

# SYNTHESIS OF FINDINGS FROM PRIOR REVIEWS OF COLORADO'S MODEL CONTENT STANDARDS: PHASE II

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## Introduction

As part of its initiative to revise the Colorado Model Content Standards (MCS), the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) contracted WestEd to conduct a comprehensive review of the MCS. CDE requested that WestEd include in its analysis a synthesis of the findings from six prior reviews of Colorado's MCS for civics, economics, geography, and/or history. The six reviews selected by CDE were conducted by three different organizations, for varying purposes, and using different indicators of quality. These reviews include an evaluation presented in *Education Week* (McCabe, 2006) as well as studies conducted by the American Federation of Teachers (2006) and the Thomas B. Fordham Institute (Munroe & Smith, 1998; Stern, 2003; Mead, 2006; and Finn, Petrilli & Julian, 2006). CDE selected these documents for their availability, perceived quality of the organization, and cross-state comparative focus.

This document includes the methodology used to analyze the previous review reports and a table synthesizing key findings from each report.

## Methodology

CDE provided reports of prior reviews of Colorado's MCS in civics, economics, geography, and/or history conducted by other organizations. WestEd was asked to review and comment on the findings of those studies, as they pertained to the questions of interest in the larger MCS review discussed above. To complete this task, analysts first examined the prior review reports. They examined the methodology and listed the criteria and/or indicators used in each prior review and identified and documented the philosophy or perspective of the writer/evaluator. Next, they summarized the key findings organized by the quality criteria of depth, breadth, coherence, and rigor, the criteria WestEd used in its standards review.<sup>1</sup> If the prior review did not present findings related to these criteria (i.e., depth, breadth, coherence, and rigor), this was noted with the phrase, "Not a category of analysis for the review." If the study included other criteria, analysts recorded those, as well as information related to the rationale (i.e., source of evidence) for each summary rating and provided explanatory comments where needed.

The information in this synthesis of findings from prior reviews is intended to help the CDE better understand why each prior evaluator drew the conclusions reported in that study report, based on such factors as rating categories and criteria. The synthesis is presented according to the organization that conducted the review, and by content areas discussed in the prior review reports. The American Federation of Teachers report (2006) and *Education Week* report (McCabe, 2006) discuss Colorado's civics, economics, geography, and history standards. The Fordham reports discuss geography (Munroe & Smith, 1998) or history (Stern, 2003; Finn, Petrilli, & Julian, 2006; and Mead, 2006).

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<sup>1</sup> Detailed discussion of these criteria can be found in the final report *Colorado Model Content Standards Review, Phase II: Civics; Economics; Geography; and History*.

In order to accurately convey the findings of the various Fordham reviews in a format consistent with the organization of the MCS, the synthesis of findings of those reports is presented in separate columns for geography and history. Although the Stern and Mead reports address U.S. history and world history content, respectively, the syntheses of these reviews have been combined in the same column because of the reports' similar methodologies and findings. The Finn, Petrilli, and Julian report is based on the findings of the Stern and Mead reports, and is included in this column, as well.

## Civics, Economics, Geography, & History: Findings from Prior Reviews of CO MCS

Topic/Criteria	<i>Education Week</i> (McCabe, 2006) Civics, Economics, Geography, & History	<b>American Federation of Teachers</b> (American Federation of Teachers, 2006) Civics, Economics, Geography, & History	<b>Thomas B. Fordham Institute</b> (Munroe & Smith, 1998) Geography	<b>Thomas B. Fordham Institute</b> (Stern, 2003; Finn, Petrilli, & Julian, 2006; Mead, 2006) History
<b>Methodology</b>				
Criteria or indicators used in study	<p><i>Education Week's</i> review of Colorado included Standards and Accountability, Efforts to Improve Teacher Quality, School Climate, and Resource Equity.</p> <p><u>Indicators Used in Study to Evaluate Standards:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) State has adopted standards in the core subjects (E/LA, math, science, social studies/history)</li> <li>(2) Standards are clear, specific, and grounded in content (2005) (middle school)</li> <li>(3) State has regular timeline for revising standards</li> </ol>	<p>The AFT's review of Colorado's MCS was part of a larger study that also included Curriculum and Instruction, Assessing Student Performance, and Accountability.</p> <p><u>AFT's Characteristics of Strong Academic Content Standards:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Define common content and skills students should learn in each of the core subjects for every grade</li> <li>(2) Be detailed, explicit and firmly rooted in content of subject area to lead to a common core curriculum</li> <li>(3) Have particular content for each of the four core curriculum areas</li> <li>(4) Provide attention to both content and skills</li> <li>(5) Be vertically aligned to show how learning builds from one grade to the next</li> <li>(6) Include sample student work to exemplify standards and help guide test development process</li> <li>(7) Include grade- and content-specific performance expectations that describe knowledge and skills expected for each performance level (basic, proficient, advanced)</li> </ol>	<p>The evaluation judged the standards by two sets of criteria.</p> <p>General characteristics that the Fordham Institute believed should apply to any set of standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) clarity</li> <li>(2) specificity</li> <li>(3) balance as to point of view</li> <li>(4) use of active verbs to gauge progress</li> <li>(5) inclusion of benchmarks</li> <li>(6) guidance to teachers</li> </ol>	<p><i>Note: The Finn, Petrilli &amp; Julian (2006) report was based on the prior reviews (Stern [2003] and Mead [2006]). The report does not present a formal methodology for determining its rating. It awarded U.S. history a D rating and world history a D rating.</i></p> <p>The remaining synthesis in this column relates to the Stern report (2003) and the Mead report (2006). The 2003 (Stern) report focused on U.S. history. The 2006 (Mead) report focused on world history.</p> <p><i>Effective State Standards for U.S. History</i>, by Sheldon M. Stern (2003)</p> <p><u>Criteria for Evaluation:</u></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Comprehensive Historical Content</li> <li>(2) Sequential Development</li> <li>(3) Balance</li> </ol> <p>Each state was awarded a maximum of 10 points for each criterion, for a total possible score of 30 points.</p> <p><u>Comprehensive Historical Content</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-10 points indicate that the standards are rich and historically comprehensive.</li> <li>• 1-5 points indicate the standards are historically selective.</li> <li>• 0 points indicate the standards are historically inadequate.</li> </ul>

<b>Topic/Criteria</b>	<b><i>Education Week</i></b> (McCabe, 2006) <b>Civics, Economics, Geography, &amp; History</b>	<b>American Federation of Teachers</b> (American Federation of Teachers, 2006) <b>Civics, Economics, Geography, &amp; History</b>	<b>Thomas B. Fordham Institute</b> (Munroe & Smith, 1998) <b>Geography</b>	<b>Thomas B. Fordham Institute</b> (Stern, 2003; Finn, Petrilli, & Julian, 2006; Mead, 2006) <b>History</b>
Criteria or indicators used in study  (Continued)		<p>Evaluations of Colorado’s MCS in Social Studies were based on the following categories:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Civics</li> <li>• U.S. History</li> <li>• World History</li> </ul>	<p>Geography-specific characteristics that focused on the comprehensiveness and rigor of the geography standards:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Spatial Terms</li> <li>(2) Places &amp; Regions</li> <li>(3) Physical Systems</li> <li>(4) Human Systems</li> <li>(5) Environment &amp; Society</li> <li>(6) Skills</li> <li>(7) Applications</li> <li>(8) Organization</li> </ol> <p>The Fordham Institute’s evaluation and organization of the criteria were guided by <i>Geography for Life: National Geography Standards</i>, which were published by the Geography Education Standards Project in 1994.</p> <p>Additional guidance was provided by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• the <i>Guidelines of Geographic Education: Elementary and Secondary Schools</i>, which was published jointly by the Association of American Geographers and the National Council for Geographic Education in 1984.</li> <li>• <i>Mapping Out a Standards-Based Framework for GEOGRAPHY—The Colorado Geography Curriculum Framework</i>, Colorado Department of Education (1995)</li> <li>• A six-person advisory committee of distinguished geographers and educators</li> </ul>	<p><u>Sequential Development</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-10 points indicate that the standards present U.S. history in a cumulative and coherent sequence.</li> <li>• 1-5 points indicate that the standards present U.S. history in a partially cumulative and structured sequence.</li> <li>• 0 points indicate that the standards do not contain a coherent and cumulative U.S. history sequence.</li> </ul> <p><u>Balance</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-10 points indicate that the historical information is consistently fair, balanced, and contextualized.</li> <li>• 3-5 points indicate that the historical material is partially balanced and evenhanded.</li> <li>• 1-2 points indicate that the standards lack historical specifics on which to make a judgment.</li> <li>• 0 points indicate that the standards convey an ideological and political agenda.</li> </ul>

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Criteria or indicators used in study  (Continued)			<p>The Fordham Institute was assisted by an advisory committee of distinguished geographers and educators.</p> <p>The Fordham Institute combines comprehensiveness and rigor into an overall score for each grade span. It provides a scaled rating system based on 90 points. Each grade span was rated on the 8 criteria of the comprehensiveness and rigor category, resulting in 24 scores from this category. The state standards were reviewed as a whole for the other 6 general criteria. As a result, there were 30 criterion scores awarded to each state. Each criterion had a maximum score allowable of 3 points. Combined they totaled to 90 points.</p> <p>The points were then translated into a grade.</p> <p>Grading Scale:</p> <p>A = 80–90  B = 70–79  C = 60–69  D = 50–59  F = 0–50  I = Incomplete</p>	<p><i>The State of State World History Standards</i>, by Walter Russell Mead (2006)</p> <p>Criteria were organized into two categories:</p> <p>(1) The quality of standards’ content  (2) The instructional focus</p> <p>Mead gave “extra credit to states whose standards are lively and engaging, and thus apt to spark a life-long interest in history.”</p> <p>Standards were reviewed in 11 core content areas:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geography</li> <li>• Ancient Mediterranean</li> <li>• The non-Western world</li> <li>• Mexico and the Western hemisphere</li> <li>• The Anglo-American context</li> <li>• Modern contexts</li> <li>• History of religion</li> <li>• Science and technology</li> <li>• Culture, arts, and philosophy</li> <li>• Democratic values</li> <li>• Balance</li> </ul> <p>The instructional focus was reviewed based on 3 criteria:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selectivity &amp; Coherence</li> <li>• “Teachability”</li> <li>• Sequencing</li> </ul>

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Criteria or indicators used in study  (Continued)				States could receive a maximum of 170 points.  States received up to 10 points for each of the 11 content areas. They received up to 30 points for standards' selectivity and coherence, 20 points for teachability, and 10 points for sequencing.  Grades were awarded based on the following point scale. 146 – 170 = A 121 – 145 = B 96 – 120 = C 70 – 95 = D 0 – 69 = F
Guiding philosophy or point of view presented in review	<i>Education Week</i> “tracks key education information and grades states on their policies related to student achievement, standards and accountability, efforts improve teacher quality, school climate, and resources.”  NOTE: <i>Education Week</i> 's report on standards in “Quality Counts at 10” is based on previous findings of the AFT; it is not an independent review of standards conducted by <i>Education Week</i> .	The AFT describes strong (clear and rigorous) academic standards as essential for providing the necessary foundation to dramatically improve student achievement and gain public confidence in our education system.  The AFT analysis reports on whether standards are clear and specific at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.	The Fordham Institute report describes combined social studies standards as a “curricular swamp” (Munroe & Smith, 1998). It recommends that each social studies subject has its own set of standards and is taught as a separate course.	The Fordham Institute stresses “the heart of social studies for American children must be U.S. history. This subject provides the intellectual foundation on which competent citizenship rests” (Stern, 2003).
Comments				Mead (2006), reviewed both the Colorado MCS and the Suggested Grade Level Expectations.  Mead indicates that world history should be taught chronologically and for at least three years between grades 7 and 12.

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<b>Key Findings</b>				
Depth	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review
Coherence	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	<i>The State of State World History Standards</i> , Mead (2006) • Selectivity & Coherence: 15 points
Rigor	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	<u>Comprehensiveness &amp; Rigor</u> (possible score of 3): <i>Grades K–4</i> (1) Spatial Terms: 3.0 (2) Places & Regions: 3.0 (3) Physical Systems: 3.0 (4) Human Systems: 3.0 (5) Environment & Society: 3.0 (6) Skills: 3.0 (7) Applications: 3.0 (8) Organization: 3.0 <i>Grades 5–8</i> (1) Spatial Terms: 3.0 (2) Places & Regions: 3.0 (3) Physical Systems: 3.0 (4) Human Systems: 3.0 (5) Environment & Society: 3.0 (6) Skills: 3.0 (7) Applications: 3.0 (8) Organization: 3.0 <i>Grades 9–12</i> (1) Spatial Terms: 3.0 (2) Places & Regions: 3.0 (3) Physical Systems: 3.0 (4) Human Systems: 3.0 (5) Environment & Society: 3.0 (6) Skills: 3.0 (7) Applications: 3.0 (8) Organization: 3.0	Not a category of analysis for the review
Breadth	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review	Not a category of analysis for the review

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<b>Other</b>				
Additional Criteria	<p>Across English/language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies/history, the Colorado MCS scored a B in Standards and Accountability—35.83 out of 40.</p> <p>Grade based on standards being clear, specific, and grounded in content. Colorado’s MCS in social studies/history were included at the middle school level, but the elementary and high school levels were not included in the review.</p>	<p>Standards in civics were determined to be clear and specific at the elementary, middle, and high school levels.</p> <p>Standards in U.S. history were determined to be clear and specific at the elementary and middle school levels.</p> <p>Standards in world history were determined to be clear and specific at the middle school level.</p>	<p><u>General characteristics of standards</u> (possible score of 3):</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>(1) Clearly Written: 3.0</li> <li>(2) Specificity: 3.0</li> <li>(3) Balanced: 3.0</li> <li>(4) Strong Verbs: 3.0</li> <li>(5) Benchmarks: 3.0</li> <li>(6) Guidance: 3.0</li> </ol>	<p><i>Effective State Standards for U.S. History</i>, by Sheldon M. Stern (2003)</p> <p><u>Criteria for Evaluation:</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Comprehensive Historical Content: 6 points (ranking: 18)</li> <li>• Sequential Development: 5 points (ranking: 19)</li> <li>• Balance: 5 points (ranking: 20)</li> <li>• Total: 16 points (53%)</li> <li>• Score: D</li> <li>• Overall Ranking: 22</li> <li>• Evaluation: Weak</li> </ul> <p><i>The State of State World History Standards</i>, by Walter Russell Mead (2006)</p> <p><u>Subject Area Criteria for Evaluation</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Geography: 9 points</li> <li>• Ancient Mediterranean: 3 points</li> <li>• Non-Western World: 3 points</li> <li>• Mexico and Western Hemisphere: 4 points</li> <li>• Anglo-American Context: 3 points</li> <li>• Modern Contexts: 4 points</li> <li>• History of Religion: 7 points</li> <li>• Science &amp; Technology: 6 points</li> <li>• Culture, Arts &amp; Philosophy: 6 points</li> <li>• Democratic Values: 4 points</li> <li>• Balance: 4 points</li> <li>• Total: 53 points (out of 110)</li> </ul>



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Additional Criteria  (Continued)				<u>Instructional Focus Criteria for Evaluation</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selectivity &amp; Coherence: 15 points</li> <li>• Teachability: 8 points</li> <li>• Sequencing: 5 points</li> </ul> Total: 28 (out of 60)
Comments	Colorado scored above average in Standards and Accountability and School Climate.	<u>Other viewpoints presented in AFT's <i>Setting Strong Standards</i> (2003):</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• States need to develop curriculum to accompany standards.</li> <li>• States need to provide funding for intervention to help students meet standards.</li> <li>• States need to align rigorous academic standards to assessments, curriculum, accountability systems, and staff development.</li> </ul>	Colorado received an A rating and the only perfect score of 90.0.	The Fordham Institute 2003 report is highly critical of the lack of specific historical content in the standards. It also criticizes the lack of historical judgment and sequential development of the historical content.  Colorado received a D for its U.S. history standards (2003)  Colorado received a D for its world history standards (2006)  Breadth was not a criterion; however, Mead made the following comment, “the Colorado standards should receive some praise for breadth. Many scientific, economic, cultural, artistic, and philosophical issues are at least mentioned. And though the standards are vague about content, they do manage a better discussion of religion than most states” (Mead, 2006).

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