

Social Studies Statewide Evaluation 2014-2015

District Superintendent 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 district superintendents 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. Following the field period, descriptive analyses were conducted and are presented here.

District Superintendent Sample

Sample Recruitment for Superintendents

All superintendents of Iowa's 338 public school districts (N=308) were sent an email using contact information available on the Iowa Department of Education website (<https://www.educateiowa.gov/>). This email included a brief description of the study along with an embedded survey link. The 30 Superintendents responsible for two districts were asked to complete the survey once for each district. In total, there were superintendent responses for 83 of the 333 (30.0%) public school districts in Iowa.

Sample Characteristics

AEA Representation

Within the superintendent sample, districts within the Mississippi Bend region were over-represented, whereas districts within the Heartland region were under-represented.

	Proportion of Sample by AEA Region (n = 83) %	Proportion of Districts in IA by AEA (n = 328) %	Difference between Sample and Population by AEA Region %
AEA			
Mississippi Bend (MB)	16.9	6.2	+10.7
Grant Wood (GW)	14.5	9.5	+5.0
Prairie Lake (PL)	14.5	11.8	+2.7
Keystone (K)	12.0	6.8	+5.2
Green Hills (GH)	12.0	13.6	-1.6
AEA 267 (267)	9.6	16.3	-6.7
Great Prairie (GP)	8.4	9.8	-1.4
Northwest (NW)	7.2	10.4	-3.2
Heartland (H)	4.8	15.7	-10.9

District Size

Roughly half (50.6%) of the superintendents within this sample represented small districts with 999 students or less.

	Superintendents (n = 81) %
District Size	
Small (0 to 999 students)	50.6
Medium (1,000 to 2,499 students)	28.4
Large (2,500 or more students)	21.0

Iowa Assessment in Social Studies

A little more than half (53.1%) of participating superintendents reported that their district administered the Iowa Assessment in social studies.

	Superintendents (n = 81) %
Offers IA Assessment in Social Studies	
Yes	53.1
No	43.2
Don't Know	3.7

Curriculum

Superintendents were asked whether their district had a social studies course progression for each school level (i.e., elementary school, middle school, and high school). Less than half of superintendent respondents indicated that their district had a social studies course progression for elementary school. However, almost seven out of ten (69.0%) reported that their district had a social studies progression for middle school, and eight out of ten (80.7%) had a social studies progression for high school.

	Superintendents (n = 81) %
Has a Social Studies Course Progression for...	
Elementary school	47.0
Middle school	69.0
High school	80.7

Overall, only 35% of superintendent respondents reported that their district had a pacing guide for social studies.

Social Studies Professional Development

Types of Social Studies Professional Development Currently Offered

All superintendents were asked to indicate the types of social studies professional development opportunities offered within their district. Roughly three out of 10 superintendents (30.1%) reported that their district did not offer any social studies professional development. A little more than a quarter of superintendents reported that their district offered workshops (25.3%) or conferences (27.7%) related to social studies.

Roughly four out of every 10 (42.2%) superintendents indicated that their district offered some other type of professional development. Reviewing the open-ended follow-up item for those who selected *other*, the majority (62.5%) of these superintendent respondents identified these *other* opportunities as meetings (e.g., professional learning community meetings, in-services).

	Superintendents (n = 83)
	%
Types of Social Studies PD Currently Offered	
Workshop	25.3
College course	1.2
Book-study group	4.8
Conference	27.7
Other	42.2
No social studies PD offered	30.1
Don't Know/Not Sure	7.2

Number of Social Studies Professional Development Opportunities in the Past 3 Years

Superintendents were asked to estimate the number of social studies professional development opportunities offered to teachers within their district within the last 3 years. Overall, there was an average of five social studies professional development opportunities per district among superintendent respondents (median = 2). Roughly three out of every 10 superintendents (32.5%) reported that there had been no social studies professional development opportunities within their district within the last three years.

	Superintendents (n = 83)
	%
Number of Social Studies PD Offered in the Past 3 Years	
0	32.5
1-4	32.5
5-10	15.7
More than 10	7.2
Don't Know/Not Sure	12.0

Perceptions of Amount of Social Studies Professional Development Offered

All superintendents were asked to consider the social studies professional development opportunities within their district and to indicate if there were *too few*, *too many*, or *about the right number of opportunities*. More than half of the superintendents participating indicated that there were *too few* social studies professional development opportunities available within their district. Only one superintendent (1.2%) reported that there were *too many* social studies professional development opportunities within their district.

	Superintendents (n = 83)
	%
Perceptions of amount of social studies professional development within district	
Too few	68.7
About right	21.7
Too many	1.2
Don't Know/Not Sure	8.4

Barriers to Offering Social Studies Professional Development

Superintendents were given a list of potential barriers to providing social studies professional development, and were asked to what degree each of those barriers was a factor in deciding whether or not to offer social studies professional development. Almost three-quarters (72%) of participating superintendents reported that other areas being deemed a higher priority was a *major factor* in deciding whether or not to offer social studies professional development. Over half of superintendent respondents (61%) reported that the time required to provide social studies professional development was a *major factor* in whether or not it is offered. About a quarter (25.6%) of participating superintendents reported that a lack of social studies expertise within the district was a *major factor*. Cost was only considered a *minor factor* by 54.9% of superintendents, and *not a factor* by 24.4% of superintendents.

Which of the following potential barriers are factors in whether or not professional development related to social studies is offered by your district?	
	Superintendents (n = 82)
	%
Cost	
1 – Not a factor	24.4
2 – Minor factor	54.9
3 – Major factor	18.3
4 – Don't Know/Not Sure	2.4
Time required	
1 – Not a factor	9.8
2 – Minor factor	24.4
3 – Major factor	61.0
4 – Don't Know/Not Sure	4.9
Lack of social studies expertise within the district to train or lead	
1 – Not a factor	36.6
2 – Minor factor	34.1
3 – Major factor	25.6
4 – Don't Know/Not Sure	3.7
Other areas are deemed a higher priority	
1 – Not a factor	6.1
2 – Minor factor	20.7
3 – Major factor	72.0
4 – Don't Know/Not Sure	1.2

Materials Offered by AEA

Superintendents were asked to indicate the types of social studies resources and materials that were available through their district's AEA. The majority of superintendent respondents reported that classroom materials related to social studies (68.7%) and professional development opportunities related to social studies (55.4%) were made available to teachers within their district.

	Superintendents (n = 83)
	%
Classroom materials (e.g., books, DVDs)	68.7
Professional development opportunities	55.4
Other	3.6

Core Effectiveness

Using a 4-point scale anchored by *ineffective* and *very effective*, superintendents were asked to indicate how effective they perceived the Iowa Core in social studies to be in preparing students for college, career, and civic life and citizenship. Less than 10% of superintendents perceived the Iowa Core in social studies as ineffective in preparing students for college (8.5%), career (6.1%), and civic life and citizenship (8.5%). However, a low number of superintendents reported that the Iowa Core in social studies was *very effective* in preparing students for college (11%), and career (8.5%).

How effective do you think the Iowa Core in social studies is in preparing students for...	
	Superintendents (n = 82)
	%
College	
1 – Ineffective	8.5
2	12.2
3	50.0
4 – Very Effective	11.0
5 – Don't Know/Not Sure	18.3
Career	
1 – Ineffective	6.1
2	20.7
3	46.3
4 – Very Effective	8.5
5 – Don't Know/Not Sure	18.3
Civic life and citizenship	
1 – Ineffective	8.5
2	15.9
3	46.3
4 – Very Effective	17.1
5 – Don't Know/Not Sure	12.2

Overall Core PD vs. SS Core PD

Superintendents were asked to indicate the professional development opportunities made available by their district related to any area of the Iowa Core and professional development opportunities related specifically to the Iowa Core in social studies. Only 7.2% of superintendents reported that their district did not offer any professional development related to any area of the Iowa Core, however more than half of superintendents (67.5%) indicated that their district did not offer any professional development specifically related to the Iowa Core in social studies. Considering the reported average amount of professional development related to any area of the Iowa Core and the reported average amount of professional development related to the Iowa Core in social studies, the Iowa Core in social studies accounted for 11.0% of all Iowa Core related professional development offered by districts.

	PD related to any area of the Iowa Core within the past year (n = 83)	PD related to Iowa Core in social studies within the past year (n = 83)
Mean	11.8	1.3
Median	8.5	0
Count	%	%
0	7.2	67.5
1-4	12.0	18.0
5-10	45.7	4.8
More than 10	26.4	2.4
Don't Know/Not Sure	8.7	7.2

Superintendent Recommendations for Additional Social Studies Support

Superintendents were asked what the Iowa Department of Education could do to better support social studies in Iowa. These responses were reviewed for themes. The most common theme was that superintendents wanted the Iowa Department of Education to provide more resources and professional development related to social studies, which accounted for 27.2% of superintendent responses. Other common themes included providing more clarity for the Iowa Core in social studies (18.5%) and to generally improve standards related to social studies within the state (13.6%).