

Nebraska Standards in Economics Review Report

The writing committees of the Nebraska Standards are to be commended on their outstanding work as a result of many hours of writing and reviewing to revise the standards for our state. It is clear from the draft of the economic standards that the committee members had a clear understanding of the subject and knowledge in the area of economic education.

What follows is a summary of my review of the Nebraska Standards in Economics within the categories of breadth, depth, clarity, specificity, and measurability. My suggestions for content inclusion are provided within each of the five areas. I have also reviewed the economics content within each of the other three areas of Social Studies in Geography, Civics and History and noted suggestions.

Breadth:

The Voluntary National Standards in Economics produced by the Council for Economic Education is the most comprehensive and generally accepted document for this area. It contains an outline of twenty standards which specify important concepts and issues in economics in grades K-12. The Nebraska Economic Standards mirror this well-known resource in terms of its recommended economic content and skills necessary for our students.

Economics is a natural application to other areas of social studies and it clearly present in Geography, Civics and History. Economic concepts such as labor and natural

resources are visible throughout the K-12 standards within the human systems theme in Geography. The knowledge of economics supports many of the issues in the application of Geography and History. Within the Civics standards, the topic of taxation and the role of government to meet the wants of society provide the economic foundation to the area of forms and functions of government.

Suggestions for improvement:

As a general note, there is a tab for a Glossary section and is mentioned in the materials yet is incomplete in the draft. This is a good component to include in the final draft.

A few suggestions in the Geography standards are mostly in the area of international trade mentioned in the human systems as well as places and regions. There is a lot of detail on economic issues and concepts related to international trade in the grade 12 standard (12.3.3) with little depth in grades 6-8.

In the area of Civics, 12.1.1f could be better defined if the concepts of economic and political systems were added. The standard 8.1.1d should be revised to “meeting the wants of society” as needs can become a normative concept with less clarity.

Economics helps explain the “why” when teaching History and should be included in the application of these standards.

Depth:

The standards are appropriately written at the recommended cognitive levels. The level of complexity deepens within the existing social studies curriculum. The foundation of basic economic content is laid in the early grades within the context of

self, family, neighborhood, community, etc. and carefully articulated throughout the remaining grade levels. The standards contain examples and notation of when a concept may be later introduced.

Suggestions for improvement:

The depth in the area of Financial Literacy needs modification. The detailed specification of content and skills at the high school level needs to be added to the middle level. Economic concepts to include in grades 6-8 to best spiral into the high school standards include careers, budgeting, and the role of banks and stocks (beyond the general statement in the area of institutions).

The other area for improvement is within the area of globalization. The economic concept of exchange rates is appropriately introduced in grade 3, but is absent in the standards which follow. The depth of content in international trade in the other social sciences is much more detailed; and should be articulated with the Geography standard in the area of human systems.

Clarity:

The standards contain all of the necessary economic concepts, ideas and skills, written in a very clear manner. The organization of the content within five main areas (markets, economic institutions, financial literacy, government, and globalization) is an effective way to communicate to educators, administrators and the general public the important ideas, concepts and skills in economic education. The subsets of indicators further define the outcome of the standard; examples give further suggestions on the necessary knowledge and skills required of students. There is clear articulation of the

economics content, with no duplication. While every subject contains its own level of jargon, it is absent in the standards.

Suggestions for improvement:

The committee should look at the high school Geography standards related to globalization on the many examples and lists associated with international trade for better articulation.

The wording of “winners and losers” in 12.2.12 could be seen as jargon; perhaps a modification to “benefits of trade short/long term” would be better stated.

Specificity

Following the generally accepted sequencing within the existing Nebraska social studies standards, (self, family, neighborhood, etc.) the revised Nebraska Standards can be easily adapted to any local curriculum. The language is clear with an ample amount of built-in flexibility. For example, a local district could use some or the entire Financial Literacy component of the standard in its existing Personal Finance class. The specificity of the standards will also assist local districts in developing new economics and personal finance courses.

Suggestions for improvement:

Providing a reference list of recommended resources in economic education is suggested. This can be done as an appendix to the final document or part of a web component on the Nebraska Department of Education website. These additional resources provide classroom lesson supplements and grade appropriate language on all economic content.

Measurability

The standards contain language which includes clearly defined, operative verbs making the standards easily assessable at the local level. They are also free of instructional strategies which are difficult to measure in an assessment format. Because the standards are correlated to established national standards in economics, they are also tied to existing nationally normed assessments available to school districts. It is not necessary to spend scarce local and state resources to re-create valid and reliable instruments to assess the economics standards.

Suggestions for improvement:

Refrain from using the operative verb of “assess” in the benchmarks below the upper level Geography standards. A more measureable objective may include language such as to “evaluate, compare/contrast, analyze”.

The educator/district resource section of the final document should include a list of available nationally normed assessments in economics (print and online) in which local districts can adapt to create grade level assessments by standard or individual concepts. Include a list of assessments related to other disciplines if available.