

# Best Practices in Social Studies Instruction

Prepared for Arlington Public Schools

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In the following report, Hanover Research examines effective and promising practices in social studies programs. The first section of the report includes a literature review that examines program sequencing, instructional strategies, and assessment methods, and the second section profiles three school districts with exemplary social studies programs.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND KEY FINDINGS

## INTRODUCTION

Some researchers contend that K-12 social studies programs have recently suffered from “a lack of curricular emphasis, shifts in federal spending, and generally limited pedagogical knowledge and strategies.”<sup>1</sup> This report intends to support Arlington Public Schools’ evaluation of its social studies program.

This report first offers a literature review on social studies education at the elementary and secondary levels, which covers sequencing, instructional strategies, and assessment, noting differences in approaches for different age groups wherever possible. A second section offers illustrative examples of social studies education theories via profiles of peer district social studies programs. Below we present key findings from the report.

## KEY FINDINGS

- **Effective social studies sequencing ensures that students accumulate knowledge and develop skills.** Educators must sequence academic tasks so that students gradually expand their skills over time. The order in which specific content is delivered to students is less important than ensuring that the material challenges students throughout the course of study.
- **School districts with exemplary social studies programs provide highly structured sequencing guides that align state standards with lesson plans.** Effective instructional and curriculum guides correlate content and performance standards with academic tasks, assessments, and resources.
- **Educators effectively incorporate technology into social studies classrooms by expanding available content and improving students’ technical skills.** Technology should enhance teaching methods rather than replace teacher responsibility. Although teachers and administrators are often intimidated by technology, experts note that simple methods such as data analysis can facilitate critical thinking among students.
- **School districts successfully integrate technology by simplifying the process for their teachers.** Teachers’ lack of technical proficiency can be a barrier for effective technology implementation. Districts assist teachers by directing them to useful, easy-to-use resources and providing technology-focused professional development.

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<sup>1</sup> [1] Case, J. “The effects of project-based units and class wide peer tutoring on students in secondary social studies classrooms.” SUNY Digital Repository, Aug. 29, 2012. <https://dSPACE.sunyconnect.suny.edu/handle/1951/57438>  
[2] Fitchett, P. et al. “Social Studies Under Siege: Examining Policy and Teacher-Level Factors Associated with Elementary Social Studies Marginalization.” The Center for Educational Management and Evaluation, Jan. 2013. <http://mdcss.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/Social-Studies-Under-Siege-Examining-Elementary-Social-Studies-Marginalization.pdf>

- **Highly effective social studies teachers use active learning approaches that engage students.** Research on history classrooms suggests that passive methods such as lecturing and recall quizzes are largely ineffective. Effective teachers engage students by encouraging interaction among students and relating course material to students' lives.
- **Research suggests that grouping students by ability does not have an effect either way on achievement, except in social studies, where it may have negative effects.** Social studies is the only subject for which discernible effects of ability grouping have been found, and these effects showed students performing less well in homogeneous groups (i.e., students with the same ability level) than in heterogeneous groups. Based partly on such findings, the National Council for the Social Studies has issued a position paper opposing the use of ability grouping.
- **Co-teaching is an effective method for differentiating instruction in social studies classrooms.** Co-teaching is typically implemented in diverse classrooms that contain students with disabilities. Experts suggest co-teachers must work together and remain engaged with students to effectively differentiate instruction.
- **Increased instructional time devoted to social studies at the elementary level is associated with increased student achievement.** Policymakers' emphasis on core subjects has decreased the time devoted to social studies in recent years, and some experts have argued that social studies can wait until students develop a foundation of literacy and mathematical skill. Elementary teachers with greater autonomy devote more time to social studies material.
- **Experts recommend that social studies educators use performance assessments to effectively evaluate students.** Performance assessments allow teachers to evaluate students' processes, rather than simply their knowledge retention. Effective performance assessments include portfolios, writing papers, and critiquing historical events.

## SECTION I: LITERATURE REVIEW

This first section reviews research-based principles and models of effective social studies instruction, covering the full cycle from program content and sequencing, through instructional strategies, and finally assessment.

### SEQUENCING

Sequencing is typically considered in terms of scope and sequence, which are defined as the “outline of skills and information to be taught.”<sup>2</sup> Scope refers to the breadth and depth of content to be taught during a designated time, and sequence refers to the order in which it is taught. Sequencing exists at various organizational levels in education. Policymakers and administrators must determine the sequence of students’ entire K-12 experience, while educators must determine the sequence of each course and unit.

Dr. Charles Reigeluth’s elaboration theory is a widely recognized sequencing theory that applies to social studies. Reigeluth explains that sequencing is important when “there is a strong relationship among the topics of the course.”<sup>3</sup> The elaboration theory distinguishes task expertise from content expertise:

- **Task expertise** is the mastery of a process and/or skill. Tasks are sequenced according to their difficulty, beginning with the simplest tasks and proceeding through gradually more complex tasks.
- **Content expertise** is the mastery of a body of knowledge. Concepts are sequenced according to their superordinate, coordinate, and subordinate relationships.<sup>4</sup>

As such, educators must methodically address the sequence of both skills and content. There is limited evidence regarding the effectiveness of different sequencing models; however, further discussions of skills and content sequencing illustrate promising methods for arranging social studies material.

<sup>2</sup> “Homeschool Glossary.” Time4Learning.

[http://www.time4learning.com/homeschool/homeschooling\\_glossary.shtml](http://www.time4learning.com/homeschool/homeschooling_glossary.shtml)

<sup>3</sup> Reigeluth, C. M. *Instructional-design Theories and Models: A New Paradigm of Instructional Theory*. Psychology Press, 1983, p. 431.

[http://books.google.com/books?id=OUq55prZIMEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs\\_ge\\_summary\\_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false](http://books.google.com/books?id=OUq55prZIMEC&printsec=frontcover&source=gbs_ge_summary_r&cad=0#v=onepage&q&f=false)

<sup>4</sup> Johnson, R. “Instructional Sequencing.” University of North Dakota, pp. 6-7.

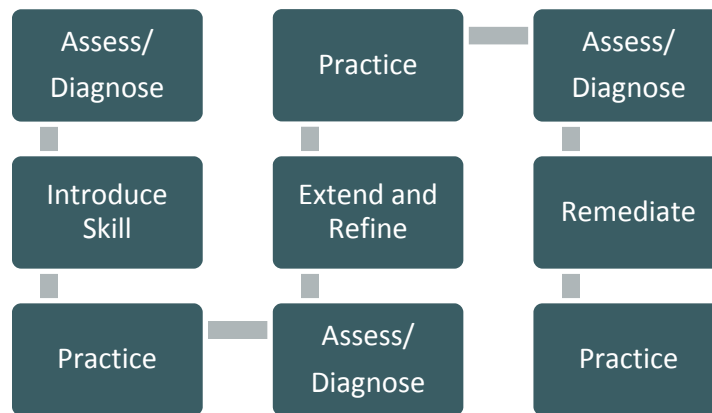
[https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CDYQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.und.nodak.edu%2FInstruct%2FJohnson%2Fid520%2FPresentation%2FInstructional%2520Sequencing.ppt&ei=\\_kx1Ubb2FcjD4APYx4CQBQ&usg=AFQjCNHbR2QGeNuOMF3WpdMLjgdXmRiL9Q&sig2=EEIj740AaKPrWVzeYG\\_6A&bvm=bv.45512109,d.dmg](https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&cad=rja&ved=0CDYQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2Fwww.und.nodak.edu%2FInstruct%2FJohnson%2Fid520%2FPresentation%2FInstructional%2520Sequencing.ppt&ei=_kx1Ubb2FcjD4APYx4CQBQ&usg=AFQjCNHbR2QGeNuOMF3WpdMLjgdXmRiL9Q&sig2=EEIj740AaKPrWVzeYG_6A&bvm=bv.45512109,d.dmg)

### SKILLS SEQUENCING

Skills sequencing refers to the order that students learn how to execute diverse tasks. Social studies requires a wide range of tasks, including reading, writing, critical thinking, and communication. Teachers are unable to completely develop one and promptly move on to the next because these skills build upon each other. Rather, educators must develop a sequence of instruction that provides students with appropriately challenging tasks.

Curriculum developers at the New York State Department of Education (NYSDOE) explain that students progress through a sequence of activities to effectively expand their social studies skills. The process involves continuous assessment and practice, along with gradual introduction, extension, and remediation of skills. NYSDOE's flowchart supports the elaboration theory by suggesting that students should begin with simpler tasks and progress through increasingly difficult tasks.

**Figure 1.1: Social Studies Skill Development Procedures**



Source: New York State Department of Education<sup>5</sup>

While NYSDOE describes the process by which students learn relevant skills, others describe the order in which specific skills should be taught. In 2008, the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, an organization dedicated to teaching 21<sup>st</sup> century readiness, collaborated with the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) to illustrate the ways in which social studies programs can help to promote 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Together, these two organizations developed a sequencing model for grades 4, 8, and 12 in the following skill areas:

- Creativity and Innovation
- Communication
- Information Literacy
- Information and Communication Technology Literacy
- Critical Thinking and Problem Solving
- Collaboration
- Media Literacy
- Flexibility and Adaptability

<sup>5</sup> "Social Studies Resource Guide with Core Curriculum: Overview." New York State Department of Education, 1999, p. 18. <http://www.p12.nysed.gov/ciai/socst/pub/ssovervi.pdf>

- Initiative and Self Direction
- Productivity and Accountability
- Social and Cross-Cultural Skills
- Leadership and Responsibility<sup>6</sup>

The model defines each skill and provides correlating tasks that students should be able to execute at various grade levels. For each task, or “outcome,” the model also provides a sample assignment that links the skill to social studies content. Figure 1.2 presents the first portion of the model, Creativity and Innovation. Educators can use the Partnership’s model to develop a sequence that ensures social studies students gradually improve their skill sets as they advance through elementary, middle, and high school.

**Figure 1.2: Creativity and Innovation**

DEFINITION	4 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	8 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE	12 <sup>TH</sup> GRADE
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Demonstrating originality and inventiveness in work</li> <li>■ Developing, implementing, and communicating new ideas to others</li> <li>■ Being open and responsive to new and diverse perspectives</li> <li>■ Acting on creative ideas to make a tangible and useful contribution to the domain in which the innovation occurs</li> </ul>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Students develop creative solutions to a class or school problem.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Students interview students and/or teachers to identify a problem (e.g., bullying on the playground) and as a group brainstorm creative ways to address the problem (e.g., producing a play that examines the issue, hosting a contest for best ideas).</p>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Students evidence original thought and inventiveness in response to an assignment, issue or problem.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> Students choose an historical figure (e.g., Abraham Lincoln, Sojourner Truth) and create an original story, play, poem or piece of art that captures/conveys a key aspect of that person’s life history</p>	<p><b>Outcome:</b> Students invent an original piece of work that can be published or presented online.</p> <p><b>Example:</b> working in teams, students create a simulation, role play, or webquest that covers a current social or political issue being covered in the news (e.g., global warming, poverty, global economy) or an historic event (American revolution, Civil war, WWII). The finished products can be packaged, presented and/or donated to a local school, with an accompanying group analysis and reflection on the most innovative and creative elements in each of the products.</p>

Source: Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Bulleted items taken directly from: "21st Century Skills Map: Social Studies." Partnership for 21st Century Skills, Nov. 12, 2008, pp. 2-18. [http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/ss\\_map\\_11\\_12\\_08.pdf](http://www.p21.org/storage/documents/ss_map_11_12_08.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Adapted from: *Ibid.*, p. 2.

### CONTENT SEQUENCING

Content sequencing refers to the order in which subject matter is delivered to students. Compared to other fields like mathematics and English, social studies covers a wide range of material, including history, geography, and civics. Educators must sequence social studies content so that students are appropriately challenged throughout the curriculum.

Although there appears to be agreement on *what* to teach students, there is no universal order for *when* to teach them each item. School districts are left to their own devices in deriving social studies curricula, but are generally guided by state standards. Virginia’s Standards of Learning (SOL) for History & Social Science provide a rough framework for the sequencing, by grade, of social studies content (see sidebar), but do not appear to require rigid adherence to this sequence.<sup>8</sup> For instance, sample lesson plans for Virginia Studies contemplate that this curriculum would be completed in grade four,<sup>9</sup> and in fact this is what some school districts do.<sup>10</sup> However, other districts cover Virginia Studies in their grade five social studies curriculum.<sup>11</sup>

#### Virginia SoLs for History & Social Science

- Kindergarten
- Grade 1
- Grade 2
- Grade 3
- Virginia Studies
- U.S. History to 1865
- U.S. History 1865 to Present
- Civics & Economics
- World History & Geography to 1500
- World History & Geography 1500 to Present
- World Geography
- Virginia & U.S. History
- Virginia & U.S. Government

Source: Virginia Department of Education

Similarly, the National Center for History in the Schools (NCHS) provides a broad set of content standards for grades five through 12. Rather than connect each standard with a grade level, the standards are organized according to “eras,” ranging from the beginning of human society to history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. NCHS explains that content standards are intended as a basic guide and “[t]eachers may wish to explore a number of different conceptual and organizational approaches to curriculum design.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> “Standards of Learning (SOL) & Testing: History & Social Science.” Virginia Department of Education. [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards\\_docs/history\\_socialscience/](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/standards_docs/history_socialscience/)

<sup>9</sup> One plan suggests, e.g., that teachers “review with students the explorers they studied in third grade.” “History and Social Science Standards of Learning Enhanced Scope and Sequence – Virginia Studies.” Virginia Department of Education. 2010. p. 14. [http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/scope\\_sequence/history\\_socialscience\\_scope\\_sequence/2008/scopeseq\\_histosoc\\_va\\_studies.pdf](http://www.doe.virginia.gov/testing/sol/scope_sequence/history_socialscience_scope_sequence/2008/scopeseq_histosoc_va_studies.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> E.g., “MCPS Curriculum Guide – Social Studies – Grade 4.” Montgomery County Public Schools. [http://www.mcps.org/Social\\_Studies\\_Files/SS4thGrCurrGuide7-11.pdf](http://www.mcps.org/Social_Studies_Files/SS4thGrCurrGuide7-11.pdf)

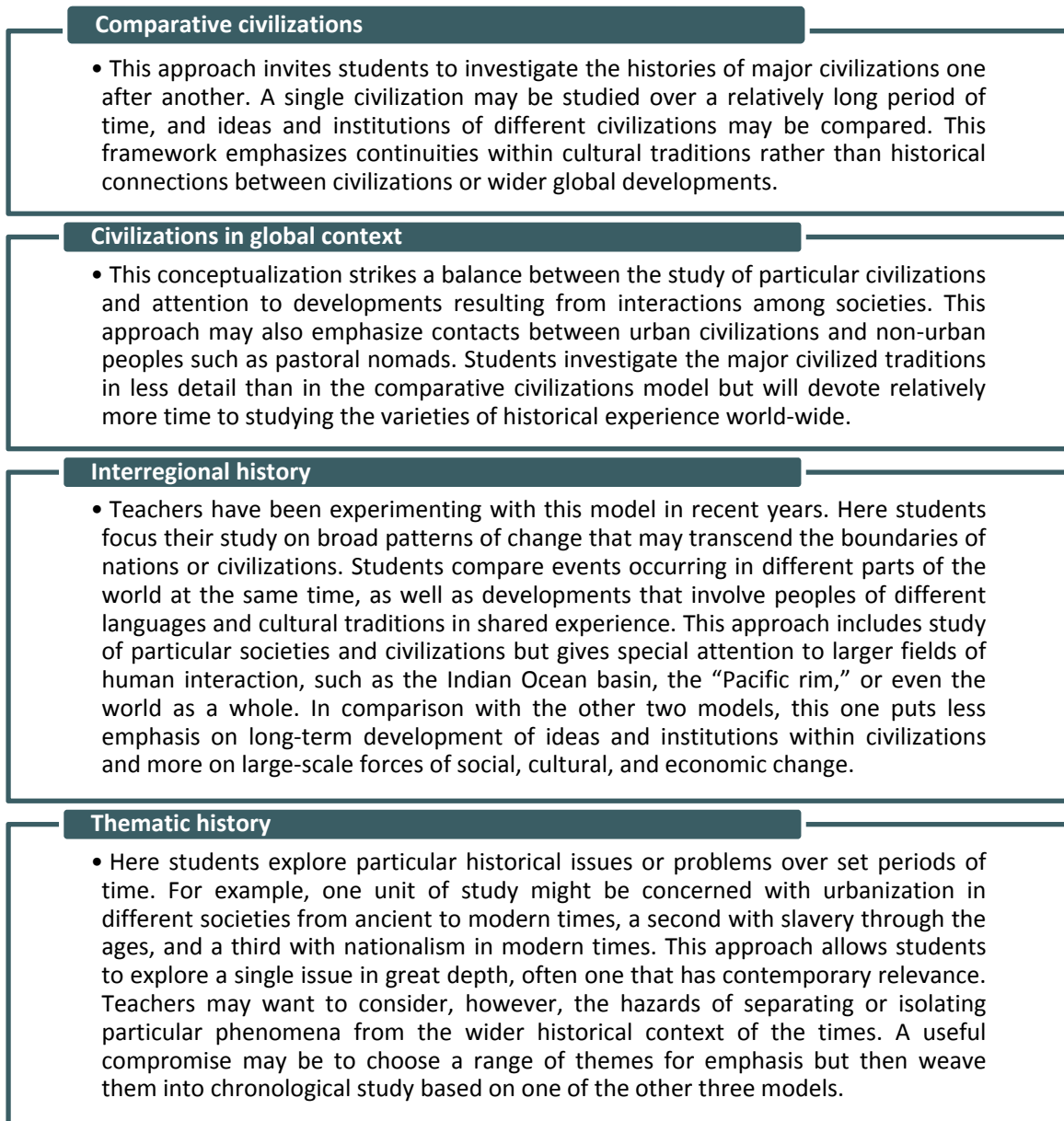
<sup>11</sup> E.g., “Fifth Grade Virginia Studies Pacing Guide.” Waynesboro Public Schools. April 19, 2010. <http://www.waynesboro.k12.va.us/documents/pacing-guides/Grade5SocStudJune10.pdf>

<sup>12</sup> “World History Content Standards.” National Center for History in the Schools, UCLA. <http://www.nchs.ucla.edu/Standards/world-history-standards>



Figure 1.3 presents NCHS’s four common approaches to world history sequencing. Each approach implies a unique sequence of historical content. For instance, “Comparative Civilizations” advises that students study major societies in sequence, while “Thematic History” advises that students study major historical motifs one after another. The diversity of approaches, along with the lack of research on effective sequencing, suggest that **the order in which social studies content is taught is not as important as the method in which it is taught.**

**Figure 1.3: NCHS Approaches to World History**



Source: National Center for History in the Schools<sup>13</sup>

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

## INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES

Instructional strategies are methods to ensure that the sequence and delivery of instruction supports student learning.<sup>14</sup> Sequencing establishes a set of desired outcomes for students, and instructional strategies are the means to reach these objectives. Instructional strategies define the interaction between teachers, students, and lesson material. This sub-section discusses four promising instructional strategies: the use of technology, interactive pedagogy, differentiated instruction, and instructional time.

### TECHNOLOGY INTEGRATION

A growing body of evidence suggests the use of technology can be beneficial in social studies classrooms, especially for students with learning disabilities.<sup>15</sup> Educators' opinions remain divided. Some welcome new technology as a "treasure chest" of new teaching tools and others disparage it as a "Pandora's box" that distracts from sound pedagogy.<sup>16</sup> There is no denying *employers'* growing demand for technical skills, however, and experts argue that social studies curricula should promote technological skills:

American youth need to develop technological skills to be competitive in the workplace and in the emergent global economy. **The growth and importance of technology in all phases of our lives suggests the need for technology to be promoted in the social studies curriculum.**<sup>17</sup>

Although observers, teachers, and policy-makers tend to agree that technology should be incorporated into classroom activities, schools encounter significant challenges in doing so. Research indicates that access to technology, curricular restraints, and teachers' lack of technological skill are barriers to effective integration of technology in social studies classrooms.<sup>18</sup>

Resource and curricular restraints can hamper technology implementation efforts. Teachers have emphasized that all students should have access to computers in order for technology to substantially impact learning. One social studies teacher explained that, "unless [the school has] the quantity and quality [of] equipment necessary to involve all students, technology has a limited effect on learning."<sup>19</sup> Teachers have also cited curricular restraints as a limiting factor. Because of state content standards, many teachers feel they are already

<sup>14</sup> "Instructional Strategies." Florida Department of Education. <http://www.cpt.fsu.edu/eseold/in/strmain.html>

<sup>15</sup> [1] Boon, R. et al. "Technology-Based Practices in Social Studies Instruction for Students with High-Incidence Disabilities: A Review of the Literature." *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 22:4, 2007, pp. 41-56.

[2] Boon, R. et al. "The Impact of Cognitive Organizers and Technology-Based Practices on Student Success in Secondary Social Studies Classrooms." *Journal of Special Education Technology*, 21:1, Winter 2006, pp. 5-12, 14-15.

<sup>16</sup> Forbes, T. "Technology in the Classroom: Data-driven Inquiry and Activity." *Social Studies Review*, Spring 2006, 45:2, p. 54.

<sup>17</sup> Heafner, T. "Secondary Social Studies Teachers' Perceptions of Effective Technology Practice." *International Journal of Computer and Information Technology*, March 2013, 2:2, p. 276. <http://www.ijcit.com/archives/volume2/issue2/Paper020214.pdf>

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

cramming too much material into a short period of time. Teachers feel that technology use “can be very time-consuming for both teachers and students.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite these concerns, experts indicate that integrating technology does not need to be resource intensive. Tom Forbes, an instructor of technology-focused teacher credentialing courses, encourages the use of **data and spreadsheets** in social studies courses. Forbes explains that data analysis activities are “perhaps the most accessible, powerful, and teacher friendly methods with which to infuse technology into subject areas across the curriculum.”<sup>21</sup> Teachers can obtain vast quantities and variety of data from the internet, insert the data into a spreadsheet, and generate charts and graphs that prompt critical thinking. For instance, high school history teachers can use census data to compare living conditions for teenagers in developing nations compared to those in the United States.<sup>22</sup>

Methods such as data analysis require greater input from teachers than simply providing students with expensive virtual activities. However, research suggests that social studies teachers “have been marked by a greater deficiency in terms of their use of innovative teaching methods made possible by various technologies.”<sup>23</sup> Many social studies teachers view technology as a supplementary, rather than integral, method for instruction. Furthermore, social studies teachers are often not equipped to effectively use technology and often resort to using it for drilling and low-order information gathering.<sup>24</sup>

Technology-related challenges are not insurmountable and school districts can play a vital role in improving teachers’ technical skills. Social studies teachers in particular can benefit from more guidance in identifying effective instructional technologies, learning how to apply them during instruction, and continued professional development.<sup>25</sup> Research indicates that low-intensity training administered over several months is less effective than more intensive training. Furthermore, teachers maintain a clearer focus when participating with a cohort of colleagues.<sup>26</sup>

When researchers asked social studies educators to define effective technology integration, they emphasized that technology should expand learning opportunities, not replace teachers’ traditional responsibilities. Teachers noted that technology should broaden the scope of social studies content and facilitate twenty-first century skills. The framework generated from these teacher responses includes seven overarching themes, indicating that effective technology integration:

- Enables instruction that goes beyond the confines of the traditional classroom

<sup>20</sup> Ibid., p. 274.

<sup>21</sup> Forbes, Op. cit., p. 53.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 54.

<sup>23</sup> Shriner, M. et al. “Social Studies Instruction: Changing Teacher Confidence in Classrooms Enhanced by Technology.” *The Social Studies*, 101:2, Mar./Apr. 2010, p. 37.

<sup>24</sup> Heafner, Op. cit., p. 270.

<sup>25</sup> [1] Ibid., p. 38.

[2] Wright, V. and Wilson, E. “Using Technology in the Social Studies Classroom: The Journey of Two Teachers.” *Journal of Social Studies Research*, 33:2, Fall 2009, p. 133-154.

<sup>26</sup> Forbes, Op. cit., p. 52.

- Extends learning beyond what could be done without technology
- Prepares students for the office of citizen in the twenty-first century
- Enhances learning by offering access to resources that are not available in traditional classrooms
- Enhances the content of the social studies, alters the nature of learning
- Promotes and supports student learning, increases communication among students, teacher, and the global community
- Positively effects student learning, and encourages technology use<sup>27</sup>

### *INTERACTIVE PEDAGOGY*

Experts recommend that social studies educators use active, rather than passive, learning approaches. Active learning is designed to engage students more than “standard” modes of instruction in which “teachers do most of the talking and students are passive.”<sup>28</sup>

Research on history teaching suggests that methods such as “passively listening to lectures, copying information from textbooks onto worksheets, and taking ‘recall’ quizzes” are largely ineffective.<sup>29</sup> In contrast, active learning methods engage students by facilitating interaction among students, teachers, and the material itself. The University of Minnesota’s Center for Teaching and Learning identified several active learning approaches that can be applied across the curriculum:

- |                     |  |
|---------------------|--|
| ■ Group discussions | ■ Problem solving                          |
| ■ Case studies      | ■ Role plays                               |
| ■ Journal writing   | ■ Structured learning groups <sup>30</sup> |

Social studies teachers, in particular, can effectively engage students through “research, debates, critical thinking, interpretation and analysis of sources beyond the textbook, stimulating class discussion and dialogue, personalizing the material, raising controversial issues, and conveying excitement about the content.”<sup>31</sup> Researchers at the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and the Campaign for the Civic Mission of Schools add to these findings, noting the following two proven instructional practices for improving student engagement in social studies:

- Incorporate discussion of current local, national, and international issues and events into the classroom, particularly those that young people view as important to their lives

<sup>27</sup> Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Heafner, Op. cit., p. 274.

<sup>28</sup> “What is Active Learning?” University of Minnesota Center for Teaching and Learning.  
<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/active/what/index.html>

<sup>29</sup> Yeager, E. A. “Thoughts on Wise Practice in the Teaching of Social Studies.” *Social Education*, October 2000, 64:6, p. 352.

<sup>30</sup> “What is Active Learning?” Op. cit.

<sup>31</sup> Yeager, Op. cit., p. 353.

- Design and implement programs that provide students with the opportunity to apply what they learn through performing community service that is linked to the formal curriculum and classroom instruction<sup>32</sup>

Other instances of experiential learning that may be effective in social studies instruction include “role plays, simulations, and demonstrations,” which can render social studies content more dynamic.<sup>33</sup> Furthermore, cooperative learning has been found to promote “empathy toward other peoples, in other cultures (and eras), ideas of citizenship, and critical thinking.”<sup>34</sup> In this vein, Class Wide Peer Tutoring, a cooperative learning strategy, and project-based units are promising instructional methods.<sup>35</sup>

### *DIFFERENTIATED INSTRUCTION*

Differentiated instruction seeks to personalize learning for each student. While traditional teaching methods tend to assume all students in a single classroom learn at the same pace, differentiated methods recognize the unique abilities and needs of each student. Advanced students can progress through course material rapidly, while others can continue to repeat material until they are ready to move on. Differentiated instruction is an umbrella term that can refer to a variety of instructional methods, including student grouping and co-teaching.

### **Grouping**

Ability grouping refers to separating students based on their educational achievement or potential in order to provide them with appropriately challenging material. Educators and others have criticized grouping, claiming it marginalizes minority students and increases the achievement gap.<sup>36</sup> However, federal education surveys indicate that ability grouping in American schools has increased in recent years.<sup>37</sup>

Ability grouping is encouraged by some educational organizations, such as the National Association for Gifted Children,<sup>38</sup> but research on the effects of grouping have been mixed. Research specifically related to grouping of secondary students in social studies is particularly limited. However, a literature review conducted in 1990 by a Johns Hopkins

<sup>32</sup> Bulleted items taken verbatim from: “Guardian of Democracy: The Civic Mission of Schools.” Leonore Annenberg Institute for Civics, 2011, pp. 28, 30. <http://civicmission.s3.amazonaws.com/118/f0/5/171/1/Guardian-of-Democracy-report.pdf>

<sup>33</sup> Ferlazzo, L. “Several Ways We Can Teach Social Studies More Effectively – Part One.” *Education Week*, Apr. 24, 2012. [http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom\\_qa\\_with\\_larry\\_ferlazzo/2012/04/several\\_ways\\_we\\_can\\_teach\\_social\\_studies\\_more\\_effectively\\_-\\_part\\_one.html](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/classroom_qa_with_larry_ferlazzo/2012/04/several_ways_we_can_teach_social_studies_more_effectively_-_part_one.html)

<sup>34</sup> Slavin, R. et al. “Cooperative Learning in Social Studies: Balancing the Social and the Studies.” Hurley Eric, p. 1. <http://www.hurleyeric.com/wp-content/uploads/CL-and-the-social-studies.pdf>

<sup>35</sup> Case, J. Op. cit.

<sup>36</sup> Ciciora, P. “Ability Grouping in Elementary School Hampers Minority Students’ Literacy.” *Illinois New Bureau*, April 21, 2009. <http://www.news.illinois.edu/news/09/0421ability.html>

<sup>37</sup> “After Decade of Criticism, Student Grouping Rises.” Yahoo! News. March 18, 2013. <http://news.yahoo.com/decade-criticism-student-grouping-rises-171605134.html>

<sup>38</sup> “NAGC Position Statements – Grouping.” National Association for Gifted Children. <http://www.nagc.org/index.aspx?id=4450>

University researcher found that ability grouping had no discernible effects on student achievement across all subjects, **except for social studies, where ability grouping may actually have a negative effect.**<sup>39</sup> Relying on this study, among others, the NCSS in 1992 issued a position paper declaring its opposition to ability grouping in social studies.<sup>40</sup>

Changing from a traditional, age-based student grouping system to a standards-based system involves a virtual transformation of school structure and processes. Researchers note this effort requires “a significant rethinking of how students are taught and how they are assessed.” Districts must change their resource allocations to staff and support classrooms and “facilitate student movement to higher standard levels throughout a school year.”<sup>41</sup>

### Co-teaching

Co-teaching is “two or more people sharing responsibility for teaching some or all of the students assigned to a classroom.”<sup>42</sup> Co-teaching facilitates differentiated instruction by allowing multiple teachers to address separate groups of students simultaneously. Beverly Koopman of Saint Mary’s University (MN) notes that “[b]y bringing a large group of students together for whole group instruction, correcting and testing, the other teacher is freed-up to work with small groups of higher need students or higher ability students providing remediation or enrichment.”<sup>43</sup>

As Koopman indicates, co-teaching is typically used in a diverse classroom and is often believed necessary for students with disabilities. Minarik and Lintner (2011) suggest co-teaching can be particularly effective in social studies classrooms:

One of the ways to put . . . differentiation into practice is to collaborate with special education teachers and to consider co-teaching as a model for delivering instruction when you have a diverse classroom containing a number of students with disabilities.<sup>44</sup>

Murawski and Dieker (2004) emphasize that co-teachers in secondary classrooms must complement each other and work together. Rather than having one teacher lecture while the other takes a break, both teachers must always be engaged with students or facilitating

<sup>39</sup> Slavin, R. E. “Achievement Effects of Ability Grouping in Secondary Schools: A Best-Evidence Synthesis.” *Review of Educational Research*, Fall 1990, 60:3, pp. 485, 494. <http://rer.sagepub.com/content/60/3/471.abstract>

<sup>40</sup> “Ability Grouping in Social Studies.” *Social Education*, September 1992, 56:5, p. 258.

<sup>41</sup> Vogel, L. “A Leader’s Journey: The Challenges of Implementing Standards-Based Student Grouping.” *National Association of Secondary School Principals Bulletin*, 96:4, Dec. 2012, p. 325.

<sup>42</sup> Villa, R. A. Thousand, J. S., and Nevin, A. I. *A Guide to Co-Teaching: Practical Tips for Facilitating Student Learning*, Corwin Press, 2008, p. 3. [http://www.corwin.com/upm-data/6847\\_villa\\_ch\\_1.pdf](http://www.corwin.com/upm-data/6847_villa_ch_1.pdf)

<sup>43</sup> Koopman, B. L. “Co-Teaching to Facilitate Differentiated Learning.” Saint Mary’s University of Minnesota. <https://sites.google.com/site/smublkoop06/competencies/curriculum-planning-development/co-teaching-to-facilitate-differentiated-learning>

<sup>44</sup> Minarik, D. W. and Lintner, T. “The Push for Inclusive Classrooms and the Impact on Social Studies Design and Delivery.” *Social Studies Review*, 2011, 50:1, p. 54.

learning in some way. Figure 1.4 presents examples of how both teachers can be actively involved in classroom activities.

**Figure 1.4: Teacher Actions During Co-Teaching**

IF ONE OF YOU IS DOING THIS . . .	THE OTHER CAN BE DOING THIS . . .
Lecturing	Modeling note taking on the board/overhead; Ensuring "brain breaks" to help students process lecture information
Taking roll	Collecting and reviewing last night's homework; Introducing a social or study skill
Passing out papers	Reviewing directions; Modeling first problem on the assignment
Giving instructions orally	Writing down instructions on board; Repeating or clarifying any difficult concept
Checking for understanding with large heterogeneous group of students	Checking for understanding with small heterogeneous group of students
Circulating, providing one-on-one support as needed	Providing direct instruction to whole Class
Prepping half of the class for one side of a Debate	Prepping the other half of the class for the opposing side of the debate
Facilitating a silent activity	Circulating, checking for comprehension
Providing large group instruction	Circulating, using proximity control for behavior management
Running last minute copies or errands	Reviewing homework; Providing a study or test-taking strategy
Re-teaching or pre-teaching with a small Group	Monitoring large group as they work on practice materials
Facilitating sustained silent reading	Reading aloud quietly with a small group; previewing upcoming information
Reading a test aloud to a group of students	Proctoring a test silently with a group of students
Creating basic lesson plans for standards, objectives, and content curriculum	Providing suggestions for modifications, accommodations, and activities for diverse learners
Facilitating stations or groups	Also facilitating stations or groups
Explaining new concept	Conducting role play or modeling concept; Asking clarifying questions
Considering modification needs	Considering enrichment opportunities

Source: Murawski and Dieker<sup>45</sup>

**INSTRUCTIONAL TIME**

The Center on Education Policy notes that after the No Child Left Behind Act took effect in 2002, many school districts reduced time for certain subjects or periods, “including social studies, science, art and music, physical education, recess, or lunch,” in order to increase instructional time for English Language Arts and math.<sup>46</sup> While this trend may be incidental in some cases, some researchers have actually argued that elementary grades social studies

<sup>45</sup> Reproduced from: Murawski, W. and Dieker, L. “Tips and Strategies for Co-Teaching at the Secondary Level.” *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36:5, p. 57. <http://www.seniasia.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/Tips-and-strategies-for-co-teaching-at-the-secondary-level.pdf>

<sup>46</sup> “Instructional Time in Elementary Schools: A Closer Look at Changes for Specific Subjects.” Center on Education Policy, February 2008, p. 1. <http://www.arteducators.org/research/InstructionalTimeFeb2008.pdf>

“should remain on the backburner” because core literacy and math skills are prerequisites for the effective study of social studies.<sup>47</sup>

Although districts have been scaling back instructional time devoted to social studies, National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) data reveal that “increased time spent on social studies in elementary grades was significantly associated with increased scores.”<sup>48</sup> And teachers at this level appear to value social studies, because researchers have found that teachers who perceive that they have “greater pedagogical freedom are more likely to teach social studies at the elementary level.”<sup>49</sup>

## ASSESSMENT METHODS

NCSS has argued that assessments should be aligned with major social studies goals and require “real-life” activities from students. NCSS advocates the use of assessments that ask students to take a “reasoned position on a controversial social issue.”<sup>50</sup> This allows educators to evaluate students’ processes, rather than simply their knowledge retention. This type of evaluation is most effectively achieved through performance assessments.

Performance assessments “require students to demonstrate that they have mastered specific skills and competencies by performing or producing something.”<sup>51</sup> Performance assessments are closely related to authentic assessments, which emulate tasks in the professional world. Experts have noted that “a performance is ‘authentic’ to the extent it is based on challenging and engaging tasks which resemble the context in which adults do their work.”<sup>52</sup> Authentic assessments allow students adequate time to plan, self-assess, revise their work, and consult with others. Experts describe effective and useful performance assessments as tasks that:

- Go to the heart of essential learnings by asking for exhibitions of understandings and abilities that matter
- Resemble interdisciplinary real-life challenges, not schoolish busywork that is artificially fragmented and easy to grade
- Set standards, for they point students toward higher, richer levels of knowing
- Are worth striving and practicing
- Generally involve a higher-order challenge for which students have to go beyond routine use of previously learned information<sup>53</sup>

<sup>47</sup> Fitchett et al., Op. cit., p. 21.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>50</sup> Moon, T. R. “Using Performance Assessment in the Social Studies Classroom.” *Gifted Child Today Magazine*, Summer 2002. <http://www.casenex.com/casenet/pages/virtualLibrary/mlandrum/perfassess.htm>

<sup>51</sup> Allen, R. “Performance Assessment.” Wisconsin Education Association Council.

[http://www.weac.org/professional\\_resources/Testing/performance\\_assessment.aspx](http://www.weac.org/professional_resources/Testing/performance_assessment.aspx)

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Bullet points adapted from: Moon, Op. cit.



The Wisconsin Education Association Council has identified several types of performance assessments:

- Designing and carrying out experiments
- Working with other students to accomplish tasks
- Building models
- Developing athletic skills or routines
- Giving speeches
- Participating in oral examinations
- Writing essays which require students to rethink, to integrate, or to apply information<sup>54</sup>
- Making collections
- Demonstrating proficiency in using a piece of equipment or a technique
- Developing, interpreting, and using maps
- Writing papers, critiques, or short stories
- Playing musical instruments
- Developing portfolios

Another approach to assessing for deep understanding, rather than mere regurgitation of information, is Norman Webb's Depth-of-Knowledge framework, originally developed for the four content areas of language arts, math, science, and social studies.<sup>55</sup> The Center for Assessment, in New Hampshire, has developed examples of how the four different levels of Webb's social studies framework might be assessed, providing an overview of how these assessment goals can be sequenced for social studies programs:

- **Level 1: Recall of Information**, including identifying or describing features of places or people; describing or explaining who, what where, when; and identifying specific information contained in maps, charts, tables, graphs, or drawings.
- **Level 2: Basic Reasoning**, including describing cause-effect of particular events; and describing how (relationships or results), why, points of view, processes, significance, impact.
- **Level 3: Complex Reasoning**, including explaining, generalizing, or connecting ideas, using supporting evidence from a text/source; applying a concept in other contexts; and making and supporting inferences about implied causes and effects.
- **Level 4: Extended Reasoning**, including analyzing and explaining multiple perspectives or issues within or across time periods, events, or cultures; making predictions with evidence as support; and gathering, analyzing, organizing, and synthesizing information from multiple (print and non-print) sources.<sup>56</sup>

<sup>54</sup> Bullet points quoted verbatim from: Allen, Op. cit.

<sup>55</sup> Webb, N. "Depth of Knowledge Levels for Four Content Areas." Wisconsin Center for Education Research. March 28, 2002. p. 7. Available at: <http://schools.nyc.gov/NR/rdonlyres/2711181C-2108-40C4-A7F8-76F243C9B910/0/DOKFourContentAreas.pdf>

<sup>56</sup> Bullet points adapted from: Hess, K. "Applying Depth-of-Knowledge (DOK) Levels in Social Studies." Center for Assessment, 2005, p. 3. <http://www.cde.state.co.us/EducatorEffectiveness/downloads/Implementation%20Resources/DOK-Social-Studies.pdf>

*DEVELOPING AND EVALUATING PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENTS*

Though state-developed assessments have materialized in recent years,<sup>57</sup> performance assessments are typically developed and administered by classroom teachers. Russ Allen, a consultant for the Wisconsin Education Association Council, describes a three-step process for developing performance assessments:

- **Step 1: List the skills and knowledge you wish to have students learn as a result of completing a task.** These should be of high value, worth teaching to, and worth learning. In order to be authentic, they should be similar to those which are faced by adults in their daily lives and work.
- **Step 2: Design a performance task which requires the students to demonstrate these skills and knowledge.** The task should motivate students, and should be challenging, yet achievable. The task should have sufficient depth and breadth so that valid generalizations about overall student competence can be made.
- **Step 3: Develop explicit performance criteria which measure the extent to which students have mastered the skills and knowledge.** The performance criteria consist of a set of score points which define in explicit terms the range of student performance. Students should be provided with examples of high quality work, so they can see what is expected of them.<sup>58</sup>

NCSS has developed a criteria worksheet for evaluating social studies assessment measures. Educators can use the criteria to compare various assessments. The worksheet asks thirteen questions, presented in Figure 1.5.

**Figure 1.5: Criteria for Evaluating Assessments**

HOW EFFECTIVELY DOES THE ASSESSMENT . . .	SCALE
Align to the content objective(s) of the instruction?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not aligned</li> <li>▪ Somewhat not aligned</li> <li>▪ Somewhat aligned</li> <li>▪ Very aligned</li> </ul>
Align to the skill objective(s) of the instruction?	
Align to your state or local accountability system?	
Provide opportunities for the average student to demonstrate understanding of content and critical thinking?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ No opportunities</li> <li>▪ Few opportunities</li> <li>▪ Some opportunities</li> <li>▪ Many opportunities</li> </ul>
Provide opportunities for the average student to apply knowledge?	
Provide opportunities to integrate or apply cross-disciplinary connections?	
Measure other competencies such as reading, writing, speaking, or listening?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Not well</li> <li>▪ Somewhat not well</li> <li>▪ Somewhat well</li> <li>▪ Extremely well</li> </ul>
Measure students' ability to utilize media and technology?	
Provide adequate time for the average student to complete?	
Provide adequate time for teachers to evaluate/measure?	
Provide appropriate scaffolding for all students to complete including English Learners, struggling learners, and students with special needs?	
Provide information to inform instruction?	
Lend itself to scoring using rubrics that could be reliably applied by different raters?	

Source: National Council for the Social Studies<sup>59</sup>

<sup>57</sup> "OSPI-Developed Assessments for Social Studies." Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington. <http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/Assessments/>

<sup>58</sup> Bullet points adapted from: Allen, Op. cit.

<sup>59</sup> "Criteria Worksheet for Selecting Assessment Measures." National Council for the Social Studies. <http://www.socialstudies.org/system/files/PerformanceAssessmentCriteriaWorksheet.pdf>

## SECTION II: EXEMPLARY SOCIAL STUDIES PROGRAMS

This section examines exemplary social studies programs at three school districts. The districts profiled in this report provide enhanced sequencing support to their educators and use effective instructional strategies, particularly technology integration. Additionally, the districts encourage the use of performance assessments in social studies. The three districts profiled in the following pages are:

- New Hanover County Schools (Wilmington, North Carolina)
- Evergreen Public Schools (Vancouver, Washington)
- Eau Claire Area School District (Eau Claire, Wisconsin)

### NEW HANOVER COUNTY SCHOOLS

New Hanover County Schools (NHCS) serves Wilmington, North Carolina and the surrounding area. The district operates 41 schools and serves 24,806 students.<sup>60</sup> New Hanover is expected to adhere to North Carolina’s state standards, which were adopted in 2010 along with the Common Core State Standards.<sup>61</sup>

#### *SEQUENCING*

North Carolina state standards prescribe social studies content for grades K-12. The standards were overhauled in 2010 to “ensure that all students at all grade levels acquire the essential knowledge and skills to be informed, active citizens in the 21st century.”<sup>62</sup> For elementary and middle school, the content is assigned for each grade level. After grade 8, however, the standards are organized by subject: World History, American History, and Civics and Economics.<sup>63</sup> Similar to Arlington Public Schools, New Hanover has more flexibility with high school sequencing than with elementary and middle school. Each set of standards describes the historical and geographical content and a set of specific skills that are to be taught. As an example, Figure 2.1 presents the sixth grade standards, for which the focus is world geography from the beginnings of human society through the 15<sup>th</sup> century. The social studies standards are grouped into “strands,” such as history, geography, economics, or civics and government, which are denoted in each standard’s code.

<sup>60</sup> “National Center for Education Statistics.” U.S. Department of Education. <http://nces.ed.gov/>

<sup>61</sup> “Common Core State and NC Essential Standards.” Public Schools of North Carolina. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/>

<sup>62</sup> “2010 Social Studies Essential Standards: Meeting the Needs of All Students In The 21st Century.” Public Schools of North Carolina. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/acre/standards/new-standards/social-studies/meeting-needs.pdf>

<sup>63</sup> “NC Essential Standards.” Public Schools of North Carolina. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/new-standards/#social>

**Figure 2.1: North Carolina 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Social Studies Essential Standards**

CODE	ESSENTIAL STANDARD
6.H.1	Use historical thinking to understand the emergence, expansion and decline of civilizations, societies and regions over time.
6.H.2	Understand the political, economic and/or social significance of historical events, issues, individuals and cultural groups.
6.G.1	Understand geographic factors that influenced the emergence, expansion and decline of civilizations, societies and regions (i.e. Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Americas) over time.
6.G.2	Apply the tools of a geographer to understand the emergence, expansion and decline of civilizations, societies and regions.
6.E.1	Understand how the physical environment and human interaction affected the economic activities of various civilizations, societies and regions.
6.C&G.1	Understand the development of government in various civilizations, societies and regions.
6.C.1	Explain how the behaviors and practices of individuals and groups influenced societies, civilizations and regions.

Source: Public Schools of North Carolina<sup>64</sup>

NHCS provides curriculum maps that align the state standards with district-established unit topics, concepts, essential questions, project ideas, and additional resources. Additionally, an extensive set of “useful resource internet links” are provided at the conclusion of the documents. Figure 2.1 presents a portion of NHCS’ sixth grade social studies curriculum map. By correlating state standards to specific knowledge and activities, NHCS provides its teachers with highly structured content and skills sequencing.

**Figure 2.2: Sample of NHCS 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum Map**

UNIT / ESSENTIAL STANDARD	CONCEPT / PACING	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	ESSENTIAL INFORMATION / RESOURCES
<p>What did you say you believed?</p> <p>Essential Standards: 6.H.1, 6.H.2, 6.G.1, 6.G.2, 6.C.1</p>	<p>Values and Beliefs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is religion?</li> <li>▪ What are the customs, types of worship, prayer, houses of worship, etc. that surrounds religions?</li> <li>▪ How are the major religions alike and how are they different?</li> <li>▪ What are the major contemporary problems and issues facing religion in the world?</li> </ul> <p>Create a Powerpoint or Prezi presentation on all of the major world religions, including information on a historical problem as well as a contemporary issue *Group project</p> <p>Research the religious life of a teenager practicing a major world religion. Write a short biography about the lifestyle of the teen selected. (Presentation could be a gallery walk that is paper based and will complete a Venn Diagram)</p>	<p>Judaism Christianity Islam Buddhism Hinduism</p> <p>(Beliefs and practices, major leaders, geography and population of believers, and sacred texts, holidays, founders and leaders)</p>

Source: New Hanover County Schools<sup>65</sup>

<sup>64</sup> “North Carolina Essential Standards: Sixth Grade Social Studies.” Public Schools of North Carolina. <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/docs/acre/standards/new-standards/social-studies/6.pdf>

<sup>65</sup> Reproduced from: “6th Grade Social Studies Curriculum Map.” New Hanover County Schools. [http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies\\_worldlanguages/Middle%20School%20Curr.%20Maps/6th%20Grade%20Curriculum%20Map%20-%20update.doc](http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies_worldlanguages/Middle%20School%20Curr.%20Maps/6th%20Grade%20Curriculum%20Map%20-%20update.doc)

NHCS’s high school social studies curriculum includes World History, United States History, and Civics and Economics. The district provides curriculum support documents that comment on sequencing. For example, NHCS’s World History Curriculum Guide contains two sets of goals related to *skill competency* and *content competency*, respectively. The two sequences are to be addressed simultaneously: “[t]he skills curriculum is not meant to be taught separately from the rest of the social studies curricula; instead, it is to be taught throughout each course.”<sup>66</sup> The skill competency goals incorporate 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, and each goal includes a set of specific objectives. For instance, goal 5 reads “[t]he learner will acquire strategies needed for effective incorporation of computer technology in the learning process.” And, reflecting Forbes’s recommendation, discussed in Section I, to incorporate data analysis into the social studies curriculum, one of goal 5’s objectives is for students to “create, modify, and use spreadsheets to examine real-world problems.”<sup>67</sup>

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

NHCS engages students through a combination of interactive methods and technology integration. Many of the activities suggested by NHCS’ curriculum maps include elements of technology, such as internet research, PowerPoint presentations, and online resources. For instance, NHCS’s eighth grade curriculum map includes a unit titled “Colonial North Carolina and Native Americans.” One suggested activity is that students use an online comic creator to create a comic book that illustrates rebellions.<sup>68</sup>

**Figure 2.3 Think Tac Toe Board**

ASSIGNMENT 1	ASSIGNMENT 2	ASSIGNMENT 3
ASSIGNMENT 4	ASSIGNMENT 5	ASSIGNMENT 6
ASSIGNMENT 7	ASSIGNMENT 8	ASSIGNMENT 9

Source: New Hanover County Schools

Additionally, NHCS uses “think tac toe” assignments, such as one developed for a unit on the World Cup.<sup>69</sup> “Think tac toe” is a strategy for differentiated instruction in which each student is provided a worksheet with nine assignments arranged in the shape of a tic-tac-toe board. Students choose three assignments that align to make three in a row, which gives the teacher ultimate control but allows students the choice of assignment.<sup>70</sup> In the NHCS World Cup version, each assignment incorporates technology in some way. The worksheet provides links to various websites that students are to explore and use to create their own finished product. For instance, assignment three directs students to an online

<sup>66</sup> “World History Curriculum Support Document.” New Hanover County Schools, 2007, p. 9.  
[http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies\\_worldlanguages/World%20History%20Curriculum%20Support%20Document.pdf](http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies_worldlanguages/World%20History%20Curriculum%20Support%20Document.pdf)

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>68</sup> “8th Grade Curriculum Map.” New Hanover County Schools.  
[http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies\\_worldlanguages/Middle%20School%20Curr.%20Maps/8th%20Grade%20Curriculum%20Map%20\(2\).doc](http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies_worldlanguages/Middle%20School%20Curr.%20Maps/8th%20Grade%20Curriculum%20Map%20(2).doc)

<sup>69</sup> “World Cup 2010 Think Tac Toe.” New Hanover County Schools.  
[http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies\\_worldlanguages/World%20Cup%20Project/World%20Cup%20Think%20Tac%20Toe%20\(2\).doc](http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies_worldlanguages/World%20Cup%20Project/World%20Cup%20Think%20Tac%20Toe%20(2).doc)

<sup>70</sup> Tomlinson, C. *Fulfilling the Promise of the Differentiated Classroom: Strategies and Tools for Responsive Teaching*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development. 2003. p. 130.  
<http://www.ascd.org/publications/books/103107.aspx>

article and asks them to respond to the article with a “blog or some other form of communication where you can share your opinion of this article and others can respond.”<sup>71</sup>

**ASSESSMENT METHODS**

NHCS supports its social studies educators in developing their own performance assessments, as well as providing for them a wide range of existing assessment options. NHCS has a detailed guide that defines performance assessments and explains how to design an assessment, criteria, and rubric.

NHCS provides teachers with a step-by-step guide to create performance assessments. One key step is to frame the performance expectations by using GRASPS, a model to ensure “that the task is authentic and real-world.”<sup>72</sup> Using the model, teachers progress through a series of relevant factors, including the goal and audience of the assessment task. Each factor includes a series of stem phrases that the teacher can simply complete to develop an effective performance assessment task.

**Figure 2.4: GRASPS Performance Assessment Framework**

<b>G</b>	<b>Goal</b> The central problem in the task.	Your task is to _____ The goal is to _____ The problem or challenge is _____ The obstacles to overcome are _____
<b>R</b>	<b>Role</b> The “character” the student plays.	You are _____ You have been asked to _____ Your job is _____
<b>A</b>	<b>Audience</b> The group who receives the performance.	Your clients are _____ The target audience is _____ You need to convince _____
<b>S</b>	<b>Situation</b> The circumstances in which the performance must take place.	The context you find yourself in is _____ The challenge involves dealing with _____
<b>P</b>	<b>Product, Performance, Purpose</b> The outcome and the reason for doing it.	You will create a _____ in order to _____ You need to develop _____ so that _____
<b>S</b>	<b>Standards and Criteria for Success</b> The measures of a good product or performance.	Your performance must _____ Your work will be judged by _____ Your product must meet the following standards _____ A successful result will _____

Source: New Hanover County Schools<sup>73</sup>

<sup>71</sup> “World Cup 2010 Think Tac Toe,” Op. cit.

<sup>72</sup> “Performance Assessment and Portfolios in Civics and Economics.” New Hanover County Schools, 2007, p. 6.  
[http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies\\_worldlanguages/Performance%20Assessment%20in%20Civics.pdf](http://www.nhcs.net/socialstudies_worldlanguages/Performance%20Assessment%20in%20Civics.pdf)

<sup>73</sup> Reproduced from: Ibid.

**EVERGREEN PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

Evergreen Public Schools is located in Clark County, Washington and serves the city of Vancouver. The district operates 37 schools and enrolls 25,750 students, making it the fourth largest school district in Washington and one of the fastest growing districts in the state.<sup>74</sup> Evergreen is expected to follow the social studies standards outlined by the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction of the State of Washington, which adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2011.<sup>75</sup>

*SEQUENCING*

Washington supplies social studies standards that “provide a grade-by-grade sequence of concepts, regional areas and chronological periods.”<sup>76</sup> Districts are not required to follow the standards precisely, and are allowed to reorder the material as long as it remains within the appropriate grade band (e.g., grades 3-5). The standards are constructed on five subjects: Civics, Economics, Geography, History, and Social Studies Skills. For each subject, the standards include components, grade level expectations (GLEs), suggested units, and suggested state-developed assessments.<sup>77</sup> As an example, Figure 2.5 presents Washington’s components and GLEs for sixth grade geography.

**Figure 2.5: Sample of Washington Grade Level Expectations, 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Geography**

COMPONENT	GRADE LEVEL EXPECTATION
<b>Component 3.1:</b> Understands the physical characteristics, cultural characteristics, and location of places, regions, and spatial patterns on the Earth’s surface.	<b>3.1.1</b> Constructs and analyzes maps using scale, direction, symbols, legends and projections to gather information.
	<b>3.1.2</b> Identifies the location of places and regions in the world and understands their physical and cultural characteristics.
<b>Component 3.2:</b> Understands human interaction with the environment.	<b>3.2.1</b> Understands and analyzes how the environment has affected people and how people have affected the environment in the past or present.
	<b>3.2.2</b> Understands the characteristics of cultures in the world from the past or in the present.
	<b>3.2.3</b> Understands the geographic factors that influence the movement of groups of people in the past or present.
<b>Component 3.3:</b> Understands the geographic context of global issues.	<b>3.3.1</b> Understands that learning about the geography of the world helps us understand the global issue of sustainability.

Similar to New Hanover County Schools, Evergreen provides instructional guides for each grade level that align state standards with specific units of study. Evergreen explains that the purpose of the guides are to “give teachers a broad vision of the overall social studies

<sup>74</sup> [1] “National Center for Education Statistics,” Op. cit.  
<sup>[2]</sup> “About Evergreen Public Schools.” Evergreen Public Schools. <http://www.evergreenps.org/AboutEPS/Pages/default.aspx>  
<sup>75</sup> “Common Core State Standards.” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington. <http://www.k12.wa.us/Corestandards/default.aspx>  
<sup>76</sup> “Washington State K-12 Social Studies Learning Standards.” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington, January 2013, p. 9. <http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/pubdocs/SocialStudiesStandards.pdf>  
<sup>77</sup> Ibid., p. 13.

content for [each] grade while also making specific suggestions of methods to both teach and assess particular social studies standards aligned to the content of the course.”<sup>78</sup> For each unit, the guides provide the associated state GLE, lesson vocabulary, instructional suggestions, resource information, and assessment suggestions. Figure 2.6 presents a sample from Evergreen’s sixth grade social studies instructional guide; the focus of this unit is Ancient River Civilizations. In addition to aligning state standards with district objectives, the guides provide additional helpful information such as web-based resources and social studies best practice information.<sup>79</sup>

**Figure 2.6: Sample from Evergreen’s 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Instructional Guide**

<b>CONTENT</b>	Geography of Ancient River Civilizations
<b>GLE</b>	3.1.2
<b>VOCABULARY</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Civilization</li> <li>▪ Cultural characteristic</li> <li>▪ Location</li> <li>▪ Physical characteristic</li> <li>▪ Place</li> <li>▪ Region</li> </ul>
<b>INSTRUCTIONAL SUGGESTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Essential question: Where did ancient river civilizations emerge and what were their common characteristics?</li> <li>▪ Discussion/writing prompt: How would you describe the geography of the region we live in?</li> <li>▪ Map activity: Label maps with place names and physical characteristics.</li> </ul>
<b>RESOURCES</b>	<p style="text-align: center;"><i>Eastern Hemisphere</i> Ch. 3, sect. 1 Ch. 4, sect. 1 Ch. 5, sect. 1 Ch. 5, sect. 2 Atlas: pgs. 605-17</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Ancient Maps</i> [web link] <i>Education Place Outline Maps</i> [web link] <i>Xpeditions Atlas</i> [web link]</p>
<b>ASSESSMENT SUGGESTIONS</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Identify the locations of multiple ancient river civilizations.</li> <li>▪ Define physical and cultural geographic characteristics.</li> <li>▪ Compare the physical characteristics of multiple ancient river civilizations.</li> </ul>

Source: Evergreen Public Schools<sup>80</sup>

**INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES**

Improving instructional quality is wholly embedded in Evergreen’s strategic plan. Evergreen’s current Five Year Plan calls for professional learning communities, instructional coaching, and teacher workshops. Each of these initiatives is meant to develop the instructional skills of its educators. For instance, Evergreen provides an instructional or

<sup>78</sup> “Social Studies Instructional Guide: Grade 6: Ancient World History.” Evergreen Public Schools, p. 2.  
<http://www.evergreenps.org/Parents/curriculum/Documents/6%20Social%20Studies%20IG%202009.pdf>

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., pp. 1-31.

<sup>80</sup> Reproduced from: Ibid., p. 11.



content coach at every school that “provide[s] direct support to the classroom teacher and help[s] guide and develop building professional development.”<sup>81</sup>

Evergreen uses a variety of interactive instructional strategies that encourage students to think independently and critically. Instructional suggestions outlined in Evergreen’s grade-level instructional guides advise open-ended writing prompts, class debates, brainstorming sessions, and group activities. Students complete assignments that ask them to create material, rather than recall material presented in lectures or textbooks.<sup>82</sup>

Evergreen’s instructional guides also suggest that technology integration is a major priority for the district. Many of the resources outlined in its curriculum guides include online and multimedia content in addition to traditional textbooks. Working web links are provided within the aligned curricula, making the process as simple as possible for its teachers. Evergreen directs its educators to free online resources hosted by universities, the Library of Congress, and the Public Broadcasting Service (PBS).<sup>83</sup>

Evergreen encourages teachers to differentiate their instruction. In the district’s Common Instructional Guide, a comparison table shows the differences between traditional classrooms and differentiated classrooms, which is reproduced in Figure 2.7.

**Figure 2.7: Traditional versus Differentiated Classroom**

TRADITIONAL CLASSROOM	DIFFERENTIATED CLASSROOM
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student differences are masked or acted upon when problematic.</li> <li>▪ A single form of assessment is often used and is most common at the end of learning to see "who got it".</li> <li>▪ A single definition of excellence exists.</li> <li>▪ Whole-class instruction dominates.</li> <li>▪ Mastery of facts and skills out-of-context are the focus of learning.</li> <li>▪ Single option assignments are the norm.</li> <li>▪ Time is relatively inflexible.</li> <li>▪ Coverage of texts and curriculum drives instruction.</li> <li>▪ Single interpretations of ideas and events may be sought.</li> <li>▪ The teacher directs student behavior.</li> <li>▪ Closed questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Student differences are studied as a basis for planning.</li> <li>▪ Multiple means of assessment are used. Assessment is ongoing and diagnostic to understand how to make instruction more responsive to learner need.</li> <li>▪ Excellence is defined in large measure by individual growth from a starting point.</li> <li>▪ Many instructional arrangements are used.</li> <li>▪ Use of essential skills to make sense of and understand key concepts and principles is the focus of learning.</li> <li>▪ Multi-option assignments are frequently used.</li> <li>▪ Time is used flexibly in accordance with student need.</li> <li>▪ Student learning needs shape instruction.</li> <li>▪ Multiple perspectives on ideas and events are routinely sought.</li> <li>▪ The teacher facilitates students' skills at becoming more self-reliant learners.</li> <li>▪ Open-ended questions.</li> </ul>

Source: Evergreen Public Schools<sup>84</sup>

<sup>81</sup> “Evergreen Public Schools’ Five Year Plan.” Evergreen Public Schools.

<http://www.evergreenps.org/Parents/curriculum/Pages/FiveYearPlan.aspx#IC>

<sup>82</sup> E.g., “Social Studies Instructional Guide: Grade 8: United States History.” Evergreen Public Schools, May 2009, p. 12.

<http://www.evergreenps.org/Parents/curriculum/Documents/8%20Social%20Studies%20IG%202009.pdf>

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 9.

<sup>84</sup> “Common Instructional Guide.” Evergreen Public Schools, p. 12.

[http://www.evergreenps.org/Parents/curriculum/Documents/Common\\_Inst\\_Guide\\_2009.pdf](http://www.evergreenps.org/Parents/curriculum/Documents/Common_Inst_Guide_2009.pdf)

### *ASSESSMENT METHODS*

Washington’s state education department has developed a set of social studies performance assessments that align with its content standards. The assessments “are multi-stepped tasks or projects aligned to specific state standards, which target skills and knowledge necessary for engaged, informed citizenship.”<sup>85</sup> Furthermore, the assessments “are designed to ensure that students employ critical thinking skills and engage in their own individual analysis of a particular context or topic.”<sup>86</sup>

The assessments are typically administered as culminating, summative evaluations at the end of a unit or school year. Each assessment is recommended for a specific grade level and intends to evaluate students compared to several GLEs. Also included is a detailed rubric explaining how to grade each assignment. Each assessment begins with the phrase “in a cohesive paper or presentation, you will:”, followed by a series of more detailed questions.<sup>87</sup>

Evergreen’s recommended assessments tend to be performance assessments, perhaps due to the lofty expectations set forth by the state education department. Rather than emphasize typical methods such as multiple choice tests, Evergreen suggests assessments that ask students to explain complex issues, compare societies, write papers, critique legislation, or predict the impact of hypothetical situations.<sup>88</sup> Consider a sample of suggested assessments from Evergreen’s 12<sup>th</sup> grade instructional guide on contemporary world issues:

- Explain why it is necessary for individual rights to be limited for the common good
- Critique the Patriot Act as it relates to rights established in the U.S. Constitution
- Create a diagram of the system of checks and balances in action based on a current or historical event (for example the Clinton impeachment, 2000 Presidential election, domestic surveillance, 2008 bailout, judicial nomination etc.)
- Compare the government of the United States with one other form of government (such as the parliamentary system) and support a position on which is most effective at preserving individual rights<sup>89</sup>

<sup>85</sup> “OSPI-Developed Social Studies Assessments.” Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction, State of Washington. <http://www.k12.wa.us/SocialStudies/WhatAreCBAs.aspx>

<sup>86</sup> Ibid.

<sup>87</sup> “OSPI-Developed Assessments for Social Studies,” Op. cit.

<sup>88</sup> “Social Studies Instructional Guide: Grade 12: Contemporary World Issues.” Evergreen Public Schools. <http://www.evergreenps.org/Parents/curriculum/Documents/12%20Social%20Studies%20IG%202009.pdf>

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 10-17.

**EAU CLAIRE AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT**

Eau Claire Area School District (ECASD) serves Eau Claire, Wisconsin. It operates 23 schools and enrolls 10,914 students, making it the eighth largest school district in the state.<sup>90</sup> ECASD adheres to social studies standards determined by Wisconsin’s Department of Public Instruction, which adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010.<sup>91</sup>

*SEQUENCING*

Wisconsin provides social studies content and performance standards. The content standards are divided into five broad strands: Geography, History, Political Science and Citizenship, Economics, and Behavioral Sciences. Required content is broad compared to Virginia, North Carolina, and Washington. For instance, the history standards simply provide 10 topics for state, national, and world history for all of middle and high school. Grade-level performance standards are housed within each content strand. These are also relatively less exhaustive and are only provided for grades 4, 8, and 12.<sup>92</sup>

Wisconsin’s relatively less detailed standards suggest ECASD has increased flexibility over its sequencing. ECASD provides curriculum maps that align state performance standards to district objectives. The curriculum maps align state performance standards with course units, learning targets, assessments, and instructional materials. Because Wisconsin provides performance standards at intermittent grade levels, ECASD applies each set of standards to lower grade levels as well. For instance, the grade 8 state performance standards are applied to ECASD’s curriculum maps for grades 5-8. Figure 2.8 presents a sample from ECASD’s sixth grade curriculum map, which focuses on world geography. The district’s curriculum maps ensure that teachers develop specific skills in each unit.

**Figure 2.8: Sample of ECASD’s 6<sup>th</sup> Grade Curriculum Map**

PERFORMANCE STANDARD	LEARNING TARGET	ASSESSMENT TYPE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	ESSENTIAL DISTRICT INSTRUCTIONAL MATERIALS
<b>E.8.3</b> Describe the ways in which local, regional, and ethnic cultures may influence the everyday lives of people	Explain how different cultural values impact people’s daily lives.	Performance Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ What is it like there?</li> <li>▪ What places have common geography?</li> <li>▪ How does culture influence a place/region?</li> </ul>	n/a

Source: Eau Claire Area School District<sup>93</sup>

<sup>90</sup> [1] “National Center for Education Statistics,” Op. cit.

[2] “About Our District.” Eau Claire Area School District. [http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/coa\\_about\\_ecasd.cfm](http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/coa_about_ecasd.cfm)

<sup>91</sup> “Wisconsin Adopts Common Core State Standards.” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, June 2, 2010. <http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/files/cal/pdf/commoncore-pressrelease.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> “Content Standard Social Studies Standard B - History: Time, Continuity, and Change.” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction. [http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn\\_ssstanb](http://standards.dpi.wi.gov/stn_ssstanb)

<sup>93</sup> “Social Studies 6: World Geography.” Eau Claire Area School District. p. 6. [http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/teachinglearning/Secondary/middle\\_school\\_curriculum\\_guides/Social%20Studies%2006--REVISED%20Combined.pdf](http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/teachinglearning/Secondary/middle_school_curriculum_guides/Social%20Studies%2006--REVISED%20Combined.pdf)

*INSTRUCTIONAL STRATEGIES*

ECASD has demonstrated a substantial commitment to technology integration. The district released a position paper on information technology that states “students must be prepared for an information based society and a technological workplace.”<sup>94</sup> The position paper defines a series of educational goals related to technology and describes examples of how technology can be used in the classroom. Figure 2.9 presents ECASD’s suggested uses of technology in the classroom.

**Figure 2.9: ECASD’s Recommendations for Classroom Technology Use**

EDUCATION GOAL	CLASSROOM TECHNOLOGY USE
Improve critical thinking skills	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Computers are used by students in project based, learner centered inquiry.</li> <li>▪ Students access current information via CDROM or the Internet.</li> <li>▪ Simulation programs are designed to recreate real problems and encourage problem solving and creativity.</li> </ul>
Improve communication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Students use e-mail to communicate across several states to conduct a study on a current topic.</li> <li>▪ Websites provide up-to-date and unique information.</li> </ul>
Improve access to remote resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Teachers and students are able to access libraries, remote information sources, and experts not possible in any other way. Cost effective distance learning applications are used.</li> </ul>
Improve student motivation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Relevant projects appealing to different learning styles improve student interest and motivation.</li> <li>▪ Projects can be individualized to meet needs.</li> </ul>
Improve information technological literacy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Computer classes familiarize students with computers, networks, and multimedia applications.</li> </ul>
Improve learning of content areas	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ Drill and practice software helps students learn math and science.</li> <li>▪ Word processing applications enhance the writing process.</li> <li>▪ Use encourages multi-disciplinary instruction and problem solving.</li> </ul>

Source: Eau Claire Area School District<sup>95</sup>

ECASD provides extensive technology-related professional development for its staff. The district offers staff development classes during the summer and evenings on Microsoft applications, Facebook, and eBay. ECASD also provides software manuals, video training, and a staff Wiki to store helpful class resources.<sup>96</sup>

*ASSESSMENT METHODS*

Wisconsin assesses all fourth, eighth, and tenth grade students’ social studies skills with CTB/McGraw Hill’s TerraNova test.<sup>97</sup> The TerraNova tests are aligned with the Common Core

<sup>94</sup> “Position Paper on Information Technology.” Eau Claire Area School District, p. 1.  
[http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/cms\\_files/resources/Position%20Paper%20on%20Information%20Technology.pdf](http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/cms_files/resources/Position%20Paper%20on%20Information%20Technology.pdf)  
<sup>95</sup> Reproduced from: Ibid., p. 2.  
<sup>96</sup> “Class Outlines.” Eau Claire Area School District. [http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/techprodev/coa\\_it\\_pd\\_outlines.cfm](http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/techprodev/coa_it_pd_outlines.cfm)  
<sup>97</sup> “Social Studies - Assessment in Social Studies Education.” Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction.  
[http://cal.dpi.wi.gov/cal\\_ss-assmt](http://cal.dpi.wi.gov/cal_ss-assmt)

and include “constructed-response, extended constructed-response, technology enhanced, and performance tasks.”<sup>98</sup>

ECASD’s curriculum guides suggest the appropriate type of assessment for each lesson. The guides recommend performance assessments for certain lessons, but also advise selected response (e.g., matching and multiple choice), observations, and constructed response (e.g., short answer and essay).<sup>99</sup> ECASD’s recommendation to use a variety of assessment types suggests that abandoning more traditional methods altogether is likely unreasonable. ECASD encourages the use of many classroom assessment tools, including:

- Checklists
- Anecdotal records
- Exhibitions
- Performance examinations
- Holistic scoring
- Demonstrations
- Student-led parent conferences
- Proficiency exit examinations<sup>100</sup>

<sup>98</sup> “TerraNova 3: The New Standard in Achievement.” CTB McGraw Hill.

<http://www.ctb.com/ctb.com/control/productFamilyViewAction?productFamilyId=449&p=products>

<sup>99</sup> “Social Studies 6: World Geography,” Op. cit.

<sup>100</sup> “Student Assessment in Social Studies.” Eau Claire Area School District, pp. 148-149.

[http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/teachinglearning/staff\\_only/planning\\_guides/social\\_studies/SocStudies\\_10.pdf](http://www.ecasd.k12.wi.us/teachinglearning/staff_only/planning_guides/social_studies/SocStudies_10.pdf)

## SECTION III: CONCLUSION

Like much of K-12 education, social studies instruction is undergoing changes, driven by trends such as technology proliferation, accountability measures and their effect on the curriculum, and the adoption of new assessment methods. This report is intended to give educators a handle on some of the key issues effecting social studies at present, including:

- **Sequencing:** Both the research literature and the practice of states and school districts suggest that, in social studies, the sequencing of skills is more important than the sequencing of content. Indeed, some researchers contend that social studies could be omitted from the early grades altogether while students focus on developing the literacy and math skills they will use to pursue social studies in later grades.
- **Technology Integration:** Using technology to enhance instruction is increasingly important, and social studies teachers can use simple ways to integrate technology with the curriculum. One researcher suggests that data analysis, for instance, is a simple but engaging way to apply technology to social studies material, and as an example of this, New Hanover County Schools includes the use of spreadsheets to analyze real-world problems as a learning objective in its world history curriculum. Professional development can be important to support teachers who are unfamiliar or uncomfortable with technology.
- **Differentiated Instruction:** Ability grouping has not been shown to have a positive effect on student achievement, and some evidence actually suggests that in social studies it can harm student achievement. Conversely, co-teaching, in which two or more teachers work with different students or groups of students in the same class, can be an effective way to address the individual learning needs of students at different levels of ability and knowledge.
- **Instructional Time:** Although social studies and other non-core (i.e., English, math) subjects have been crowded out of some curriculums because of the demands of state testing or new standards such as the Common Core, evidence suggests that increased social studies instructional time in the elementary grades can improve student achievement.
- **Assessment:** The NCSS has recognized that social studies assessments should be more “real life,” and should reflect the goals of the social studies curriculum, such as understanding and engaging with the political and civic world students inhabit. Thus, performance assessments, in which students actively produce content rather than regurgitate information, can be particularly well-suited to the social studies curriculum. Evergreen Public Schools, for instance, provides suggested social studies assessments in which students are asked to apply learned concepts to contemporary issues or to take a position on an issue and support it.

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