

Colorado Academic Standards: Social Studies Benchmarking Report Summary



COLORADO
Department of Education

Introduction

The Colorado Department of Education remains committed to providing rigorous academic standards of the highest quality. The College, Career and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards was released by the National Council for Social Studies in 2013. CDE has requested third-party experts conduct a formal study to identify the quality of the social studies standards being implemented during the 2013-14 school year, and to determine how and to what degree Colorado's current social studies standards compare with the C3 Framework as well as the social studies standards of higher-performing states and countries.

The C3 Framework can provide guidance on the review of CDE Social Studies Standards to include the application of knowledge within the disciplines of civics, economics, geography, and history, as students develop questions and plan inquiries, apply disciplinary concepts and tools, evaluate and use evidence, and communicate conclusions and take informed action.

Methodology (pp. 5-10)*

C3 Framework Alignment Review: The alignment process began by evaluating each component of the C3 Framework and drawing out key criteria that inform the level of match. The key criteria that were considered to determine standard-to-standard match and to code these matches were as follows:

1. Depth and Breadth:
 - Content expectations of the standard
2. Rigor:
 - DOK required
 - Key words signifying DOK
3. Coherence
 - When key ideas were introduced and how they were built on from grade to grade

Alabama, Vermont, Ohio, and Finland Alignment Review: CDE selected the external referents to which the CAS-SS would be compared. Included in the selection criteria was whether the standards were from states or countries respected for their strong overall academic performance and quality of their standards.

- **Organization/Structure:** Analyst's considerations related to standards organization and structure included similarities and differences in grade articulation (standards articulated by individual grade, grade-span, course, etc.; cross-grade strands versus no repetition of content), hierarchy of standards (number of levels in standards, e.g., strand, standard, benchmark, indicator), number of standards (number of strands, standards, indicators), design/format (organization and structure of standards), and ways in which intended knowledge and skills are communicated.
- **Concepts and Skills:** Analyst's considerations related to standards concepts and skills included similarities and differences in standards scope and sequence (the depth and breadth of concepts and skills described in the standards), grade spans (the sequencing and distribution of concepts and skills within and across the grade spans), and wording (specificity of language; focus on action verbs, knowledge, etc.).

Findings & Recommendations

(NOTE: The findings include both Strengths and Gaps of the CAS-SS; however, in an effort to keep this summary brief, only the gaps have been included – See pp. 10-12 for the complete listing of strengths and gaps).



- a. Overall, the C3 Framework requires a more rigorous DOK than the CAS-SS. However, neither set of standards requires extended thinking/reasoning (DOK 4) until Grade 8.
- b. Particularly in the elementary grades, CAS-SS tend to be more civics and geography based. Although CAS-SS content specificity remains strong throughout, content in the higher grades becomes slightly more conceptual.
 - l. At some points, like indicator D2, Econ 4, there was full alignment at the earlier grades, partial alignment at the middle and then full alignment at the higher grades. This can be demonstrative of a lack of focus and coherence in the CAS-SS as it compares to the C3 indicators.
- c. For multiple CAS-SS standards, the content could be used to address the C3 expectations, but students would need to be asked to engage in a higher level of cognitive demand.
- d. The C3 Framework emphasizes the importance of student inquiry and the development of questions that drive each student to be engaged. C3 provides the flexibility to address students' driving curiosities, which then leads to understanding how and why civic, historical, economic, and geographic thinking are useful for examining questions.
- e. The C3 Framework is more likely than CAS-SS to require that students' understanding includes consideration of multiple perspectives and contexts.
- f. Depth of concepts across disciplines can be an issue throughout the CAS-SS. For example, in 1st grade students are asked in history to "discuss common and unique characteristics of different cultures using multiple sources of information" while at the same time in geography they are asked to "recite address including city, state and country and explain how those labels find places on a map". This is an example of the differing grain sizes within a grade across disciplines.
- g. There are very few connections to Dimension 1(Developing Questions & Planning Inquiries), Dimension 3 (Evaluating Sources and Using Evidence) and Dimension 4 (Communicating Conclusions and Taking Informed Action) throughout the CAS-SS.
 - l. Communicating conclusions and taking informed action (Dimension 4 of the C3 Framework) is a weak area throughout CAS-SS. Dimension 4 prepares students to take action in their communities, and the CAS-SS do not currently include this in grades K-8.
- h. It would be beneficial to reflect more specifically on the 21st Century Skills and Readiness Competencies, to ensure all students are getting access to the skills needed to be competitive in college and careers.
- i. *Alignment to External Referents - Concepts & Skills:* Both Colorado and Alabama outline skills in the introduction to the document but do not specifically integrate and/or incorporate into the actual grade level standards statements (with the expectation of some reference to geographic thinking in the evidence outcomes in parts of the CAS-SS standards) (pg.19).

OBSERVATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION

1. **Inquiry.** The most noticeable difference between CAS-SS and C3 is the exclusion of inquiry, particularly at the early grades. CDE reviewers could look at the way Vermont included inquiry as a main component of their standards to begin to ensure these skills are embedded in the standards.
 - a. One area where this is already present in the current CAS-SS is in 4th grade Geography GLE 1. All four evidence outcomes ask students to engage in geographic inquiry. This is sporadically built throughout the geography standards across grades and could be built into the other content standards (pg. 22).



2. **Integration.** The CAS-SS emphasizes four content standards of social studies but there are times it may be difficult to determine coherent connections between the four at a grade level. For instance, the 7th grade civics GLEs do not clearly connect to the three other content standards. CDE reviewers could look at Alabama as a way to demonstrate how to integrate disciplines across a grade level into a coherent curriculum (pg.23).
3. **Elementary Gaps.** The grain size in some of the current elementary evidence outcomes varies from specifics like “reciting your address” to broad like “understanding the social, political and economic ramifications of...” Reducing these and incorporating more of the indicators of C3 may help build coherence and level the grain size in the CAS-SS in grades K-5. Also adding themes and topics similar to Ohio may also help bring coherence and level grain size of the elementary CAS-SS (pg. 23)
 - a. In Ohio’s standards, each theme is split up into strands including history, geography, government and economics. Each strand is then organized into skill/topic descriptions (i.e. geography; spatial thinking, places and regions, and human systems).
4. **Middle and Depth & Breadth and Rigor.** ... The CAS-SS along the lines of depth & breadth and rigor... For instance, a grade six CAS-SS GLE states, “the historical eras, individuals, groups, ideas and themes in regions of the Western Hemisphere and their relationships with one another” is a very broad statement that is not clarified by the evidence outcomes. The evidence outcomes use verbs like explain, determine, and identify, all low level verbs. Reviewers could look at Dimension 2 of the C3 Framework to increase the rigor, depth and specificity of the standard. D2.His.4.6-8 states “analyze multiple factors that influenced the perspectives of people during different historical eras”. Asking to students to analyze perspectives in these eras offers more rigor and depth. Using the alignment chart in Appendix A could help identify areas where this can happen.
 - a. One other way to address coherence in the middle and high school grades is to more clearly delineate timeframes and concept coverage. Identifying broad timelines in US and World History at specific grades could help the standards go deeper and build from grade to grade. (pg.23-24)
5. **Taking Informed Action.** In C3, considerable attention is paid to building students’ capacity to take informed action. CAS-SS covers this in a more limited extent at the high school level. This dimension... is one of the most important components that can ensure Colorado students are prepared “competent and responsible citizens” (pg. 24).
6. **Integration of Disciplinary Literacy.** The C3 Framework emphasizes a connection to ELA via Dimension 3 (Gathering and Evaluating Sources). Reviewers may want to make clearer connections to the CAS-ELA within the actual standards document to ensure an emphasis on academic and disciplinary literacy (pg. 24).
7. **Connections to 21st Century Skills.** ... it may be beneficial for reviewers to more clearly integrate the 21st Century Skills and Readiness Competencies in Social Studies at each grade level, identifying specific GLEs and evidence outcomes like the inquiry component in the Vermont document (pg. 24).
8. **Coherence.** Colorado reviewers could review each content standard by grade to ensure increasing complexity of similar concepts throughout the grades. For instance, a 6th grade history evidence outcome for GLE 2 states, “Determine and explain the historical context of key people, events and ideas over time...” and the 7th grade history evidence outcome for GLE 2 states” Determine and explain the historical context of key people and events from the origins of the American revolution...” are connected conceptually but do not build off of each other.
 - a. Understanding that the content in each grade would be different, it may still be beneficial to ask students to engage with the concepts in higher ways at each grade level.



- b. Another aspect to review in terms of coherence is to ensure the prepared graduate statements, the GLEs and the evidence outcomes build on each other.
 - I. One example of a gap in the current CAS-SS is high school Civics GLE 1. The Prepared Graduate Competency says, “Analyze and practice rights, roles, and responsibilities of citizens”, the GLE states, “Research, formulate positions, and engage in appropriate civic participation to address local, states and national issues or policies” but not one of the evidence outcomes includes the research necessary to address the GLE or prepared graduate statement. A review of these gaps would greatly strengthen the document. (pg. 24).

Grade Level Alignment Review/Recommendations (Appendix C)

- Grades K-2 (pp. 55-56)
 - There is a need for clearer connections between the GLEs and C3 indicators and the evidence outcomes. (Illustrative Example #2)
 - I. Illustrative Example #2: First grade CAS-SS GLE 1 in history states the following: “Describe patterns and chronological order of events of the recent past” With the following evidence outcomes:
 - a. Identify the components of a calendar. Topics to include but not limited to days of the week, months, and notable events (DOK 1)
 - b. Identify past events using a calendar (DOK 1)
 - c. Use words related to time, sequence, and change (DOK 1)
 - II. The evidence outcomes lack in depth to reach the expectation of the GLE and/or the C3 indicator that states: “create a chronological sequence of multiple events”. The evidence outcomes may outline initial steps in the process but do they get students to the level of rigor and depth expected in both the GLE and the C3 indicator (pg. 56).
- Grades 3-5 (pp. 57 – 58)
 - Economics has the lowest alignment to the C3 Framework at this grade band.
 - The History standards in the CAS-SS cover a very broad area and are not specific enough to help unpack the C3 indicators (Illustrative Example #3)
 - I. Illustrative Example #3: The CAS-SS history standard 2 in grade 5 is a very broad and expansive standard:
 - a. The historical eras, individuals, groups, ideas, and themes in North America from 1491 through the founding of the United States government.
 - II. Most of the GLEs are fairly broad but the evidence outcomes outline the specifics. In this case the evidence outcome is just as broad and can be difficult to implement:
 - a. Identify and explain cultural interactions between 1491 and the American Revolution. Topics to include but not limited to the Columbian Exchange, the interactions between Europeans and native Americans in the 17th and 18th centuries, and the developing relationship between Europeans and enslaved Africans (DOK 1-2)
 - III. CDE reviewers could use the C3 to help make the evidence outcomes a little more specific by connecting the “topics” to specific C3 indicators.



- a. For instance, an evidence outcome could be “Explain why Europeans and Native Americans differed in their perspectives and how it impacted their interactions” – combining the evidence outcome above with D2.HIS.4.3-5.
- Grades 6-8 (pp. 58-60)
 - There are a large number of D2 indicators in economics and geography not being addressed by the CAS-SS GLEs. (Illustrative Example #4)
 - I. Illustrative Example #4: In the 8th grade CAS-SS GLEs there is a focus on “Economic freedom, including free trade, is important for economic growth”. There is no connection to a C3 indicator but the evidence outcomes highlight some very important economic ideas:
 - a. Give examples of international differences in resources, productivity, and prices that provide a basis for international trade (DOK 1-2)
 - b. Describe the factors that lead to a nation having a comparative and absolute advantage in trade (DOK 1)
 - c. Explain effects of domestic policies on international trade (DOK 1-2)
 - d. Explain why nations often restrict trade by using quotas, tariffs, and non-tariff barriers (DOK 1-2)
 - II. This demonstrates some of the reasons there is a gap in alignment between economics in the CASS-SS and the C3 Framework.
- High School (pp. 60 – 61)
 - Connections to D1 (Developing Questions and Planning Inquiries) are lacking in the HS CAS-SS.
 - There are no CAS-SS GLEs that align with the *perspective indicators* (see pg. 47 of the C3 Framework) of the C3 Framework.
 - The HS History standards are very broad (Illustrative Example #5)
 - I. Illustrative Example #5: The CAS-SS History GLEs and evidence outcomes are very broad and may be difficult to implement. For example, History GLE # 2 states: The key concepts of continuity and change, cause and effect, complexity, unity and diversity over time. Then the evidence outcomes are as follows:
 - a. World history (both East and West including modern world history):
 - Evaluate continuity and change over the course of world history (DOK 1-3)
 - Investigate causes and effects of significant events in world history (DOK 1-2)
 - Analyze the complexity of events in world history (DOK 2-3)
 - Examine and evaluate issues of unity and diversity in world history (DOK 1-3)
 - b. United States history (Reconstruction to the present):
 - Analyze continuity and change in eras over the course of United States history (DOK 2-3)
 - Investigate causes and effects of significant events in United States history. Topics to include but not limited to WWI, Great Depression, Cold War (DOK 1-2)
 - Analyze the complexity of events in United States history. Topics to include but not limited to the suffrage movement and the Civil Rights Movement (DOK 2-3)



- Examine and evaluate issues of unity and diversity from Reconstruction to present. Topics to include but not limited to the rise and fall of Jim Crow, role of patriotism, and the role of religion (DOK 1-3)
- II. There is a lot in each of these evidence outcomes. It may be helpful to break these down using the C3 into three different (change, continuity and context, causation and argumentation, and perspectives) GLEs with specific evidence outcomes.