

Social Studies Statewide Evaluation 2014-2015

AEA Education Services Director Sample

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Background

At the request of the Iowa Department of Education, investigators at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) were asked to assess several key dimensions of Social Studies education in Iowa.

The project was completed by UNI's Center for Social and Behavioral Research (CSBR) under the direction of Mary Losch and the project was coordinated by Neal Pollock. In addition to overall project guidance provided by Stefanie Wager at the Iowa Department of Education, Chad Christopher, UNI Social Science Teaching Advisor, assisted with the development of the assessments and provided consultation throughout the project.

Study Design

Fashioned after other assessments of educational curricula and associated needs, the assessments were developed to include teacher knowledge of the social studies curriculum, instructional practice information, and content knowledge about social studies instruction. Special attention in the analysis was focused on determining any differential practice and needs between K-5 and 6-12 levels of instruction.

The key questions to be answered by the assessment were:

- How much time is being devoted to social studies each week?
- What is the current curriculum being utilized in each district?
- How do elementary teachers define/describe their social studies teaching?
- What is the current progression of courses in each district K-12?
- What are the perceptions of facilitators/barriers to teaching social studies?
- What is the certification level of classroom social studies teachers?
- How much professional development do social studies teachers in each district receive each year? What are the focus areas for this professional development?
- What needs exist for additional professional development?
- Are there barriers to professional development and if so, what are they?
- What is the familiarity of teachers with the Iowa Core in Social Studies and the ELA literacy standards for history/social studies?
- How are AEAs supporting social studies?
- What needs can be met by the state regarding social studies?

Data were collected from AEA Education Services Directors via online questionnaires (administered using *Qualtrics*). To assure that all key issues are included and addressed appropriately, a small number of pretests were conducted prior to the launch of the survey. A summary of findings is presented below.

AEA Education Services Director Sample

Recruitment for AEA Education Services Directors

Emails were sent to the Education Services Director at each of Iowa's nine AEAs using contact information provided by the Iowa Department of Education. This email included a brief description of the study and an embedded survey link. Four out of the nine AEA Education Services Directors participated in the survey.

Since there were only four responses in total, a brief summary of responses are summarized in this report in lieu of percentages.

Social Studies Professional Development Currently Offered

All four responding Education Services Directors indicated that social studies workshops were made available to teachers within their regions. Other than workshops, one respondent identified concept-based teaching and learning courses as being made available by to teachers within their region. No other social studies professional development opportunities were identified among the four respondents.

Total social studies professional development opportunities offered within the past three years by individual agencies ranged from three to ten. All four respondents believed that there were *too few* social studies professional development opportunities offered by their agency.

Considering barriers to offering more social studies professional development, other content areas being deemed a higher priority was the largest factor. A lack of social studies expertise within the agency was considered a *minor factor* for three of the four participating AEA Education Services Directors. Cost was only considered a major factor for one respondent, whereas the other three respondents reported that it was *not a factor*.

When asked about other possible barriers to offering social studies professional development, one respondent noted "When offered, we have too few teachers to participate to make it worth their time and ours. There seems to be a lack of urgency to change the way they are teaching—they think they know the best ways already." One other respondent commented, "Districts do not have the funds to pay for substitute teachers to attend social studies professional development offered by our agency. They are also very hesitant to have the teacher be gone from their classroom during the school year. They want the 'A Team' in the classroom, not a substitute teacher."

Perceptions of the Iowa Core in Social Studies

Two of the four participating Education Services Directors indicated that they did not know how effective the Iowa Core in social studies was in preparing students for college, career, civic life, and citizenship. The remaining two respondents both perceived the Iowa in Social Studies to be effective in preparing students for college, however they were split in how effective they perceived it to be in preparing students for career, civic life, and citizenship.

The number of professional development opportunities related to any area of the Iowa Core made available by each participating agency ranged from 5 to 50. Three out of the four agencies offered professional development specifically related to the Iowa Core in Social Studies. Among those three agencies, the number of opportunities related to the Iowa Core in social studies within the past year ranged from one to four.

Each of the four Education Services Directors were asked to how the Iowa Department of Education could better support social studies in Iowa. One respondent had no comment. Points from the other three are listed below:

- Revise Social Studies Essential Concepts and Skills so they are more rigorous standards.
- Continue to provide Social Studies PD modules that can be deployed across the state.
- Make standards grade-specific and/or release recommended course maps/models
- Host/hold conferences and large PD opportunities across the state, not just in Des Moines.
- Create a master list of Iowa cultural institutions and the resources they provide.
- More opportunities for distance learning (via Zoom, AEA PD Online, etc) for Social Studies
- Do Not be as "restrictive" in the content (having to use the exact power point slides, the same language, and the same activities) across all agencies. This method does not allow for differences in the audiences it's being delivered to.
- Continue to build the capacity within the AEAs