



Ohio

Council for the Social Studies

Position Statement: House Bill 239 (End of Course Testing)

Approved by Board June 3rd, 2020

Let us be clear. There is no subject more at the center of preparing youth for this nation's highest office--that of "Office of Citizen"--than social studies. Through high-quality social studies education, youth are better prepared for college, career, and civic life. Critical learnings in social studies include:

- U.S. and Ohio constitutional foundations necessary to sustain and strengthen our republic; a mode of self-government made-up of the people, by the people, and for the people.
- Contributions of key figures in our nation and world's march towards freedom, justice, human rights, and prosperity.
- Critical civic skills, such as how to identify and confront deliberate disinformation, and to reach across deep divisions to build a more just and peaceful state, country, and planet.

In a time of intense political division, affirmation masquerading as information, and individuals needing to act on behalf of the public good, legislative disinvestments continue to lead to cuts to the subject best positioned to heal and unite our nation--the social studies. Most recently, Ohio House Bill 239 sets out to cut the American Government end-of-course graduation exam, even though testing in social studies accounts for the lowest amount of instructional time in any core subject area (10%), which is far less than the 74% dedicated to Mathematics and Language Arts.

In 2012, all elementary and middle grades social studies state exams were defunded and suspended. We acknowledge that existing state exams reflect poor pedagogy and cause undue taxation and hardship to teachers and youth. Remedies are needed both in D.C. and in Columbus to combat test fatigue and faulty evaluation systems, while enacting policies that save and strengthen social studies in Ohio's schools.

Misguided legislation has chosen winner and loser core subject areas, and unfortunately, social studies is losing. Nationally, since the enactment of *No Child Left Behind*, 44% of school districts have reduced instructional time in social studies (CCSSO, 2018). Results from our *2020 State of the Social Studies in Ohio Survey* show:

- Social studies educators report a “C-“ letter grade on the health and vibrancy of social studies teaching and learning in Ohio.
- 1/3 of social studies teachers received no professional development in the content area they are licensed to teach.
- Teachers report their school leaders continue to place more emphasis on, give more instructional time to, and provide more resources for Mathematics, English, and Science.

The effects of this disinvestment in historical thinking and civic-mindedness ripple through our communities, in the majors and careers youth select, in the voting booths and attitudes residents hold towards politics and government, and in the overall quality of civic dialogue and engagement.

Research notes that the marginalization of social studies is most apparent in districts that serve a high percentage of students of color. The crowding out of social studies, especially, in elementary and middle school grades, is a cost too high for a pluralistic democracy that thrives on an educated and civically engaged citizenry. Our organization has witnessed firsthand through member testimonies and conducted empirical research, how the discontinuation of state social studies assessments has led to decreased instructional time, resources, and lowered status in schools.

After the legislature voted to suspend the 5th grade Ohio Achievement Assessment in 2010, our higher education community members utilized stratified random sampling to interview 51 elementary school principals in both urban and nonurban settings from across the state on the effects of this legislation. We learned more than half (54%) of the principals reported reductions in social studies instructional time in their buildings in response to this action. Simply put, what is tested by the State is valued, invested in, and taught in local classrooms under existing legislation.

OCSS calls upon federal and state lawmakers to stop this cycle of curricular neglect and make a long-term financial commitment to the teaching of social studies in *all* grades, in *all* schools, and to *all* students. Our proposal specifically calls for:

- Replacing the existing end-of-course exams with one new, Ohio-grown, inquiry-based social studies assessment that blends content in American History and American Government, starting with the class of 2027.
- Allocating 1.2 million dollars in competitive grants for elementary and middle grades teachers for high-quality social studies professional development.

It is long past-time for the State of Ohio to invest in its “civic education front-line responders” by supporting high-quality social studies assessments and teacher professional development. The health and vibrancy of our republic depends on it.

If you haven’t done so, please, contact your State Representative and express your support for OCSS’s proposal to save and strengthen social studies in schools.