

## Assessing History in Kansas

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### ABSTRACT

Kansas assesses United States History, World History, Civics, Economics, and Geography in assessments administered in grades six and eight and in high school. The exams are multiple-choice. The goal of the Kansas assessment program is to assess both factual knowledge and higher-level analytical skills. Teachers in the state are concerned that the multiple-choice format of the exam is too limiting and believe that a performance component would improve the validity of the exam for assessing higher cognitive tasks. Kansas has joined the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills and will be reviewing its standards and assessments during the next few years. There is a strong possibility that the emphasis on such skills will result in the establishment of performance assessments. Kansas makes extensive use of practicing classroom teachers in developing standards and assessments. It is certain that teachers will be heavily involved in any changes that occur.

Kansas was thrown into a state of perpetual education reform after the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk* by the United States Department of Education. By the end of the decade The Kansas State Board of Education mandated that voluntary academic standards be written by committees of educators chosen by the staff of the Kansas State Department of Education.<sup>1</sup> Kansas had no official statewide curriculum and the standards would be voluntary and advisory. A state assessment program was developed in which local schools were required to administer the state assessments in math, science, English, and social studies. While the curriculum was not mandated, the assessment was. No penalty was attached for schools performing poorly, but few local school boards, administrators, or teachers relished reading about low assessment scores in the local papers. The state's largest newspaper, *The Wichita Eagle*, regularly published articles, editorials, and columns critical of American education in general and Kansas schools in particulars. Over the next twenty-five years Kansas education changed to meet greater expectations, and these changes had a considerable impact on the teaching and learning of history in Kansas.

Three sets of standards and assessment were developed over the twenty years leading up to 2008, and in each case the status of history in the schools of Kansas became stronger. By the time the second set of standards was published in 1999, Kansas had replaced generic "social studies" with content specific standards in history, government, economics, and geography. The third set of standards and assessments resulted in an even stronger history-centered curriculum.

Before exploring the history of those twenty-five years, a brief introduction to this paper and its author is in order. This paper differs substantially with the others in the series. Like the other papers it traces the history of the standards and assessments in the author's state, points out strengths and weaknesses, and suggests future directions. The difference is that the author of this paper has been a classroom teacher for thirty-two years and is currently teaching to the state standards and administering the assessment to his students. He plays leadership roles in two statewide organization of history/social studies teachers, the Kansas Council for Social Studies and the Kansas Council for History Education. He is active in political action and professional development issues with the state teachers union, the Kansas National Education Association and has worked with many education policy makers and political office holders. He has served on numerous advisory committees and panels with the Kansas State Department of Education on issues relating to history and social studies education. He has also designed and directed a Teaching American History grant, which provided an intensive three-year professional development experience for thirty-six history teachers drawn from schools throughout the state. In many ways this is a very personal paper; it is certainly not an academic paper. In is

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<sup>1</sup> Kansas has an elected state board of education with wide authority to set educational policy. The actual administration of that policy is the responsibility of the Kansas State Department of Education which operates under the State Board's authority. Individual school districts operate under Kansas State Department of Education regulations, but have considerable autonomy in setting local curriculum.

largely a chapter in the author's professional autobiography and the observations made in the paper are largely based on personal experience and not scholarly research and formal interviews.

The first set of standards and assessments were extremely unpopular among Kansas social studies teachers. The standards were not centered on specific academic disciplines but were a series of general statements relating to interdisciplinary themes. The themes were:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and Environment
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Science, Technology, and Society
- Global Connections
- Civic Ideals and Practices

The standards and themes worked quite well in providing teachers guidance in developing local curriculum guides, but they were entirely conceptual in nature and did not specify particular content. As long as assessments were developed and administered locally, teachers could develop lessons with the specific content to be assessed. The standards were too vague for teachers to develop lessons aligned to the state assessment. The standards indicated that revolution was important as a concept, but gave no indication as to whether the American, French, Russian, Iranian, or other specific revolutions would be the basis for exam questions. Teachers understood the questions could not be released in advance, but at least a list of topics would have been appreciated.

The first state social studies assessments consisted of two parts. A multiple-choice section included questions over specific content consistent with the general themes in the standards. Teachers and students had no idea what to expect and the resulting frustration made the exams, the state department of education, and the contractor that had developed the assessment, the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation at the University of Kansas, quite unpopular among Kansas educators.

Teachers disliked the second part of the test as much or more than the first. Rather than using a selected response format such as multiple-choice, matching, or true-false, the second part of the test was a performance assessment in which students constructed a response. The purpose of a constructed response part of the test was to assess higher-order skills requiring more sophisticated levels of analysis than could be assessed well with multiple-choice items. Students were to design projects in which they would develop a social studies question and communicate an answer in a format approved by teachers. These could range from simple poster board assignments to research papers. The project was to address the question from four social studies "perspectives". The perspectives included the political, economic, sociological, historical, geographical, and psychological. Unlike the multiple-choice section, which was scored by the Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation, each local school scored the projects based on a rubric supplied by the state.

Many teachers liked the idea of assessing higher order thinking skills, but found the format of the performance assessment too vague and the four "perspectives" that needed to be incorporated into projects as artificial and unnecessary.

There were similar problems with the English, math, and science assessments. As the 1990's progressed education experts began to publish reports critical of the standards being produced in various states. Both the American Federation of Teachers and the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation funded projects to collect and evaluate state standards. The Kansas Social Studies standards were rated as unacceptably vague by the two organizations. Both of them established criteria calling for standards to be based in established academic disciplines and specific in spelling out the content students were expected to learn.

Kansas began the process of developing new social studies standards in the summer of 1998. The ten members of the elected Kansas State Board of Education each appointed one member to the standards writing committee and the staff of the Kansas State Department of Education selected fourteen other members. Almost all of the committee members were K-12 teachers or former teachers who had moved on to positions in educational administration or higher education. Despite the politicized nature of the appointments to the committee, it met one or two days a month over a fourteen month period with little ideological tension.

The committee understood that it would be writing specifications for a newly designed social studies assessment. Representatives from The Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation attended some meetings and offered informal training on the construction and use of assessments. The purpose of this presence was to ensure that the new standards would be written in a manner that would be useful to teachers designing instruction and be specific enough to meet the technical needs of the test item writers as they constructed valid questions. This cooperation between standards writers and test developers was a major factor strengthening both the standards and the assessment.

The mandate from the Kansas State Board of Education clearly stated that the new standards were to be discipline specific and the committee established criteria similar to what had been used by the American Federation of Teachers and the Fordham Foundation as they evaluated other state standards as models for its own work. There was one major criterion, especially emphasized by the Fordham Foundation, that the committee could not meet. The tradition of local control of education was deeply embedded in Kansas culture and the committee had to avoid the impression it was imposing a “state curriculum”. The Fordham Foundation considered specific grade-by-grade course expectations essential for its highest rating. Despite having a state assessment, the Kansas standards were officially voluntary and advisory; schools were to be granted maximum flexibility to determine what specific courses to offer and when to offer them. The standards published in 1999 and the 2004 revision both received high marks from the Fordham Foundation, but the absence of a required grade by grade course sequence prevented them from earning an “A” on the Fordham grading scale. While several members of the committee would have preferred establishing a specific mandated curriculum, there was an understanding that it would not be politically acceptable to Kansas State Board of Education members and would be widely resented by history and social studies teachers in the field. Most of the committee believed that it would be best to make a small step toward a more uniform state curriculum than to alienate educators in the field by moving to quickly.

The actual standards produced by the committee took the form of an outline. Technically, there was only one history standard, one government standard, one economics standard, and one geography standard. Assessments were administered to all fifth, eighth, and eleventh graders in the state. At each grade level the standards were broken down into more specific benchmarks and each benchmark was broken down into more specific indicators.<sup>2</sup> A small number of the indicators were selected by the committee to be assessed on the state assessment. The committee only had the authority to recommend the final product to the State Board of Education; the Board itself had final approval of the whole process, including the standards document and the designation of tested indicators.

Schools were free to design any course configuration they chose, but the standards document specified which indicators would be tested at grades 5, 8, and 11. The results from individual school were reported to the State Board of Education and poor results could threaten a schools state accreditation.

The actual history standard read:

*The Student uses a working knowledge and understanding of significant individuals, groups, ideas, eras, and developments in the history of Kansas, the United States, and the world, utilizing essential analytical and research skills.*

This was little more specific than the previous social studies standards, but at each assessed grade level Kansas, United States, and World history were broken down into several chronological benchmarks and one historical thinking benchmark. An example of a chronological benchmark at the eleventh grade level was:

*Benchmark 4: The student uses a working knowledge and understanding of individuals, groups, ideas, and turning points in the era of the emergence of the modern United States (1900-1930).*

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<sup>2</sup> The current standards, which use the same standards, benchmark, indicator structure can be found on the Kansas State Department of Education website, [www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org), by following the educators tab. The direct link to the standards page is <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=1715>.

That specific Benchmark had nine indicators, three of which were designated to be assessed on the state exam. Some indicators were written at a basic factual level, labeled as knowledge indicators in the standards document and assessment specifications. An example of a knowledge indicator for Grade 11, Benchmark 4 was:

*The student describes the various social conflicts that took place in the early 1920s (i.e. rural vs. urban, fundamentalism vs. Modernism, Prohibition, and nativism).*

The new assessment was entirely multiple-choice with one correct answer for each question. As a knowledge indicator the question was to have an answer that required straight factual knowledge, not the ability to analyze information or make inferences from a reading selection. Teachers understood that there would be two knowledge level questions on the state assessment from this indicator, and that the correct answers would relate directly to the list of items in the parentheses.

Some indicators required the assessment of analytical and inferential skills. Those indicators were labeled as application indicators. An application indicator for grade 11, Benchmark 4 was:

*The student uses immediate, long range, and multiple causation to explain the causes of World War I.*

Teachers who understood how to use the standards realized that this application indicator this would be assessed with questions utilizing a short reading selection, political cartoon, chart, map, or a similar visual stimulus which would have to be studied to infer a correct answer.

After writing the standards, benchmarks, and indicators, the committee selected the specific indicators to be assessed. As was the case with the writing process, much of the preliminary discussion took place in grade level and discipline subcommittees. The final selection was made in whole group discussions. One of the procedures the committee agreed to at the beginning of the process was that decisions would be made by consensus, but individual members would be free to present minority reports. That was not necessary and the final selection of assessed indicators was made without incident.

When the standards document was approved by the State Board of Education the committee's work was officially done. Almost all committee members were brought into the next phase of the process. The actual assessment had to be constructed and teachers had to be made familiar with both the standards document and the assessment. There were also implications for teacher preparation to be considered.

At several stages during the committee's work, drafts of the work had been distributed for public comment. Drafts were actually posted on the State Department of Education website and its social studies consultant, an employee of the Department who had facilitated the committee, met with groups of teachers and curriculum supervisors throughout the state to discuss the draft. The committee solicited written comments and discussed dozens of letters from teachers and the general public. One committee member had a relationship with the National Council for History Education and through assistance of its executive director was able to receive comments on an early draft of the document from historians Paul Gagnon and Mary Beth Norton. Committee members also conducted public hearings in several locations around the state before making its final recommendation to the Board.

After the standards document was approved some committee members participated in reviewing test items and provided professional development to help teachers become familiar with the standards and assessment. The Kansas State Department of Education started conducting three-day summer institutes to help teachers understand how to use the standards. Committee members were involved in conducting those institutes. Several committee members were hired to consult with individual districts and consortia of small districts to assist in redesigning their social studies curriculum. Committee members participated in meetings with history and education professors from state and private universities to explain the implications of the standards for higher education curriculum and answer questions.

The Kansas State Department of Education developed new teacher preparation standards for social studies teachers and again committee members were heavily involved in that process. The revised standards did not, to the disappointment of some committee members, end the comprehensive social studies license issued by the state. Some committee members and some State Board of Education members wanted to replace the comprehensive social studies license with individual teaching endorsements in history, government, economics, and geography. One faction in the Kansas State Department of Education convinced the State Board that Kansas had too many small rural high schools to make such a plan feasible, and schools with only one social studies teacher needed staff who could teach all social

studies related disciplines. The new teacher preparation standards did result in more history being required for social studies licensure than had been the case, though a full history major was not required.<sup>3</sup>

The standards document approved by the Kansas State Board of Education in 1999 represented a resounding victory for history in the debate between history and social studies. The committee had been dominated by individuals philosophically opposed to the concept of “social studies” as a discipline. While economics, geography, and government were well represented on the committee, advocates of history were the most numerous and the most aggressive in promoting their discipline. More history indicators were selected for assessment than those of any other single discipline and the standards document strongly recommended that U.S. history be taught as full year courses in grades 5, 8, and 11. The committee also recommended a semester of Kansas history in grade 7 and a full year of world history in either ninth or tenth grade.<sup>4</sup> Committee members debated on how to reflect the diminished status of social studies in the standards document’s title. Some states had adopted History/Social Studies, but even that was placing too great a value on social studies for many committee members. The final title was *Kansas Curricular Standards for Civics-Government, Economics, Geography and History*.<sup>5</sup> While history advocates liked to think they had saved the best for last by placing history at the end of the title, it was actually a compromise to list the disciplines alphabetically.

Teachers in Kansas were generally pleased with the new standards and comfortable with the assessment. One of the greatest weaknesses of the standards was that many indicators were difficult to fit into the traditional scope and sequence used in Kansas schools. Few schools required geography in high school and many did not even offer the subject. The same was true of economics, a subject many teachers felt uncomfortable teaching. Elementary teachers were particularly concerned. The standards were relatively sophisticated at the fifth grade level and many elementary teachers believed they lacked content preparation, particularly in history and economics. The Kansas State Department of Education did offer one-day workshops during the school year as well as the summer institutes, but it had only one social studies specialist to organize and conduct professional development concerning the standards and assessments. Some districts did hire consultants for short workshops, often former standards writers, but the void in training was never really filled.

The greatest problem with the standards was that many of the indicators did not fit naturally into the design of traditional courses. History teachers began to complain that they were being required to take time out from their history curriculum to teach units on economics. Some districts were cutting world history down to a semester and just teaching assessed indicators. They would fill the other semester with an economics course.

Despite the problems, the second round of standards and assessments was considered a success by history and other social studies teachers and the State Board of Education. The Thomas B. Fordham Foundation and the American Federation of Teachers praised the new standards. The individuals who worked on them were proud of their accomplishment.

Many of the same committee members were back together when the standards were revised in 2003-04. A legislative mandate required the Kansas State Department of Education to revise the standards every five years. That requirement was later changed to every seven years. The 1998 committee had been provided with a budget of \$60,000. Given that the committee members were not paid, though schools were reimbursed for substitute teachers, the funds allowed for over twenty days of meetings. The major expense was the travel expenses of committee members. The staff

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<sup>3</sup> The Kansas State Department of Education does not specify a specific number of courses required for licensure. Each college or university submits an individual program for approval by the Kansas State Department of Education. Many teacher education programs in the state require as few as twenty-four semester hours of history. These are usually split evenly between world and United State history. Freshman level survey course can make up as many as twelve of those hours.

<sup>4</sup> The State Board of Education had previously mandated that nine weeks of Kansas history be required at some point between grades seven and twelve, and that one year of United States history be required during high school. Those mandate continue, but no specific curriculum for those course has ever been required. Even with a required state assessment, curricular standards remain advisory.

<sup>5</sup> The Kansas State Department of education continues to occasionally use the term social studies, though History-Government has become the dominant nomenclature.

time of the state social studies specialist who facilitated the meeting was covered through the regular Kansas State Department of Education budget. The 2003 committee had only a \$20,000 budget, thus less time to work on the project. The short budget was not a major problem since this was truly a revision of the previous standards, not a case of writing whole new standards as the 1998 committee had done.

The major goal of the 2003 committee was to revise the economics, geography, and government indicators in a manner that would allow them to be better integrated into history courses. The most troublesome indicators had been the ones dealing with economics. The revision approved in 2004 reworked indicators to put them in a historical context as much as possible. The standards split United States history chronologically with fifth grade assessed indicators dealing with the period before 1800, the eighth grade dealing with the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the high school assessment covering the 20<sup>th</sup> century. One economics indicator read:

*The student evaluates the costs and benefits of governmental economic and social policies on society (e.g. minimum wage laws, anti-trust laws, EPA regulations Social Security, farm subsidies, international sanctions on agriculture, Medicare, unemployment insurance, corporate tax credits, public works projects).*

This economics indicator fit naturally into a high school United States history course. As the new standards document took shape, and drafts were shared with teachers and the public, it became obvious the integration of the other disciplines with history was being well received.

History teachers had good reasons to be pleased with the revised standards and assessments. The dominance of history in what had been the Kansas “social studies” curriculum became stronger than ever. The new document was entitled, *Kansas Curricular Standards for History-Government, Economics and Geography*. The committee explicitly developed that title in order to emphasize the place of history in the curriculum. The State Board of Education accepted the recommendation.

New standards, if only a revision of the previous version, required a new assessment. The Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation was contracted to process the results of the assessment; but the contract to develop the assessment had been awarded to a California education non-profit organization called WestEd. WestEd had sent representatives to most of the meetings of the standards writing committee and provided the type of assistance The Center for Educational Testing and Evaluation had offered the 1998 committee.

WestEd assessment experts believed in the concept of opportunity to learn. That meant testing should take place as soon after learning as possible. Implementing that standard would have required an end of year assessment model. The Kansas State Board of Education could not accept a state assessment at the end of the year for each grade. It would have been too expensive, it would go too far toward an actual state curriculum, and there was also concern about the number of state assessments students were taking in response to No Child Left Behind mandates. The procedure for administering the exam was changed in two ways in order to reduce the time lapse between instruction and testing.

The elementary exam was moved from fifth to sixth grade and indicators for the sixth grade assessment were chosen entirely from what was expected to be taught in fifth and sixth grade. The courses recommended for those grades in the standards document were American history to 1800 in fifth grade and world civilization to 1300 in the sixth grade. This change raised concerns on the part of many Kansas teachers when the test was administered in the spring of 2008. While there was no formal survey, anecdotal evidence indicated that moving the exam to the sixth grade resulted in less time spent teaching history in the fifth. History assessment scores did not involve the same severe penalties as low math and reading scores. In Kansas, sixth grade is usually taught in middle schools and fifth grade in elementary schools. Elementary school administrators quickly realized that low scores a history assessment administered in a middle school would hold few consequences on their schools, even if the U.S. history content was to be taught in fifth grade.

An unambiguously positive change took place in the timing of high school exam. The Kansas State Board of Education accepted the standards committee’s recommendation to implement opportunity to learn at the high school level. The high school exam was divided into two parts, a world history section and a United States history section. Individual schools were permitted to administer the entire sixty question exam at one time or administer the thirty question world history section at the end of the year students took world history and the United State history section at the end of the year they took United States history.

The assessment could not be administered until it was constructed. The budget for assessment development and administration were drawn from a variety of accounts, some rather multi-purpose in nature. Precise figures for the entire cost of the process have been difficult to track. It was undoubtedly an expensive process. WestEd testing experts reported that a rule of thumb in the industry was that it costs approximately \$1000 to develop each assessment question.

Teachers were contracted to write test items to specifications developed for each indicator.<sup>6</sup> This would be a modest expense, as little as fifteen dollars a question. WestEd would then have content experts and copy editors examine each question and make edits. The questions would then be assessed by two teams of Kansas teachers. WestEd staff conducted the meetings and took the part of full participants. In addition to history and social studies teachers, each team would include special education teachers. One team would examine test items for bias. Bias as defined by the team did not be limited to the usual issues such as race, religion, and gender. Bias dealt with the whole issue of whether or not individual items were culturally appropriate. A question using nautical terms would potentially be rejected if it might result in a Kansas student who understood the content being assessed missing a question because he or she was confused by the unfamiliar vocabulary. The second team would examine each question for content accuracy. Special education teachers on the team would assist in editing the questions to prevent confusing students with learning disabilities. Questions were not simply accepted or rejected by the review teams. Each team would discuss the wording of each question and possible answer until a consensus was reached. Questions would sometimes be eliminated if consensus could not be reached. Test items making it through the process were then field tested by administering them to small groups of students. This helped eliminate questions that were missed by too many students because of structural flaws not discovered by the review teams. By the time all of those steps were complete the cost of individual items could be quite high.

Alternate exams were written for students with the most severe intellectual handicaps. These students suffered from sufficient mental retardation that they were not in regular classrooms, but received history instruction from special education teachers. The one percent of the overall student population with the most severe intellectual limitations was given special assessments designed by their special education teachers. These would usually be oral, not written. A historical concept might be assessed by asking students to know the names of presidents on coins and geography could sometimes be assessed by having a student demonstrate he or she knew the way from the classroom and the cafeteria and back. An additional two percent of the student population was administered the Kansas Assessment with Modified Measures (KAMM). These were multiple-choice exams with simpler vocabulary and three possible answers instead of two. KAMM questions went through the same writing and editing process as the regular questions, though more special education teachers were involved in the bias and content teams.

The assessments administered in the spring of 2008 were an improved product over the previous version. Teachers were very supportive of recasting government, economics, and geography indicators in a historical context. High School teachers were enthusiastic about the opportunity to administer the world history and United States history sections separately. The Kansas State Department of Education also developed new resources to assist teachers in preparing students for the assessment.

The Kansas State Department of Education gathered teams of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers to prepare manuals that would help teachers use the standards more effectively. The manuals were officially known as flip charts, though they were eventually published as booklets rather than in the form of real flip charts. Three flip charts were developed, one for each level of the assessment.<sup>7</sup> Each flip chart provided very specific information for each assessed indicator. Key information included:

- Sample Questions
- Whether the question would be written as a straight factual recall question or if a reading selection, map, political cartoon, or other visual stimulus should be expected as part of the questions.

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<sup>6</sup> A useful thirteen-page document entitled Kansas Social Studies Assessment Specification listing the indicators and explaining the structure of each assessment can be found at [www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org) by following the links under educators tab. The direct link to the assessment page is <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=161>.

<sup>7</sup> The Flip Charts can be found on [www.ksde.org](http://www.ksde.org) by following the assessment link under the educators tab. The direct link to the assessment page is <http://www.ksde.org/Default.aspx?tabid=161>.

- In the case of the high school exam, whether the question would be the United States or World History section.

Dozens of teachers were brought together in the summer of 2008 to review the results of the first administration of the assessment and to make recommendations for setting cut scores to determine the five proficiency levels, ranging from exemplary to unsatisfactory, for individual students who had taken the assessment. The consensus among teachers at those sessions was that the flip charts had been very helpful in helping them to understand what type of questions to expect on the state assessments and to design appropriate lessons and instruction.

The Kansas State Board of Education has considerable authority under the state constitution to set education policy, but no authority to raise revenue. The result is that funds are often short for implementing policy and carrying out basic operations. The failure of the state legislature to provide funds accounted for the four-year delay between the approval of the 2004 standards and the first administration of the assessment. Getting resources to teachers in the field was also a problem. The flip charts were useful, but there were insufficient funds to provide training for teachers to use them to maximum effect. Kansas developed a strong standards and assessment system, but failed to adequately invest in the professional development component to make the best possible use of them.

The Kansas State Department of Education had one history/government staff specialist to provide services to 304 school districts and over 1,000 schools. She has done excellent work with the resources available to her. The summer academies conducted the first few years after the 1999 standards were approved have not been funded since the 2004 standards came into effect. Despite the problems, there have been some bright spots.

The lone staff specialist has continued to offer workshops for districts. The flip charts and standards were made available on the Kansas State Department of Education's website. Two professional organizations for history teachers, the Kansas Council for Social Studies and the Kansas Council for History Education have consistently invited the staff specialist to their annual conferences and those sessions have been well attended.

Teaching American History grants have been a major source of professional development. Several Kansas school districts have been awarded grants written for the specific purpose of preparing teachers to use the standards effectively. A component of many of these grants has been to provide teachers with an opportunity to earn graduate degrees in history. Over one hundred Kansas history teachers have earned graduate history degrees through Teaching American History grants. Attendance at statewide social studies and history conferences has grown every year since the grants program has been in effect. Participants in these grants have become providers of professional development in Kansas school districts, often as a result of having been referred to districts by the Kansas State Department of Education staff specialist.

Schools and teachers received results of the new assessments in the fall of 2008. This was considered a "baseline" year, in other words the cut scores for the performance levels would be established after the results were analyzed. The performance levels were:

- Exemplary
- Exceeds Standard
- Meets Standard
- Approached Standard
- Academic Warning

Schools had an option of giving the exam online or as in a paper and pencil format. Percentage correct scores for the online format were available immediately, but since cut scores were not available, there was no meaningful way to interpret the scores.

Groups of teachers and administrators were assembled by WestEd in the summer of 2008 to analyze results and make recommendations for the setting of cut scores for performance levels. Those recommendations were factored into the calculations of WestEd assessment team and cut scores were released in October of 2008.

The following table displays the score range for the five performance levels. The sub standard levels are shaded.

| Grade | Academic Warning | Approaches Standard | Meets Standard | Exceeds Standard | Exemplary |
|-------|------------------|---------------------|----------------|------------------|-----------|
| 6     | 0-27             | 28-45               | 46-64          | 65-79            | 80-100    |

|             |      |       |       |       |        |
|-------------|------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| 8           | 0-26 | 27-43 | 44-66 | 67-80 | 80-100 |
| High School | 0-27 | 27-43 | 44-66 | 67-80 | 81-100 |

By October of 2008 schools had received reports indicating how individual students scored on the overall assessments with sub-scores for history, civics, geography, and economics. High School scores included an overall assessment score as well as scores for the world history and United States history parts of the test. The overall score was used to determine the performance level of individual students.

The reports also included a breakdown of how the students in the school did on individual indicators compared to state averages. For instance, indicator 4c.2.2 on the high school assessment was a world history indicator dealing with the Enlightenment. The state average on this indicator was 37.3 %. As teachers analyzed these state reports they could see how their students compared to the state average on individual indicators and use the data to make adjustments to instructions. The assessments did not include enough questions per indicator to give individual student data at the indicator level. Teachers could use the results to establish the performance level of individual students on the overall assessment, but there was no performance score for individual indicators. To have provided such data would have required adding more questions to the assessment or reducing the number of assessed indicators.

The 2008 administration of the assessment was, as stated, the baseline year. Once the cut scores are set the exam will be given to the students graduating on even numbered years, beginning with the class of 2010. That class will take the exam in the spring of 2009 as high school juniors. Schools have the option of administering the high school exam in two parts, a world history section and United States history section beginning with the class of 2012. Since most Kansas schools offer world history in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, most schools will administer the world history section to 10<sup>th</sup> graders in 2010. Those scores will be banked and the United States history section will be administered in 2011 when the students are 11<sup>th</sup> graders.

This procedure results in considerable confusion. Schools have to make sure that students scheduled to graduate in 2016 take the exams in sixth and eighth grades. Long-term multi-year schedules need to be made out. An additional problem is determining what to do with students that move from one school to another. No teacher or administrator wants to be held accountable for a student who moves in three weeks before the test and fails to meet the standard. The high school exam presents even more problems; many students will take the world history and United States history sections in different schools. These issues remain unsettled at the time of this writing.

The author of this paper serves on the Boards of Directors of both the Kansas Council for Social Studies and the Kansas Council for History Education (of which he is currently the president). He frequently serves on advisory committees to the Kansas State Department of Education on issues relating to social studies and history education. Leaders in both organizations and the Kansas State Department of Education have expressed some concerns about the current assessment. The greatest concern is that the multiple-choice format does not provide a valid indication of student mastery of higher cognitive tasks.

Robert J. Marzano is a leading advocate of standards-based instruction and assessment. He is also one of the most widely read and influential researchers and theorists impacting k-12 education today. In his book, *The New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives*, he makes a strong distinction between knowledge acquisition and knowledge utilization. His definition of knowledge acquisition corresponds with the application level on the Kansas assessment.<sup>8</sup> He finds multiple-choice items of little value beyond assessing knowledge acquisition. He strongly recommends performance assessments such as essays for those tasks of the type listed as application indicators in the Kansas standards.

As Kansas social studies and history educators meet at conferences and other settings, the issue of the state assessments often dominates the conversation. There is increasing concern that teachers are being pressured to develop multiple-choice classroom tests aligned with the standards, specifically the assessed indicators. Teachers are being required to develop “pacing guides,” which set timelines for teaching particular indicators and “common assessments”. Common assessments are exams all the teachers in a school teaching the same course give. These are often multiple-choice.

Teachers are reporting much less time devoted to research projects, oral reports, essay writing, and field trip. Representatives of the Kansas State Historical Society, which sponsors National History Day in Kansas, report a decline

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<sup>8</sup> Robert J. Marzano and John S, Kendall, *The New Taxonomy of Educational Objectives* (Thousand Oaks, California: Corwin Press, 2007), pp. 133-136.

in participation among public schools. Private schools that do not give the state assessment are continuing to participate in National History Day at previous levels.

When history teachers get together the frustration is palpable. Dr. Sam Wineburg of Stanford University, the author of *Historical Thinking and Other Unnatural Acts*, spoke on *Reading Like a Historian* at the joint conference of the Kansas and Missouri Councils for History Education on September 26, 2008. Many if not most of the audience was already somewhat familiar with his work and his talk was well received. Much of the casual conversation heard in the convention center during the rest of the conference centered on how difficult it was to put Dr. Wineburg's ideas into practice given the reality of the assessments.

A related concern has to do with the state of history in the elementary grades. The History/Government Assessment is not mandated by the federal government through No Child Left Behind, but reading and mathematics are. There are more and more anecdotal reports that history and social studies are not being taught in the early grades, or at least not very much. Most sixth graders in Kansas attend departmentalized middle schools and have one period a day of history, but lower grades tend to be taught in self-contained classrooms. Teachers report that they are devoting less and less time to science and social studies. High school and middle school teachers report that students have less general background knowledge of social studies knowledge than a decade ago. Unfortunately, these are random and anecdotal observations. There has been no serious research study or survey on the time devoted to history and social studies in Kansas elementary schools.

Significant and positive change may be on the way. Kansas has joined the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.<sup>9</sup> This organization promotes the reorganization of the curriculum into Core Subjects and what it refers to as 21<sup>st</sup> Century themes.

The core subjects are:

- English, reading, or language arts
- World languages
- Arts
- Mathematics
- Economics
- Science
- Geography
- History
- Government and Civics

The core themes are:

- Global Awareness
- Financial, Economic, Business and Entrepreneurial Literacy
- Civic Literacy
- Health Literacy

The core subjects and themes are supplemented by three sets of skills, which are:

### **1. Life and Career Skills**

- Flexibility & Adaptability
- Initiative & Self-Direction
- Social & Cross-Cultural Skills
- Productivity & Accountability
- Leadership & Responsibility

### **2. Learning and Innovation Skills**

- Creativity & Innovation
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving

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<sup>9</sup> Updated information and background information on the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century skills can be found on its website <http://www.21stcenturyskills.org/>.

- Communication & Collaboration

### **3. Information, Media and Technology Skills**

- Information Literacy
- Media Literacy
- ICT (Information, Communications, & Technology) Literacy.

The current timeline for revising history standards calls for the committee to be formed in 2012 and a new assessment to be in place no sooner than for the class of 2016. That timeline was established before the state joined the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills. The Kansas State Department of Education is in the process of reaching out to educators in the schools to explore ways that the existing curriculum can be integrated into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills framework. Part of that framework will deal with much more authentic types of assessments.

It is too early to tell where this will lead. The Kansas State Board of Education has made a serious commitment to integrating the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Framework in Kansas education. The emphasis on civic literacy, global awareness, communications, critical thinking, and related skill are a natural vehicle for a strong history curriculum, which moves for beyond the multiple-choice driven assessments now in place.

The History/Government staff consultant from the Kansas State Department of Education has been in touch with the presidents of the Kansas Council for History Education and the Kansas Council for the Social Studies to begin discussion on the implication of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Framework for the teaching and assessment of the social studies disciplines. It is too early to know if the scheduled revision of the standards will be accelerated, but it is a distinct possibility. There is also the possibility that the business community will encourage a move toward and emphasis on a vocational approach to curriculum that will be at odds with the liberal arts and civic education emphasis preferred by many of the history teachers in the state.

While the changes that may take place in history standards and assessments during the next few years are not known, one thing is certain. Teachers will be heavily involved. It is a special characteristic of the standards and assessment process in Kansas that teachers are so very much involved. The fact that the leaders of the two major organizations serving history teachers in Kansas were contacted so early as major changes are again about to be made is very encouraging.

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The U.S. state of Kansas, located on the eastern edge of the Great Plains, was the home of nomadic Native American tribes who hunted the vast herds of bison (often called "buffalo"). The region was explored by Spanish conquistadores in the 16th century. It was later explored by French fur trappers who traded with the Native Americans. Most of Kansas became permanently part of the United States in the Louisiana Purchase of 1803. When the area was opened to settlement by the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854 Information on Kansas's economy, government, culture, state map and flag, major cities, points of interest, famous residents, state motto, symbols, nicknames, and other trivia. Brush up on your geography and finally learn what countries are in Eastern Europe with our maps. Maps of Europe. Title. Recommended indicators to be assessed by the Kansas Social Studies Assessment. Grade level (6, 8 or 11) is indicated. o Indicators suggested for local assessment. Kansas Curricular Standards for Civics-Government, Economics, Geography and History. 2. 18. 6. describes the purpose and functions of multi-national organizations (e.g., NATO, International Court of Justice, International Red Cross, Amnesty International, United Nations). 7. takes and defends a position concerning the use of various tools in carrying out U.S. foreign policy (e.g., trade sanctions, extension of "most favored nation" status, military interventions). Key: D Recommended indicators to be assessed by the Kansas Social Studies Assessment.