

No Child Left Behind

The Impact on Social Studies Classrooms

How is social studies faring in schools in the age of No Child Left Behind? SOCIAL EDUCATION asked six leading NCSS members how No Child Left Behind has affected their schools and their own classroom teaching. The members teach at different grade levels and in different parts of the country. We were interested in finding out whether the time and resources their schools are assigning to meeting the reading and math requirements of No Child Behind are making it more difficult for teachers to teach social studies. We asked them to describe their teaching strategies and tell us how these are being influenced by No Child Left Behind. Here are their replies.



BARBARA KNIGHTON is a first and second grade looping teacher at Winans Elementary School, Waverly Community Schools, Lansing, Michigan. She is also a member of the Editorial Board of the NCSS journal for elementary teachers, SOCIAL STUDIES AND THE YOUNG LEARNER.

I am currently a first grade teacher at a suburban school district outside of Lansing. I am a looping teacher, meaning that I keep the same class of students together for two years, and become their second grade teacher too. I have been teaching for fifteen years, and have been at this school for eleven of them.

The impact of the No Child Left Behind initiative can be seen at my school on a daily basis. In Michigan, the high stakes state test is used to assist in determining if a school is meeting the required educational criteria. One effect of the No Child Left Behind legislation has been that we are spending more classroom instruction time teaching test taking skills and preparing for the Michigan Education Assessment Program. Our building has purchased materials to teach the test taking skills and we are required to use them as early as the second grade. We also have to spend a certain amount of time each day teaching literacy and math. The result is that many teachers sacrifice social studies or science to be sure to fit literacy and math into the schedule.

The reading requirements have helped push a renewed literacy focus to the front of our staff development and school improvement work. We have weekly literacy team meetings and a professional reading study group. At both the building level and district level, extra financial support is being used to boost reading progress. In my building, we have three extra reading teachers and a reading

paraprofessional. We also have developed several ways to assess and keep data that show what work we've done and keep closer tabs on student progress. All these things take a considerable amount of time both during class and outside of teaching time.

The problem is that social studies, science, health and social skills are often put off to the side and forgotten. I have found that many teachers in the early grades (K-2) use literacy strategies as a way to try and meet the social studies goals. This often results, in my opinion, in surface learning and studying no topic in depth.

I prefer to choose a topic and make plans to cover it in depth. The adjustment I have had to make in light of the No Child Left Behind legislation is to look for more ways to connect reading and writing skills with my social studies and science instruction. I have my first and second graders respond to social studies topics in writing much more often. We also do more book writing together as a class. In the past few years, there have been many more good books on social studies topics written at the primary and pre-primary level. Time for Kids, National Geographic and Heinemann are some publishers who have done a very nice job of offering great titles to purchase. I attempt to provide my students with many books and sources of reading materials. I allow them to practice their reading skills by reading to each other, and I've also begun using a home/school journal in which students write several times a week to their families to share what they've learned during the week. They often choose to write about social studies or science. In these ways, I can continue to focus on literacy skills, as required by my principal and my district, while covering topics in science, social studies and health on more than just a surface level.

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CAROL WARREN teaches the third grade at Sacaton Elementary School, Sacaton, Arizona. She is a member of the NCSS Board of Directors.

Our school has been labeled as underperforming, and this has already had an impact on social studies instruction. Major efforts are put into language arts and math, for which increased classroom instruction time has been mandated. Teachers, therefore, have less time for other subjects. Because No Child Left Behind requires testing in science and not social studies, I believe that social studies instruction time will lessen even more in the future.

In these circumstances, teachers have to develop special strategies for social studies instruction. My strategies include integration with other subjects; preparing shorter lessons for use in the odd time slots that often appear in elementary class schedules; and, the one I feel most comfortable with, using lessons that teach social studies while practicing skills tested by No Child Left Behind. I use lessons from a project called GeoLiteracy, which was developed through a grant by the Arizona Geographic Alliance, to do this. Geoliteracy has K-8 lessons teaching every Arizona geography objective and practicing Arizona reading and writing objectives. They will be piloting lessons for a similar program combining geography and math, called GeoMath, this year. What I like about such programs is that the emphasis is on the social studies, but teachers can point to the practicing of tested skills when administrators are demanding more reading and math instruction.

One of my favorite integrated social studies lessons is a geography lesson that I wrote. It teaches an Arizona geography objective concerning trails into and through the territory of Arizona, focusing on the Gila Trail in particular. I use excerpts from the journal or diary writings of four individuals who traveled the trail in the late 1800s, in which they described new desert plants and animals they encountered. The students learn about the Gila Trail, locate its route through Arizona, read the descriptions, and then draw the plant or animal just as the traveler described it. After drawing it, they learn the identity of the plant/animal, see a picture of it, reread the description, and discuss how the writer described it. The last activity in the lesson has the student imagine that he or she was an early traveler through the desert and write a letter to a family member describing a desert plant or animal as if they were seeing it for the first time. This lesson addresses an Arizona history objective on primary source material and practices Arizona language arts objectives on identifying an author's purpose and writing personal letters. It also integrates art into social studies. With this lesson, I can meet my social studies objectives and still satisfy my district's desire to increase reading and writing instruction time.

As social studies instruction time has been cut, I have had to rely more on text material and do fewer extension activities. I cover what is mandated in the Arizona Social Studies Standards, which is basically my district curriculum, and very little else. Rather than cut whole subjects out, I teach less about each subject. For example, in our study of the Prehistoric Anasazi civilization, I have in the past provided enrichment activities. One such activity shows how

the Anasazi used natural resources by making a paintbrush out of the Yucca plant and painting designs on a clay pot the student has made. Last year, we made the paintbrush but painted on a paper drawing of a pot to make the lesson shorter. I also condensed what I read from a literature selection I use with the lesson. I don't know if we will have the time to do even the shortened version of the activity this year.



RACHAEL SHARPE teaches social studies at Kanapaha Middle School, Gainesville, Florida. She was the NCSS Middle School Teacher of the Year in 2002.

In Florida, we have a state standardized test that is high stakes both for students and schools. It is directly related to the president's education agenda for accountability. These scores are the primary basis for deciding whether students are retained or don't graduate. Schools also receive a grade. A school is rewarded financially for an 'A' grade, but if a school receives an 'F,' it is in jeopardy of being shut down and students are given "voucher opportunities" to attend private schools. Needless to say, the school curriculum is focused on subjects that are being tested (math, reading, writing, and science).

At this time, social studies is not on the test, so social studies is seemingly not considered part of the core curriculum. Thus, leaders of our state organization, the Florida Council for Social Studies (FCSS), are trying to convince the state legislature to pass legislation affirming that social studies is part of the core curriculum. The state government has been hesitant, as it does not want to have to allocate funds to add social studies to the state test, but feels it would have to in an effort to ensure accountability. The leaders in FCSS are trying to convince the government that testing is not what we want, but that is not the message the government is hearing.

Because of the importance of reading among the subjects tested, there is a literacy push in the content areas. To strengthen my students' literacy skills, I use literacy strategies in my social studies classes to help them develop comprehension, analytical, and synthesizing skills. One strategy that I have found useful is CRISS, which means Creating Independence through Student-Owned Strategies. This is mostly a matter of graphic organizers, note-taking tools, mnemonic devices, vocabulary development, and questioning strategies, as well as prior-knowledge/brainstorming techniques, and problem-solving procedures to help students with comprehending and analyzing reading passages. It also helps with concept development and the synthesis of information to develop a well-written piece. I use CRISS strategies to teach vocabulary development. I examine terms frequently used by key historians (Patrick Manning, Peter Stearns, Gerald Schlabach, Deborah Johnston, Eric Martin, and Julian Pleasants to name a few). This allows the students to begin to understand how historians deal with history. I have students practice CRISS and other strategies when we look at primary/secondary documents and answer document-based questions. This then leads into developing good writing skills.

I am a strong believer in helping students develop critical thinking skills. In my middle school classroom, I am responsible

for teaching gifted sixth grade students social studies and science. I do this in an integrated manner to develop student interest and understanding to a higher level (especially among my female students as I see more of them at this age losing interest in such subjects). At the beginning of the school year, students address the questions—What does a scientist/historian look like? How do scientists/historians use the tools of their trade? And what is the role of scientists/historians in society—in a unit on defining science and history. We have researched the Internet to discover significant information on male and female scientists in history. Students then create PowerPoint presentations to deliver to their classmates and at Open House for Parents at the beginning of the school year.

My curriculum is not driven simply by the textbook. I believe if we as educators are creative and innovative and put in the extra effort, we will see a pay-off with students as they become interested and eager to learn.

If we ever have a social studies test that is based on critical thinking, then I really feel my curriculum and teaching methods are suitable. But if we have one that depends on a regurgitation of facts then I will be forced to change my emphasis.



BRUCE DAMASIO teaches all grades from ninth through twelfth at Liberty High School in Sykesville, Md. An NCSS High School Teacher of the Year in 2002, he is a member of the NCSS Board of Directors.

At this point in my career, No Child Left Behind has had no direct, personal impact, but it looms over the horizon like an oncoming storm. State standards and testing issues impact us more on a direct, daily basis at this point, but No Child Left Behind has long range implications for all of us.

In my personal experience, and from what I hear in anecdotes and conversations, more and more students are coming to high school with less knowledge in social studies. This is because social studies is being cut back to allow more time for math and reading classes and sciences in middle and elementary schools.

We also have concerns over certification. As a result of No Child Left Behind, teachers in Maryland need twenty-four credit hours in history and civics/government and the clock is ticking. Many teachers will find themselves in a bind as will schools, administrators and others.

Teachers who have amassed many years of experience and love for a class/course and are effective, dedicated teachers will be unable to teach these classes if they do not have the needed hours by No Child Left Behind standards. Many good teachers will face serious questions of how to get their jobs done and still find time to go and get more hours from taking extra classes in their fields. Most of the college classes they can take are at night and after school, but these often do not focus well on specific content needs for teaching history and government. The costs are also significant, and there is a question about who will bear the costs of taking these classes—will it be teachers alone?

The potential is there to end up with fewer electives for high

school students—particularly in economics, world geography, and psychology, which are not part of No Child Left Behind. Schools will direct more effort, money, teachers and classes into history and government and less to electives. We have a department that offers fourteen electives, four of which have AP test possibilities for our students. These electives are some of our most popular and successful classes, yet are threatened by No Child Left Behind if teachers are shifted or courses are dropped to meet these guidelines.

In conclusion, at this point, No Child Left Behind has had little direct impact on my teaching or that of most teachers as well. But there are looming problems that we need to solve, which have an impact not just on students but on administrators, supervisors, parents, and teachers.



SUE BLANCHETTE teaches eleventh grade regular and AP U.S. history at Hillcrest High School, Dallas, Texas. She was an NCSS High School Teacher of the Year in 2000 and president of the Texas Council for the Social Studies in 2002-2003.

Long before No Child Left Behind, Texas had high-stakes tests required for graduation at the high school level. So we have been dealing with the kind of issue raised by No Child Left Behind for a long time. The latest version of these tests—the Texas Assessment of Skills and Knowledge, better known as TAKS—went into effect last year, adding social studies and science to the material tested in high school. This year eleventh graders must pass the entire TAKS test (English/language arts, math, social studies and science) in order to graduate.

This test has not been imposed on us against our wishes. On the contrary, we asked for it—no, we demanded it! The Texas Council for the Social Studies (TCSS) believed that being added to the accountability system would bring validity to our discipline, money to our coffers, and knowledge to our students.

Although I've been president of the Texas Council for the Social Studies, I have a different view on testing from the official position of the Council. TCSS supports high stakes testing in social studies, mainly because its exclusion has resulted in social studies education being ignored in favor of those areas that were tested (i.e., reading, writing and math). I do not support high stakes testing! I understand the drive behind it, but we have got to find a better solution. Testing the kids to death is not working!

These days, it is common to hear questions like “Is it on TAKS?” with the implication, “If it isn't, don't waste your time on it.” Texas has just completed the social studies textbook adoption process. Textbook adoptions have revolved around how well the books addressed TAKS objectives, not how well they addressed the content. Companies are quick to demonstrate how they have provided ancillary materials to boost TAKS scores, or highlighted or bracketed in the teachers' editions to focus attention on TAKS objectives.

In my humble opinion, this is narrowing the study of history to names and dates and drill-and-kill, and the students are losing out on the passion of history. I cannot and I will not reduce the study

of history to facts, figures, and skills. That attitude has made social studies classes the eyesore of the curriculum for years. Many of us remember an endless recitation of dates and people and graphs that made social studies classrooms a crashing bore. We bless the one teacher in our lives who really brought the past alive and we have tried over the years to bring the pathos and human diversity and excitement of the discipline to our students.

An interesting note on the first administration of TAKS in Texas this year was that the social studies scores at the high school level across the state were the highest of any of the disciplines. If the kids don't graduate, at least they won't blame us! It's been announced that a student getting twenty-two out of the fifty-five questions right will pass the TAKS test needed for graduation. But the impact TAKS is having on all of us seems to be greater than is justified by a test that only requires that students get 40 percent of the answers right.

The concepts behind No Child Left Behind are admirable. Educators are keenly aware of the shadow children who seem to slip farther and farther behind each year until they finally just slip away. But high-stakes testing is not necessarily the entire answer either. New research is beginning to show that high stakes testing is not translating over to higher SAT or AP scores; it is leading to increased drop out rates, lower graduation rates and a lower age of students who take the GED instead of graduating from high school. It would appear that instead of raising the bar to help all students, what is actually happening is that the students with more challenges to overcome are simply leaving. And on top of all of this, the mandates of No Child Left Behind are not being properly funded. If the nation believes that changes are needed to insure more accountability in education, it must be willing to pay for the changes. More teachers, better facilities, and improved resources like additional tutoring and up-to-date technology all cost money. The development of accurate assessment methods and the time needed to prepare for and take the tests all cost money. But much of the needed funding has not been forthcoming on the national level. The resulting drain on state and local resources is beginning to have repercussions across the country.

How will all this affect how I teach? Very little, I suspect. I firmly believe in painting a picture of the past, and weaving together the people and events so that students understand that the events in the past happened to folks just like them. I will continue to do this. Since the publishers and others have provided tremendous TAKS resources, I will use those that I find helpful in this process and integrate them into the materials that I have spent a lifetime collecting. And if I need to digress to provide background to make a concept more understandable, I will do so, whether it is tested or not.

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TIMOTHY J. TUTTLE teaches ninth grade honors world history, eleventh grade U.S. history and twelfth grade government and economics at Santiago High School, in Corona, California. He was an NCSS High School Teacher of the Year in 2001.

Next spring, California will announce its guidelines for adopting the new requirements set by the No Child Left Behind legislation. We will have to wait and see but there are clear directives that must be followed. Teachers new to teaching must have at least a B.A. or B.S. in their subject area. This is great and will help raise the competency of teachers. Additional requirements, however, will have an impact on the numbers of teachers in all fields. New teachers must also pass a subject competency test. The social studies include a vast array of majors: history, sociology, psychology, anthropology, political science, economics and philosophy. Are separate tests going to be given for each of these subject areas or are teachers going to be required to take one general test to show competency in all of these subject areas? Do teachers of social studies need to be competent in all the social studies to be effective and highly qualified? We do not know the answers to these questions and it is a concern that may not only affect the number of new teachers but also the types of course offerings and electives in schools.

I am also concerned that the time needed for test preparation will take time away from teaching subject material. As a teacher, I am already frustrated that most of the month of May is taken up with testing. The No Child Left Behind legislation will add another layer of testing. What subjects will have to be sacrificed to make room for another high-stakes test? Will we end up sacrificing programs that encourage students to become active learners to produce students who can bubble in correct answers but have no idea how those answers relate to them or the world in which they live? Unlike math, the social studies curriculum cannot be adapted to tests that require a single answer that solves a particular problem. Social studies demands that the students be able to gather information and then extrapolate an answer based on the facts of the event being studied. The tests that ask for only one answer focus on the facts; they do not indicate whether a student has learned anything from the facts.

There is a critical balance between teaching facts and teaching thinking skills. Some say, “how can we teach students to think if they do not have the information to think about?” Factual information is important to any discussion, but before we teach our students every fact of history we need first to give them a structure that will help them make the facts relevant. I think we should be teaching our children how to think critically about the world in which they live. We should be teaching them how and when to apply their knowledge. Currently, the emphasis of the tests is strictly focused toward the facts and leaves out the aspect of the social studies which makes the subject interesting to our students. I think that teaching our students to be critical thinkers about the world in which they live, and to know how to use facts when it is appropriate and relevant to a problem, is of greater value to our students.

In my own teaching, I would hate to have to cut back on the

integrated and interdisciplinary programs of which I am particularly proud and which we are at this point able to justify. My fear is that once test results are reported there will be pressure to eliminate these programs because they do not address enough of the specific aspects of the curriculum chosen to be tested. One of these programs combines curriculum from the social studies and language arts and is entitled You Have the Right to Be Informed. It has been recognized for excellence by the Constitutional Rights Foundation and the National Education Association. The project involves the students in extensive research into a significant trial or Supreme Court case and culminates in the students writing, producing and presenting a play, which recreates the events of the trial or case. Over the years, we have investigated the issue of criminal rights (*Miranda v. Arizona*), personal rights (*Roe v. Wade*), trials of conscience (The Pentagon Papers), treason (The Trial of the Rosenbergs), the right to die (Karen Ann Quinlan) and the issue of the rights of citizens to protest (The Trial of the Guardsmen at Kent State). This year we are looking at the First Amendment issue of the freedom of the press in the Supreme Court case of *Hazelwood v. Kuhlmeier*. The integrated nature of this project allows the students to do detailed research, which includes contacting those involved in the original cases. Some of those contacted in the past include the attorney general of Arizona, the Rosenberg children, Norma McCorvey, Daniel Ellsberg and Tony Russo, the parents of Karen Ann Quinlan, and John Califano, who was wounded at Kent State.

Of the two other programs, one is also an integrated language arts and history course which combines the curriculum from the eleventh grade United States history and American literature classes to study history from the Colonial period to the 1960s. The other is a five level integrated interdisciplinary program involving the curriculums from the social studies, math, science, language arts and fine arts. The basic structure of this program, called Skull Island, begins with the students on a simulated floating school studying the cultures of Japan, the Philippines and tribes in Borneo. On the way to Borneo the ship sinks. After several days drifting in the ocean the students find themselves washed up on Skull Island. For six weeks the students are faced with required tasks, disasters and unexpected bonuses.

I have always felt that my first level of accountability was to the parents of my students and the community at large. My students' parents and the community have actively supported the activities and projects that go on within my classes, and this kind of support is vital, in my opinion, to saving the programs.

I believe it is our responsibility as teachers to defend ourselves as professionals. We have allowed politicians who know little about what we do as professionals and far less about how we create a positive learning environment to define and dictate how we should do our job. 🗣️

The editors of SOCIAL EDUCATION are interested in hearing from readers about how No Child Left Behind is affecting their teaching of social studies. Please send us a letter describing its effects on your school and/or on your strategies for teaching social studies in the classroom. Please send your comments to SOCIAL EDUCATION, 8555 Sixteenth Street, Suite 500, Silver Spring, Maryland 20910; or via e-mail to socialed@ncss.org.

This so-called No Child Left Behind is a reform piece, offering reforms for education. There's nothing wrong with that. But if, in fact, you think that you are ever going to have reform without resources, it's not going to happen. Wilson: One of the other major criticisms of No Child Left Behind deals with the implications of using a standardized test as means of assessing achievement. And that is where we left off on Roosevelt Island. I mean, of course they need calculation skills, and they need to know reading comprehension skills, but we don't fill out bubbled tests or assignments, or we don't even think in bubbled ways. The primary positives of the No Child Left Behind Act include: Accountability standards are set and measured annually by each state to foster educational growth and achievement. All results are also annually reported to parents. NCLB requires schools to focus on providing quality education to students who are often underserved, including children with disabilities, from low-income families, non-English speakers, as well as African-Americans and Latinos. Parents are provided annually with a detailed report of student achievement, and explanations are provided of achievement levels. Cons. Major drawbacks of the No Child Left Behind Act include: Federal Underfunding.