people and other adults, is history a discipline that strives to understand the past using what artifacts can be found and the best thinking of human minds, or is history a combination of the two? Minnesota's position seems to be that history is primarily a body of information to be passed on to young people. Such an approach to history may be a hard sell for young people, who might not find the content to be so interesting as do their teachers. In addition, such an approach might be questioned as to whether it is the best approach to use if the aim is to have our schools nurture curious, free-thinking, rational citizens.

Consider reducing the amount of historical content students are to master at the senior high level.

I counted 83 U.S. history benchmarks for Grades 9-12 and 106 world history benchmarks for the same grades. If one assumes that the school year lasts as long as 200 days, one would have to teach one U.S. history benchmark practically every two days, and one would have to cover such content even more rapidly in world history. Such a press to cover content would force lecture teaching and superficial learning, likely to be remembered only for a short time.

Consider rethinking what will be the chronological focus or major themes for each year when U.S. and world history is taught. The high school history courses address their domains from beginning points in history up through the present. This means that those courses repeat much content already taught at earlier levels. One approach would be to have earlier grades focus on earlier periods of history, middle grades focus on middle periods of history, and high school grades focus mainly on recent history. Such an approach would need to find effective ways to review at appropriate times content

⁶ See the following website: <http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/thinking5-12.html>.

taught earlier and to tie content of the past to the present in all courses. Another approach might be to have special themes for different levels. One level might focus on matters economic: namely, how people engaged in productive activities and modified technologies to become more productive over time; another level might focus on the struggle for political rights and on challenges to democracy; and still another level might focus, using ideas of historians like William McNeill, on the spread of ideas, technologies, and other things (including germs) as people become more interconnected.

In any case, the focus on covering so much content works against having students learn anything in any depth, would force students to put aside their curiosity and focus only on what is taught, would prevent students from thinking like historians who conduct research, and would prevent students from grappling with the complexities of any of the issues people dealt with in the past. Such an approach would also encourage teachers and students to think in a very unproductive way for citizens: namely, to look at events always from a hindsight perspective, where, since the events took place in the past, we know what the outcomes were and we get seduced into thinking that the events had to turn out as they did. The fact is that people live in their present and that they are forced to make decisions without knowing what will happen next. President Bush had to think that way when he ordered U.S. troops to move into Iraq, and citizens have to think that way whenever they vote or make decisions about where to live or whether to change careers.

Consider having students study issues in depth, to relate them to their own lives and learn how to discuss them rationally with their peers and with adults.

In democracies citizens have the freedom and opportunity to make many of their own personal decisions, which often have social ramifications, to select their leaders, and to vote on issues. The Minnesota standards and benchmarks do not emphasize helping students to develop the skills to engage in discussion of issues and to make decisions with regard to them.

Here are examples of existing benchmarks, followed by how the benchmarks could be expanded to help students develop discussion and decision-making skills and relate the content of those benchmarks to their own lives:

Benchmark in Minnesota's draft standards	How the benchmark could be modified to build within it a discussion and decision-making emphasis
Students will explain why we have rules, consequences, and privileges (Kindergarten, p. 1)	Students will suggest and evaluate rules, which might be used to help solve some problem the group is facing.
Students will recognize that because of scarcity they need to make decisions. (Grade 1, p. 4)	Students will make economic decisions using rational procedures.
Students will understand the importance of ...keeping informed about current issues. (Grade 3, p. 8)	Students will assess the credibility of different sources with regard to some specific issue.
Students will know and understand the role Lincoln's assignation played in hardening the North's attitude toward the South and Reconstruction (Grade 7. p. 25)	Students will identify problems the Union faced with regard to reconstructing the Nation, will propose alternative ways those problems might be resolved, and will identify pros and cons of those alternatives, striving to think as people were thinking in Lincoln's times.
Students will understand the controversy surrounding Wilson's 14 Points, the Treaty of Versailles and the consequences of both (Grades 9-12, p. 40)	Students will analyze the issue of whether the U.S. Senate should ratify the Treaty of Versailles, focusing on whether the U.S. should join the League of Nations.
Students will explain the importance of sustainable use of the environment (Grades 9-12, p. 52)	Students will assess whether land beside the Mississippi River at a given location should be used for wetlands, for farming, or for a power plant.
Students will explain the direct and indirect effects of fiscal policy on employment, output, and interest rates.	Students will describe the fiscal policy currently proposed by the President and will evaluate it using such economic values as freedom, justice, efficiency, economic growth, and stability.

This reviewer is not proposing that such modifications actually be placed within the Minnesota standards. Rather, he is proposing that the standards be modified to make room for teachers to engage students in problem solving and decision making where they must weigh conflicting values. The problem with the current standards is that there are so many standards that teachers will not have the time to engage students in such discussions of past and current events, where teachers may coach them in honing their problem-solving, decision-making, and discussion skills.

Consider whether to identify themes for each grade level.

It is hard to know what will be emphasized at the various grade levels when one reads Minnesota's draft standards document. Is social studies at the various grades to be a collection of social studies units, or is it to have some common focus toward which the standards are to be addressed? Minnesota might decide not to have themes for each grade level and to leave such decision making to local school districts.

A related problem is that at the elementary level, especially in Grades 3, 4, and 5, it might be difficult to find text material that encompasses all of the U.S. history and world history that is listed. To be sure, it is not sound educationally to base one's standards and teaching around a single textbook for a grade level; yet one has to recognize that many elementary teachers do not have strong backgrounds in history, and they will need text resources to help them with the content they are to teach. In addition, in times of tight budgets, school districts probably will not have sufficient funds to purchase for each of those three grades separate textbooks for U.S. history and for world history.

A similar problem exists in Grades 6, 7, and 8, because the U.S. or world history in those grades is accompanied by Minnesota history. Will teachers need text resources for the teaching of Minnesota history? If so, would it be financially feasible to have separate Minnesota history texts for each of the grades 6, 7, and 8? It might make more sense to address Minnesota history for a semester during one of those grades or to address Minnesota history when teaching U.S. history, but not world history.

Finally, in many sequences of courses time is allocated to the study of the local community, its history, government, and economics. Would there be a place for such studies in Minnesota? The standards do not seem to make room for such studies.

The National History Standards have some useful ideas for themes for the elementary school related to the preceding discussion:

Standards in History for Grades K-4⁷

- Topic 1: Living and Working Together in Families and Communities, Now and Long Ago
- Topic 2: The History of Students' Own State or Region
- Topic 3: The History of the United States: Democratic Principles and Values and the Peoples from Many Cultures Who Contributed to Its Cultural, Economic, and Political Heritage

⁷ The National Standards for History may be found at this website:
<http://www.sscnet.ucla.edu/nchs/standards/>.

- Topic 4: The History of Peoples of Many Cultures Around the World

Minnesota might want to examine these topics as possible themes, should it want to develop themes for each grade level. It may, as noted above, decide to allow districts to develop their own themes, or it may develop a set of themes different from those identified by the national standards.

So far as upper grades are concerned, themes could be organized around historical eras. World history might be organized around the theme of how different regions of the world developed separately and how over time, as a result of changes in communication and transportation technologies and economic, social and political decisions, they came into contact with each other with significant—sometimes devastating—consequences. Such an approach might be a useful one for understanding the current issue of the relationship between the Muslim world and European and American cultures.

Consider addressing some additional topics that are especially important today.

Earlier, this reviewer indicated that the standards, especially in history at the high school level, seem to cover too much content. Now the reviewer is about to do something that runs counter to that comment. He will identify a few topics that seem to receive too little emphasis in the standards. These are topics that seem important, given the current issues facing this nation since the end of the Cold War with Soviet Union and since 9/11. Three of those topics are as follows:

- What are the perspectives of the major religions in today's world, and how do perspectives vary within those religious traditions?
- What conditions are necessary if democracy is to spread to non-democratic nations and be sustained? Why is it difficult to establish genuine democracy in some cultures?
- What are the major problems of this planet, and how may our nation and private organizations help address those problems?

Summary

It is clear that much work went into the development of Minnesota's draft standards and benchmarks. Hopefully, this review is a constructive one, where recommendations may be considered and accepted or rejected. For those that are accepted, this reviewer is hopeful that his ideas are sufficiently specific to provide clear direction. He is also most aware of the fact that Minnesota has very good thinkers in the field of social studies education. Hopefully, they are also reviewing the draft standards publication and their ideas will be given serious consideration.