

MINNESOTA REPORT CARD

SUBJECT	2000	2006
English	F	B
History*	F	F
Geography**	F	A
Math	F	D
Science	A	B
OVERALL GRADE	D-	D+

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

ENGLISH—B

- *Minnesota Academic Standards: Language Arts K–12, May 19, 2003*
- *Alignment of Minnesota Early Learning Standards with State K–12 Standards, Working Draft September 2003*
- *Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment—Sample Tests/Practice Tests*

English standards in Minnesota are presented grade-by-grade from K–8, and one set of standards is used for grades 9–12. Readers will be impressed by the clarity of these documents and the noticeable increases in difficulty of material from one grade to the next. The categories are presented in a commonsense format: writing; reading and literature; and speaking, listening, and viewing. A pleasant surprise is the discovery that American literature is mentioned at almost every grade level. But the state’s treatment of literature is not all roses. In fact, despite its inclusion at almost all levels, the literary content in grades 9–12 still manages to lack comprehensiveness. Students should be presented, not only with a short list of required reading (though such a list is certainly important), but also with an overview of how those works play into larger literary genres and how they’ve influence other authors and texts. Minnesota doesn’t present that overarching picture with the detail it deserves. A way to remedy this problem is to create standards for each high school grade. Such an arrangement virtually assures a greater detail and topical exploration. But hats off to Minnesota’s English standards, which are well on their way to joining the ranks of the nation’s best.

MATHEMATICS —D

- *Minnesota Academic Standards, Mathematics K–12, May 19, 2003*

The best that can be said of Minnesota’s relatively new math standards is they’re an improvement. But that’s not saying much, since the set they replaced were so consistently awful. The new standards require memorization of the basic number facts and computation of the sums and differences of three-digit numbers by hand. All good, but the strands on fraction arithmetic are a mess, while middle grade Algebra is weak—a serious shortcoming, since these are the years when a foundation should be built for more in-depth study of this topic in later years. The same is true of Geometry, where the Pythagorean Theorem is introduced several years too late, in high school. And the whole document needs a careful vetting by an editor who not only knows mathematics, but grammar—there are an unconscionable number of little editing mistakes in these standards.

SCIENCE—B

- *Minnesota Academic Standards K–12, 2003*

One of the greatest virtues of these standards is their organization, immediately made clear to readers. Minnesota begins by presenting a 23-page tabulated matrix that illustrates exactly what is covered within each grade. Physical science receives a thorough treatment in the younger grades, but, as students age, the content rigor wilts. Small errors weaken the sections. Life science is good and Minnesota makes no concerted effort to hide or downplay the importance of evolutionary biology. While the nature and Science section is generally good, too, it loses steam by dabbling in vacuities, e.g., “the student will recognize that everyone can do science and invent things.” On the whole, not bad. But these standards, with little work, could be bumped into A-range.

*U.S. HISTORY—F

- *High Standards, 1999*
- *Social Studies: A Guide for Curriculum Development to Support Minnesota’s High Standards, 2001, Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning*

Have you ever wanted to know “how different people may respond differently to the same event”? Or have you ever yearned to “describe a past event from the point of view of a local community member,” or “illustrate the influence of diverse ideals or beliefs on a theme or an event in the historical development of the United States”? If not, that’s probably because you recognize the above activities are a complete waste of time. But in Minnesota, they’re part of the state’s standards, nestled under the mind-numbing “Peoples and Cultures” document. To save time, just know that Minnesota has no real U.S. history standards, and what passes as such is simply vague and platitudinous language about “perspectives” and “ideals.” From our “perspective,” these so-called standards stink.

WORLD HISTORY—A

■ *Social Studies Framework, 2004*

From the very beginning, Minnesota’s standards are clear about what is expected of its students. While they lack year-by-year grade specificity, they are organized into three grade clusters that leave the districts some curricular flexibility. Students focus on interesting people and places in the early years, laying the groundwork for more comprehensive study a few years later. Students survey the entire scope of world history in middle school and again in high school, with an eye toward more complex topics the second time around. Clear expectations and benchmarks are provided for each grade cluster, and they are treated with the same excellent level of detail and coherence as the historical content the standards present. When it comes to world history, the Land of 10,000 Lakes is worth looking to for guidance.