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# TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORMS IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION

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TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORMS IN SOCIAL  
STUDIES EDUCATION

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment

of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

to the faculty of the

DEPARTMENT OF ADMINISTRATIVE AND INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP

of

THE SCHOOL OF EDUCATION

at

ST. JOHN'S UNIVERSITY

New York

by

William E. Murphy

Submitted Date 3/17/2020

Approved Date 3/17/2020

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Dr. Catherine DiMartino

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **TEACHER PERCEPTIONS OF STANDARDS-BASED REFORMS IN SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION**

William Murphy

This study examined the perceptions of secondary social studies teachers regarding the influence of standards-based education reforms in social studies education. This qualitative inquiry utilized document analysis, focus groups and one-on-one interviews of secondary social studies teachers from a suburban high school in Long Island, New York. Participants possessed between one and twenty-five years of teaching experience and were currently teaching social studies classes in the 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grades. Due to an existing lack of research on the topic, this study collected and analyzed data according to the grounded theory framework. Following a grounded theory model, this study identified social studies teachers' perceptions regarding their experiences with standards-based reform legislation that had been implemented at the federal, state and local levels. The goal of such an inquiry, based on the grounded theory model, was to create a new theory regarding the impact of standards-based reform implementation in social studies education.

The findings revealed that teachers were overwhelmed and frustrated by the negative consequences that standards-based reform implementation had on social studies education. Teachers were frustrated by their lack of knowledge about standards, their inability to promote the standards-based skills that are measured on assessments and the need to eliminate content and constructivist activities in order to "teach to the test."

Consequently, teacher frustration was compounded by an inability to effectively communicate their dissatisfaction with the larger educational establishment. Finally, as a means of dealing with the negative consequences of standards-based reforms, teachers sought out opportunities for meaningful collaboration with colleagues and desired to teach courses and grade levels that were less affected by standards-based reforms.

## DEDICATION

I dedicate this achievement to those who are closest to me, prayed for me, and sacrificed in an effort to help me complete this doctoral dissertation. This document serves as the culmination of my academic and professional achievements and I realize that I have not made this journey alone.

To my grandparents who filled my childhood with unspeakable happiness and wonder. I would not be the person I am today without the knowledge of where I came from and what was to be expected of me going forward.

To my parents who worked tirelessly to provide for their family and sacrificed in so many ways that no one will ever know about. You were an example of selflessness, faith and compassion that allowed me to grow in confidence. To my mother who raised me to be the man that I am today, who taught me to fulfill my promises, keep my head up so I could look the world in the eye and never stop working until a job is complete.

To my two wonderful boys Tommy and Charlie, whom I love more than words can ever express. I hope that one day this achievement will increase your faith in yourself and help you to recognize that you can accomplish anything that you put your heart and mind to. At the same time, I hope that you realize as I have that nothing, no accomplishment or accolade, is as precious as family and nothing is as valuable as having a catch with you on the front lawn.

To my wife Diana, my best friend. You are the love of my life. Without your support and encouragement, I would never have even contemplated this endeavor. Thank you. You have always been there to reassure, advise and inspire me throughout this

process. I could not have done it without you. I am so blessed to have you in my life. I can only hope that this brings me one step closer to making you as proud of me as I am of you.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am forever grateful to all of the teachers and administrators who participated in this study. They passionately shared their experiences, thoughts and opinions in an effort to paint a comprehensive picture of social studies education over the past two decades.

Thank you to my dissertation committee members. Each of you has been instrumental in my journey through the doctoral cohort program at St. John's University. To my mentor Dr. Catherine DiMartino, I cannot thank you enough for all of your extraordinary efforts. Your support, encouragement, insight and passion for social studies allowed me to approach my work with confidence and a sense of purpose. As our cohort faculty advisor, Dr. Mary Ellen Freeley continually provided reassurance and optimism that allowed me to believe that I could complete the doctoral program. Dr. Roger Bloom's enthusiasm and support for my topic and career provided a much-needed tail wind that brought me to the point where I could see how close I have come to accomplishing my goals.

Also, I would like to thank my professional mentors. I have been fortunate to learn great examples of leadership from Mr. Mike Harrington, Mr. Eric Gomez and Ms. Robyn Einbinder. Each of you has motivated and supported me in my work and future aspirations.

Finally, I would like to thank each of my doctoral program cohort members. It has truly been an amazing journey and I am fortunate to have shared it with such dedicated professionals and scholars.



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# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### **Purpose of the Study**

One of the many goals of social studies education is to provide students with the knowledge and skills that are necessary to participate in a free and democratic society (NCSS, 2016). The American education system's ability to provide a quality social studies education becomes of paramount concern in light of recent studies that have shown American adults generally know very little about governmental processes and political institutions (Journell, 2011).

Between 2000 and 2020 a flurry of reform legislation that included No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core, Annual Professional Performance Review and New York State Regents requirements altered the established educational landscape. Education reform emerged as a national issue during the Bush and Obama administrations during the first decade of 21st Century. Enacted in 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act sought to provide a framework that would provide federal education funding to states in return for institutional accountability that was measured through student performance (Bush, 2004). The ultimate goal of NCLB was for states, districts and schools to guarantee every child would "reach proficiency level" in predetermined measurable objectives. Unfortunately, NCLB failed to truly reform the American education system because states created standardized assessments that lacked rigor, mandated artificially low achievement thresholds and delayed the full implementation date for compliance by nearly a decade (Singer, Thompson, & DiMartino, 2018). Furthermore, the bipartisan law was quickly abandoned by key

constituency groups including the National Education Association for establishing a structure of “test, blame and punish” (Eskelsen-Garcia, 2015).

By 2009, the Obama administration had begun to champion a new education initiative called Race to the Top (RTTT). Race to the Top was a \$4.35 billion federal grant that was created to develop competition between states with the goal of spurring education innovation and reform on the state and local level. In order to qualify for federal education funding, a point system was developed that rewarded individual states for adopting performance-based evaluations, common standards and other specific educational policies (RTTT Executive Summary, 2009). By 2010, the Common Core Learning Standards became the embodiment of RTTT’s aspiration for common education standards across the nation. Common Core Learning Standards emerged out of the bipartisan National Governors Association with input from the Council of Chief State School Officers. According to the Common Core State Standard’s Initiative (2019) the goal of Common Core is to “provide learning goals for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level.” Common Core Standards simply provide benchmarks for student proficiency in English Language Arts and Mathematics skills. The standards were developed under the notion that those specific skills would be integrated across all subjects, thereby resulting in “college and career-ready students.” Since controversial debates over content were seen as having the potential to derail its implementation, Common Core Standards intentionally avoided the hypothetical pitfalls associated with mandating a specific social studies curriculum.

By providing federal funds to states that willingly adopted Common Core Standards and assessments, RTTT became the catalyst for sweeping education reforms

across the nation (Singer et al., 2018). In response to RTTT, New York State enacted legislation in 2010 requiring an annual professional performance review (APPR) of all teachers and principals. The goal of APPR was to improve the quality of instruction by ensuring “there is an effective teacher in every classroom in every school” (NYSUT, 2010). APPR provides a numerical composite score that is derived from student performance on standardized tests as well as formal observations. The numerical score assigned to each individual teacher then correlates to one of five teacher ratings: “ineffective,” “developing,” “effective,” and “highly effective.” While there have been several minor revisions to the original APPR adopted in 2010, the general purpose and structure remains the same.

In response to the changes necessitated by the adoption of Common Core Standards in New York State, a revised New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework was adopted in 2014. The framework combines the New York State Common Core Standards for Literacy and Writing and the revised New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies. The new framework is a fusion of the 1996 New York State Learning Standards, recommended National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) Practices, and the College, Career and Civic Framework (NYS Social Studies Framework, 2015).

As a result of adopting a Common Core aligned social studies framework in addition to an APPR that relies on student performance on standardized test, New York State’s Department of Education also initiated changes to the Global History Regents Exam, US History and Government Regents Exam and the social studies requirements for graduation. Starting in 2014, Global History and Geography were split into two distinct units of study. A revised Regents Exam for the standards aligned Global History

II Framework became available in 2018. The revised Regents Exam for the standards aligned US History Framework will be administered in 2020. In 2015, the Commissioner's regulation regarding multiple pathways for graduation went into effect. No longer were students required to pass both the Global History and US History Regents Examinations (NYS K-12 Social Studies Framework, 2019). Instead, students were granted the option to graduate with only passing either the Global History II or US History Regents Examination as long as they passed one ELA Regents Exam, one Math Regents Exam, one Science Regents Exam and one additional assessment (Engage NY, 2019). The additional assessment needed for graduation may be a Regents Exam for another subject (Math, Science, LOTE, CTE, Social Studies) or a Department of Education approved AP exam or SAT subject test (NYS Diploma Requirements, 2017).

By investigating social studies teachers' experiences and opinions, this study provides an opportunity to communicate the practical impact of standards-based reforms to a constituency that has effectively been marginalized by a rapidly evolving educational landscape. This study seeks to identify teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of federal, state and local education policy on social studies education as well as their own personal practices.

### **Theoretical/Conceptual Framework**

This study used critical theory as the theoretical framework to examine teacher perceptions of the influence that federal, state and local standards-based education reform implementation had on social studies education. A common theme within critical theory is the identification of control in society and the misuse of power (Jermier, 1998). Critical theory is skeptical of concentrated power as it develops unevenly throughout



social structures and is therefore a common theoretical framework for research examining the crossroads of politics and education. Both Linvill (2008) and Journell (2011) used critical theory in qualitative studies that examined how political factors within social studies education resulted in uneven distributions of power.

Because it is opposed to the objectivity of traditional-rational theory, critical theory seeks to examine the extent to which existing social-structures are rational and just by exposing illegitimate authority in whatever capacity it emerges (Corradetti, 2019). Carr (2000) states that the aim of critical theory is to create “a particular form of knowledge that seeks to realize an emancipatory interest, specifically through a critique of consciousness and ideology” (p. 209). Through the identification of false rationalizations and historical injustices, critical theory strives to expose an illegitimate power’s exploitation of some aspect of society with the ultimate purpose of improvement through corrective actions (Corradetti, 2019). Critical theory helped to identify uneven distributions of power within social studies education resulting from education reform legislation at the federal, state and local levels. In order to determine the extent to which teachers perceived the current structure of social studies education as rational and just, this study identified aspects of standards-based education reform that teachers recognized as barriers to the delivery of a thorough and comprehensive social studies education.

According to Labaree (1997), there are three overarching goals within American education that are not necessarily congruent with one another. By identifying democratic equality, social efficiency and social mobility as separate goals within American education, Labaree (1997) proposes that education reforms are neither pedagogical nor structural changes. Instead, Labaree suggests that education reforms are political

calculations that are heavily influenced by whichever goal a reformer uses as their philosophical orientation (1997). Proponents of the democratic equality goal of American education contend that schools should foster the concept of citizenship in order to promote political and social equality. Those who view education as a means of social and economic stabilization support social efficiency by providing individuals with the skills to become productive members of the workforce. The goal of social mobility advocates the idea that education is actually a commodity that provides social advantages to individuals by permitting them to compete more effectively for desirable social and economic positions (Labaree, 1997). Since teachers and education reformers at the federal, state and local levels may have very different goals within American education, critical theory served as an appropriate and practical framework for understanding the tensions that emerged out of the incompatible interests of social studies' various stakeholders. By utilizing critical theory, this study sought to identify the extent to which teachers perceive the impact of federal, state and local standards-based reforms as legitimate.

Grounded theory served as the conceptual framework for this study. Grounded theory was developed by Glaser and Strauss (1967) in an attempt to alleviate the fact that existing theories were unable to fully address issues that were being studied (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Grounded theory does not ascribe an existing theory to collected data. Instead, grounded theory generates a new theory from the categories and themes that emerge out of the categorization of collected data. Unlike other conceptual frameworks, grounded theory begins with Glaser and Strauss' idea that it is impossible to know prior to the investigation what the salient problems will be or what theoretical concepts will

emerge (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Allen (2003) explained grounded theory as a conceptual framework that begins with a question and leads to the collection of qualitative data. As an ever-increasing pool of data is collected, information is subsequently analyzed and coded. Once collected data is coded, categories are constructed that lead to the emergence of new concepts. It is those concepts that become the basis of a new theory that provides insight into a given area of study (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, this study followed grounded theory procedures in order to collect data to drive the development of a new theory about the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. It is at the intersection where grounded theory's emerging new concepts meets the emancipatory interests of critical theory that this study's theoretical and conceptual frameworks fully compliment each other.

### **Significance of the Study**

Considering the impact that education has on a participatory democracy such as the United States, the findings of this study provide benefits beyond the academic setting. The fact that democratic institutions require an educated population justified the need to explore teacher perceptions of federal, state and local policies affecting social studies education. This study is significant because it reveals teacher perceptions of both standards-based education reform implementation and its impact on secondary social studies pedagogy.

The objective of this study was to draw attention to social studies teachers' perceptions of the impact that federal, state and local standards-based reforms have on social studies education. Since there is limited research on the impact of federal, state and local standards-based education reform on social studies education, this study helped

to uncover critical areas that have yet to be examined. This study is important because its findings provide direction for the development of new theories that can guide pedagogical practices. This study addressed the discrepancy between the goals of standards-based reforms and lived experiences of social studies practitioners. Therefore, the findings that emerged in this study may be applied to the development of a programmatic overhaul of social studies education. By addressing potential weaknesses in secondary social studies education, this study may be utilized to inform college level teacher preparatory programs, administrators, teachers, students and parents. Teacher preparatory programs could use the information from this study to tailor instruction and activities in a way that would empower novice social studies teachers to successfully incorporate adopted education policy into their pedagogy. The findings of this study are also instrumental for district administrators who seek to create targeted professional development for secondary social studies educators. Finally, this study's findings regarding suggested improvements for educator training and professional development can benefit teachers as well as help provide a comprehensive social studies education for all students.

### **Connection with the Vincentian Mission in Education**

Having identified teacher perceptions of federal, state and local standards-based education reform that influence social studies education, this study is instrumental in challenging institutional structures that serve as barriers to improving the education system. Consistent with critical theory, this study provides insight and direction for an improved social studies education that is liberated from various forms of uneven distribution of political power. The present study accomplished its goal of providing a

more robust social studies experience that will result in the ability of students to fully participate in America's democratic institutions.

### **Research Questions**

1. What are secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of federal, state and local education policy on social studies education between the years 2000 and 2020?
2. What are secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of standards-based reforms on their personal professional practices in social studies education?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Political Forces:** For the purposes of this study the term political forces will include federal, state and local standards-based education reforms.

**NCLB:** "No Child Left Behind" is federal legislation that was passed by Congress and signed into law by George W. Bush in 2001. A reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, it mandated that states meet federal testing requirements in order to qualify for federal funding.

**RTTT:** "Race to the Top" is federal legislation passed by Congress and signed into law by Barak Obama in 2009 and funded by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. It created a competitive environment where states and local districts would implement innovative reforms in order to qualify for grants through the Department of Education.

APPR: The “Annual Professional Performance Review” is a 2010 New York State statute that provided new guidelines for performance-based evaluation of teachers and administrators. The annual professional performance review provides a numerical composite score that correlates to a teacher/administrator rating that ranges from “ineffective” to “highly effective.”

New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework: Adopted in 2014, the framework combines the New York State Common Core Standards for Literacy and Writing and the New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies. The framework is a fusion of the previously used New York State 1996 learning standards: 1) History of the United States and New York; 2) World History; 3) Geography; 4) Economics; 5) Civics, Citizenship and Government, Common Core Literacy Skills and the NCSS recommended Social Studies Practices and the College, Career and Civic Framework.

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF THE RELATED RESEARCH**

This chapter provides insight into the theories that informed the design and interpretation of the study. It expands upon both the critical theory framework and grounded theory conceptual design that were identified in the previous chapter and provides analysis of existing research and how these frameworks are applicable to the present study. Grounded theory proposes that researchers employ a review of literature to the extent that the researcher becomes knowledgeable of, familiar with, and sensitive to the realities contained within collected data. Therefore, this chapter provides a critical review of existing literature and research on the influence of standards-based reforms in social studies education. The literature that is reviewed in this section provided the context for the formulation of a new theory, based on the collection and analysis of data, that is presented in Chapter 5.

#### **Theoretical Framework**

As mentioned in the previous chapter, this study used critical theory to examine teacher perceptions about the influence that standards-based reforms have had on social studies education. Critical theory dates back to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century and is rooted in the theories of both Freud (psychoanalysis) and Marx (social, historical and economic conflict). The modern incarnation of critical theory emerged from the 1920's in what came to be known as the Frankfurt School. Initially tasked with studying the emerging labor movement of the 1920's from a Marxist perspective, the hallmark of the Frankfurt School later became what is known as critical theory (Corradetti, 2019). From its inception, critical theory was unique in that it aimed to avoid the false assumptions of

objectivity when perceiving realities that were found in traditional-rational thought. Instead, the starting point of critical theory assumes an imbalance of power in social structures throughout society and seeks to identify them (Corradetti, 2019).

Starting in 1930, Max Horkheimer led the Frankfurt School during a critical period that expanded both its scope and influence (Corradetti, 2019). While strengthening the ties between the Frankfurt School and the social theories of Freud, Horkheimer propelled the School's direction into the spheres of politics, economics and social structures. By the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century, the intensity of the Cold War resulted in the marginalization of Marxist theory in both the Frankfurt School and wider academia. Eventually, disagreements between several prominent members over the correct interpretation and application of Marxism plagued the Frankfurt School and led to the departure of Henryk Grossman (Corradetti, 2019).

Under Horkheimer's leadership, what emerged out of the Frankfurt School in the subsequent years was a distinct philosophical theory that merged philosophy and social science (Bohman, 2005). According to Horkheimer, modern critical theory is distinct in that it not only discovers experienced realities but acts as a liberating force that results in the transformation of social structures (Horkheimer, 1972). Modern incarnations of critical theory evolved into more narrow fields of study, such as critical race theory and critical feminist theory, while retaining the structure and goals of Horkheimer's traditional critical theory (Bohman, 2005). Critical theory was chosen for this study because, once identified, it provided a remedy for the uneven power structures that have developed in social studies education as a result of federal, state and local standards-based reforms.



In order to fulfil conflict theory's emancipatory interests, grounded theory was used to develop a new theory regarding teacher perceptions about the influence that federal, state and local standards-based reforms have on social studies education. Glaser and Strauss argued that it is not possible to know what problems or theories will emerge before data is collected (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Therefore, the ultimate goal of grounded theory is to develop a new theory or form of knowledge that is grounded in and the result of substantial data. Accordingly, grounded theory proposes limiting exposure to existing literature in order to limit the impact of existing theories. Thus, the grounded theory approach to this study provides for a limited initial review of related literature. It is only at the point when emerging ideas are fully grounded in collected data, that new theories can be properly viewed as either complimenting, supporting or refuting the concepts and ideas found in related literature (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). By repeating multiple rounds of data collection, memoing, coding, and analysis throughout this study, the process of formalizing ideas eventually developed into a new theory regarding teacher perceptions about the influence of federal, state and local standards-based reforms on social studies education.

### **The Impact of Standards Based Education Reform**

The standards-based education reforms enacted between 2000 and 2020 have shaped the current educational landscape. Federal, state and local education reform policies guide the daily activities, yearly performance and lifelong experiences of both students and educators. Therefore, it is necessary to review existing literature so that proper context can be provided for this study's inquiry into teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education.

Few can argue the nobility of the primary goal of NCLB, namely developing fully literate students. However, Brooks, Libresco & Plonczak (2007) point out that NCLB created a new “soft bigotry” of low expectations for teachers (p.749). They argue that NCLB adheres to the belief that prescribed curriculums combined with rigid testing programs will increase learning. Unfortunately, in such a system, teachers and students are ultimately robbed of a constructivist-based curriculum that is driven by student inquiry and delivered through meaningful teacher interactions (Brooks, Libresco & Plonczak, 2007).

By the time Race to the Top (RTTT) was implemented in 2010, NCLB already convinced many teachers that they were losing the liberty to shape curriculum and pedagogy within their classroom. A critical discourse analysis of speeches by former Secretary of Education Arne Duncan found the rhetoric used by policy makers and media organizations during the early days of RTTT created an “us versus them mentality” that resulted in policy makers taking sole responsibility for school improvement and teachers feeling dehumanized and disempowered (Anderson et al., 2014). The diminishing empowerment of social studies teachers was not due to rhetoric alone. The top down hierarchy created by NCLB and RTTT common standards added to educators’ feelings of isolation and powerlessness. Libresco (2015) studied a group of social studies supervisors in New York as they grappled with revising assessments so that social studies would remain in the elementary and middle school curriculum. Libresco (2015) found that the supervisors agreed to cut content questions from their assessments in favor of emphasizing skills. Astonishingly, the group of supervisors avoided any discussions about what content elementary and middle school curriculums should contain, and never

discussed “the extent to which the civic efficacy purpose of social studies should be reflected in assessments” (Libresco, 2015, p.13).

The authors of Common Core education reforms made a conscious decision to focus on the identification, adoption and implementation of the academic skills necessary for lifelong success. Mandating specific curriculum content was successfully avoided so as to avoid the potential pitfalls of curriculum content debate. However, the unintended consequence of implementing Common Core Standards across all subjects has been significant. According to Singer et al. (2018), due to the adoption of Common Core Standards, “content-area teachers outside of English Language Arts are now supposed to emphasize literacy experiences instead of the subjects they are supposed to be teaching” (p. 195).

By adopting Common Core Learning Standards throughout all academic subjects, states hoped to foster critical-thinking skills that would result in college and career-ready students (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Serure (2018) conducted a mixed methods study of 136 social studies teachers in six western New York school districts. Her study found 96% of social studies teacher respondents supported the idea that the primary purpose of educators is to foster critical-thinking skills (p. 91). Taken in isolation, this would apparently show alignment between the goals of social studies teachers and New York State’s Common Core based standards. The same study simultaneously found that only 64% of social studies teacher respondents agreed with the statement that they “helped students learn basic subject content knowledge” (Serure, 2018 p. 92). Despite a majority of social studies teachers concurring with the primary goal of Common Core, a far smaller number actually believed they succeed in delivering social studies content. The

discrepancy between the number of teachers who believe they foster critical thinking skills and the number who believe teachers provide adequate subject content, provides a basis for Singer's assertion that the adoption of Common Core Standards ultimately interferes with the ability to provide a quality social studies education. Surprisingly, this same study found that the existing discrepancy might be somewhat obfuscated by the teachers themselves since 87% responded that they did not believe state standards influenced their assessments of students (Serure, 2018, p. 91).

The degree to which standards-based education legislation impacts the purpose and practices of social studies education could potentially affect a teacher's perception of the control they have over pedagogical decisions (Thornton, 2005). When determining the implications of Common Core Standards based reforms in social studies, Kenna and Russell (2014) found that while new state standards generally encourage active learning, instructors are "so overwhelmed by the sheer volume of standards that students rarely reap the intended benefits" (p. 78). Kenna and Russell also pointed to assessments influenced by Common Core Standards as a barrier to the implementation of student-centered, critical-thinking curriculum development. Vogler and Virtue's (2007) quantitative research found 96% of social studies teachers believed that assessments drove their personal practice decisions in the classroom.

In addition to the common standards required to qualify for federal funding through RTTT, states also had to implement an Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR). Richards' (2014) qualitative study of stakeholder perceptions about the adoption of APPR in New York found discouragement and distrust of the educational establishment on the part of the teachers. Teachers perceived that they were being held

accountable for factors that contributed to student performance but were ultimately out of their control. Richards (2014) also found that many teachers shared the belief that they were actually less effective as a result of APPR due to the fact that they were losing important instructional and preparation time to develop Student Learning Objectives (SLO) and new assessments. In addition, the study found a general sense of frustration about APPR due to the fact that the system was confusing and seemed unfair as a result of some teachers using state assessments while others used local assessments. A number of teachers pointed out that they were uncomfortable with being evaluated by administrators who lacked actual classroom teaching experience (Richards, 2014).

### **Standards Based Reforms and Social Studies Curriculum Materials**

As the scramble to include the skills from ELA standards in social studies classrooms began, districts adopted various curriculum changes. Gilles et. al. (2013) found that some districts created ELA/social studies teaching teams while others “simply told social studies teachers that they will begin teaching content literacy” (p. 2). As the effects of standards-based reforms intensified, one of the most pressing issues in standard-aligned social studies classrooms became their use of appropriate material. The apparent disconnect between standards-based reform legislation and teacher pedagogy manifests itself in the use of textbooks that fail to simultaneously deliver social studies content and develop literacy skills. When reviewing materials used in social studies classrooms, Gilles et. al. (2013) found that textbooks represent the vast majority of social studies curriculum materials. However, most textbooks are not necessarily student-friendly in vocabulary and assumptions about students’ prior knowledge.

Similarly, Scott and Suh (2015) found a disconnect between state standards and curriculum materials. Studying the relationship between Virginia's State Social Studies Standards and curriculum materials, Scott and Suh (2015) found that content did not generally align with widely used civics and government textbooks. They found materials used in classrooms ultimately failed to promote the Virginia State Social Studies Standard of increasing student commitment to critical public issues. Scott and Suh (2015) also found that textbooks were often designed for, and marketed to, classrooms across many different states that had each adopted a different set of standards. In Virginia, this resulted in a widely used civics textbook that clearly emphasized certain topics like individual rights while ignoring state standards specifically designed to promote student awareness of democratic responsibilities.

In a 2004 study about the impact of education reform on curriculum resources, Watt identified the potential for a similar incongruity between New York State Standards and social studies materials. Watt found that one of the primary factors leading to a discrepancy between curriculum materials and established learning standards was that textbook publishers openly admitted to adapting their materials to only support specific standards adopted by a small group of states (2004). The decision of publishers to meet the needs of only certain states is exacerbated by the fact that the New York State Department of Education is responsible for developing and adopting standards and curriculum frameworks, while local school boards maintain complete control over selecting curriculum materials (Watt, 2004). As a result, social studies teachers often find themselves in the untenable position of using curriculum materials that were designed to address standards adopted by states other than the one in which they operate.

## **The Need for Effective Social Studies Curriculum and Pedagogy**

When implementing a social studies curriculum that includes content about civics and politics, researchers have found that secondary social studies teachers work with a student population that is extremely impressionable due to a lack of existing content knowledge. Journell (2011) examined instructional methods of four high school government teachers as they covered issues surrounding the 2008 presidential election. His goal was to understand how teachers conceptualized politics for their students through the attempts they made to generate interest in the 2008 presidential election. He concluded that conceptualizing politics is difficult for many students because they possess little prior knowledge of American politics and lack exposure to political information outside of the classroom. According to National Assessment of Educational Progress data, 40% of students are unaware that political parties establish nominees for federal elections including the presidency (Niemi and Junn, 1998). Their lack of political knowledge is so extensive that even when expressing personal opinions on political issues, many students possess little understanding about their role in the American political process.

Clearly, if a student's first meaningful encounter with political information originates in the classroom, it is necessary to examine the experiences and goals of the teachers who provide it. Since Journell (2011) found little empirical evidence identifying how teachers attempt to foster their students' interest in and understanding of politics, his study sought to observe the instructional activities of high school government teachers just before the 2008 presidential election. Specific teachers, representing schools with various demographic backgrounds, were chosen for in-depth qualitative interviews that

focused on the desire to teach about politics and regularly incorporate technology. The teachers were interviewed twice, and student interest was gauged by using a short survey to measure students' interest and knowledge of politics (Journell, 2011).

Journell (2011) found that even students who self-identified a preference for one of the major parties lacked a nuanced understanding of even the basic ideological divide between America's two major political parties. He also found that teachers were aware that students came to the class politically disinterested. His study showed evidence that teachers widely incorporated technology into lessons on the 2008 election, including propaganda from both campaigns. Little research is available that sheds light on how social studies teachers actually go about teaching civics or current political issues in American classrooms. Generally, teachers emphasize the importance of voting and developing thoughtful, informed political positions (Hahn, 1998). But, at a time when standards-based education reforms have placed a premium on developing college and career ready students the impact of those reforms on social studies education remain largely ignored. The consequences of failing to identify the practical effects of standards-based reforms on social studies education are further augmented by the fact that an individual's education level has been tied to their willingness to be politically active (Nie, Junn & Kenneth, 1996).

While the impact of specific standards based educational reforms has been largely ignored, Lo and Tierney (2017) argued that increasing students' political interest has been a goal of education for many years. They conducted a qualitative study on the interactions between students who participated in Project Based Learning (PBL) in a diverse, urban school in the Northwestern United States. They hoped to measure the



long-term effectiveness of social studies education that engages students in attention-grabbing activities in order to trigger an interest in political issues. Their work acknowledged a repetitive theme in this area of research, namely that there is little existing research into the effectiveness of civic engagement in social studies education. They also found that minimal attention has been paid to the long-term effects of secondary social studies education because students are not yet part of the electorate (Lo & Tierney, 2017). Their study observed that students' interest in politics was initially increased through cooperative learning "engagement" activities. However, long-term political curiosity was limited as the students' attention was subsequently diverted to other activities. They concluded that the direct transfer of knowledge is the key to long-term political interests and information retention (Lo & Tierney, 2017). Their conclusion highlights the need for the present study since the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies could heavily impact overall effectiveness of the ability of teachers to provide a direct transfer of knowledge to their students.

This present study fills a gap in existing literature by focusing on the experiences of teachers who's daily pedagogical practices are affected by the implementation of standards-based reforms. Through the examination of social studies teachers' lived experiences, this study has led to the development of a new theory about the effects of standards-based reforms on social studies education.

## **Conclusion**

Research showed that there is a potential disconnect between the common practices of social studies teachers and standards-based reform legislation in the areas of classroom pedagogy, curriculum and textbook substance. Social studies teachers and

standards-based education reforms share the primary objectives of developing critical-thinking along with college and career ready students. At the same time, secondary social studies teachers seem to struggle with mounting pressure to deliver curriculum content that is at the heart of effective social studies instruction and is crucial to successful performance in the era of high stakes testing (Kenna & Russell, 2014). As a result of these two realities, this study investigated social studies teachers' perceptions of their own experiences with standards-based reform implementation.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides information about the methods and procedures for data collection and analysis for this study. Following the theoretical framework of critical theory described in the previous chapter, the collection and analysis of data rejects the false assumptions of objectivity and seeks to identify the imbalance of power within the structures of social studies education. The emancipatory goal of the critical theory approach to this study will be elaborated on in the findings and conclusion sections in subsequent chapters. This study's qualitative research approach is detailed in this chapter along with the methods and procedures for data collection, coding, and analysis. The data collection and analysis identified in this chapter provide the basis for the findings and conclusions detailed in chapter 5 of this study.

#### **Methods and Procedures**

#### **Research Questions**

1. What are secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of federal, state and local education policy on social studies education between the years 2000 and 2020?
2. What are secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of standards-based reforms on their personal professional practices in social studies education?

#### **Setting**

The setting for this qualitative study is a central high school district located in Long Island, New York. The student population of the district numbers 5,347 and has a

demographic breakdown of 81% white, 6% Asian, 10% Hispanic/Latino and 2% African American (NYSED, 2018). The community in which the school district resides has a median household income of \$132,000 and a per capita household income of \$51,000 (U.S. Census, 2017). Among the students attending the schools within the district, 11% qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. The classification rate of school aged students with disabilities is 14.2%. The average expenditure per pupil for students in the district is \$23,454 (NYSED, 2019). Among high school seniors, the district has an overall graduation rate of 96%. The teacher turnover rate in the district is 7% with a 15% turnover rate for teachers with five years of experience or less. The 2019-2020 median teacher salary for the district is \$117,203 (NYSED, 2018). Approval to perform this study within this school district was granted through written permission from the Superintendent's Office (Appendix G).

### **Participants**

Purposeful sampling was used for this qualitative study. The ultimate goal of purposeful sampling is to intentionally obtain specific insight from a particular group of people due to the fact that they are best qualified to provide the necessary information regarding the topic being researched (Creswell & Poth 2018). Participants for this study consisted of 16 educators from a single school district in Long Island, New York. All participants were licensed secondary social studies teachers who possessed between 1 and 28 years of teaching experience. At the time that study was performed, all participants fell into one of the following categories: administrators with at least 20 years of social studies experience; tenured teachers with more than 15 years of experience; tenured teachers with between 5 and 14 years of teaching experience; and untenured teachers with

between one and four years of teaching experience. These categories were constructed in order to provide a comprehensive overview of social studies teachers experiences and reflections. These categories were beneficial since these distinct groups of social studies practitioners had different experiences relating to the adoption of standards-based reforms between 2000 and 2019.

Table 1

*Description of Participants*

<i>Participant</i>	<i>Middle School/ High School</i>	<i>Years of Experience</i>	<i>Subject(s)/Levels Taught</i>
<i>Participant A</i>	<i>H.S.</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>A.P., Regents, Electives</i>
<i>Participant B</i>	<i>H.S.</i>	<i>21</i>	<i>A.P., Regents, Electives</i>
<i>Participant C</i>	<i>H.S.</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>A.P., Regents</i>
<i>Participant D</i>	<i>M.S. &amp; H.S.</i>	<i>14</i>	<i>8th Grade S.S., Electives</i>
<i>Participant E</i>	<i>M.S. &amp; H.S.</i>	<i>12</i>	<i>7th Grade S.S., Regents</i>
<i>Participant F</i>	<i>M.S. &amp; H.S.</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8th Grade S.S., Regents, Electives</i>
<i>Participant G</i>	<i>H.S.</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>Regents, Collaborative, Electives</i>
<i>Participant H</i>	<i>H.S.</i>	<i>20</i>	<i>A.P., Regents</i>
<i>Participant I</i>	<i>H.S.</i>	<i>25</i>	<i>Regents, Electives</i>
<i>Participant J</i>	<i>M.S. &amp; H.S.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>8th Grade S.S., Regents</i>
<i>Participant K</i>	<i>M.S.</i>	<i>13</i>	<i>8th Grade S.S., Electives</i>
<i>Participant L</i>	<i>M.S.</i>	<i>1</i>	<i>7th Grade S.S., Electives</i>
<i>Participant M</i>	<i>M.S.</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>8th Grade S.S.</i>
<i>Participant N</i>	<i>M.S.</i>	<i>4</i>	<i>7th Grade S.S.</i>
<i>Participant O</i>	<i>M.S. &amp; H.S.</i>	<i>28</i>	<i>Social Studies Department Chair</i>
<i>Participant P</i>	<i>M.S. &amp; H.S.</i>	<i>22</i>	<i>Social Studies Department Chair</i>

The sample of volunteer participants represented different experiences: grades, levels and courses taught, as well as gender, age and length of career (Table 1). Initial recruitment of volunteer participants took place through public posting of a recruitment flier (Appendix I). All participants took part in focus groups and/or individual interviews. At the conclusion of the focus groups, six participants were selected to participate in follow-up, one-on-one semi-structured interviews. The interviews were

utilized in order to provide more depth regarding the themes that emerged out of the initial rounds of data analysis. Following IRB guidelines and procedures, separate letters of informed consent were sent to all participants. The informed consent explained that participation in the study was voluntary and that participants had the right to terminate their participation in the study at any point (Appendix C).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2011) qualitative research studies attempt to make sense of and interpret the meanings that people ascribe to their experiences and surroundings. This study utilized the grounded theory approach in its qualitative research design. The data collection procedures for this study were based on Glaser and Strauss' (1967) work that defined the conceptual design of grounded theory. Instead of relying on predetermined theories and existing literature, this study followed grounded theory procedures that provided for collected data to drive the development of a new theory. In order for this study to collect enough data to generate the development of a new theory, data collection continued until it reached a saturation point. In qualitative studies, data saturation is reached when themes within categories begin to repeat and it becomes clear that additional data will cease to be beneficial (Saunders et al., 2017).

This qualitative study triangulated collected data through focus groups, semi-structured interviews and document analysis to ensure the accuracy of analysis of secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of standards-based education reform on social studies education.

## **Focus Groups**

Focus group interviews that address a particular topic of interest are useful in triangulated projects and are beneficial for investigating topics that lead to the creation of innovative ideas (Berg & Lune, 2012). Since the goal of the grounded theory approach to this study was developing a new theory about teachers' perceptions of standards-based education reforms, the first round of data collection consisted of focus group interviews. Focus groups are highly flexible, and moderators can generate insights into unanticipated areas as a result of group discussions (Berg & Lune, 2012). This study used four focus groups, each consisting of three to five participants. Two focus groups consisted of participants who taught exclusively or primarily at the middle school level. The additional two focus groups consisted of participants who taught exclusively or primarily at the high school level. All focus groups were comprised of both veteran and untenured teachers. The focus groups' interviews lasted for 40-60 minutes and followed a semi-structured focus group interview protocol. The semi-structured interview protocol for the focus groups allowed the moderator to deviate from the planned script and probe for additional information as well as allowed the participants to take part in a dynamic group experience (Berg & Lune, 2012).

## **Interview Protocol**

Consistent with a grounded theory approach, once the initial round of data was collected from each of the focus groups, at least one participant was selected from each focus group to participate in one-on-one interviews. Special consideration was given to ensure that the separate categories of middle school, high school, veteran teachers and untenured teachers were represented in the one-on-one interviews. Additionally, two

administrators (social studies department chairs) participated in one-on-one interviews in an effort to provide additional insight into the themes that emerged out of the initial rounds of focus group data. An interview protocol consisting of semi-structured questions was followed in order to elicit interview participants' perceptions about the influence that NCLB, RTTT, Common Core, APPR, and the revised NYS Social Studies Framework have had on their experiences teaching social studies (Appendix D). The approximate time for each interview was 40-60 minutes. The interviews took place after school and during a participant's off period during the workday. Interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed into paper copy. A transcribed copy of the interview was provided to the participants who were then asked to confirm its accuracy. Participants were interviewed once every three weeks over a six-week period for a total of three interviews. As is common with grounded theory, subsequent rounds of interviews followed an interview protocol (Appendix E) that emerged out of the initial and successive rounds of categorization, coding and analysis (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

### **Document Analysis**

Qualitative research often involves document analysis of existing data to support data generated from other sources (Creswell and Poth, 2018). Document analysis constituted the third source of collected data for this study. This study drew from two distinct categories of existing data (official documents and personal documents) as part of its document analysis data collection (Bogdan and Biklen 2006). This study performed an analysis of official documents that included federal and state education policies (NCLB, RTTT, APPR, and NYS Social Studies Framework). Analysis of these official documents provided the framework for the development of this study's grounded theory



approach to the categorization, coding and analysis of data, and the initial focus groups and one-on-one interview protocols.

The second type of documents analyzed were personal documents, in the form of lesson plans (with accompanying printed materials and handouts), from each of the participants selected for one-on-one interviews. Each of the collected lesson plans was implemented by the participants in a 7<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade social studies class during the 2019-2020 school year. Analysis of participants' lesson plans strengthened the triangulation of data found in the responses of interviewees in focus groups and one-on-one interviews (Creswell and Poth, 2018).

### **Trustworthiness of the Design**

In order to ensure that the collected data was reliable, the researcher interviewed multiple participants who represented a variety of groups within a secondary social studies education setting. The researcher carefully selected participants who represented different experiences (grades taught, courses taught, gender, ages and length of career) to participate in the collection of data.

Trustworthiness of this study's design was developed through the triangulation of data in order to correctly identify teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. The study triangulated collected data through the use of focus groups, semi-structured interviews, and analysis of both official and personal documents (federal, state and local education legislation/policy and participant lesson plans).

The validity of the study was established by creating a paper audit trail that was used for member checking. The audit trail consisted of printed interview transcripts, hard

copies of lesson plans, printed materials and handouts, adopted state and federal standards, the NYS Social Studies Framework and hard copies of multiple rounds of the coding process (memoing, categorization and analysis). Interview transcripts were member checked by participants for accuracy and provided participants the opportunity to judge the credibility of the findings and interpretations of this study (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The peer review process provided the opportunity for experienced social studies educators to provide feedback about the analysis and findings of this study. Peer feedback was ascertained at the conclusion of each round of the coding process by assembling veteran social studies educators who reviewed the researcher's analysis of emerging themes.

### **Research Ethics**

Researcher ethics were established by following the St. John's/IRB guidelines. Access to the school district where the study was conducted was ascertained through written permission from the Superintendent's office. Potential participants were recruited through a public posting advertising for volunteers who met the requisite qualifications for the study. Candidates who volunteered for participation were screened for the requisite qualifications and contacted with a follow up email. While participants were staff members of the same school district as the researcher, participants were not in any subordinated status and in no way could be rewarded, penalized or disciplined for their willingness (or lack thereof) to participate in the study. All participant information and collected data remained confidential both during and after the conclusion of the study. Collected data remains solely with the researcher and will not be shared with another

entity. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality and were free to withdraw from the study at any time.

### **Data Analysis Approach**

A grounded theory approach to qualitative research is often utilized when there is little existing research about a social phenomenon. By designing a qualitative study around a grounded theory approach, new theories emerge from the analysis of an extensive amount of information obtained through several rounds of data collection. During this study the coding process was initiated at the conclusion of each round of data collection. The initial coding process for this study began with memoing. Memoing is the process whereby triangulated data from focus groups, one-on-one interviews, and documents can be analyzed. During the memoing process, the researcher's initial observations and reactions were noted for future analysis and interpretation that drove subsequent rounds of data collection. This study's research design was consistent with grounded theory in that it recognized that the multiple perspectives of its participants (secondary social studies teachers) are context dependent.

Another important element of grounded theory is the process of emergent design (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Emergent design is the concept that the steps of a qualitative study cannot be tightly prescribed because every point of the study must be permitted to change and shift in the direction that collected data takes it. Qualitative research's emergent design liberates the researcher to avoid preconceptions, bias, and the limits of prior knowledge. Emergent design means that qualitative studies must continually analyze collected data and use it to inform both the direction of the research as well as its analysis (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

For this grounded theory study, the coding of data followed a three-step process. The first step in this study's data analysis was to perform open coding of data in order to identify an overarching core phenomenon (Strauss & Corbin 1998). Open coding of collected data was performed for each of the two research questions in this study. In a grounded theory study, the purpose of analyzing data through open coding is to ultimately create a new theory that is grounded in data. During the open coding process of this study, the researcher identified five themes that became apparent from the completion of the memoing process (Appendix J). The second step was to further analyze data through axial coding by breaking the core phenomenon down into smaller, distinct categories. As more data was collected, the five initial categories were narrowed down further into sub-categories that highlighted specific "dimensions" that existed within each of the five themes regarding teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies education (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). Axial coding was completed by identifying the causal conditions, strategies, context and consequences of the core phenomenon that was observed (Strauss & Corbin 1998). The analysis of data in this study followed the pattern of categorization, concept development, and comparison to emerging ideas. This pattern was repeated until it culminated in the development of three overarching themes that formed the basis of a comprehensive theory regarding teacher perceptions about the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies education (Appendix K).

The interpretation, categorization and analysis of coded data in this study was validated through a peer-review process. A group of veteran social studies educators reviewed the interpretation, categorization and analysis of data and provide feedback to

the researcher about the conclusions that were drawn. The researcher used that feedback to inform the development of subsequent interview questions, data analysis and coding.

After identifying and confirming each axial coding category through the peer review process, a paradigm was established for truly understanding the core phenomenon of the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies education. Participants were interviewed again and asked to expand upon their perceptions about the causal conditions, strategies, context and consequences regarding the impact of standards-based reform implementation. Selective coding was then performed on collected data in order to develop a narrative that provided context for the relationship between the categories that were identified during the earlier stages of coding. This narrative was then compared to other collected data and shared with participants to guarantee that it reflected their realities (Strauss & Corbin 1998).

A distinct feature of grounded theory is that it results in the creation of a new theory pertaining to the observed phenomenon. It was at the point where collected data, coding and participant feedback synergized that the new theory regarding social studies teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education emerged.

### **Researcher Role**

In qualitative research, one can minimize the impact of personal perceptions and experiences by acknowledging those factors that could potentially impact a researcher's ability to impartially categorize, analyze and interpret collected data. The researcher's experience as a social studies teacher must be acknowledged in the role as the researcher for this study. By being cognizant of and declaring potential conflicting factors, one can

avoid personal biases and proceed with analysis that is based solely on the categorization and interpretation of data collected from participants. This study's grounded theory design requires reflexivity by supplying information about the researcher's background and experiences in education. Reflexivity is important so it is understood how particular factors inform the researcher's interpretation of data as it relates to the creation of a new theory (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). To this point, as the author, I recognize my position as a social studies teacher for the past 20 years in the school district where the study takes place. Furthermore, having entered the teaching profession in 2000, I have personally witnessed changes to social studies education that occurred as the result of standards-based education reform on the federal, state and local levels. Finally, I recognized that my personal demographic information; white, middle-aged male, from a middle-class community on Long Island, could potentially factor into the analysis of collected data thereby impacting the findings of this study. By declaring my personal biases, I maintained my awareness of them and implemented sufficient safeguards to assure their limitation. Throughout this study I set aside time to reflect on how my personal values and biases shaped my interpretation of collected data. An audit trail was created by taking notes on my reactions and responses to the themes that emerged out of collected data. I shared my reflections with my mentor throughout the rounds of data collection to minimize the impact of researcher bias. Additionally, as the lead researcher, I developed a relationship with teacher and administrator participants that was separate from the one that exists between professional colleagues. In order to separate participation in this study from existing professional relationships, discussion of the study was strictly limited to predetermined and allotted times for focus groups, interviews and document data

collection. All responses and data obtained from participants as part of this study remained confidential.

## CHAPTER 4

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to determine social studies teachers' perceptions about the impact that standards-based reforms have had in social studies education. This study utilized four focus groups, followed through several rounds of one-on-one interviews, as well as document analysis of lesson plans. This chapter provides analysis of collected data according to themes that emerged within the context of the research questions. There were three overarching themes that emerged from the analysis of collected data. The first major theme to emerge was the Ideal Social Studies Education. Within the overarching theme of an Ideal Social Studies Education there emerged two sub-themes, Goals of a Comprehensive Social Studies Education and Components of a Comprehensive Social Studies Education. The second overarching theme to emerge out of analysis of collected data was Implementation, which focused on the effects of standards-based reforms. Structural Changes to Social Studies Education, Positive Effects of Standards-Based Reforms and Negative Effects of Standards-Based Reforms were three sub-themes that emerged within the second major theme of Implementation. The third and final overarching theme to emerge out of data analysis was (Dis)Engagement. Within the major theme of (Dis)Engagement, two sub-themes emerged: Failure of Communication and Attempts to Mitigate the Negative Effects of Standards-Based Reform Implementation. This study addressed two research questions. The first research question inquired about teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of federal, state and local policy on social studies education between the years 2000 and 2020. The second research question investigated teachers' perceptions regarding the



impact of standards-based reforms on their personal professional practices in social studies education. The findings identified in this chapter are reviewed according to the research questions in the summary section of this chapter. A discussion of these findings and conclusions according to research questions is presented in chapter 5.

### **Theme 1: Ideal Social Studies Education**

An overarching theme that emerged during the analysis of collected data was that of an ideal social studies education. There was widespread agreement across all participants about what encompasses an ideal social studies education. Within the larger concept of an ideal social studies education, two sub-themes emerged from collected data. The first sub-theme to emerge was Goals of Social Studies Education. The second sub-theme to emerge was Components of a Comprehensive Social Studies Education. Taken together, these two sub themes help to paint a comprehensive picture of what social studies education looks like in its most idealistic form.

#### **Goals of Social Studies Education**

When asked about the goals of a comprehensive social studies education, teachers and administrators across all four focus groups and individual interviews, as well as analyzed lesson plans, highlighted four separate and distinct goals within social studies education. The primary goal of delivering historical content and facts was a major takeaway from the analysis of collected data. All four focus groups (encompassing high school and middle school teaching experiences), as well as individual interviews with teachers and administrators, identified the delivery of content as a primary goal of social studies education. Participant B (Group 1), a veteran high school teacher with 21 years of experience stated, “My view of social studies is that it is comprehensive in that it

provides students information about history, society, culture and geography.” Participant E (Group 2), a 12-year veteran with both middle and high school experience, echoed that sentiment with the statement, “When I got into the field of social studies, I imagined that I would explaining the story of history to kids. I believed that content would give them some perspective about how to think for themselves.” Participant N (Group 4), who is a middle school teacher with only four years of experience, elaborated on the idea that the delivery of content is a goal of social studies education by sharing, “When I started teaching, I was always certain to make sure that all of the content was covered. That was my main goal and it was delivery and reinforcement of content. In a follow up one-on-one interview, Participant O (Administrator), who possessed 28 years of experience, expanded on this point further by explaining the relationship that the field of history has within a larger social studies education. Participant O stated:

I can’t quote anybody, but the general sentiment has really been the difference between social studies and history. I think that has always been a question. Social studies education versus history and definitely with your heavy hitters (expert teachers), they love their content.

A second goal of social studies education that emerged from analysis of collected data is the idea that social studies should foster a sense of citizenship. A high school teacher with 13 years of experience, Participant A (Group 1) explained:

Upon graduation students should have a grasp not only on US history, but also world history, geography, economics and how they factor into the different events that occur. This would provide them the basis for being a productive citizen and member of society... That would be ideal.

Participant C (Group 1) who has been teaching high school for 22 years expanded on that idea by stating, “I like what Participant A said, the civic component of it is a huge piece of social studies and we need to definitely focus on that more than we currently do right

now.” Similarly, a high school administrator for 22 years, Participant P, echoed these sentiments by stating, “I think our goal is to produce informed citizens... We want them to make wise decisions about elected officials; hopefully not relying on other people’s opinions, but their own decisions.” First year middle school teacher Participant J (Group 4) elaborated on the goal of fostering citizenship by stating, “Having done this for a couple of years now, I think ideally that social studies is going to prepare them for citizenship. They (students) should get the concept a little in Global History and more in US History, and certainly in senior year (Participation in Government) classes. It should make them participate in our democratic process.”

Both veteran and new teachers at the middle school and high school level, as well as administrators, expanded upon the goals of social studies education by identifying a third specific objective. During the analysis of data, another common sentiment shared by participants was that social studies education should provide students with skills that are beneficial for entering the larger economy. Participant I (Group 3) who has taught high school for 25 years stated:

You know, I wanted the students to become knowledgeable, using the information about history, government and economics that we taught them as they navigated throughout their adult lives. So, my idea is to equip them, really, with skills and knowledge that would help them to participate in the global economy and as a citizen of the U.S. and the world as well as.

Similarly, Participant L (Group 4), who has only one year of middle school experience, highlighted the same need for developing skills that would allow students to participate in the economy by stating, “The goal is to have them write better, coherently, to organize thoughts, structure ideas and put them into words so they can succeed in college and beyond.” Participant O (Administrator) provided additional insight into this assertion:

“Students need to be financially literate to succeed in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century and the economics classes are one of the only places they receive that information.”

The fourth and final goal identified by participants was that social studies education should foster the development of critical thinking skills. Participant C (Group 1) stated, “My goal is to promote critical thinking and appreciation for what social studies is supposed to do... to enlighten people by making them more aware of the differences both within and outside our society.” Participant G (Group 2) who has 13 years of experience at the high school level shared similar sentiments by adding:

When I went to school you would walk into a classroom, sit down and the board would be covered with notes; there were no connections between the things we learned. My goal as a teacher is to say to students, “let’s connect!”, you know, imperialism to industrialization... cause and effect. This way we are making students aware of and think about the way events can impact the world in which we live.

A more developed explanation about why critical thinking is a major goal within social studies education was provided by veteran administrator Participant P:

So, I actually use this explanation when I facilitate the 8<sup>th</sup> grade parent orientation. I say to the parents, “When you close your eyes and think of the social studies classroom, you think of a teacher saying, what was the date of this? What was the battle that happened here? List me the chronology of events.” And I explain to them that we have Google for all that now. So those skills are not the purpose of social studies education. It’s really about thinking critically, evaluating and putting things into context.

Overall, there was broad consensus among all four focus groups that encompassed teachers and administrators with varying lengths of experience at both the middle and high school level. Analysis of participant responses showed a belief that social studies education is composed of four overarching goals, namely: 1. content delivery; 2. fostering citizenship; 3. developing skills necessary to participate in the economy; 4.

fostering critical thinking skills. Establishing these four overarching goals within a comprehensive social studies education is necessary to fully understand the lived experiences of teachers who have wrestled with the effects of standards-based reform implementation over the past two decades.

### **Components of a Comprehensive Social Studies Education**

When participants were asked what their ideal vision of a comprehensive social studies education would look like, there were three major themes that emerged with broad consensus. Participants identified constructivist education (hands on/project based) activities, a story-based delivery of content that makes social studies “come alive,” and an interdisciplinary approach as crucial elements of a comprehensive social studies education. Each of these components were identified by each of the various focus groups.

A constructivist education, which emerged from the works of Piaget and Dewey, is highlighted by learning that is active as opposed to passive, and collaborative as opposed to isolated. Additionally, in a constructivist education, teachers facilitate learning by building on students’ prior knowledge and by making active associations to objective learning. Veteran high school teacher Participant C (Group 1) is in their 22<sup>nd</sup> year, and summed up support for a constructivist approach to social studies by stating, “I believe social studies should be project based and much more exploratory. Students should have time to learn the whole story rather than the four bullet points that

contributed to an event and the four effects of an event. I'd much rather them have a full story. I think they would take that with them out of the classroom and carry it with them for their whole lives." Participant H (Group 3), a 20-year high school teacher echoed that sentiment by stating, "We should aid different learning styles by trying to differentiate instruction. That way, students with different learning styles would have their needs met. A lot of it should be project based and hands on. A project-based approach to social studies would allow students to explore how A connects to B and C, as opposed to I have to teach them A. And I have to teach them B. And I have to teach them C." As a veteran high school teacher, Participant B (Group 1) advocated for a constructivist approach to social studies education by stating, "I think a lot of what I want to instill is accomplished through projects... I think having kids work on projects provides them an opportunity to use technology and achieve independent learning... I've tried to maintain the ability to use technology with students, to have them be creative in their own right and use those creative pieces as a vessel for the skills that they have to learn." Participant D (Group 2), a middle and high school teacher with 14 years of experience, put it more bluntly:

I think many students, especially given their current needs academically and emotionally, would get a hell of a lot more out of learning about something like the Civil War by doing a hands on activity, being a part of something, and remembering that they lived it for those periods, instead of sitting there copying the notes or doing the activity that you are creating to help get them that three, four, or five on the AP test or that 65 on the Regents.

The second component of a comprehensive social studies education identified by teachers was that social studies should essentially be story based and "come alive" for their students. This theme emerged from data analysis with the strongest consensus amongst participants. A 12-year middle and high school veteran teacher, Participant E

(Group 2) stated, “When I got into the field of social studies, my vision was for me to be sharing the stories of human experiences with the kids. I think that is important for students to gain perspective, think for themselves and be civic minded.” Participant F (Group 2) who is in their second year of teaching at the high school and middle school levels concurred by stating, “I love history, and when I became a teacher, I was excited to stand in front of children and impart my love of history on the kids. When teachers are able to communicate their love of history, it allows students to learn how they fit into the grand scheme of the world itself.” First year middle school teacher Participant J (Group 4) expanded upon that idea further by stating, “I am totally of the mindset from my experiences with my own teachers in high school (that I absolutely adored), that students should see social studies as, ‘Oh, it's story time! It's time to tell awesome, epic tales of humanity!’” Second year middle school teacher Participant M (Group 4) quickly concurred by stating, “My expectation upon entering social studies education was that everyone wants to know all these interesting stories and it should be such a great experience for my students.” Veteran middle and high school teacher Participant D (Group 2) provided greater insight into how teaching social studies by telling the story of history makes the subject come alive for students: “I always look for fun anecdotes and interesting historical stories because they get the kids interested. Students identify with the stories and internalize them. It gets my students to want to hear more.”

In the follow up individual interviews, participants elaborated on why it is important to them that social studies “come alive” for students through telling the story of history. Participant A who has 13 years of experience at the high school level stated:

I think it shows the teacher's enthusiasm. Kids really like to focus on that, and they get enthusiastic as well. I think that's one piece to it. The other piece is that

stories allow students to make a connection to themselves. People have an idea that history is comprised of distant events that happened somewhere in the past. Stories allow students to make connections to common events we see today. I think that is the piece that draws kids towards social studies. Interesting topics like war, sacrifice and intrigue are things that are part of a larger story. I fear we're losing sight of making history come alive. I think we're losing sight of making kids interested in our story, especially in American history. If that is to happen, they're essentially losing interest in how we came to be, and that hurts all of us in the long run.

Second year middle and high school teacher, Participant F elaborated further:

I think the thing that really gets the kids' attention is when you give them some type of anecdotal story that they can latch onto to and draws them in. Especially the gory stuff of history. The kids, it doesn't matter who they are, always find that interesting. Just yesterday I was covering World War I and I was talking about some of the major battles between 1914 and 1917. I was sharing statistics of the fatalities and casualties for each battle. And the kids were like, "513,000? 580,000? 1.2 million? How's that possible?" And they're drawn in because they can't wrap their heads around the devastation that occurred. And one kid asked, "Is this the deadliest war ever?" I'm like, "Oh no, no, no it is not, but we'll get to that later in the year." They're already anticipating what we are about to learn in the next unit.

A high school teacher with 25 years of experience, Participant I went so far as to link the ability to make history come alive through stories to the overall effectiveness of a social studies teacher by asserting, "The ability of a teacher to make the subject come alive reflects an innate ability to recognize what is attractive to their students and meet their needs within any given lesson."

The third major component of a comprehensive social studies education that emerged from analysis of data is that it should be interdisciplinary. An interdisciplinary approach to social studies education would incorporate elements of other disciplines, drawing from literary works, works of art, music and a variety of other fields. Such an interdisciplinary approach is an avenue that allows teachers to meet various needs of students and is reflected in Gardner's (1993) theory of multiple intelligences.



Veteran high school teacher Participant H (Group 3) stated, “I am always thinking in terms of trying to help students see the interdisciplinary nature of social studies. We’re the subject that touches on every other subject... art, science, music and everything else. It allows students to have a big, global perspective. I believe it also makes social studies more accessible to a wider population of students due to their diverse interests.”

Participant B (Group 1), also a veteran high school teacher, expressed similar sentiments:

My view of social studies is that it's comprehensive when it uses an interdisciplinary approach so that it teaches students about history, geography, society, and culture (including art and music). I think it should be fun for kids to learn about their world and I feel like right now, the way it is, it is too driven by multiple choice, too driven by standards, that we don't get to delve deep into the stories and experiences that make all of the social studies an enjoyable experience.

Participant O (Administrator) also expressed the belief that social studies should be interdisciplinary by stating, “I think anytime we could bring in more interdisciplinary aspects it would be beneficial. I would like to see an alignment of social studies that would make it a little more relevant to their experiences outside of the social studies classroom.”

Analysis of the data revealed that despite different lengths of teaching experience at both the middle school and high school levels, teachers as well as administrators shared the opinion that social studies education should be constructivist. Social Studies should “come alive” through the incorporation of historical anecdotes and an interdisciplinary approach in order to be a comprehensive experience.

## **Theme 2: Implementation of Standards-Based Reforms**

The second overarching theme that emerged from the analysis of collected data was focused on the implementation of standards-based reforms. The implementation of

standards-based reforms in social studies was concentrated in three distinct sub-themes: 1. structural changes that resulted from the implementation of standards-based reforms; 2. positive effects of standards-based reforms in social studies education; 3. negative effects of standards-based reforms in social studies education. Each of these sub-categories, within the larger theme of standards-based reform implementation, shared a broad consensus between the different demographic groups of social studies educators represented amongst the participants.

### **The Structural Shift Within Social Studies Education**

Analysis of the data revealed that teachers perceived a significant structural shift within social studies education as a result of the standards-based reform implementation. The primary example of this structural shift is the outcomes-based climate that has come to dominate social studies education. In the view of many participants, standards-based reforms have had the direct result of making social studies education too focused on “teaching to a test.” Participant C (Group 1) is a 22 year high school veteran that verbalized this shift by stating, “I think that far too often in the courses we teach, too much of what we do is circumscribed by the nature of the exam to which we’re gearing the instruction; whether it’s an AP exam or Regents exam.” Veteran high school teacher Participant B (Group 1) shared a similar sentiment: “I feel like we deprive our students of a spark of joy they should have from learning and unfortunately they’re just being driven by a grade.” Coming from the perspective of a fourth year middle school teacher, Participant N (Group 4) elaborated on the idea that standards-based reform implementation impacted their pedagogy by stating, “I have had to step away from creativity in my classroom in order to prepare for the Regents and Advanced Placement

exams.” Participant A(Group 1), a 13 year high school teacher elaborated further: “My lessons have really become bare bones, so they (students) could perhaps look at a specific response to a specific question that we in turn are really only teaching because it is one of the most common things on a Regents or AP exam.” As a middle and high school teacher with 14 years of experience, Participant D provided greater insight on the struggle to “teach to the test” with the following statements:

So, I'm teaching 10th grade World History and I have to teach and reteach them how to write an enduring issues essay. I have to make my lessons less reliant on a graphic organizer which would ultimately have helped students understand the content because I'm busy preparing them for the way the essay on the Regents is going to be. It's actually kind of crazy because we'll spend years teaching the kids how to write an (enduring issues) essay and then in 11th grade, they're going to be taught how to write a brand new essay... a Constitutional issues essay, which no one, not even the teacher, has seen yet. So, I ask myself what the purpose of my class is. Is it to teach the kids history?

I remember in middle school when I was in 9<sup>th</sup> and 10th grade, we learned about ancient Egypt and ancient history. Now Egypt is just a footnote in our civilizations unit. We don't even cover it anymore despite its importance, I'm too busy providing a roadmap for success on the Regents.

Participant N (Group 4), who teaches middle school and is in their fourth year of teaching, elaborated further:

I think the biggest impact of standards-based reforms in my classroom would be in the area of my assessments. I think all of our questions now, whether they're multiple choice or stimulus based, incorporate skills from the Regents like interpreting evidence, chronological reasoning or geographic context. I think the result has been now my lessons are geared towards trying to incorporate skills for assessments on a daily basis.

Teachers also shared how the newfound emphasis on “teaching to the test” detracted from other important aspects of social studies. Veteran middle and high school teacher

Participant D (Group 2) stated:

I found a shift in my role as a teacher and what I spend my time doing ... I used to look for fun anecdotes and historical stories to go along and get the kids interested and wanting to hear more. And now I'm worried about how I'm phrasing this

question? Is this question the way they're going to see it on an exam? Am I using the words and the vocabulary that are consistent with the standards so that this way they're used to it? Because, like we said earlier, with all of the new changes, you have to use the vocabulary constantly for students to actually get it... So rather than me focusing on a good story about history that I could tell them and connect to a current event, I'm focusing on how do I word this question, how does my lesson reinforce the CRQ, and is this an enduring issue from the New York State Standards?

Veteran high school teacher Participant G (Group 3) offered insight into how “teaching to the test” impacted collaborative classes: “As a collaborative teacher I think I’ve always said that my job was to try to get my children where they needed to be so they can succeed despite whatever disabilities they encountered. I was always creative in my lessons in order to engage my students and I would always ask ‘How can I use technology?’ or ‘How can I be more creative?’ to help them succeed. Now I ask myself, ‘How often should we repeat this skill to do it enough times that it gets them to pass the exam?’” Middle school teachers explained how the shift towards “teaching to the test” impacts the middle school even though Regents exams are not administered until high school. Veteran middle school teacher Participant K (Group 3) stated, “I feel like it has impacted us in the 7<sup>th</sup> grade because we were doing things we’ve never done before in order to prepare them for a test they will take in high school. That’s something that we had always done with content, but now we’re not assessing our students to see what they’ve learned. We’re testing them solely to prepare them for the format of a test in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grades. Students are still trying to figure out what an enduring issue is, and I don’t even know what the state thinks an enduring issue is. I mean we’re not trying to trick kids, right?”

In follow-up individual interviews, teachers provided more blunt assessments of the connection between standards-based reforms and the shift towards teaching to assessments. With 13 years of high school experience, Participant A recounted:

I loved teaching ninth grade because there was only a final exam. It was a test that the teachers made up themselves. That was awesome because I really could just spend as much or as little time on any topic that I wanted. Then we started creating a district wide final because we were trying to model the 10<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum and the Regents exam. Suddenly, we had to find questions that were found on the Regents and model our final exams after them. I really had to take a step back and reevaluate what I was teaching and spending time on. Because if certain questions ended up on the final, it's like, "Okay, we need to adapt and make sure we cover that specific piece of information since it's on the exam."

I have such a passion for US History, but once I got into the 11<sup>th</sup> grade, I was sad to realize the realities of the Regents level. All of the things I've been wanting to teach about, there's no time for it because it's not found on the Regents exam. Therefore, I just need to skip it or quickly move on. I was like, "Wait a minute. What do you mean we don't spend more time on this? This is interesting stuff." And I was advised by both teachers and administrators, "Nope, it's not really on the Regents, just move on." It was very frustrating.

When asked what changes have been made to daily teaching practices that would fall under the concept of "teaching to the test," veteran high school teacher Participant I stated, "I've implemented changes that I see as valuable to my students... those that will lead them towards achieving on both the Regents exam and unit tests. Have I changed everything around, no, but what is tested is largely now what will be taught. I recently gave my students a short essay assignment and I included two document sources. The sources were lengthy and contained difficult vocabulary. But I didn't include them because I thought they would help my students understand the information. I'm essentially only doing it because I'm getting my students ready for the Regents exam."

Administrators acknowledged teachers' perceptions that there has been a shift in social studies education towards "teaching to the tests." Participant O (Administrator) captured the struggle many teachers experience with "teaching to the test":

My weakness was the French Revolution. I could have spent six weeks on it. I knew I couldn't, I had to cut back a little, but I refused to eliminate it. It was only one question on the test, but I wasn't getting rid of that topic. So, I think the teachers really have to make some very conscientious decisions because of the reforms and probably APPR. I think that once people started to focus on what their scores were and, "Oh my gosh, if I don't have this mastery or this passing, I'm not going to be rated well." That definitely shifted the focus for a lot of teachers to, "I'm just going to teach to the test." Which, I think is sad especially for history. When you have passions for certain areas, why wouldn't you want to explore that in more depth?

Participant P (Administrator) shared this sentiment by stating:

Right now, we're teaching new skills in the service of teaching the social studies content. And I think that's a big shift. Looking at the new tests, which we haven't been given yet, there's a really big emphasis on analysis. Students are going to need to find a way to do some sort of analysis in order to successfully answer questions on the new exams. So, I think there's definitely been a shift in how teachers approach their classes and the lessons they teach because kids need to practice all of those skills in the classroom.

The intense focus on teaching to the test was not only identified by the focus groups and one-on-one interview responses. Analysis of participant submitted lesson plans highlighted participants' belief that the contemporary social studies classroom engaged in activities and utilized activities that were specifically designed with a focus on standardized test preparation. Stimulus based multiple choice questions as well as CRQ (Constructed-Response Question) assignments and document analysis were prevalent throughout all of the lesson plans.

In focus groups and subsequent individual interviews, social studies teachers who possessed different lengths of experiences at both the middle school and high school levels continually commented on a perceived shift towards "teaching to the test." A

major take away from these conversations was that a consequence of teaching to the test has been a movement away from historical content in social studies instruction.

Standards aligned assessments place a premium on writing, reading and historical reasoning skills. As a result, teachers recognized that the unintended consequence of “teaching to the test” has made particular academic skills a primary focus within their curriculum, at the expense of historical content. Participant P (Administrator) observed a shift towards skill-based lessons in social studies education: “There’s a really big emphasis on critical thinking skills like analysis on the new tests. Students are going to need to find a way to do some analysis in order to successfully answer some new questions on this new exam, so there’s definitely been a shift and there’s definitely been a shift in how teachers approach that because they need to practice those skills in the classroom.” Veteran middle and high school teacher Participant D (Group 2) noted, “I have found that some of the curriculum has gotten lost. I understand that skills are needed, and skill-based reforms are important... It’s just that the constant changes resulting from the reforms have kind of stopped me teaching history and I’ve added more and more skills.” Veteran middle and high school teacher Participant E (Group 2) followed up: “Like my colleague said, I think I like some of the skills we are incorporating in the classroom, but there’s been such a shift towards skills and away from actual history and content that it’s like I’m almost just teaching a skills class.” A second-year middle school teacher, Participant M (Group 4) shed light on the shifting balance between skills and content by stating, “It’s a challenging situation. You are going to pick a topic that is already difficult for students and throw an essay on top of it to make that the skill they need to focus on. So, if they’re super engaged in a topic, I figure that will help them to

write an essay. But then they resent the writing part of it and begin to dislike the topic. So, it really takes a little bit of the enjoyment and fun out of the course by artificially inserting these skills into the curriculum.” When asked how an increased focus on skills impacted the way teachers approach what is done in the classroom, 13-year high school teacher Participant A (Group 1) responded by saying:

I'm constantly working on new lessons, I'm constantly trying to figure out how, in a 41-minute period, I can teach all of the necessary content and how to add also a skill that they need for the new Regents rolling out in US history. Every single day I'm adding skills for a test that we have not even seen yet. I'm trying to figure out what the state might be looking for in the hopes I'm actually preparing my students for questions that they're eventually going to be asked.

When asked to provide some insight about how particular lessons changed as a result of the focus on skill development Participant A shared:

Prior to the new state framework and redesign of A.P. US history, I used to spend almost five days just covering the Civil War. Forget about some of the stuff that would be on the test, I used to play a Civil War game that would take two class periods. And then I would teach them content for three more days. This year, the Civil War unit consisted of reading the textbook for a homework, and then in one day I basically covered the causes and effects of the entire Civil War. Then we moved on. The Emancipation Proclamation happened in there somewhere, the Gettysburg Address was mentioned in the homework and we just moved forward onto Reconstruction.

Another example is what's happened in the 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade curriculum. I used to teach 9<sup>th</sup> grade for several years. When I taught Ancient Greece, we spent a whole entire day doing a mini-Olympic Games and all this other fun stuff. We covered the purpose behind the Olympics, and what are they focusing on now? Just strictly enduring issues essays. When I see Ancient Greece being taught today, there is zero fun happening in the classroom. In fact, two different social studies teachers that are currently working on Ancient Greece cover the entire topic in 3 days and spend the rest of the time developing skills. For that unit that I would spend, let's say 10 days on just diving into the culture of ancient Greece... the art, philosophy, the history and geography.

Participant D (Group 2) who has 14 years of middle and high school teaching experience explained, “We spend three or four days writing an essay. After teaching the enduring



issues essays last year, we decided we needed to spend three or four days each time students would write an essay. This was done so that way students would really understand how to do it. But, it's all very technical. It's like a mathematics project they need to follow step one, step two, step three.” Clearly, the effects of the increased focus on skills over content in social studies has not been lost on the teachers.

Veteran high school teacher Participant C (Group 1) expanded on the effects of focusing on skills:

The emphasis has been more on skills that facilitate active learning and critical thinking. So, the activities that they (students) are doing have trained them to do that. But I would be lying to you if I said that every year when I get back the scores on the A.P. exam, and I look at who got a 3, 4, or 5, a good number of those kids who get 3's and 4's in my mind know very little about American history. They merely learned enough of the necessary skills to get a particular grade on the exam. So, I often wonder, what are students really walking away with?

Teacher perceptions of an increased focus on skills building were evident throughout participant submitted lesson plans. Lesson plans provided evidence that contemporary social studies education promoted skill building through specific document analysis, writing, and critical thinking activities on a regular basis.

The increased focus on teaching skills resulted in a broad consensus for the third sub-theme to emerge out of the implementation of standards-based reforms. Participants repeatedly commented on the fact that one of the noticeable structural shifts in social studies as a result of standards-based reform implementation was that there is essentially not enough time to effectively teach both historical content and required skills. Veteran middle school teacher Participant K (Group 4) recounted:

I feel that 13, 14 years ago I'd probably have academic freedom with the things that I taught in my classes. Not that I don't have academic freedom, but within the framework it's difficult to get a lot the history into smaller amounts of time. It becomes difficult to figure out what to cut out and what not to cut out with the

new framework in place... I've learned through my experience, that is a difficult thing to do with 7th grade students, because spending a little bit more time on something makes it a little bit easier for them to comprehend.

Following up on their colleague's thought, second year middle school teacher Participant M (Group 4) shared an example that highlighted the dilemma of incorporating a large skill-based social studies curriculum in a limited school year: "They never cut back in the framework, they continually add to it." When asked for a specific example, Participant M explained, "They still expect us to hit every time period. In the 8th grade you have to cover the modern presidents, but in reality, you're just going to run out of time and end up stopping at Reagan."

Veteran high school teacher Participant B (Group 1) explained the impact on students:

I feel like we are totally handcuffed by the framework that we're supposed to teach. Anytime a student shows even a spark of interest in something, you're forced to spend five minutes on it and then push on, because we're not interested in the story. We're interested in the causes and effects, that is it. I feel like we do our students an injustice. They don't understand then the cost of anything we study... Like World War II, they just don't understand the cost, because telling someone a casualty number can't actually flesh out what it actually felt like, or looked like, or was like, to be part of this event in history. It's hollow and I feel like that's what teaching social study is right now...very hollow.

Participant E, a veteran middle and high school teacher (Group 2) elaborated on the idea further:

I found some of the things I used to do, I don't do so much anymore. A good example is organizing information for the kids after we've gone through the lesson. Years ago, we'd teach a lesson in class, add another lesson, and then spend the day on comparing things or organizing it in some graphic organizer so that it would sink into their heads and they'd have a better understanding. I've had to throw out a lot of those parts of lessons simply just to rush through it in order to have time to analyze a document that is connected to the lesson. Some kids will keep up with that, but a lot of the kids that need that extra time to let things settle in are completely lost at that point.

Similar experiences were noted when middle and high school teacher Participant D (Group 2) stated:

Let's take the enduring issues essays, they seem like a good idea and they're exactly what you'd want to do as a historian. But for a regular kid trying to get through his day, it doesn't make sense to them at all. It puts them at a disadvantage because we're cutting out the history aspect of it, we're throwing in all these things to challenge our kids. At the end of the day everything's getting lost. They're not getting the content that they should and they're not achieving skills at the level that they should be.

When asked how the increased focus on incorporating skills into social studies instruction impacted the daily experience of teachers, high school teacher with 13 years of experience Participant A (Group 1) stated, "I find it impossible to try and tackle the skills that they need in a 41 minute period, on top of checking their homework, while addressing whatever kind of emotional needs they have, handing back homework, taking attendance and covering the curriculum content. It's changed my role in terms of it making me micromanage every single second, just to make sure that we are staying on pace." Participant P (Administrator) reflected on conversations they have had with teachers who struggle to incorporate both skills and content into their curriculum: "I think that sometimes teachers feel like they're tied to that framework and that perhaps they don't have as much freedom as they may want to, particularly in a grade where there is a test attached to it."

One implication of the structural changes to social studies that resulted from the adoption of standards-based reforms is that teachers find it difficult to promote specific skills and learning standards. While in focus groups, most participants openly shared their frustrations with the impact of standards-based reforms. However, it was only when asked directly in follow-up individual interviews that participants provided information detailing their struggle to promote specific learning standards and critical thinking skills during classroom instruction. Participant A who has 13 years of experience as a high

school teacher stated, “I am not really proficient in the current standards... Some of the framework, I'm hoping to touch on it. I try to use as many resources as I possibly can to make sure I'm targeting those standards. But I don't know if I really am.” Participant G concurred, stating, “I think that these skills are valid, but I don't think our teachers are used to teaching those skills. Maybe something like an enduring issues essays, as time has gone on, teachers have got a better understanding of how to implement that kind of essay skill into a class because it is going to be on the test.” Participant I echoed that assertion with the statement, “I know from what the test is what they're looking for and I can adapt my instruction toward that end. But like I said in the last interview, I feel like there's always continuous change going on, so I could never really feel confident in knowing for sure what exactly all this means for me and my students.” As a second-year teacher, Participant F completed a teacher preparation program after the era of standards-based reforms was well under way, and was the only participant to assert any confidence in their ability to promote specific learning skills and standards. Participant F expressed confidence by stating, “I think I have a fairly good understanding of them (the standards) and can incorporate them effectively. It's more of a focus on ensuring that the students have various primary sources and the ability to learn necessary skills. That's the big change... teaching those critical thinking skills first to ensure that throughout the course of the year the skills are based on content and understandable for the kids.” When asked how well teachers have been prepared to promote specific learning skills and standards, high school teacher Participant A explained:

I feel I'm not really prepared at all. I'm not really trained and I as I mentioned before I'm extremely overwhelmed even though I've been teaching for 13 years. I'm overwhelmed trying to incorporate all these standards and skills into an

everyday lesson while also making sure that the students are engaged because a lot of times skill building is not really all that exciting.

When Participant O (Administrator) was asked how effectively teachers promoted specific learning skills and standards in lessons they stated, “We know what we want students to be able to do, but I'm not sure that we as educators are always giving the right type of cues and directives to get them to do that.” When asked what kind of preparation they believed would be helpful for teachers to promote specific skills and standards currently lacking in lessons, Participant O expanded on their original statement by explaining:

I think that one of the most important pieces would be to bring in someone who could help our teachers teach students to read. Because as social studies educators, we're not really well versed in that. I think we just kind of think, “Well, they have to read, of course they're reading.” I think I would definitely like to have somebody in working on that with us. I also think that that would translate into somebody who could help us teach the kids how to write.

Participant responses showed widespread agreement that standards-based reforms resulted in significant structural changes within social studies education. As a result of the standards-based reform era, participants recognized a shift towards “teaching to the test” and prioritizing skills that appear on assessments at the expense of content. Subsequently, this shift resulted in an inability to successfully simultaneously promote academic skills and teach content curriculum within the allotted time. Finally, participants recognized that the manner and pace in which standards-based reforms were implemented left teachers unsure of their ability to successfully promote the new standards and framework in their classrooms.

## **Benefits of Reform Implementation**

While data analysis showed a number of structural shifts within social studies education, a second sub-theme to emerge was that there were several benefits that resulted from the implementation of standards-based reforms. Most of the participants credited the implementation of standards-based reforms for bringing the goal of critical thinking skills to the forefront of social studies education. All teachers across all demographic categories identified the current focus on developing critical thinking as a positive effect of reform implementation.

As a veteran teacher of 22 years, Participant C (Group 1) acknowledged the current focus on critical thinking skills: “Early on in my career students were a bit more passive in class, just copying notes or just listening to what I was doing. Gradually the emphasis has been on more active learning and critical thinking. So, the activities that they're doing now have trained them to do that.” It is interesting to note that while this statement acknowledges incorporating critical thinking skills into the social studies classroom by a veteran teacher, it is merely a description of the shift that has taken place. It is absent of any mention of positive benefits from standards-based reforms or the long-term benefits of critical thinking skills.

Conversely, teachers with less experience that have recently completed college and masters level teacher preparation programs were much more likely to extol the standards’ focus on critical thinking as a clear benefit. First year teacher, Participant J (Group 4) stated:

They've marched in the direction of analysis of actual documents and evidence... “How good is your evidence? Is there better evidence to take the other side with?” That to me is the direction it ought to go. And that's also, frankly, what college is like too. Ultimately, down the line, they're going to have to do this, be

it at a board meeting, college classroom, wherever the heck it is... all towards argumentation and participation in our democracy.

Participant K (Group 4) who has 13 years of middle school teaching experience commented, “Now it's like, ‘Hey let's group up, let's do this detective style... And figure out how Rome fell, was it a murder or was it...’ That sort of thing. In my judgment, I think that the focus on critical thinking is relatively positive and it gets them hopefully a little bit more engaged.”

Another benefit that emerged through analysis of the data was that teachers who are new to the profession are more likely to not see standards-based reforms as an impediment to a comprehensive social studies education. Participant P (Administrator) noted the divide between veteran and new teachers by stating, “I think that new teachers who were students that were recently working with graduate programs have a familiarity with the new standards. Second year middle school teacher Participant F (Group 2) explained, “So for me, I don't have the materials or knowledge of teaching before a lot of these changes. So, a lot of the stuff I'm benefiting from because as this shift happens, I'm not doing it for the first time. So, I'm in that nice situation.” Participant J who is in their first-year teaching echoed a similar sentiment with the statement, “Coming out of college in 2015... I don't want to say we were pretty well versed in it, because it was still new, and we are still implementing it, but in terms of daily activities, it's pretty similar to what I started with... I know other teachers definitely changed a lot of their daily routines. But for me, being a new teacher, not much has really changed.” Participant L, another first year middle school teacher concurred: “I haven't been teaching that long either. So, I grew up using these types of new models and using stimulus-based cartoons, assignments and tasks in the classroom... So, I really haven't seen my practice change all that much.”

Second year middle school teacher Participant M not only shrugged off the extent to which standards-based reforms impacted classroom instruction, they touted its benefits when they stated, “It hasn't been that long that I've been teaching, so there haven't been too many changes I've had to make. But the push for stimulus-based questions definitely takes away from just saying, ‘Read these pages.’ And I think it's definitely a good direction.”

In individual follow up interviews, second year teacher Participant F explained that as a new teacher the implementation of standards-based reforms has been an equalizing factor in the profession by thrusting veteran and new teachers into the same uncharted territory. Participant F explained:

I think because the framework has changed in so many ways, the entire department is in the same boat, because it changed for all of us. I think it's just helped me out a little bit more, because I'm not the new guy on the block who's trying to catch up to what everybody else is doing. I started at the same time that other teachers were just shifting the way they did everything, so it's the first year for them doing it too.

So, I feel more confident because I can come up with something and share with other teachers and they go, “This is perfect. This is what we're trying to do.” And rather than being, “Oh, well I've always done it this way, so I'm not going to change,” since we're all changing it lets me know that I can do this, which I think is nice. It's given me more confidence in my lesson planning ability and the materials that I make.

When asked whether they noticed any differences in the way that teachers have responded to the implementation of standards-based reforms, Participant P (Administrator) explained that while there may be a commonality between groups based on length of experience, personality was also an important factor:

I think it's really an individual impact. I think for some it has had a negative impact, but I think for others it has had very little impact because I think they do what they do. For others I think it has had little impact because that's what they've only known, depending on the point of entry into their career. So, if



you're talking about a young teacher, that's all they've known, and that's what they do. If you are talking about a veteran teacher who sort of rolls with the punches and says, "Okay, this is what it is, and I'm going to incorporate it into my teaching, because I love teaching and I'm a good teacher, and I'm just going to take it in a stride," then it hasn't had very much impact. And then you have unfortunately a few who have seen it as moving backward and have let it affect them negatively, but I'd say that they are very few and in the minority.

One of the more interesting ideas to emerge as a positive effect of standards-based reforms was that while the concept of "teaching to the test" was viewed as a negative development, teachers viewed standardized tests as a necessary tool to gauge student achievement. 13-year high school teacher Participant A (Group 1) expressed this idea:

I think in theory, standardized tests make sense. Because it's keeping all of us accountable. I don't want to use the word standard, but it's making sure across the board, if we're looking at just New York, that all of the teachers are hitting the same benchmarks. It's easy for us then to say, "Okay this population was super successful, these teachers are doing X, Y, and Z." Because if we don't have those standardized tests, then how can we ensure that all of the social studies teachers are covering the correct amount, or all of the content that the state or the government thinks that we're supposed to be covering.

Having spent time in Albany to help design the new World History Regents, veteran high school teacher Participant G (Group 3) was impressed by the effort that was put into crafting a reliable and fair exam. Participant G (Group 3) stated:

So, I've written about 50 multiple choice questions for the new Regents, and I did range finding on CRQs and enduring issues. And it's kind of funny, I sat there in a room one weekend in Albany, and we're presenting questions that we came up with, and everyone in the room was actually a teacher. You know, there wasn't a lot of "other" people. You had a special ed teacher, you had a new young teacher, and you had the old retired teacher there as well. And really everyone in between... And the person that was in charge was amazing. She'd point out, "That's a bad alternative wrong answer." And it was because two of the other answers didn't have China and something else in it or one answer was too long. So, the state was looking at some of these small little details... I was like, "Wow! I didn't even think of that." I just never thought that they put that much attention into it...

When asked what improvements they would make to social studies education, Participant P (Administrator) summed up the general consensus regarding the standards-based tests as a benefit to social studies education with the statement, “You never want to have a situation where a teacher is teaching solely to a test...But it's not that I don't agree with the skills that are being taught in preparation for the test.” Participant O (Administrator) added, “I don't want to say that there shouldn't be an assessment for each of those grades, but I'm just wondering if there's a different way to do it.”

A final positive effect of reform implementation that emerged from analysis of collected data was that, contrary to initial fears, APPR has not negatively impacted social studies or become a major factor in educators' professional decisions. When asked how they would describe the role that APPR plays in the professional decisions they make on a daily basis, participants clearly stated it was a nonfactor. Participant A, a high school teacher for the past 13 years explained, “I think... I don't want to say it's a dog and pony show, but we know what the rubric is and we know how we can foster a lesson plan that's going to be more on the “right side” or in agreement with the Danielson model for the APPR.” Even second year teacher Participant F showed little concern about APPR by stating, “Do we actually do it here? With the APPR, the thing I do like is that it gives me a direct understanding of where I can improve in the classroom. Is it in my management, is it in the atmosphere of the classroom, or is it more in how I plan and how I prepare myself? So, I do like that aspect about it.” When teachers were asked directly about APPR there was an underlying sense of professionalism that alleviated much of the potential fear. Veteran high school teacher Participant G stated, “I don't think about it. I don't know. I think about doing the job and if I'm doing the job well, they're going to tell

me I'm doing the job well. I always say it's my chairperson's job after 13 years to tell me. If I'm doing something well, okay good, but tell me what I'm not doing well or tell me where I can be better.” Participant I, a veteran high school teacher with 25 years of experience, was even more direct in their statement:

Zero. It has had no impact whatsoever. Okay, I don't pay attention to it. I pay attention to it more in terms of how it might affect other teachers or the teaching profession, but it hasn't affected me... I mean, the district has been very good at protecting us from any negative consequences because I think they value who we are and know what we're capable of.

Interestingly, the response of Participant P (Administrator) mirrored that of Participant I:

In this district? I don't actually think APPR has had a lot of impact on social studies. I think that we did a very good job of shielding teachers from the negative effects of it. Again, I can't speak to anybody else except for me and our department here. But, certainly even though we had to change the way we did things, I don't think, or I'd like to think that none of the teachers in the department felt like all of a sudden there was the big bad police. And as far as the scores went, the Regents scores have been the Regents scores and they're fairly consistent from one year to the next.

Analysis of the data showed that there were several positive effects of standards-based reforms in social studies. Among the benefits of standards-based reforms is the renewed focus on important critical thinking skills. Additionally, new teachers were less likely than their veteran counterparts to view the implementation of standards-based reforms as negative. There was consensus that teaching to the test is detrimental, and data analysis showed that teachers recognized standardized exams provided a necessary benchmark for student achievement. The fact that APPR has succeeded in providing some level of accountability, without becoming a negative influence, is the final positive effect of standards-based reform implementation.

## **Negative Effects of Standards-Based Reform Implementation**

The third sub-theme to emerge within the larger context of standards-based reform implementation is concentrated on the numerous perceived negative effects. The negative consequences of standards-based reform implementation shared widespread consensus among all social studies teachers across various lengths of experience at both the middle and high school level. Participants identified seven specific negative consequences that resulted from the implementation of standards-based reforms in social studies education.

When asked how the implementation of standards-based reforms impacted social studies education, there was wide ranging agreement that the era of standards-based reforms has led to too many changes in social studies education that have been implemented too rapidly. Veteran high school teacher Participant B (Group 1) shared this opinion by stating, “It seems like every six years we have a new federal program. Every 10 years we have a new state program. The amount of professional development, the amount of paper, the number of meetings we go to for these, would be much better spent focusing on strategies to teach and less professional development about the new format of a test.” Veteran high school teacher Participant C (Group 1) expressed his frustration with the rapid and consistent changes to social studies by stating, “I would say that in my 25 years of teaching, I’ve seen a lot of reforms and new initiatives. And they always say, ‘We’re going to do this differently.’ For me it is all like Sisyphus pushing the boulder up the hill.” The main concern that arose from the number and pace of reforms is that it is essentially impossible for teachers to gain a handle on what the changes actually entail. Veteran middle school teacher Participant K (Group 4) stated:

We're at a time where all these assessments, at least in social studies, are going to be brand new. So, we (teachers) don't have any evidence to really support how it's going to impact our kids... I wish we knew more. I feel like the state is dropping the ball a little bit with the rollout of these new reforms and the new testing because there's just bits and pieces of information, we don't have all the info.

Participant H (Group 2) who has 20 years of high school experience reiterated how frustration has developed as a result of the frequency of changes to social studies education:

I think to this day, the changes are ongoing. So that it feels like the rug is continually shifting underneath us as teachers. We cannot really gain hold of any one of the changes that has been brought about in the last 20 years, really after 2012 with Common Core instruction.

I think we grasped the DBQ when it came out in the early 2000's, but since 2012, I've seen New York State adopt... I forget what they were called... The "Inquiries." In my inbox on my home computer are the C3 Inquiries, at the very bottom of the saved files, but I've never looked at them. So, someone was paid a million dollars to make these and New York State isn't following them? They've created a new framework and everything, but do they follow what the Inquiries were trying to accomplish? Not really.

A middle and high school teacher with 14 years of experience, Participant D (Group 2) echoed this sentiment:

I feel like we are going to spend all this time teaching these new reforms and then in a couple of years there's going to be a whole new set of reforms because they're going to realize this is too hard of a task we're assigning for the students. Then it's going to be, once again, our turn to reinvent the wheel or go back to something that we have done already, but maybe didn't do it well because the reforms happen so quickly that we're constantly changing what we're doing and how we are focusing our lessons.

When asked about the pace of reforms in social studies education in a follow-up interview, veteran high school teacher Participant I stated:

I would say that the pace has been constant, and it's really been haphazardly implemented. Especially with our own US History and Government course and what's going to be expected of us on the new Regents exam. I would say that we did see a lot of the Common Core being rushed into practice during its first few

years. I think what has also happened over time is that through their implementation, things that they thought were important have now been in essence discarded, like the Social Studies Inquiries and inquiry-based approach and the C3 format we were supposed to follow. I think those things have been left behind because it was such a haphazard implementation.

Participant I elaborated on how the pace of change affected them personally by stating, “You know, my immediate reaction to all of this is, ‘Oh crap, it's new stuff.’ It could be, ‘Hey, continuity and change are all very good, the kids need to know that!’ But it's really made me skeptical. It's really made me question who's in charge, if anybody, and what their motivation is for bringing these changes to us.”

Another negative consequence of standards-based reforms that participants identified was that the expectations of academic performance upon which reforms are based do not reflect the age-appropriate abilities of students. Participants from all focus groups, across the various demographics of teaching experience, vocalized the belief that the standards that have been adopted are essentially too difficult for large sections of the student population to master or comprehend. Veteran middle and high school teacher Participant E stated, “Sometimes the skills that we imagined that a kid should have, they don't necessarily have the ability to attain. So, often you'll be reading for things like purpose or point of view and the kids have a tough time understanding what the documents mean in general, let alone in the context of purpose or point of view. It actually adds a layer of confusion for the kids.” Veteran high school teacher Participant H (Group 2) expressed their assessment of the situation:

Is this Regents really an accurate assessment of what the students are able to do? And is it a fair assessment of them? Just because the skills you're asking for are in their range and their experience... Can you really expect them to do some of what the DBQ is asking them to do? When you get up to the (11<sup>th</sup> grade) U.S. Regents, they're moving towards a point of view or bias question. Now how does

a kid without any historical knowledge, or very limited historical knowledge, make an assessment about whether something's biased or not?

Veteran middle and high school teacher Participant D (Group 2) expressed a similar opinion by stating, “There's an added pressure to get these kids to achieve something that they may not necessarily be able to achieve. And often we sacrifice the fun parts of history to do it. You find yourself becoming a dry historian, just trying to extract certain things from a document that aren't necessary for a kid to understand the history. And you're wondering what the point is.” Second year middle school teacher Participant M explained how the expectations of skill proficiency exceed the abilities of middle school students:

You have to make the assumption these kids don't know how to write anything. They either are going to be well-prepared depending on what (elementary) school they came from or not and they're expecting class parties every week. So, starting off in the 7th grade, it's like don't even mention trying to talk to them about what an enduring issue is, they're not going to understand it.

With 12 years of middle and high school teaching experience, Participant D (Group 2) echoed that observation:

I still do projects, although not as many because I'm taking those projects and replacing them with writing skills for the enduring issue essays. But I don't feel that students are capable of or need to be able to pull from a document and describe a document in the manner that the state wants. I liked the thematic essay, where students could write what they know about a topic and, as long as they hit the most important or critical points, you know that they understood the history.

Throughout the rounds of data collection, teachers continually expressed a fear that the state would view students' inability to keep pace with artificially high expectations as an indication of their own poor performance. Middle school teacher Participant F, who has two years of teaching experience stated, “Sometimes I worry that my lessons aren't as good as they could be because I'm not helping my students

understand the information. I'm relying on the kids to figure it out themselves by practicing skills they need to develop, and in some of my classes that's a very tall order for them.” Even a veteran with 15 years of high school teaching experience shared a similar concern. Participant G explained that their collaborative classes were particularly put at a disadvantage by the state’s expectations:

To give a kid an exam the way it's formatted and just do straight up reading passages, I think that's tough. I think it impacts my collaborative kids greatly because sometimes their processing time or processing speed is longer than the state expects. I think we take for granted even simple vocabulary. I'll never forget the time that we were given a reading passage titled *The Virtue of Terror*. The kids were reading it and they get to the word virtue, and they asked, “What does virtue mean?” You don't think of a word like virtue as being something that would be difficult for children to understand. But a simple word like virtue, or when they are asked a simple word like “context,” as in historical context. Some of my kids have a hard time even knowing what context is after we have taught and reviewed it multiple times. So, I think those are some things that are going to be detrimental to some of my kids.

Part of the responsibilities of being a social studies department chair is to observe teachers delivering classroom instruction. That experience afforded the opportunity to witness firsthand the discrepancy that existed between the way individual students responded to the implementation of standards-based reforms. Participant O (Administrator) explained, “I think it really depends on the student. A lot of kids do very well with, let me memorize 10 things and then I can tell you what those 10 things are and, Poof! ... ‘I'm good!’ So, for students like that, I think that social studies education has become more challenging. For students who inherently like to articulate and discuss, I think the standards benefit them and they're enjoying the class a lot more.”

Another negative effect that emerged from analysis of the data was that while participants were quick to point out that the goals of standards-based reforms are noble;



they essentially fail to recognize the reality of teachers' daily experiences. As a teacher for 13 years at the high school level, Participant A (Group 1) explained:

I understand, in theory, the purpose behind the reforms and the standardized tests. I think where they missed the mark is how much is really needed, or how much time students need to do the work that's required. Students don't really do homework anymore, so we cannot necessarily rely on them doing all of this reading at home. So, we need a certain amount of seat time. We only have 178 days mandated of students in the building. We only have 41 minutes in a class period. I think that's where they're not realizing some of the parameters that take away from us achieving that critical thinking goal. We can't just rely on the student's doing homework and us doing all of the critical thinking in class. We need to make sure we're teaching the content in class, and not rely on homework, versus decades ago when students had the capability of doing homework because there weren't all of these other things getting in their way.

Participant C (Group 2) who has 22 years of high school experience highlighted this sentiment:

I think many of these standards-based reforms don't take into account how different students are today. Because developmentally their brains have changed and are shaped by digital technology so that their attention spans are very short. That they process information differently. They think about things differently. I don't think we have a very realistic approach to trying to raise standards to help increase achievement and sometimes I can't help but think that, in a generation or two, people are going to look back on this push at the beginning of the 21st century to raise standards and make things more rigorous. They're going to look at it the same way we today look back on the days of the 50's and 60's, where people say, "Yeah, they said I had to wear the dunce cap because I always failed, and I couldn't read." And people are like, "Well, wait a minute. They didn't realize that you had a learning disability?"

As a high school teacher for 22 years, Participant B (Group 2) offered clarification of the idea that the standards-based reforms appeared to be disconnected from the experiences of teachers and the realities of the contemporary classroom setting by stating, "Skills we're teaching them are not straightforward writing, it's not critical thinking, it's skills for writing a very particular concocted essay. I don't even know how to describe it, but these are not skills they'll be using throughout their life." In a follow-

up interview, Participant F (two years of teaching experience) shared this opinion when he stated, “Every student I've ever had, especially the higher achieving students, all they want is for you to teach them. For you to give them the information and help them make those connections. To give them the work, but teach them first. But the way the framework is designed, they have to pull the information out for themselves.”

When asked how the effects of standards-based reforms affected teachers on a personal level, there was one negative effect that was repeatedly described by teachers across all demographic categories. Teachers expressed a sense of being micromanaged in their professional duties. Many teachers qualified this idea with the caveat that they were not personally micromanaged by their building or district administration, but instead the state, national or larger education system as a whole. A high school veteran with 20 years of experience, Participant H (Group 3) stated, “As a teacher, I know if I could have more control over what I do and what I don't do, content-wise... If I could take time from some things and have that time to do other things, I think students would be loving my class and be more engaged.” Veteran high school teacher Participant H went on to explain:

I kind of feel like perhaps if we were teachers that weren't in such a great department and such a great school, this might be a way different conversation. Maybe in some other places some of these changes that we find constricting are really needed. I kind of feel like if we took away all the standards stuff for a member of our department, their classes would still be phenomenal, and even more phenomenal than they are now. Because we have a clear vision of what students need to have and the skills they need and would be able to do really awesome things. So, for teachers in our department, in our building, in our district, these standards are constricting and are frustrating.

Veteran high school teacher Participant I (Group 3) quickly joined in stating, “In a way, the standards have gotten in the way of our own collegiality because somebody's making

the future for us. Somebody's telling us what the future of education is supposed to look like to them. So, like we were saying before, we (teachers) are reactionary, no longer having the ability to even think of the future.” Participant F, who has two years of experience at the middle and high school level, explained his sense of being micromanaged by stating, “I think it just handcuffs social studies teachers a little bit. With direct instruction, I'm so paranoid that if I don't give the exact lesson they're looking for, someone's going to be angry with me. So, there are times when I want to spend part of my lesson just giving kids the information and having them take notes. But I'm so afraid of doing that...” When asked to provide specific experiences where they felt micromanaged, participants responded without hesitation. Second year teacher, Participant F, offered the following:

My sister, she's a music teacher. She could teach social studies right now because, here's the textbook, here's the framework, follow it and you're good. And if you have access to worksheets, you can do it. But to me, that's not what a social studies teacher is. A social studies teacher gives kids evidence and lets them explore it. And yes, sometimes that involves a lecture. Because the history, the kids don't know it, but you studied it, you know the history... that's what I always thought I was going to be as a teacher, but the framework doesn't really allow for that.

A veteran high school teacher of 13 years, Participant A recounted a specific example of feeling micromanaged:

A great example would be just today. I'm in the middle of the Progressive time period and we're talking about Woodrow Wilson and WWI. Obviously, you know what's popping up in their brains... who this president was, what happened during what time period, and so on. We were discussing when he got re-elected and a kid shouted out, “Is World War III really going to happen with Iran?” Then one girl goes, “Wait, if we go to war, what do we do?” It took me a moment to understand that she was asking me if she would still go to school if there's a war.

So, it would be really, really fascinating to kind of pause the lesson and discuss how during World War I, what life was like in America versus how a war would

impact us today. Or even just understanding, where we're going, and if there would be war at all. But I didn't have time to really describe it and to explain it, to dive into it. And it's just like, okay, we've got to move on because I have to finish this lesson. I think that there's moments in my classes that students are really interested in what we're talking about and like what we're talking about. It triggers something in their brains, but we don't have the luxury of really diving into it. Then of course there are other times, I don't think things are as significant or interesting or fascinating, and I have to teach it to them because I know it's on the standardized test. It's moments like these when I feel like I don't have control.

Even new teachers who did not experience social studies education before the adoption of standards-based reforms found their impact on daily classroom activities to be formulaic.

Participant F who has two years of teaching experience at the middle and high school level stated:

I feel limited because I'm so concerned about what I'm supposed to be doing, I'm making sure I'm doing the right thing by only following what's expected and I don't deviate much. I look at some of the lessons I made, and everything is this jigsaw model. So, now we do this, then we do that, we're rotating them through. I'm experimenting a little bit more this year with other stuff, but it still feels very much the same... Different graphic organizer, but it's really the same skill.

According to participants, another negative effect of standards-based reforms is that following the prescribed standards-based social studies curriculum has essentially made their classes "boring." One anecdote that highlighted teachers' perception that standards-based reforms have made social studies boring came from 13 year high school veteran teacher Participant A (Group 1):

I actually had a conversation that's very similar to this idea of it (social studies) being dry at parent-teacher conferences. A parent of my student was sitting across from me saying that, "She's struggling a little this year, but her passion is really social studies. She's thinking of becoming a social studies teacher." I looked at the parents and I said, "If she really loves history, she should not become a high school teacher. She should really go on to college professor." They looked at me with 10 heads, and I tried to explain to them that the tests have really sucked all the fun, all the enjoyment, all the story telling, all the exciting little things that make you go, wow, that are really cool... They sucked it out.

Fellow veteran high school teacher Participant B (Group 1) echoed that idea: “I think a student’s experience is very dry now in the classroom. That's what I think. It is hard to put together lessons that dive deep, that give them a spark to learn more, to go home and say, ‘I want to learn even more about this cool thing,’ or that cool story my teacher taught me about today. I feel like those moments are rare now.” Similar to other negative effects of standards-based reforms, the perception that social studies has become “boring” can also be traced back to the increased focus on skills that are tested on standardized assessments. Participant D (Group 2) has 14 years of experience at both the middle and high school level. They shared, “Like we've said it earlier, they (students) are bored. I just feel like I'm teaching them how to write an essay through an equation.” Participant E, a teacher for 12 years at both the middle and high school level, provided further insight by stating, “The big thing for our kids is that they get writing sometimes twice a day in English classes. Then they come to us and they get another period of writing. I'm sure that there's also other standards in other classes where they also have to do writing. I don't think more is necessarily better or that it's going to be more helpful for these kids.” High school veteran teacher Participant I highlighted the deadening effect that skills-based lessons have had in social studies:

Now as it becomes more formulaic, with DBQs and with CRQs, you have to teach them this skill, and we have to go through each one of these things, and we have to make it the same throughout... It has had, in my opinion, a deadening effect on what we do. And on the kids. They're not motivated. They're motivated to hear the stories we can tell. They are not motivated to assess whether document one is on this side of a T-chart, or that side of a T-chart. It's really had a deadening influence. And then it translates to students being less interested.

I don't think text analysis is all that helpful, especially long text. I'm sorry. Thinking that our students today can read long texts in class and cite them and do whatever is just a dead practice, in my opinion. Today I read a Plunkitt speech and the kids just looked down at the paper and they follow along politely with me,

but I think it's a dead tactic and it's not lively. It's not, I don't want to say entertaining, but it's not interesting to them to do so. And yet, that's the crux of common core and other framework ideas.

It's become more boring with the focus on texts. I think the focus on text has come in reaction to the fact that our students are not reading anymore and somebody said, "Hey, we need to encourage people to read, so let's just get them to read really old stuff in social studies classes." And we'll make up for the deficit that the rest of society is telling them not to read by giving them cell phones at an early age and everything else.

As a new teacher with two years of experience, Participant F had recently completed a masters level teacher preparation program designed to promote current learning standards. Still, Participant F recognized the deadening effect that standards-based reforms have had in the classroom:

It's just frustrating because the thing I loved about history was the anecdotes, the stories, the things that make it so interesting for the kids. And we've turned history into the thing that all the kids complained about in the first place. "It's boring, I don't understand it, it's so much work." And instead of making it fun and interesting for the kids to learn from, we turned social studies into the exact thing that they hated and have been complaining about for decades in the first place.

In addition to participant responses, document analysis confirmed a heavy focus on skill-based activities in nearly all participant submitted lesson plans. As a result, "fun" or hands on activities were kept to a minimum in all but a handful of lesson plans. Hands-on and engaging lesson plans were limited to elective courses that did not end in standards-based assessments.

Resources that do not correspond to standards-based learning objectives are another source of frustration resulting from standards-based reforms. Teachers voiced concerns that sources across a spectrum of textbooks, handouts, curriculum guides, test

banks and online resources fail to promote the learning standards and new social studies framework. Veteran high school teacher Participant A explained:

Although there are resources where they focus on certain skills and make suggestions, it's not really applicable to our everyday lessons and it's really not helpful. Even their resources become extremely overwhelming and it's like, click here, click there and then you have to read 10 pages and then you realize, okay, this isn't going to really help my students or this is not really practical.

Test banks, without a doubt, do not match the framework and that is pretty evident. I've been on the state website New Visions a lot and the website does not have enough resources out there... When I looked at U.S. History, there were units that had no resources whatsoever and were still put into their online database.

Participant F who is in his second year of teaching both middle and high school voiced similar concerns with online resources:

Something like New Visions has a lot of good documents, but everything is paced as if you were teaching 365 days a year. They'll spend 12 days on something, where in an ideal world maybe, but we don't have that time for the way they break it down. So, it still needs to be retrofitted to fit with the actual needs of teachers.

Concerns about an online textbook that was specifically designed for the new standards were expressed by veteran high school teacher, Participant G: “The new online textbook that we got is based on the new framework. But there is no CRQ, enduring issues or stimulus-based questions in there. So, the assessments for those skills on that online thing are still based on the old standards and simple recall questions; which is kind of crazy.”

When it came to textbooks, there was a broad consensus that what was available did not help promote the current learning standards. Participant I, a 25-year veteran high school teacher, expressed frustration with available resources by stating, “I don't use the textbook because reading the textbook is deadening. I don't want to say reading is deadening, it's a necessary aspect of our job. But, having a 16-year old in 2019 read a

document from 1735 and care about it, is a very hard thing to do.” Veteran high school teacher Participant A explained, “The textbook definitely does not match, unless the school districts are buying their textbooks every other year since it seems like the framework is constantly being changed.” Middle and high school teacher Participant F has only two years of experience, but similarly echoed complaints that textbooks didn’t align with learning standards: “Our textbook has a lot of good primary sources, but they’re not framed in a way that’s actually aligned to the test, for the way the curriculum is designed.”

The analysis of data shows that the final negative effect of standards-based reform implementation is a direct result of an existing disconnect between available resources and current standards. Such a disconnect has resulted in a lack of adequate resources to use in instruction and has developed into a belief among teachers that they are being asked to “reinvent the wheel.” Participant D (Group 2) who has 14 years of both middle and high school experience, elaborated on this idea stating, “You get to a point of your career where you’re, 5, 10, 15 years in and things just become automatic. And now it’s kind of like for the first time in a long time, some of us are like new teachers again. Here’s something I’ve done for 14 years, now I have to ask myself, ‘How do I change it to fit the new standards?’.” Veteran high school teacher Participant A discussed the frustration in “reinventing the wheel” by stating, “There’s nothing out there. I feel as if teachers are really just trying to scramble and understand what the state and federal government really want us to do. No one has any viable resources that are concrete. People are just trying to figure it out on their own.” Veteran high school teacher Participant G explained the sense that teachers are “starting all over again”:



I felt like I didn't know my craft well for a while, and then I started getting more comfortable. You make these connections and then it's not a struggle anymore. You're making them effortlessly. And then all of a sudden, everything changes. So, it's kind of like, we joke around a lot that I'm in year 18 and the last two or three years I felt like a brand-new teacher. I think the hard part is managing all the new things that you have to do and want to do, it's just so time consuming.

The pressure on teachers to redesign and recreate lessons and activities did not go unnoticed by department chairs whose job was to provide training for and observe teacher implementation of standards-based reforms. Participant P (Administrator) commented, “You need all new assessments and you need a lot of new activities. It feels like you're recreating the wheel as you are implementing the new framework.”

Across multiple focus groups and individual follow-up interviews there was wide ranging agreement that standards-based reforms had multiple significant negative effects in the field of social studies education. The negative effects included consistent and rapid change, disproportionately high expectations, an apparent disconnect between classroom experiences and adopted standards and being forced to utilize resources that do not align with current standards. These negative effects were coupled with the feeling that teachers were essentially being micromanaged in their daily activities while simultaneously experiencing the reality that reform implementation was making social studies “boring” for teachers and students alike.

### **Theme 3: (Dis)Engagement**

The third overarching theme to emerge from the analysis of data was (Dis)Engagement. Analysis of collected data revealed that as standard-based reforms were implemented in the classroom, teachers with different amounts of experience at different grade levels shared a sense of disengagement from the curriculum, their colleagues and the larger education system. There were two sub-themes that emerged

within the larger context of teacher disengagement. The first sub-theme identified was the breakdown in communication between teachers and stakeholders within their own school and the educational system as a whole. The second sub-theme to emerge was an attempt by teachers to mitigate the effects of standards-based reform implementation by collaborating with colleagues or retreating into courses and grade levels free from the constraints of standardized assessments.

### **Communication Breakdown**

An analysis of the data revealed that a failure to maintain effective communication between teachers and the larger education system was an important contributing factor to teacher disengagement. One such example was the fact that all participants shared the belief that teachers lacked a thorough understanding of Next Generation Learning Standards, the new NYS Social Studies Framework, and the C3 Inquiries. This sentiment was expressed by veteran high school teacher Participant A:

I feel like I'm not that knowledgeable about the them (Next Generation Learning Standards, and C3 Inquiries) at all. We've taken a lot of time during our department meetings to look at the new framework and I've been working with another colleague of mine to really look at them. But we realized very quickly that there was a lot of content that we currently didn't cover. The obstacles of teaching all these new skills along with content additions to the curriculum is what I've been focusing on. But it's definitely not being able to identify Next Generation Learning Standards, the C3 things you mentioned, or whatever else the state has decided to do.

Participant I is a veteran high school teacher with 25 years of experience. Participant I expressed a minimal level of familiarity with the new social studies framework and admitted that he lacked a firm grasp on Next Generation Learning Standards and C3 Inquiries. Participant I stated:

I would not say that I'm very well acquainted with the Next Generation Learning Standards. I understand that they want to boost civic activity, civic understanding

of what our government does and how it operates. So, basically, I'm just not knowledgeable about it.

At the same time, I think I have a basic understanding of the changes that were implemented in the new framework. I think I have a very good understanding of what the content is going to focus on. I think I know from what the test is, what they're looking for, and I can adapt my instruction toward that end. But like I said in the last interview, I feel that since there is almost continuous change going on, I can never really feel confident in knowing for sure what exactly all this means to me and my students.

When asked to elaborate on why teachers lacked a thorough understanding of the Next Generation Learning Standards and C3 Inquiries, Participant I continued:

The changes in standards are hard for me as an educator to comprehend. For instance, when we look at one part of the Regents exam where they're implementing the new standards, students are being asked about a point of view and whether it's a valid perspective... The state uses standardized terminology to ask the question in language that is so unintelligible to me. I'm not even sure as an adult what they're trying to get at, so I can't imagine my kids can understand it. In response, I've just made CRQ exercises myself. We just basically make our own questions up for students that we hope follow what the state wants to do.

Clearly, such statements demonstrate a failure on the part of federal and state education authorities to adequately communicate information about Common Core, Next Gen Learning Standards, C3 Inquiries and the NYS Framework in a meaningful and practical way.

While there is a glaring lack of communication between teachers and the larger educational system at the national and state level, data analysis also showed a more subtle breakdown of communication at the school building level. Social studies department chairs are responsible for observing and evaluating social studies teachers within the school district, as well as providing professional development to familiarize teachers with changes that result from the adoption of standards-based reforms. When asked to what

extent social studies teachers are knowledgeable about the new NYS Framework, Next Generation Learning Standards and C3 Inquiries, Participant O (Administrator) mildly appraised the apparent lack of knowledge among teachers by stating, “I would describe it as a work in progress, they're still really trying to become familiar with what the framework actually means in practice.” An even more optimistic view of teachers’ knowledge of standards-based reforms was presented by Participant P (Administrator): “I would like to think that it is pretty good, given that we have spent a lot of time talking about it over the past several years.” It is noteworthy that this response is more aspirational than concrete in its observation. Tellingly, this response focused exclusively on how much department meeting time had been dedicated to reviewing changes in the framework. It is void of any specific examples that could bolster confidence that teachers are truly knowledgeable about the NYS Framework and C3 Inquiries. While subtle, such a discrepancy between perceptions is evidence that, even at the local level, the education system fails to accurately consider the reality of teaching social studies in the contemporary educational climate.

A communication breakdown between teachers and administration was not found solely in the realm of learning standards and framework knowledge. While all social studies teachers were eager to initiate discussions about the negative effects of standards-based reforms, administrators were much less inclined to do so. There was a striking discrepancy between teacher and administrator perceptions regarding the fact that the implementation of standards-based reforms had resulted in teachers feeling frustrated and overwhelmed.

When asked to consider how they were personally impacted by various standards-based reforms, participants often became passionate when discussing the numerous factors that led them to become overwhelmed and frustrated. As a veteran high school teacher with 13 years of experience, Participant A explained the frustration that resulted from poorly communicated guidelines and ambiguous teaching materials:

I don't think we're proficient in it (promoting standards-based skills) and we're not really given any strict guidelines. Although there are resources we are using, in particular from the college board, where they focus on certain skills and they make suggestions, it's not really applicable to our everyday lessons and sometimes it's really not helpful. Even the resource become extremely overwhelming. It's like click here, click there, and then you have to read 10 pages until you realize, "Okay this isn't going to really help my students" or, "This is just not practical in 41-minutes."

Similarly, a lack of communication regarding standards-based reform implementation and application in a special education setting resulted in frustration and isolation for teachers of collaborative social studies classes. As a veteran high school teacher with 13 years of experience, Participant G explained:

I think the hardest thing is getting the handle of the new way of doing these things. And I think that's the biggest detriment to my special education kids if they aren't properly prepared. They're the ones that are going to be impacted because they're not going to be ready. So, I think it falls on us. This is what the job is now, and we have to do the work... I think that I always tell my kids that I'm a waiter and I'm here to serve them. So, I think one of my collaborative classes might need this and another one of my collaborative classes might need that. And I think that I'm constantly individualizing my lessons for what service, what modification and adaptations my kids need. I think it's difficult at times because you're constantly modifying materials on your own while not trying to lose any of the content.

When asked directly how standards-based reform has been beneficial to their teaching career, veteran high school teacher with 25 years of experience, Participant I, described the entrenched frustration among teachers in the starkest terms:

Honestly, in no way has it been beneficial to my career as a teacher. They've only been, to me, frustrating. They've been nonsensical. The position of the state and people in authority, of not listening to recommend changes, has been totally frustrating. So, they haven't had a positive effect on my career nor on my students at all. They make me question myself. Wait... I'm just going to say, they make me question my ability to implement the changes. In a way, the changes that have happened and the professional development that we have to sit through... has deadened somewhat what used to be my love of creativity in the classroom.

Second year teacher, Participant F highlighted the notion that teachers were frustrated by the current state of social studies education by stating, "I'm frustrated. Part of being a teacher was my love of history and the love of the stories and how history pieces it all together. And at times I feel like at this job, I'm not a social studies teacher, I'm just teaching based on, 'Here's the book on how to teach, follow this'." When asked if this sense of frustration has had an impact on the morale of teachers, veteran high school teacher Participant A stated, "I think our morale has definitely decreased. I feel like there's a lack of enthusiasm when we look at the framework, and when we look at what is expected of students, because we know that a lot of our students cannot achieve success based on what they're required to do. So, I think it's very overwhelming." Participant F, a second year middle and high school teacher, echoed the idea that morale was down among teachers: "I would say it's negatively affected the morale of social studies teachers. One of the things I hear a bunch is that it's just become more difficult to be a social studies teacher. Not that any of them have a problem with history or teaching social studies itself. It's that the framework and curriculum make it harder."

Throughout multiple rounds of data collection all teachers consistently referenced a personal "frustration" that developed as a result of standard-based reform implementation. Accordingly, one would expect administrators to readily acknowledge that a sense of frustration exists among social studies faculty. Department chairs are in a

unique position to observe the changes in the overall morale of social studies teachers. They run department meetings, observe classroom lessons and work directly with classroom practitioners to implement standards-based reforms. In contrast, administrators failed to recognize the pervasive sense of frustration among teachers at all, except when directly asked to explain how the morale of social studies teachers has been affected by the implementation of standards-based reforms. When asked directly about the teachers' apparent sense of frustration, administrators did not address the issue with the same passion as classroom educators. Participant O (Administrator) described a decline in teacher morale mildly: "I think, in general, it has been somewhat detrimental to their morale. I think that they probably feel that there is not a lot of wiggle room for them to devote to their own passion." When asked the same question, Participant P (Administrator) seemed to equate a teacher's acceptance of standards-based reform implementation to their love for the teaching profession:

I think that's a really individual impact. I think for some it has had a negative impact, I think for others it has had very little impact. I think they do what they do... I'm talking about a veteran teacher who sort of rolls with the punches and says, "Okay, this is what it is, and I'm going to incorporate it into my teaching, because I love teaching and I'm a good teacher, and I'm just going to sort of take it in a stride." Then it hasn't had much impact. And then you unfortunately have a few who have seen it as moving backward and have let it affect them negatively.

In another instance, Participant P (Administrator) explained why frustration may be more prevalent among veteran teachers by stating:

Veteran teachers were taught a different way, so they may be more reluctant to change what they've been doing, it may be more uncomfortable to them, so they may not see the merits of a new way of doing things.

Clearly, there is a disconnect between teachers and administrators when it comes to the sense of frustration that has resulted from the implementation of standards-based

reforms. Such a disconnect is indicative of the sentiment of teachers that they are unable to effectively share their thoughts and concerns about the negative effects of standards-based reform with people in positions of authority.

The inability to effectively address their overwhelming sense of frustration has contributed to another factor in teacher disengagement. One of the clearest sources of frustration identified by teacher participants was the feeling of being essentially powerless to confront the educational establishment at any level regarding the negative consequences that had emerged from standards-based reforms.

All of the teachers who participated in this study believed that the larger education system was disinterested in the reality of their daily experiences. A veteran high school teacher with 15 years of experience, Participant I identified this sense of powerlessness by stating, “There is a feeling, that your future is in somebody else's hands. Your expertise is not valued by those in charge... I'm talking about the college board and the state. Somebody who's not in your classroom is making these changes for you to adopt, but they have no experience in what you do.” Participant G is a veteran social studies teacher who has gone to Albany to aid the New York State Department of Education in designing the new Regents exams. Even while acting in this position they acknowledged that teachers’ voices were marginalized. As a veteran high school teacher with 13 years of experience, Participant G stated, “I think that being able to write for the state gives me a little say, but not much. There were times that we've gone up to look at exams, proofread exams or critique exams. At that moment of time they weren't looking for our real input on the exam. They were looking for us to clean up grammar and little stuff like that. If we were to say, ‘This map is unclear,’ they're like, ‘Well that's the map



the author used to write'." The lack of available opportunities to share concerns about standards-based reforms was described bluntly by veteran high school teacher Participant A: "There are none. Who is going to listen? There's really a lack of opportunity. I guess I could write a strongly worded letter, but who would listen... There's never any follow-up with the people who are really in the trenches to ask, 'How does this work, how did you find our framework, how did you fit it into your lesson?'" Clearly, the aforementioned sense of frustration is intensified by the fact that teachers perceive that they have no means to redress their concerns. This feeling of futility becomes a catalyst for the likelihood of greater disengagement by teachers in the future.

### **Attempts to Mitigate Negative Effects**

The second sub-theme to emerge within the overarching theme of (Dis)engagement was the concerted effort on the part of teachers to mitigate the negative effects of standards-based reforms. Data analysis showed that teachers attempted to mitigate the negative effects of standards-based reforms through their desire to engage in high quality professional development experiences that are rooted in collaboration with their social studies colleagues. Alternatively, professional development that was not ongoing or merely focused on implementing changes associated with standards-based reforms in a non-collaborative format not only failed to alleviate the effects of standards-based reforms, but also added to social studies teachers' frustrations. Participant I, a veteran high school teacher with 25 years of experience, described the impact of ineffective professional development:

Basically, administrators alert us to the changes that are happening and they rely on us to implement them as best we can... When we're looking at parts of what the state is implementing, it's deadening in a way. It's not just upsetting or frustrating in that we don't know, it's that we're not confident of the changes and

how to implement them. It's also frustrating that we don't get to do much else in terms of professional development and in terms of how we can enliven our classrooms rather than just teach these new skills.

The senselessness of this “deadening” form of professional development was driven home by veteran high school teacher Participant A:

Although we spent some time during department meetings looking at some of the standards assessed on the Regents, it became a little overwhelming... I feel like at that point when we started looking at it, all of a sudden, the state instituted all these new changes and we had to start over looking at the prototypes for the 10th grade test all over again.

Analysis of collected data revealed that teachers saw opportunities for continuous collaboration as the key to effective professional development. Participant O (Administrator) explained how limited opportunities were the major constraint for meaningful collaboration: “I have seen my teachers, they are dedicating time after school to meet with each other, but they're finding the time on their own rather than having it provided for them during the structure of the school day. I think mostly it's out of necessity.” Veteran high school teacher Participant A echoed the idea that limited time was the primary barrier to meaningful collaboration with colleagues:

We don't really talk about best practices or how can we tackle a particular skill. We don't have those kinds of opportunities, so we don't have a chance to truly collaborate. I think since the new frameworks have been rolled out in the social studies, that people are really just grasping at straws and trying to survive on top of the regular everyday teaching requirements. Lesson planning, grading papers, assigning things and photocopying...we don't collaborate at all in terms of how we can tackle those C3 things.

While sufficient time for quality collaborative professional development may seem elusive, Participant P (Administrator) acknowledged the importance and benefits of providing continuous collaborative professional development:

Here, we tried to give teachers the opportunity to work with grade level colleagues to practice and to put into place the outcomes of those new standards.

So, whether it's lessons or assessments, we try and give teachers time to work together so that they actually can put it into action. Last year we arranged for several professional development opportunities just for the 9th grade teachers, and it started really early in the year.

The teachers who have been more open to the change, I think were more willing to collaborate because they were willing to jump in and say, "Okay, we have these changes, so now it's my job to adapt to them and I'm going all in and I'm going to make all this new stuff.... So, I may as well share with everybody so that they can see what I'm doing and I can see what I get from them as well."

When participants were asked how professional development opportunities had impacted their understanding of New York State Learning Standards and the ability to adapt practices to meet them, most of the participants acknowledged that their district had made a concerted effort to communicate changes and expectations for upcoming assessments.

Veteran high school teacher Participant A expressed this opinion in the following statement:

I feel like our department chair and our district have tried to give us opportunities, like when we had a renowned Advanced Placement teacher come to a department meeting. I feel like they attempt to give us some kind of critical thinking skill building activity that could perhaps transcend into all the different areas. But, having one of those opportunities a year is not enough. That's just one activity and one skill. Unless the skill your learning really speaks to you, a teacher isn't necessarily using it in their classroom. You also can't use one activity all the time, because it doesn't cover all the multiple skills.

Second year middle and high school teacher, Participant F, expressed a similar sentiment:

"Most of the P.D. I've done has been school given, so it's been designed by the department chairs from within in the district. I think one of the things that they've done very well, is helping us identify the expectations and skills that will be on the new assessments."

Although teachers believed the education system was generally disinterested in their personal experiences, and department administrators had failed to recognize the

pervasive sense of frustration, teachers believed that they had benefitted from planned opportunities for collaborative professional learning communities (PLCs). Participant F, a second-year teacher split between teaching at the middle school and high school levels explained, “I think, especially in this district, I have a lot of opportunities within the social studies department to ask questions and share my thoughts. I work with several different chair-people, so I have multiple sounding boards.” Untenured teachers within this particular district are contractually required to regularly meet with administrators and each other. By forming PLC’s, untenured teachers have an ongoing opportunity to share concerns and frustrations with professional social studies practitioners, and these opportunities have left them with a positive impression. While such opportunities may be the result of formal, contractual obligations, they need not be. In fact, most participants explained that collaboration with other social studies professionals in any form helped to mitigate the isolated, stress-filled experiences of modern social studies teachers.

Participant F explained:

It’s just helpful working through all these issues in small groups and large groups, with just a lot of collaboration. Just this week we had a meeting between the high schools, and we talked about the different methods that we as teachers use to achieve those skills and help the students dive into what the framework is asking us for. I thought that was immensely helpful.

The minute the teachers were sharing, I started thinking, "How can I bring this into my own classroom?" Because they're showing it works, it's addressing the skills that the kids need to develop over the course of this year...Let me start developing a lesson that builds those skills and tries this different activity for the kids. I think without PD...it'd be a lot more difficult to develop some things, other than to turn and talk or to read the primary source and annotate and discuss, which is a great thing that we're able to do in this district.

When asked what their ideal vision of professional development would look like,

Participant P (Administrator) stated:

I think one of the things that I would like to incorporate in any professional development program that I created would be the opportunity for teachers to A. work together and B. to visit each other's classrooms. I think, unfortunately, oftentimes teachers are isolated... People do great things and then other teachers in the departments don't know that they're doing great things. So, I think one of the things that I would want to do is to be able to round-robin people to be able to go in and see what other people are doing.

A veteran high school teacher with 21 years of experience, Participant B (Group 2) summed up the importance of collaboration: "It's all about support. I need a lot of support from other teachers with great ideas and I need more time. That is the biggest thing."

While the primary avenue to circumvent the negative effects of standards-based reforms was to engage in opportunities for collaborative professional development, there was another avenue identified. Analysis of collected data found that all of the teachers interviewed for this study acknowledged a desire to circumvent the pressures caused by standards-based reforms. In order to avoid the numerous negative effects of standards-based reform, teachers readily discussed seeking refuge in grades and elective courses that do not culminate in standardized exams. Such opportunities are coveted because they are free of the anxieties caused by standards-based reforms; leaving room for creativity on both the part of the teacher and student.

As a middle and high school teacher with 14 years of experience, Participant D explained the benefits of courses free from standardized assessments:

The thing that I love about the middle school and teaching in the middle school is the lack of pressure to get everything squeezed in before the Regents exam. Not having a Regents exam takes some of that pressure off and it allows for a lot more hands-on activities and a lot more fun to be had with the kids, which they actually enjoy. You'd be able to take time. I never felt like I was rushing through a unit to make sure that I got it done. And if it was a unit that wasn't particularly

interesting, there was a good way to find an activity to make it interesting for them.

Participant E's 12 years of middle school and high school experience led him to concur with the statement, "There's a little bit of extra time in the middle school to do things that I thought were appropriate for the needs of the kids and to make them more successful for not only this year but the years after that." When asked how teaching specific grade levels or course assignments affected their experiences implementing standards-based reforms, veteran high school teacher Participant A explained:

Although I don't miss 9th grade in terms of teaching that grade level because of the immaturity that I just did not find enjoyable, I loved teaching 9<sup>th</sup> grade because it's only a district final. It was just kind of a final that the teachers made up themselves. That was awesome because then I really could just spend as much or as little time on something as I wanted.

A veteran high school teacher with 25 years of experience, Participant I described how elective courses offered room for both teacher and student creativity:

So, there's one elective course that I teach called Hands-on History, which are all the ideas that I would have loved to implement in my classrooms for regular Regents kids. But this class has given me an outlet for all of those ideas to use in this one class where kids really get to learn through hands-on activities.

I like to think of myself as a creative teacher, so there's always this enthusiasm. During the school year, I look for sparks to come up about how I could change my practice or what new projects to do. For instance, when I learned about Hamilton on Broadway, and that sparked the idea of, "Well, why don't we have the kids make a rap about a historical figure?" And it's become one of the projects that they really like, and they really grab onto in that elective class. So, the enthusiasm for those sparks of an idea, have been high throughout my career. But for teaching the regents level classes, I could say, actually, in the last five years or so, I'm no longer making those changes to engage students. I'm making changes to implement the skills. I tried to put a creative spin on it, but invariably, it's something that can't be spun into fun.

Middle school teachers also shared a desire for teaching elective courses that don't culminate with a Regents exam or other standardized assessment. Veteran middle

school teacher Participant K (Group 4) stated, “There are so many historical social studies topics out there that we don't even get a minute or a second to cover. They are extremely interesting and exciting. Students have an interest in learning about more than their core social studies class.” First year middle school teacher Participant L concurred:

About the electives, I'm totally in agreement. I'm all about giving more choice, especially in the middle school. I think that'd be great because there's so many little things, like women playing baseball during World War II when soldiers went off to war, or the color barrier in different fields, things like that, where you really can't pause to take the time to investigate those topics in the regular social studies class because you have to adhere to the framework.

Participant F, a second-year middle and high school teacher explained:

There are so many things that I find interesting that I know the kids would like, but you can't do it in the regular social studies classroom. So, it puts more of an emphasis on these extra (elective) classes. But how many can the school really offer? Because you still have to teach other regular social studies classes.

Administrators interviewed for this study reflexively explained that there were very few instances where teachers directly asked to “get out of teaching something.” However, the desire to teach social studies elective courses that were not constrained by standards-based reforms had not been lost on administrators. They acknowledged a desire to teach elective courses as a common sentiment found across each of the schools in the district.

Participant O (Administrator) explained that teachers in their department requested to teach established elective courses, stating “Teachers bring it (their request) to me... they ask to teach it and we try to run with it... and fit Criminology or Psychology in their schedule.” Participant P (Administrator) noticed personal interest and enthusiasm as major factors that spurred teachers in their department to request the creation and development of new electives:

Usually personal interest drives the creation of new elective course offerings in our department. They may have heard from another teacher in another district that they offered a certain course, and it's something that they would like to teach here. Sometimes it's a kid that sparked an idea for them. Sometimes they see a need, or they've heard kids talking. Or, if when they went to school there was a course that they took that they wish that they could bring here...It's a combination of things.

Analysis of collected data shows that social studies teachers, with varying lengths of experience at both the middle and high school levels, attempt to mitigate the negative effects of standards-based reforms through two distinct alternatives. The first course of action to mitigate the negative impact of standards-based reforms was to gain support through quality professional development opportunities that are based in collaborative exercises with social studies colleagues. The second alternative employed by teachers was to mitigate the negative effects of standards-based reforms by teaching electives and grade levels that do not have standardized assessments. By seeking out opportunities for electives and other “pressure-free” social studies courses, teachers disengaged from traditional social studies courses in order to find opportunities to cover content with a level of creativity that is impossible under the constraints of standards-based reforms.

Data analysis identified three overarching themes: Ideal Social Studies Education, Implementation and (Dis)Engagement. Within the first overarching theme of an Ideal Social Studies Education two sub-themes emerged to reveal teacher perceptions about the goals and components of a comprehensive social studies education. Within the second overarching theme Implementation, the sub-themes that emerged identified structural changes to social studies education as well as positive and negative effects of standards-based reforms. Comprised of the two sub-themes Breakdown of Communication and Attempts to Mitigate Standards-Based Reform’s Effects, the third overarching theme of



(Dis)Engagement detailed the actions that social studies teachers take as a result of standards-based reform implementation. A detailed discussion of these findings according to research questions takes place in Chapter 5.

### **Summary**

The first research question in this study investigated secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of federal, state and local education policy on social studies education between the years 2000 and 2020. The analysis of data found that standards-based reforms resulted in a structural shift within the field of social studies education that increased levels of frustration among teachers. Teachers believed that the structural shift within social studies resulted in a number of negative consequences that contributed to their sense of frustration. The most frustrating negative consequences noted by participants were an increased focus on performance-based results, a minimization of historical content, a lack of available standards-aligned resources and a general lack of knowledge about the reforms. Each of these negative consequences was indicative of a communication breakdown that negatively affected a teacher's ability to either fully grasp standards-based reforms or effectively voice concerns about them. This communication breakdown was highlighted by the different perceptions about standards-based reforms held by new and veteran teachers. While new teachers shared the same general concerns as their veteran counterparts, they were largely more optimistic when it came to the discussion of standards-based reforms. Increased opportunities for communication through recently completed teacher preparatory programs and regular professional dialogue appear to have made new teachers more confident about their comprehension of and ability to implement standards-based reforms.

The second research question in this study investigated secondary social studies teachers' perceptions regarding the impact of standards-based reforms on their personal professional practices. Analysis of the data found that teachers seek to regain a sense of autonomy that was lost due to the implementation of standards-based reforms. In order to escape the negative consequences of standards-based reforms, social studies teachers (particularly veteran teachers) desire to retreat into courses and grades not constrained by standardized assessments. Analysis of the data also found that teachers desired opportunities for collaborative professional development in order to manage courses and grades still impacted by standards-based reforms. Participants believed that by collaborating with other social studies professionals, teachers could develop organic solutions to the problems imposed by standards-based reform implementation in a collegial and pressure-free atmosphere.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This dissertation presented a grounded theory study of social studies teachers working in a Long Island central high school district. It explored teacher perceptions of standards-based reforms' impact on social studies education. Analysis of the data collected from focus groups, follow-up one-on-one interviews and lesson plans revealed three key findings that emerged across the sub-groups of new and veteran teachers at both the middle and high school levels. There were four major findings for this study. First, standards-based reforms negatively impacted social studies education by structurally shifting it away from the ideal of a comprehensive social studies education. Second, a communication breakdown between classroom teachers, administrators and the larger education system has resulted from teachers' overwhelming frustration with standards-based reform implementation. Third, social studies teachers seek to escape the negative effects of standards-based reforms by retreating into courses and grades that are not constrained by standardized assessments. Fourth, since teachers (particularly veteran teachers), perceived the impact of standards-based reforms negatively, they desire opportunities for high-quality professional development that are rooted in collaboration with their colleagues. This chapter will discuss the major findings of the data analysis with regard to each research question, along with a discussion of the findings in the context of existing literature reviewed in chapter 2. This chapter closes with recommendations for future practice and research.

## **Implications of Findings: Research Question 1**

The first major discovery from this study was that federal, state and local standards-based education reforms caused a shift within social studies education that increased levels of frustration among teachers. The modern era of education reform began in earnest in 2002 when No Child Left Behind provided federal funding to states in return for institutional accountability through student performance (Bush, 2004). By 2009, Race to the Top provided federal grants in return for the adoption of performance-based evaluations and common learning standards that had emerged out of the National Governors Association (RTTT Executive Summary, 2009). The Common Core Learning Standards provided benchmarks for integrating English Language Arts and Mathematics skills across all subjects in order to produce “college and career ready students.” In 2010, New York State enacted the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) for all teachers and principals (NYS Education Department, 2010). Finally, a revised New York State K-12 Social Studies Framework was adopted in 2014. The framework combined the New York State Common Core Standards for Literacy and Writing and the revised New York State Learning Standards for Social Studies (NYS Social Studies Framework, 2015). Participants explained that the implementation of these standards-based reforms between 2000 and 2020 caused a structural shift in social studies education that pushed the modern social studies classroom further away from their ideal vision of a comprehensive social studies education. This discovery affirmed existing literature by revealing that contemporary social studies teachers identified democratic equality, and social efficiency as distinct goals of an ideal social studies education (Labaree, 1997). However, the implementation of standards-based reforms has taken social studies on a

trajectory away from such an ideal. As a result, the sense of frustration that has developed amongst teachers is emblematic of what critical theory would point to as an uneven distribution of power within the structure of social studies education (Jermier, 1998; Carr, 2000; Linvill, 2008; Journell, 2011; Corradetti, 2019).

For many participants, standards-based reform implementation came to represent a movement away from the ideal vision of a comprehensive social studies education. All participants in this study, including new and veteran teachers as well as administrators, recognized the theoretical benefits of incorporating standards-based reading, writing and higher order thinking skills in the social studies curriculum. At the same time, teachers also repeatedly expressed a desire to make social studies “come alive” for students by incorporating historical content. This study found that a tension had emerged between the desire of social studies teachers to make historical content come alive and standards-based reforms’ goals of fostering reading, writing and critical thinking skills. However, the idea that educators must choose between fostering standards-based skills and making history come alive may be a false assumption. Both standards-based reforms and the desire to make history come alive share the ultimate purpose of deepening student understanding. Participants explained that sharing historical content in a manner that makes it come alive “elevates student interest” and “personalizes historical information.” The incorporation of higher order thinking in social studies deepens a student’s understanding of ideas to the point where they are capable of applying knowledge in and out of the academic setting (Wiggins & McTighe, 2012). Unfortunately, instead of perceiving standards-based reforms as being complimentary to their goal of deepening student understanding, many teachers (particularly veteran teachers) view them as a hinderance. The prevalence of

standards-based skills on standardized assessments has made them a major focus of daily classroom activities. Participants explained that due to the addition of reading, writing, and critical thinking skills to the existing historical content, there was simply not enough time to cover the entire social studies curriculum (Kenna & Russell, 2014; Vogler & Virtue, 2007). Accordingly, all of the participants lamented that an unintended consequence of standards-based reform implementation has been the fact that in an effort to focus on skills measured on standardized tests, they are compelled to cut historical content (Eskelsen-Garcia, 2015; Libresco, 2015). In the eyes of teachers, the pervasive focus on “teaching to the test” is the most destructive consequence of the structural shift in social studies that resulted from the implementation of standards-based reform (Brooks, Libresco & Plonczak, 2007; Eskelsen-Garcia, 2015; Libresco, 2015; Serure, 2018).

Many of the social studies teachers provided vivid descriptions about the frustrations that resulted from their attempts to promote the new English Language Arts skills at the heart of standards-based reforms and assessments. The difficulty that teachers experienced promoting standards-based literacy skills stemmed from their admitted lack of expertise in that area (Serure, 2018; Singer et al., 2018). Additionally, most of the participants cited a frustration with having to sort through an abundance of online databases, textbooks, and other social studies curriculum resources that never seem to fully align with standards-based reforms (Watt, 2004; Gilles et. al., 2013; Scott and Suh, 2015).

A second major discovery of this grounded theory study was that these repeated educational changes negatively impacted social studies education by leading to a communication breakdown between classroom teachers, administrators and the larger education system. The communication breakdown was most evident when it came to the

awareness of administrators and government policy makers about the frustrations that teachers experienced as a result of standards-based reform implementation. Teachers were passionate about their collective sense of overwhelming frustration. Teachers conceded that their frustration stemmed from the fact that they possessed little more than a superficial knowledge of Next Generation Learning Standards, C3 Inquiries and the revised New York State Social Studies Framework. Teachers illustrated their lack of knowledge about the current standards and framework by providing statements such as, “I’m just not familiar with them at all.” Since some of the reforms directing modern social studies have been in effect for well over a decade, teachers’ broad unfamiliarity with the current framework and standards is evidence that the educational establishment has failed to effectively communicate the changes brought about by standards-based reform to teachers at the classroom level (Kenna & Russell, 2014; Serure, 2018).

When teachers in this study were asked to discuss their difficulty promoting specific standards-based skills, they emphasized their frustration by repeatedly using terms like, “not prepared at all,” “not really trained” and “extremely overwhelmed” (Kenna & Russell, 2014; Serure, 2018; Singer, 2018). Conversely, when asked to assess the capability of social studies teachers to implement changes that resulted from the adoption of standards-based reforms, administrators asserted that teachers were essentially competent due to the amount of time that had been allotted for discussing the topic during meetings. Such a disconnect between the perceptions of teachers and administrators is evidence that teachers do not have open lines for meaningful communication with educators in higher levels of authority. The absence of open communication channels essentially prevents teachers from sharing their anxieties and apprehensions that are related

to reform implementation. Consequently, administrators are precluded from fully comprehending the realities of teachers' frustrations and their ability to provide properly targeted professional development is impeded.

All of the teacher participants expressed that their growing sense of frustration has been augmented by the idea that "no one is going to listen." Such disempowerment epitomizes the notion that classroom practitioners have "lost their voice" (Corradetti, 2019; Libresco, 2015). As a result, teachers' perceptions indicate an imbalanced power structure within social studies education that is irrational and unjust (Jermier, 1998; Carr, 2000; Linvill, 2008; Journell, 2011; Corradetti, 2019). Therefore, the lack of ongoing meaningful communication between teachers and administrators has resulted in what can be summed up as an "us versus them" mentality (Anderson et al., 2014; Richards, 2014).

### **Implications of Findings: Research Question 2**

When determining how standards-based reforms impacted the personal practices of social studies teachers, this grounded theory study made two major discoveries. The first major discovery was that social studies teachers seek to escape the negative effects of standards-based reforms by retreating into courses and grades that are not constrained by standardized assessments. This study discovered that teachers were disheartened by the fact that much of their curriculum and daily classroom activities were essentially dictated by recent changes to the social studies framework and learning standards. Veteran teachers were particularly aware that they had lost the autonomy they previously held in pedagogy decisions (Thornton, 2005). The use of critical theory as the theoretical framework for this study identified the uneven power structure that dictated standards-based reforms (Jermier, 1998; Carr, 2000; Linvill, 2008; Journell, 2011; Corradetti, 2019). Critical theory's



purpose for acknowledging an imbalance of power is to act as a catalyst for the fructifying effect of liberation (Horkheimer, 1972; Corradetti, 2019). Veteran teachers who participated in this study repeatedly explained their frustrations about successive waves of standards-based reforms in social studies education over the past 20 years. Although they desired to focus on content and employ constructivist activities to spur student interest, social studies teachers felt handcuffed by the current standard-based reform era's focus on developing literacy and critical thinking skills. Having experienced a system breakdown in communication, teachers essentially experienced a sense of isolation that left them powerless to confront concerns related to standards-based reforms. This study discovered that teachers were already unwittingly seeking liberation by self-selecting grade levels and courses that limit the impact of standards-based reforms. Participants who taught at the middle school level were unguarded about the freedom they had to spend more time on constructivist activities and content that they believed was engaging to students (Libresco, 2015). While middle school teachers acknowledged the same negative consequences that resulted from standards-based reforms as their colleagues who taught at the high school level, they explained that the impact at their level was much less severe. When asked about the negative consequences of standards-based reforms, teachers who currently taught at both the high school and middle school levels explained that the middle school level was "more enjoyable" because "there was no pressure to teach to the test" and there was "time to make it interesting" for students by focusing on relevant content and employing constructivist activities (Brooks, Libresco & Plonczak, 2007; Eskelsen-Garcia, 2015).

Another means of regaining the autonomy that was lost due to standards-based reform implementation was for teachers to seek to teach elective courses that are unfettered

by mandated standardized assessments (Thornton, 2005; Libresco, 2015). All of the teachers who participated in this study provided blunt assessments of how standards-based reforms impacted the courses that culminated in a standardized assessment. Most of the teachers used terms such as “boring,” “monotonous” and “dry” to illustrate the effects of standards-based reforms in the modern social studies classroom. Administrators provided a much more tepid acknowledgement of teacher frustrations by stating, “I think, in general, it (standards-based reforms) has been somewhat detrimental to their morale. I think that they probably feel that there is not a lot of wiggle room for them to devote to their own passion.” The difference between teachers’ lived experiences and administrators’ assessments regarding frustrations that resulted from standards-based reform implementation left teachers with the impression that administrators are indifferent to their plight. This contributed to an “us versus them mentality” amongst teachers, compounded frustrations and resulted in a sense that they were being micromanaged (Anderson et al., 2014; Richards, 2014). Conversely, those same teachers were downright gleeful when describing the positive experience of teaching elective courses. They revealed a collective preference for elective courses by using terms such as “exciting,” “creative,” “passionate” and “I love teaching that class.” Social studies teachers explained that electives effectively became outlets for all of the ideas, activities and enthusiasm that have become less common as a result of standards-based reforms’ focus on literacy skill building.

The era of standards-based reforms from 2000 to 2020, spanned No Child Left Behind, Race to the Top, Common Core and a revised New York State Social Studies Framework. These standards-based reforms promoted literacy and critical thinking skills in the hopes that they would develop college and career ready students. The second major

discovery regarding the effect of subsequent waves of standards-based reforms at the federal, state and local levels on social studies teachers' personal practices was that teachers desired opportunities to collaborate with other social studies professionals (Gilles et. al., 2013). While all of the new teachers interviewed in this study identified the same negative consequences of standards-based reform implementation as veteran teacher participants, veterans described standards-based reforms in much stronger negative terms than teachers who recently entered the profession. The most common negative consequence identified by participants was a shift in focus away from teaching historical content in favor of building literacy and critical thinking skills. However, there was a clear difference in tone when new and veteran teachers discussed the multiple challenges of implementing standards-based reforms. Unlike veteran teachers, new teachers were generally more optimistic in their evaluation of standards-based reforms. This can partially be explained by the fact that new teachers were trained in preparatory programs geared towards reform implementation or simply that they had not had enough teaching experience to draw different conclusions. It appears that continuous collaboration in a collegial atmosphere has resulted in new teachers being less critical of standards-based reforms. New teachers regularly cited positive benefits of both formally collaborating with administrators and informally meeting with other social studies teachers. In the district where this study was conducted, new teachers are contractually required to attend regular meetings with administrators and other non-tenured teachers. New teachers repeatedly described collaboration with their colleagues as an indispensable coping mechanism for understanding and implementing standards-based reforms. Collaboration was not solely beneficial for new teachers. In the district where this study was conducted, administrators

reserved time throughout the school year for 9<sup>th</sup> grade teachers to meet, discuss and develop strategies and materials for implementing the new social studies framework. Veteran teachers who participated in these meetings lauded the benefits of ongoing, collaborative professional development opportunities (Gilles, et. al., 2013). The greatest benefit identified by participants who attended these 9<sup>th</sup> grade meetings was a collegial crowdsourcing of lesson plans and assessments. Both new and old teachers who participated in this particular collaborative event expressed appreciation for the cooperation and support that they experienced. While productive collaborative efforts may be prescribed through formal professional development opportunities, that does not necessarily need to be the case (Gilles, et. al., 2013). All of the teachers in this study agreed that if they could not take part in school or district created collaborative professional development that promoted the sharing of best practices regarding literacy and critical thinking skills, they would simply prefer time designated to seek out opportunities to meet with colleagues on their own.

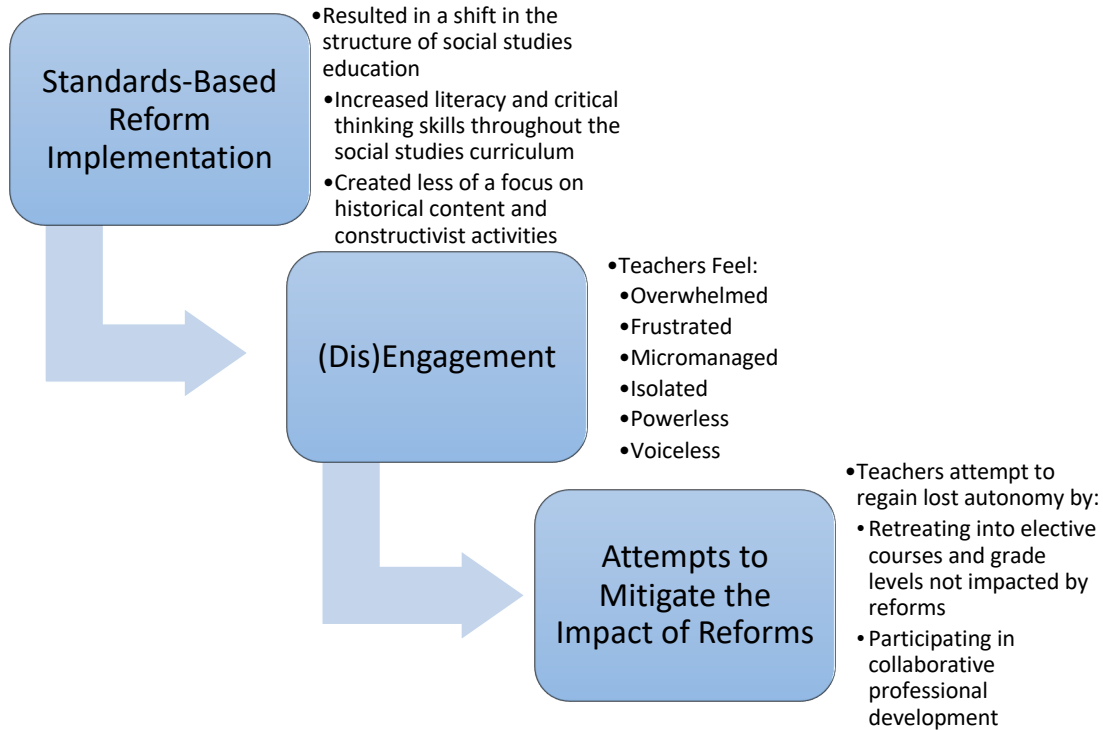
### **New Theory**

Grounded theory research produces findings that become the basis of a new theory that provides deeper insight into a given area of study (Strauss and Corbin, 1998). The findings and discussion of this grounded theory study led to the creation of a new theory regarding social studies teachers' perceptions of standards-based reform implementation. In order to fully understand the context of the new theory, it is necessary to examine the findings of this study in the context of existing theory regarding the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies.

The present study confirms many aspects of existing theory, challenges others and adds to areas yet to be addressed. Teachers who participated in this study confirmed the findings of Brooks, Libresco & Plonczak (2007). They had found that rigid testing programs and prescribed curriculums resulted in the loss of constructivist activities and meaningful teacher interactions. Similar to Anderson (2014), this study found that teachers had settled into an “us versus them mentality” that was the result of a top down hierarchy limiting teacher autonomy. The current study also concurred with Serure’s (2018) findings that showed teachers overwhelmingly supported the idea that contemporary social studies education should foster critical thinking skills but had failed to effectively communicate historical content. The current study supported another aspect of existing theory by echoing Singer’s (2018) assertion that social studies teachers struggled to promote literacy skills in which they had no expertise. Finally, this study confirmed Gilles et. al. (2013) and Scott and Suh’s (2015) findings that social studies teachers struggle with available social studies materials and resources that do not fully align with adopted standards.

While the present study generally supported existing literature, the findings of this study challenged particular aspects as well. Richards’ 2014 study found that the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) resulted in teacher discouragement and a distrust of the educational establishment. No such sentiment related to APPR was found amongst the teachers and administrators who participated in this study. On the contrary, unlike Richards’ 2014 study, participants in this study stated clearly that APPR was not a factor that impacted them professionally. Multiple participants repeatedly made statements that APPR “was not a factor” and had “zero impact.” One participant went so far as to

respond by asking, “Is that even a thing anymore?” Clearly, the impact of APPR has changed as the role of APPR has evolved over the las half decade.



*Figure 1.* The Impact of Standards-Based Reforms on Teacher Autonomy

The new theory which resulted from this study fills a gap in existing theories pertaining to the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies education. Existing literature has failed to address how social studies teachers attempt to exercise autonomy in an era characterized by the implementation of federal, state and local standards-based reforms. Figure 1. is a graphic representation of the theory about standards-based reforms’ impact on teacher autonomy that emerged from this study’s findings. According to this theory, the current state of social studies education, which has been shaped by standards-based reform implementation, has left social studies teachers frustrated and overwhelmed by their utter lack of autonomy. Meanwhile, the underlying imbalance of power within the

existing structure of social studies education has left teachers with no effective means to redress their grievances. As Figure 1. illustrates, having been essentially isolated and rendered powerless, social studies teachers seek to regain some level of autonomy through two distinct means. Social studies teachers either seek to alleviate their frustration by regaining their voice through meaningful collaboration with colleagues or escape the effects of reforms altogether by retreating to courses or grade levels where they are liberated from the oppressive forces of the educational establishment.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Due to the nature of qualitative research, the small sample size of this study may limit the external validity of its findings. According to Johnson (1997) the external validity of qualitative research is limited because its goal is often to study what makes a particular group or circumstance unique. However, when informed of the size and setting of the group that is being researched, a reasonable assumption can be made as to the extent to which the findings can be applied elsewhere. Replication logic poses the possibility that if the same research is applied to alternate settings and similar results are found, then one can generalize external validity of this study's findings to a larger population (Johnson, 1997). Additionally, the sample chosen for this study was purposeful and all participants work as teachers or administrators in the same district where the researcher is employed as a teacher. Since the researcher facilitated both the focus groups and one-on-one interviews, it may have had an influence on participants' responses. However, participants were not subordinate of the researcher and in no way could be penalized or disciplined for the candidness of their answers or their willingness (or lack thereof) to participate in the study. Another limitation is that this study took place over the course of five months during the

2019-2020 school year. Since contemporary political forces are constantly changing and new education reforms are constantly being implemented, the findings of this study may be specific to this one particular snapshot in time.

### **Recommendations for Future Practice**

For the past five decades, educational policy makers at the national, state and local levels have adopted various standards-based reforms in an effort to increase student performance. The implementation of these reforms in social studies has resulted in a flurry of new policies that include mandates, new learning standards, a new curriculum framework, and standardized assessments (NYS Social Studies Framework, 2015; NYS K-12 Social Studies Framework, 2019). As a result of changes that have been introduced during the era of standards-based reforms, teachers experience high levels of frustration and isolation that could have a profound negative impact on their ability to provide students with a comprehensive social studies education.

The findings of this study reveal that educational leaders must take steps to restore a sense of autonomy to social studies classroom teachers. Teachers believe that standards-based reforms micromanage their professional practices. This perception reinforces an “us versus them mentality” with the rest of the educational establishment (Anderson et al., 2014). It fuels their belief that teachers’ voices are not heard. Having perceived that they are essentially powerless and cannot engage in a constructive dialogue, teachers (including those with the most experience) seek to retreat into courses and grade levels where their expertise is often wasted.

One of the most significant steps that could be taken to restore a sense of autonomy amongst social studies teachers would be for the educational establishment to engage



educators with opportunities for constructive dialogue. All of the participants in this study believed that teachers did not have enough input in the decision-making process that produced Common Core, APPR, Next Generation Learning Standards, C3 Inquiries or the new NYS Social Studies Framework. As the next wave of education reform begins, policy makers have already recognized that they would benefit from incorporating social studies teacher input into the development of new policy. In fact, Engage New York (2020) listed 19 social studies professionals as members of the New York State Department of Education's Social Studies Content Advisory Panel designated to provide a wide array of perspectives in the development of new education policies. However, the benefits of including feedback from social studies professionals is limited to the number of individuals that are invited to share their experience-based input. Therefore, a concerted effort to represent a broader cross section of social studies experiences from districts across the state should be undertaken. The Social Studies Content Advisory Panel members should meet regularly with local social studies educators in order to elicit opinions that would be instrumental in shaping future education policy. Including a large number of social studies teachers from across the state in the process of developing educational policy would insulate new policies from the criticism that they are disconnected from the realities of contemporary classroom application. While teachers in this study agreed with many goals of standards-based reforms, they were frustrated and confused by their practical application and inaccessible jargon. The further inclusion of teachers as part of the developmental process for education policy would make future education policy more user friendly and accessible to both educators and students. There are a variety of means by which the educational establishment could incorporate teachers in the formation of education policy.

At the state level, canvassing a vast array of teachers for their opinions and ideas regarding the development of new education policy would provide a voice to a large number of educators. At the local district and school level, committees could be formed to provide teachers with the opportunity for a deeper and continuous dialogue. Attempts to increase opportunities for teachers to communicate their opinions as educational practitioners, as well as their ideas and concerns, would provide them with a sense of control over the structure and direction of social studies education (Thornton, 2005).

Another recommendation for future practices that would increase a sense of self-efficacy and autonomy amongst social studies teachers is to provide opportunities for teachers to collaborate with peers as part of a continuous program for professional development. This study recognizes that there is a limited need for basic informational sessions of professional development. If done regularly, such occasions are viewed as monotonous, authoritative and ineffective (Gilles et. al., 2013). By embedding collaborative opportunities in structured professional learning communities (PLCs) within social studies departments, teachers will regain a sense of autonomy and efficacy that has diminished. By increasing a teacher's ability to exert increased control over their classrooms and activities, their frustration will decrease. A decrease in social studies teachers' frustration, by developing open lines of communication and providing collaborative opportunities, would result in a greater ability to provide a comprehensive and thorough social studies education.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Future studies could replicate the methodology and interview protocol employed in this study with teachers from different school districts in different settings in order to

produce a larger body of research. While the findings of this study are narrow in that they apply to secondary social studies teachers, future studies could investigate the impact of standards-based reforms on populations of teachers who teach different subjects and alternate pedagogical experiences. Then, this research could be useful for the development of future educational policies that address secondary education as a whole.

The findings of this study could also become the basis of a larger quantitative study that measures social studies teachers' attitudes and frustrations regarding the implementation of standards-based reforms. A broad-based quantitative study of social studies teachers' perceptions of standards-based reforms that is based on the findings of this study would be helpful in determining the present study's transferability.

Additionally, since new teachers saw the implementation of standards-based reforms in less negative terms than veteran teachers, it would be helpful for future studies to inquire about the efficacy of different types of teacher preparatory programs. Studies could be conducted to identify aspects of teacher preparatory programs that are most beneficial to the successful understanding and implementation of standards-based reforms. The findings of that research could then be incorporated into professional development to help veteran teachers.

## **Conclusion**

The discoveries made from this study reveal teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies education. As the recommendations for future policy suggest, these findings highlight the need for open lines of communication between social studies teachers and the rest of the education system, as well as increased teacher autonomy. The existing structure that has adopted and

implemented standards-based reforms over the past 20 years has produced a feeling of frustration and helplessness amongst social studies teachers. As a result, social studies teachers (particularly veteran teachers) seek to escape the authority of standards-based reforms by retreating into elective classes and grade levels free of standardized assessments. If the structure within social studies education that produced these effects is permitted to exist, social studies education will continue to suffer as its most experienced and senior teachers seek to leave the core social studies courses. Instead, we must allow teachers to regain their voice and exercise greater control over the direction and daily activities of social studies education. The research literature on the impact of standards-based reforms is limited when it comes to the lived experiences of teachers. The existing gaps between the philosophy that led to the creation of standards-based reforms and the practical application of those reforms must continue to be addressed. Only by including the perceptions of everyday classroom teachers in future education reforms can the social studies teacher community regain a sense of autonomy and attain their ideal vision for a comprehensive social studies education.

## APPENDICES

### Appendix A: Request to Conduct Research (Superintendent)



[REDACTED]  
Superintendent of Schools  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Dear [REDACTED]:

I am currently a Doctoral student at St. John's University and I am writing to request your support in conducting a research study to investigate secondary social studies teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms between 2000 and 2020. This study will help to better inform educational leadership about the current state of secondary social studies education as well as the ability of teachers to provide a comprehensive social studies education.

I am reaching out to you to request permission to conduct one-on-one interviews and conduct focus groups consisting of social studies teachers and administrators during the 2019-2020 school year. For both the interviews and focus groups, teachers will be given a pseudonym in order to maintain confidentiality. The results of this research study will be shared with the Superintendent of Schools.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request. If you would like to grant permission, please email the approval to [william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu). If you have any questions please do not hesitate to contact me at (516) 532-7403, or my faculty sponsor, Dr. Catherine DiMartino at 718-990-2585. The results of this study will inform educational leadership about the practical consequences of standards-based reforms on social studies education.

Respectfully

William Murphy

## Appendix B: Informed Consent for Participating in Interviews



### Invitation and Consent to Participate in a Research Study (Interview)

Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study to investigate secondary social studies teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms between 2000 and 2020. I will be conducting this study as part of my doctoral dissertation for St. John's University, Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership.

Your participation in the research study will consist of three semi-structured, one-on-one interviews that will last between 30-60 minutes. Digital recordings of the interviews will be made so that the data can be transcribed and analyzed. Pseudonyms will be used during the transcription such as "Participant 1," for all proper names in order to maintain confidentiality. All consent forms will be kept separate from the transcription data to ensure that names and identities of all participants will not be known by anyone other than the researcher.

There are no perceived risks associated with your participation beyond those of everyday life. While there is no direct benefit for your participation in the study, it is reasonable to expect that a result of your participation will provide researchers and practitioners with information about the impact of standards-based reforms in social studies education. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you prefer, you may skip or refuse to answer any question(s). At any point during the study, you have the right to end your participation without penalty. All responses and feedback will be kept confidential throughout the entire research study. This study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools, the Principal, and the Instructional Review Board of St. John's University.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at [william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu), or call 516-532-7403. You may contact my faculty advisor at [dimartic@stjohns.edu](mailto:dimartic@stjohns.edu) or call 718-990-2585. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at 718-0990-1955, or [digiuser@stjohns.edu](mailto:digiuser@stjohns.edu).

Thank you, I truly appreciate your time and participation in this study.

Respectfully,

William Murphy

#### Agreement to Participate:

Consent: Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participants Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C: Informed Consent for Participating in the Focus Group



Dear Participant,

You are being invited to participate in a research study to investigate secondary social studies teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms between 2000 and 2020. This study will help to better inform educational leadership about the current state of secondary social studies education as well as the ability of teachers to provide a comprehensive social studies education. I will be conducting this study as part of my doctoral dissertation for St. John's University, Department of Administration and Instructional Leadership.

This portion of the research study will consist of a focus group interview lasting between 30 and 60 minutes. Digital recordings of the focus group responses will be made so that the data can be transcribed and analyzed. Pseudonyms will be used during the transcription such as "Participant 1", for all proper names in order to maintain confidentiality.

All consent forms will be kept separate from the transcription data to ensure that names and identities of all participants will not be known by anyone other than the researcher. Participation in this study is voluntary. If you prefer, you may skip or refuse to answer any question(s). At any point during the study, you have the right to end your participation without penalty. All responses and feedback will be kept confidential throughout the entire research study. This study has been approved by the Superintendent of Schools, the Principal, and the Instructional Review Board of St. John's University.

If you have any questions or concerns, please email me at [william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu](mailto:william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu), or call 516-532-7403. You may contact my faculty advisor at [dimartic@stjohns.edu](mailto:dimartic@stjohns.edu), or call 718-990-2585. If you have questions concerning your rights as a human participant, you may contact the University's Human Subjects Review Board at St. John's University, specifically Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe at 718-990-1955, or [digiuser@stjohns.edu](mailto:digiuser@stjohns.edu).

Thank you, I truly appreciate your time and participation in this study

Respectfully,

William Murphy

### Agreement to Participate:

Consent: Your signature below indicates that you have decided to volunteer as a research participant for this study and that you have read and understood the information provided above. You will be given a signed and dated copy of this form to keep.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Researcher Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix D: Focus Group Protocol

### Focus Group Protocol

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study focus group. This study is investigating teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. This study will help to better inform educational leadership about the current state of secondary social studies education as well as the ability of teachers to provide a comprehensive social studies education. Before we begin, is there anyone who does not wish to participate in this focus group? If any of you decide at any point during the focus group that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During the focus group I am going to ask a few questions. After each question is asked, I will ask that each participant share their ideas in discussion with both myself and the other group members. The entire focus group session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. The only people who will know what is said are those of us in this room during the focus group session. When the results of the focus group are shared none of your names will be included. Does anyone have any questions before we begin?

### Focus Group Questions:

- 1) What is your vision of what social studies education should look like?
- 2) In your opinion, how have standards-based reforms impacted the overall social studies curriculum? Can you provide specific examples?
- 3) How would you describe the impact of standards-based reforms on the role of teachers in social studies education?
- 4) How have your personal teaching practices changed over the course of your career? Can you provide examples?
- 5) How would you describe the impact of standards-based reforms on the general experiences of your students in your social studies classes?
- 6) In your opinion how have standards-based reforms affected your personal vision of social studies?

### Closing:

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. Your feedback helps to support my research study as well as our ability to provide a comprehensive and effective social studies education to our students.



## Appendix E: Interview Protocol (Teachers)

### Round 1

	Knowledge	Experience	Reflection
Demographic Questions			
Changes in Social Studies Curriculum	NCLB, CCSS, NYS Social Studies Framework.	Adaptations, modifications, additions	Positive or negative impact on teaching and students
Changes in Teaching Guidelines	APPR, ELA Skills, CCSS, NYS Social Studies Framework, NYS Regents Requirements, etc.	Tried innovative activities based on current education policy.	Impact on students and achieving goals for the class.

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study interview. This study is investigating teachers’ perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. Before we begin, can you confirm that you would like to participate in this interview? If you decide at any point during this interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During interview I am going to ask several questions. The entire interview session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. No one other than the researcher and volunteer participant will know who participated in the interview. When the results of the interview are shared your name will not be included. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How long and in what capacity have you been professionally involved in social studies education?
2. How would you describe your understanding of the current Social Studies Framework and New York State Learning Standards?
3. How would you evaluate your ability to promote specific learning standards through your teaching?
4. How have professional development opportunities affected your understanding of New York State Learning Standards and your ability to adapt your practices to meet them?
5. What kind of impact have standards-based education reforms had on your opportunities to collaborate in a meaningful way with colleagues?

6. In what ways have standards-based reforms been beneficial to your teaching career? How have they been detrimental?
7. How has teaching specific course assignments affected your experiences with standards-based reforms?
8. Reflecting on your career so far, what additional issues come to mind when you think about the adoption of standards-based reforms in social studies education?
9. How would you describe APPR's role in the decisions you make as a social studies teacher?
10. If you could, what improvements (if any) would you make to contemporary social studies education?

## Interview Protocol (Teachers)

### Round Two

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study interview. This study is investigating teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. Before we begin, can you confirm that you would like to participate in this interview? If you decide at any point during this interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During interview I am going to ask several questions. The entire interview session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. No one other than the researcher and volunteer participant will know who participated in the interview. When the results of the interview are shared your name will not be included. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1) How has the pace of the education system's implementation of standards-based reforms affected your ability to understand and incorporate them into your daily practice?
- 2) How do the resources (texts, websites, handouts, question banks) that are available to you match the objectives of current standards-based social studies education?
- 3) In your opinion what are the most significant factors that contribute student interest in social studies lessons?
- 4) How much control do you feel you have over the content, skills and daily activities in the social studies classes you currently teach?
- 5) What opportunities do you have to any share concerns that may have developed as a result of the implementation of standards-based education reforms?

### **Closing:**

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. Your feedback helps to support my research study as well as our ability to provide a comprehensive and effective social studies education to our students.

## Interview Protocol (Teachers)

### Round Three

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study interview. This study is investigating teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. Before we begin, can you confirm that you would like to participate in this interview? If you decide at any point during this interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During interview I am going to ask several questions. The entire interview session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. No one other than the researcher and volunteer participant will know who participated in the interview. When the results of the interview are shared your name will not be included. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1) In what ways do you currently attempt to foster citizenship and provide students with skills beneficial to the economy?
- 2) If you could create a professional development program that was designed specifically to help social studies teachers implement standards-based reforms what would it look like?
- 3) How would you describe the impact that standards-based reforms and changes to the NYS Social Studies Framework have had on the morale of social studies teachers?
- 4) If you could teach any courses (regardless of whether they are currently offered by your district) what courses would you choose and why?

### **Closing:**

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. Your feedback helps to support my research study as well as our ability to provide a comprehensive and effective social studies education to our students.

## Appendix F: Interview Protocol (Administrators)

### Round 1

	Knowledge	Experience	Reflection
Demographic Questions			
Changes in Social Studies Curriculum	NCLB, CCSS, NYS Social Studies Framework.	Adaptations, modifications, additions	Positive or negative impact on teaching and students
Changes in Teaching Guidelines	APPR, ELA Skills, CCSS, NYS Social Studies Framework, NYS Regents Requirements, etc.	Tried innovative activities based on current education policy.	Impact on students and achieving goals for the class.

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study interview. This study is investigating teachers’ perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. Before we begin, can you confirm that you would like to participate in this interview? If you decide at any point during this interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During interview I am going to ask several questions. The entire interview session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. No one other than the researcher and volunteer participant will know who participated in the interview. When the results of the interview are shared your name will not be included. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. How long and in what capacity have you been professionally involved in social studies education?
2. From your experience as an administrator, how would you describe teachers’ understanding of the current social studies framework and New York State Learning Standards?
3. In your experience, how have professional development opportunities affected the ability of teachers to adapt their practices to support the New York State Learning Standards? Examples?
4. In your opinion, how have standards-based education reforms impacted opportunities for teachers to collaborate with their colleagues? Examples?
5. How would you describe the impact of standards-based reforms on the experiences of students in social studies classes?

6. In your experience as an administrator what impact has APPR had on social studies education?
7. As you look back at your career, how has social studies education changed as a result of the adoption of standards-based reforms?
8. Reflecting on your career so far, what additional issues come to mind when you think about the adoption of standards-based reforms in social studies education?
9. If you could, what improvements (if any) would you make to contemporary social studies education?

## Interview Protocol (Administrators)

### Round Two

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study interview. This study is investigating teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. Before we begin, can you confirm that you would like to participate in this interview? If you decide at any point during this interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During interview I am going to ask several questions. The entire interview session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. No one other than the researcher and volunteer participant will know who participated in the interview. When the results of the interview are shared your name will not be included. Do you have any questions before we begin?

- 1) How important are the ideas of fostering citizenship and providing students with skills beneficial to the economy in modern social studies education?
- 2) What kinds of supports are offered to teachers who feel that standards-based reforms may be a hinderance to making history “come alive” for students?
- 3) How would you describe the impact that changes to the NYS Social Studies Framework have had on the morale of social studies teachers?
- 4) How have teacher requests for specific course offerings (AP/Regents levels, grades, electives) changed over the past 20 years?

### **Closing:**

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. Your feedback helps to support my research study as well as our ability to provide a comprehensive and effective social studies education to our students.

## Interview Protocol (Administrators)

### Round Three

**Welcome:** Thank you for participating in this research study interview. This study is investigating teachers' perceptions about the impact of standards-based education reforms on social studies education between 2000 and 2020. Before we begin, can you confirm that you would like to participate in this interview? If you decide at any point during this interview that you would no longer like to participate, please let me know.

**Overview of the Process:** During interview I am going to ask several questions. The entire interview session will be captured in an audio recording in order to allow for an accurate account of what takes place. No one other than the researcher and volunteer participant will know who participated in the interview. When the results of the interview are shared your name will not be included. Do you have any questions before we begin?

1. If you could create a professional development program that was designed specifically to help social studies teachers implement standards-based reforms what would it look like?
2. What differences have you noticed between new and veteran teachers in their responses towards the implementation of standards-based reforms?

### **Closing:**

Thank you for taking the time to share your thoughts on the impact of standards-based reforms on social studies education. Your feedback helps to support my research study as well as our ability to provide a comprehensive and effective social studies education to our students.



# Appendix G: Superintendent Consent

11/19/19, 6:02 PM

## Study

[Redacted]

Tue 11/19/2019 5:22 PM

To: William E. Murphy <william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu>

Cc: [Redacted]  
[Redacted]  
[Redacted]

\* External Email \*

Dear Bill,

It was a pleasure meeting with you today and hearing how much progress you have made in your doctoral program. The district is pleased to approve you conducting your research study on premises with social studies teachers and administration. Please let us know if you will need any further assistance or support.

Best of luck as you continue on this endeavor.

Regards,

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

**Deputy Superintendent**

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

CAUTION - External email. Do not click links or open attachments unless you recognize the sender and know the content is safe.

## Appendix H: IRB Approval

Date: 12-5-2019

IRB #: IRB-FY2020-278

Title: Teacher Perceptions Regarding the Influence of Political Forces Upon Social Studies Education

Creation Date: 10-30-2019

End Date: 11-23-2020

Status: **Approved**

Principal Investigator: Willam Murphy

Review Board: St John's University Institutional Review Board

Sponsor:

### Study History

Submission Type	Initial	Review Type	Expedited	Decision	<b>Approved</b>
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### Key Study Contacts

Member	Catherine DiMartino	Role	Co-Principal Investigator	Contact	dimartic@stjohns.edu
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Member	Willam Murphy	Role	Principal Investigator	Contact	william.murphy17@stjohns.edu
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Member	Willam Murphy	Role	Primary Contact	Contact	william.murphy17@stjohns.edu
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# **Social Studies Educator Volunteers Needed**

## **Research Study on The Impact of Standards-Based Reforms in Social Studies Education:**

### **If you are interested, we are looking for:**

- Social Studies Teachers & Social Studies Department Chairs
- Middle School and High School Levels
- Teachers With:
  - 1-4 Years of Experience
  - 5-15 Years of Experience
  - 16-25+ Years of Experience

### **Study Involves:**

- Focus Group Interviews
- One-On-One Interviews
- Lesson and Planning Materials
- Total time commitment of 3-5 Hours

For more information please contact William Murphy at  
william.murphy17@my.stjohns.edu



## Appendix J: Categorization of Themes

### Categorization of Themes

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>GOAL OF SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Deliver content</li> <li>2. Foster citizenship</li> <li>3. Develop critical thinking skills ♦</li> <li>4. Provide skills beneficial to the economy</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b>WHAT COMPREHENSIVE SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION LOOKS LIKE</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Constructivist (active hands on/project based)</li> <li>2. Social Studies should “Come Alive” (story based) ♦</li> <li>3. Comprehensive and interdisciplinary ♦</li> </ol>	
<p><b>EFFECT OF REFORMS ON SOCIAL STUDIES EDUCATION</b></p>		
<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>STRUCTURALLY</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Standards based reforms have made social studies too focused on teaching to the test ♦</li> <li>2. SBR’s have made skills the focus of social studies at the expense of content ♦</li> <li>3. SBR’s created a situation where there is too much to teach and not enough time ♦</li> <li>4. Lack Knowledge of Next Gen Learning Standards, SS Framework, C3 Inquiries ♦</li> <li>5. Teacher difficulty promoting specific skills/learning standards</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>NEGATIVELY</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. SBR = Changes too often and too rapidly</li> <li>2. Expectations regarding skills do not match age appropriate cognitive development ♦</li> <li>3. Reforms appear to be disconnected from teacher experiences and student needs</li> <li>4. SBR’s resulted in teachers feeling micromanaged</li> <li>5. SBR’s have made social studies boring</li> <li>6. SBR’s force teachers to reinvent the wheel ♦</li> <li>7. Frustrated/overwhelmed teachers</li> <li>8. Resources do not match teaching objectives</li> <li>9. Teachers are powerless to confront the negative consequences of reforms</li> </ol>	<p style="text-align: center;"><b><u>POSITIVELY</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Foster critical thinking skills ♦</li> <li>2. Tests are a necessary benchmark ♦</li> <li>3. Reforms help new teachers</li> <li>4. APPR not a factor in the social studies teachers’ practices ♦</li> </ol>
<p><b>ATTEMPTS TO MITIGATE THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF REFORMS</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Professional development focuses on structural changes/test preparation ♦</li> <li>2. Need effective professional development through collaboration with peers ♦</li> <li>3. Electives provide opportunity to examine content in greater detail ♦</li> <li>4. Courses and/or grades without standardized tests are preferable because they provide a pressure-free atmosphere ♦</li> </ol>		

## Appendix K: Coding of Themes According to Participant Response

### Ideal Social Studies Education:

- 1) Goal of Social Studies education is to deliver content:
 

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 1, 2, 5	
	Question 4: Participants: (14 n, ms)	
Administrators:	Question Q2: Participants: 15	Round 3
  
- 2) Goal of Social Studies education is to foster citizenship:
 

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 1, 2, 5, 9	
	Question 6: Participants: (10 n, ms)	
Administrators	Question Q1: Participants: 16	Round 2
  
- 3) Goal of Social Studies should be to foster critical thinking skills:
 

Focus Group:	Question 1: Participants: 3,7	
	Question 2: Participants: 7	
Administrators:	Question Q1: Participants: 16	Round 1
  
- 4) Goal of social studies education should be to provide skills beneficial to the economy
 

Focus Group	Question 2: Participants: (12 n, ms)	
Administrators	Question Q1: Participants: 15	Round 2

### What Comprehensive Social Studies Education Looks Like:

- 1) Social Studies should be constructivist (hands on/project) based:
 

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 3, 8 ,13,	
	Question 2: Participants: 1, 2	
	Question 4: Participants: 1, (11 ms)	
Individual Teachers	Question Q6: Participants: 1	Round 1
  
- 2) Social Studies should be story based and “come alive”
 

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 5, (6 n, ms), 7, (10 n, ms), (13)	
	Question 2: Participants: (13 n, ms)	
	Question 3: Participants: 4♦, 6♦	
	Question 5: Participants: 1	
	Question 6: Participants:3	
Administrators	Question Q3: Participants: 15, 16	Round 1
	Question Q7: Participants: 16	Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q6: Participants: 1	Round 1
	Question Q10: Participants: 1, 6	Round 1 (Make changes to SS)
	Question Q3: Participants: 1♦, 6, 9	Round 2

- 3) Social Studies should be comprehensive and interdisciplinary  
 Focus Group Question Q1: Participants: 3, 8, 9  
 Administrators Question Q9: Participants: 15 Round 1

**Implementation:**

Structural

- 1) Standards based reforms have made social studies too focused on teaching to the test

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 2, 3	
	Question 2: Participants: 1, 2, 6, 7, (14 n, ms)	
	Question 3: Participants: 4♦, 7♦, 8, 9, (11 ms)♦	
	Question 4: Participants: 1, 3	
Administrators	Question Q6: Participants: 15	Round 1
	Question Q7: Participants: 16	Round 1
	Question Q9: Participants: 16	Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q3: Participants: 7, 9	Round 1
	Question Q7: Participants: 1♦, 6	Round 1
	Question Q1: Participants: 1 ♦	Round 2
	Question Q4: Participants: 9 ♦	Round 2

- 2) SBR's have made skills the focus of social studies at the expense of content

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 4, (10 n, ms)
	Question 2: Participants: 4, 5, 6, (10 n, ms), 11 ms, (13 n, ms), (14 n, ms)
	Question 3: Participants: 1♦, (6♦ n), 13
	Question 4: Participants: 1, 5, (14 n, ms)
	Question 5: Participants: 3, 4
Administrators	Question Q6: Participants: 15 Round 1
	Question Q7: Participants: 15, 16 Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q3: Participants: 7 Round 1
	Question Q6: Participants: 6 Round 1
	Question Q10: Participants: 9 Round 1

- 3) SBR's created a situation where there is too much to teach and not enough time

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: (11 n, ms), (12 n, ms), (13 n, ms)
	Question 2: Participants: 1, 2, 4, 5, (6 n)
	Question 3: Participants: 1
	Question 4: Participants: 5♦, (11 ms)
	Question 5: Participants: 6 n
	Question 6: Participants: 1♦, 2♦, (14 n, ms)
Administrators	Question Q8: Participants: 16 Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q2: Participants: 1 Round 1
	Question Q7: Participants: 6♦ Round 1
	Question Q10: Participants: 7 Round 1

4) Lack Knowledge of Next Gen Learning Standards, SS Framework, C3 Inquiries:

Administrators	Question Q2: Participants: 15	Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q2: Participants: 1, 9	Round 1
	Question Q3: Participants: 9	Round 1
	Question Q4: Participants: 9	Round 1
	Question Q1: Participants: 6 ♦	Round 2
	Question Q2: Participants: 6	Round 3

5) Teacher difficulty promoting specific skills/learning standards:

Administrators	Question Q1: Participants: 15	Round 3 ♦
Individual Teachers	Question Q2: Participants: 1,7,9	Round 1
	Question Q3: Participants: 1, 6	Round 1
	Question Q2: Participants: 1	Round 3

Negative:

1) Changes too often and too rapidly:

Focus Group	Question 2: Participants: 2, 3 ♦ (Sisyphus), 8	
	Question 3: Participants: (11 n, ms), (12 n, ms)	
	Question 6: Participants: 4 ♦, 1	
Individual Teachers	Question Q3: Participants: 6	Round 1
	Question Q4: Participants: 9	Round 1
	Question Q1: Participants: 7, 9 ♦	Round 2

2) Expectations regarding skills do not match age appropriate cognitive development:

Focus Group	Question 2: Participants: 5, 8, 9, (11 n, ms), (12 n, ms)	
	Question 3: Participants: 5 ♦, (12 n, ms), (13 n, ms) ♦	
	Question 4: Participants: 4	
	Question 5: Participants: 5, (12 n ms), (13 n ms), (14 n ms)	
	Question EQ4: Participants: 5	
Administrators	Question Q5: Participants: 15	Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q8: Participants: 6 ♦(grade), 7 ♦ (sp.ed.)	Round 1

3) Reforms appear to be disconnected from teacher experiences and student needs:

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 8, 9, (12 n, ms)	
	Question 3: Participants: 2 ♦, 3 ♦, 9	
	Question EQ1: Participants: 1, 2, 3 ♦	
	Question EQ3: Participants: 9	
	Question Q3: Participants: 7 ♦,	Round 2
Individual Teachers	Question Q4: Participants: 1 ♦,	Round 2
	Question Q1: Participant 1 ♦, 6,	Round 3

4) SBR's resulted in teachers feeling micromanaged:

Focus Group	Question 3: Participants: 1	
	Question 5: Participants: 8	

	Question 6: Participants: 8, 9	
Individual Teachers	Question Q5: Participants: 9	Round 1
	Question Q8: Participants: 1,6	Round 1
	Question Q4: Participants: 1 ♦,6♦	Round 2
	Question Q3: Participants: 9	Round 3

5) SBR's have made social studies boring:

Focus Group	Question 5: Participants: 1, 2, 4, 5, 9	
	Question 6: Participants: 10	
	Question Q3: Participants: 9 ♦	Round 2
	Question Q4: Participants: 9	Round 3

6) SBR's force teachers to reinvent the wheel:

Administrators	Question Q3: Participants: 16	Round 1
Individual Teachers	Question Q5: Participants: 7	Round 1
	Question Q2: Participants: 1 ♦,	Round 2
	Question Q3: Participants: 7	Round 3

7) Teachers Feel Frustrated/Overwhelmed:

Administrators	Question Q3: Participants: 15♦	Round 2
Individual Teachers	Question Q3: Participants: 1, 7, 9 ♦	Round 1
	Question Q5: Participants: 1 ♦	Round 1
	Question Q6: Participants: 7	
	Question Q4: Participants: 6♦	Round 2
	Question Q2: Participants: 9	Round 3
	Question Q3: Participants: 1	Round 3

8) Resources do not match teaching objectives:

Individual Teachers	Question Q3: Participants: 1 ♦	Round 1
	Question Q8: Participants: 9 ♦	Round 1
	Question Q2: Participants: 1 ♦,6,7,9	Round 2
	Question Q2: Participants: 7	Round 3

Positive:

1) SBR's foster critical thinking skills:

Focus Group	Question 1: Participants: 6 n	
	Question 5: Participants: 3, (10 n, ms), (14 n, ms)	
	Question 6: Participants: (10 n, ms)	
Administrators	Question Q1: Participants: 16	Round 1

2) New Teachers Don't Regard the impact of SBR's as negative:

Focus Group	Question 4: Participants: (6 n, ms), (10 n, ms), (12 n, ms),	
Administrators	Question Q2: Participants: 16	Round 1
	Question Q5: Participants: 15	Round 1
	Question Q6: Participants: 15	Round 1
	Question Q3: Participants: 16	Round 2



- |                     |                              |         |
|---------------------|------------------------------|---------|
| Individual Teachers | Question Q2: Participants: 6 | Round 1 |
|                     | Question Q5: Participants: 6 | Round 1 |
|                     | Question Q6: Participants: 6 | Round 1 |
- 3) Tests are a necessary benchmark
- |                     |                                  |         |
|---------------------|----------------------------------|---------|
| Focus Group         | Question EQ1: Participants: 1    |         |
| Administrators      | Question Q8: Participants: 15    | Round 1 |
|                     | Question Q2: Participants: 15,16 | Round 3 |
| Individual Teachers | Question Q6: Participants: 1     | Round 1 |
|                     | Question Q10: Participants: 1,6  | Round 1 |
- 4) APPR Not A Factor:
- |                     |  |         |
|---------------------|--|---------|
| Administrators      | Question Q5: Participants: 16                    | Round 1 |
| Individual Teachers | Question Q9: Participants: 1 (dog and pony show) | ,7,9    |
- Round 1

**(Dis)Engagement:**

- 1) Professional development is lacking/focuses on structural changes/test preparation:
- |                     |                                    |                                 |
|---------------------|------------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Administrators      | Question Q3: Participants: 16      | Round 1                         |
|                     | Question Q4: Participants: 15      | Round 1                         |
| Individual Teachers | Question Q2: Participants: 1, 7, 9 | Round 1                         |
|                     | Question Q4: Participants: 1 ♦, 9  | Round 1                         |
|                     | Question Q5: Participants: 9       | Round 1 (email test prep ideas) |
|                     | Question Q2: Participants: 1       | Round 3                         |
- 2) Teachers are powerless to confront the negative consequences of reforms:
- |                     |                                       |         |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|---------|
| Administrators      | Question Q2: Participants: 15         | Round 2 |
| Individual Teachers | Question Q5: Participants: 1 ♦,7, 9 ♦ | Round 2 |
- 3)
- 4) Effective professional development is collaborative:
- |                     |                                   |                                 |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------|
| Focus Group         | Question 6: Participants: 2       |                                 |
| Administrators      | Question Q3: Participants: 15, 16 | Round 1                         |
|                     | Question Q1: Participants: 16     | Round 3                         |
| Individual Teachers | Question Q4: Participants: 6, 7   | Round 1                         |
|                     | Question Q5: Participants: 1 ♦    | Round 1 (Not Collaborative Now) |
|                     | Question Q4: Participants: 6 ♦    | Round 2                         |
|                     | Question Q2: Participants: 6      | Round 3                         |
- 5) Electives provide the freedom to delve into content/less pressure
- |             |   |  |
|-------------|---|--|
| Focus Group | Question 6: Participants: 5, (11n, ms), (12 n, ms), (13 n, ms), (14 n, ms), |  |
|             | Question EQ2: Participants: 4, 5 (6 Contradicts)                            |  |

Administrators	Question Q9: Participants: 15	Round 1
	Question Q2: Participants: 16	Round 2
Individual Teachers	Question Q6: Participants: 6	Round 1
	Question Q7: Participants: 6 ♦, 9 ♦,	Round 1
	Question Q10: Participants: 7	Round 1
	Question Q1: Participants: 7	Round 3
	Question Q3: Participants: 6 ♦	Round 3

6) Courses/Grades w/o standardized tests are preferable:

Administrators	Question Q4: Participants: 16	Round 2
Individual Teachers	Question Q7: Participants: 1 ♦, 6	Round 1
	Question Q3: Participants: 6	Round 2
	Question Q4: Participants: 1 ♦, 6, 9 ♦	Round 3

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