



# SC Council for the Social Studies

Developing critical thinkers, problem solvers, and engaged citizens

## **Position Statement on State Assessment in South Carolina**

Pre-filed legislation in both the SC House ([H. 3142](#), [H. 3759](#)) and Senate ([S. 77](#), [S. 419](#)) would remove state-mandated social studies assessment. While the South Carolina Council for the Social Studies applauds the General Assembly for examining the issue of over-testing in South Carolina classrooms, we do not believe that state-mandated testing is the issue.

In education, there is an old adage: “what gets tested gets taught.” This has certainly been the case when it comes to state-mandated assessment in South Carolina. Research shows that the lack of social studies assessment correlates to reduced instructional time for social studies and increased instructional time for the tested subjects. (Appendix A) Teachers of untested areas, such as, Social Studies, Science, and the Arts often struggle with fewer instructional materials, less money devoted to professional development opportunities, less instructional time, and double the students of their counterparts in math and ELA.

### **H. 3759, S. 233- What will happen with no US History/Constitution End of Course Examination Program?**

If the General Assembly decides to end assessment in social studies, SCCSS advocates ending the US History and Constitution End of Course Examination Program in the eleventh grade (implemented in the 2004-2005 school year). High School students receive a balanced curriculum due to required units needed for graduation. Students must take United States History and Constitution, United States Government and Economics, and an elective in social studies (i.e., World Geography, World History, Street Law, Psychology, Sociology) in order to graduate. Lack of state-mandated social studies assessment at the high school would not narrow the curriculum.

### **H. 3759, S. 233- What will happen with no state-mandated assessment in elementary and middle schools?**

The only way to ensure that students in grades three through eight have the opportunity to learn social studies is through state-mandated accountability. If the General Assembly decides to eliminate social studies testing at the elementary and middle school levels, there will be unintended consequences:

- (1) Elementary teachers will be told to focus solely on English/ Language Arts and mathematics instruction;
- (2) Field trips taken to the State House to meet their local legislators will cease;
- (3) Students will no longer learn South Carolina History at grades three and eight;
- (4) Students will no longer learn US History in grades four and five;

- (5) Students will no longer learn World History in grades six and seven;
- (6) There will be an allocation of resources from social studies to English/Language Arts and mathematics;
- (7) Schools risk losing accreditation with the elimination of social studies classes;
- (8) The Education Oversight Committee would no longer be required to oversee revisions of social studies curriculum standards, opening the door to less academic standards that lack rigor;
- (9) Mandates from the General Assembly related to social studies instruction (see Appendix B) would not be implemented.

### **S. 15- Proposes End-of-Course Test in a new half-credit course in Personal Finance<sup>1</sup>**

The SCCSS agrees that every student should graduate high school with knowledge and skills in personal finance. The new 2020 Social Studies Standards will combine Economics and Personal Finance as a required 1/2 credit for high school graduation. Standard 2 covers important topics including, but not limited to, creating and managing a budget, how to balance and manage a bank account, comparison shopping, careers, short-term and long-term financial goals, income, the roles of savers and borrowers, financial institutions, student loan debt and financial aid, credit and creditworthiness, credit fraud, investing for the future, and insurance and risk management. For this reason, SCCSS does not believe a new course should be created. Adding a new End of Course Examination Program at the high school level runs contrary to the goal of reducing testing.

### **What is Social Studies?**

According to the National Council for the Social Studies<sup>2</sup>, “Thomas Jefferson, Horace Mann, John Dewey and other great educators understood, public schools do not serve a public so much as create a public. The goal of schooling, therefore, is not merely preparation for citizenship, but citizenship itself; to equip a citizenry with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed for active and engaged civic life.” The social studies classroom is uniquely positioned to help students to develop the necessary civic competencies to become actively engaged members of their community. The South Carolina Council for the Social Studies strongly supports the position that the survival of our democracy depends upon quality social studies instruction in grades K-12.

Social Studies is the integrated study of civics/government, economics, geography, and history. As an umbrella discipline, the field of social studies includes United States History and Constitution, Economics/Personal Finance, American Government and Constitution, Street Law, Geography, South Carolina History, World History, Psychology, and Sociology. Effective study in these areas is where students are able to apply real-world application to learned skills from

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<sup>1</sup> A BILL TO AMEND THE CODE OF LAWS OF SOUTH CAROLINA, 1976, BY ADDING SECTION 59-29-17 SO AS TO REQUIRE A ONE-HALF CREDIT COURSE OF STUDY IN PERSONAL FINANCE WITH AN END-OF-YEAR TEST AS A REQUIREMENT FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION BEGINNING WITH THE 2020-2021 SCHOOL YEAR. <https://www.scstatehouse.gov/billsearch.php?billnumbers=S.%2015>

<sup>2</sup> National Council for the Social Studies, Revitalizing Civic Learning in Our Schools (2013), [https://www.socialstudies.org/positions/revitalizing\\_civic\\_learning](https://www.socialstudies.org/positions/revitalizing_civic_learning).

English/ Language Arts and mathematics. Social Studies is where students learn about their community and understand their place in the state, nation, and world. Critical thinking applied in the Social Studies helps students develop the habits of mind and dispositions to become competent and responsible citizens who are informed and thoughtful, who participate within their community, who engage in civic action, and who develop moral and civic virtues. <sup>3</sup>

### **History of State- Mandated Assessment in South Carolina**

When the General Assembly passed the Education Accountability Act (EAA) in 1998, the intent was to strengthen the state's education system through mandating common academic standards in all content areas and state-created assessments with the goal of being number one in education by 2010. With the introduction of state testing in mathematics and English/Language Arts (ELA), grades three through eight began to experience a narrowing of the curriculum. Administrators allocated more instructional time for the tested subjects. Teachers of untested areas, such as, Social Studies, Science, and the Arts began to struggle with fewer instructional materials, less money devoted to professional development opportunities, less instructional time, and double the students of their counterparts in ELA and math.

Heafner and Fitchett (2012) found that in the period between 1993 and 2008, ELA instructional time increase by 52 minutes per week, mathematics by 30 minutes per week, while social studies instructional time decreased by 56 minutes per week. <sup>4</sup>

In education, there is an old adage: "what gets tested gets taught." As social studies assessment was added to grades 3-8, some balance was returned to the core curriculum. South Carolina was in a unique position in the era of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Beginning in 2002-2003, social studies and science were assessed in grades 3-8 using The Palmetto Achievement Challenge Tests (PACT)<sup>5</sup>. As many states conformed to assessment mandates found in NCLB, our social studies colleagues around the nation began to report diminished instructional time as NCLB did not include social studies.

Numerous journal articles and editorials have been published about the impacts of NCLB (see Appendix A). These include narrowing of the curriculum to only tested subjects; loss of instructional time for social studies, science, the arts, physical education; resource reallocation to tested subjects, etc. As recently as November 2018, the Social Studies Collaborative of the Council of Chief State Schools Officers noted research "consistently demonstrates that social studies receives the least amount of instructional time in the elementary grades when compared to the amount of time afforded to other core content areas."<sup>6</sup> A recent survey conducted by the SCCSS revealed the same is true in the South Carolina. Like the Social Studies Collaborative,

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Heafner, Tina & Fitchett, Paul. (2012). Tipping the scales: National trends of declining instructional time in elementary schools. *Journal of Social Studies Research*. 36. 190-215.

<sup>5</sup> South Carolina Assessment and Accountability Profile, CPRE, June 2000.  
[http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/assessmentprofile/947\\_sc.pdf](http://www.cpre.org/sites/default/files/assessmentprofile/947_sc.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> Council of Chief State Schools Officers (2018), *The Marginalization of Social Studies*. <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/marginalization-social-studies>.

the teachers in South Carolina believe that it is our content that helps “prepare students for civic life and that the marginalization of social studies in the early grades is an issue of equity for all students.”<sup>7</sup>

Since South Carolina state law mandated social studies assessment, social studies classes were guaranteed instructional time in grades three through eight. With economic slowdowns in the early 2000s, the General Assembly sought ways to reduce the cost of state-mandated testing. The new state test, South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SC PASS) implemented in 2009. It tested all students in grades 4 and 7 in social studies and science, while students in grades 3, 5, 6, and 8 took either the science or the social studies test (with approximately half of the students in each of those grades taking each test). Out of economic necessity, South Carolina balanced the budget and students paid the price in reduced social studies and science instruction.

In 2014, the General Assembly amended the EAA so that students in grades 4-8 were administered state-mandated testing grades 4-8 in English/Language Arts, mathematics, science, and social studies. Finally, in 2016, the General Assembly amended the EAA so that students in grades 4,6, and 8 were administered state-mandated testing in science. Students in grades 5 and 8 were administered state-mandated testing in social studies.

**How will elimination of social studies assessment in grades 5 and 8 social studies impact amount of time spent on state-mandated assessments?**

Currently, students in grades five and seven are assessed in social studies. Elimination of social studies testing at grades five and seven would only reduce the total amount of time on state-mandated testing from approximately 450 minutes to 330 minutes<sup>8</sup>. This is not a significant reduction in time spent on state-mandated assessments.

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<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> Time estimates computed from 2018 SDE parent brochures. SCPASS <https://ed.sc.gov/tests/tests-files/scpass-files/2018-scpass-essentials-brochure/> and SC READY <https://ed.sc.gov/tests/tests-files/sc-ready-files/sc-ready-2018-brochure/>.