

Social Studies: A Call to Action

An Analysis of Survey Results of Teacher Knowledge of Social Studies
Instructional Practice, Curricula, and Associated Needs

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2001 brought a new emphasis on accountability to schools across the country. Accountability measures focused on reading, mathematics, and science. To ensure a strong democracy, social studies was considered a crucial component of every child's core learning. But now social studies appears to have been overshadowed in the drive to close gaps in student performance and increase student achievement in math and reading. This results in many social studies teachers across Iowa without access to needed resources and content-specific professional learning. Therefore, this impacts student learning negatively.

To assess the current status of social studies in Iowa, the Department of Education commissioned the University of Northern Iowa's (UNI) Center for Social and Behavioral Research to conduct a statewide survey of Iowa's social studies teachers. The survey focused on four main areas:

- Teacher knowledge of social studies standards and curriculum,
- Current instructional practices in social studies classrooms,
- Professional development in social studies, and
- Needs identified by teachers to strengthen social studies education.

The survey was conducted in the spring of 2015 and more than 1,500 elementary and secondary social studies teachers participated. In addition to surveying Iowa teachers, superintendents and Area Education Agency (AEA) Education Services Directors were surveyed about their opinions.

The findings indicate some areas of concern:

- While 81% of the high school teachers surveyed indicated their curriculum was somewhat aligned or in complete alignment with the Iowa Core in Social Studies, only 42.9% of the elementary teachers reported that their curriculum was fully aligned or somewhat aligned with the Iowa Core in Social Studies.
- When surveyed about instructional practices, high school teachers said they most frequently used whole-class discussion and technology-based applications to enhance learning. Used less frequently were analysis of primary source documents and writing assignments such as essays and reflections.
- Only 12.9% of the elementary teachers surveyed said that social studies professional learning opportunities were available to them within the last three years, while 75% of high school teachers reported access to professional development within the last three years. Also, 32.5% of the superintendents surveyed reported that there had been no social studies professional development within their districts in the last three years.
- In addition to the survey questions, teacher respondents were also given the opportunity to respond to some open-ended questions and provide any additional comments. Three common themes arose in these responses:

- A frustration that social studies was not deemed a priority
- A need for more social studies resources and professional development
- The need for better standards in social studies

The complete survey results are available in the appendix of this report.

SURVEY BACKGROUND

Investigators at UNI were asked to assess several key dimensions of social studies education in Iowa. The project was completed by UNI's Center for Social and Behavioral Research (CSBR) under the direction of Dr. Mary Losch and the project was coordinated by Dr. Neal Pollock. In addition to overall project guidance provided by Stefanie Wager at the Iowa Department of Education, Chad Christopher, UNI Social Science Teaching Advisor, assisted with the development of the surveys and provided consultation throughout the project.

Study Design

Fashioned after other assessments of educational curricula and associated needs, the surveys were developed to include teacher knowledge of social studies standards, curriculum, instructional practice information, and content knowledge about social studies instruction.

The key questions to be answered by the study were:

- How much time is being devoted to social studies each week?
- What is the current curriculum being utilized in each district?
- How do elementary teachers define/describe their social studies teaching?
- What is the current progression (scope and sequence) of courses in each district K-12?
- What are the perceptions of facilitating factors/barriers to teaching social studies?
- How much professional development do social studies teachers in each district receive each year? What are the focus areas for this professional development?
- What needs exist for additional professional development?
- Are there barriers to professional development and if so, what are they?
- What is the familiarity of teachers with the Iowa Core in Social Studies and the English Language Arts (ELA) literacy standards for history/social studies?
- How are AEAs supporting social studies?
- What needs can be met by the state regarding social studies?

Data were collected from K-12 teachers via online questionnaires (administered using *Qualtrics*). To assure that all key issues are included and addressed appropriately, a small number of pretests were conducted prior to the launch of the survey. Following the field period, descriptive analyses were conducted and are presented here.

Sample Recruitment for Teachers

Because no complete data source exists for Iowa social studies teachers, it was not possible to directly contact teachers. Instead, invitations were sent via principals. In all, 1,342 public and private principals were sent an email using contact information available on the Iowa Department of Education website (www.educateiowa.gov). This email included a brief description of the study and a request to forward an embedded survey link to their social

studies teachers. Elementary school principals were asked to send the link to all of their teachers, and middle and high school principals were asked to send the link only to their social studies teachers. Principals were also asked to provide the number of teachers who were sent the link.

Not all principals provided the numbers of teachers that they contacted. Therefore, a precise response rate cannot be calculated. For the information provided, 251 principals reported emailing the survey link to 2,685 teachers. Of the principals who provided the number of teachers contacted, 568 or 21% of teachers responded. However, many principals did not respond with the number of teachers they forwarded the survey to, and this response rate only represents 37.2% of the total amount of completed teacher responses (1,528). Teachers from all but two of Iowa's 99 counties were represented within this sample.

Sample Characteristics

Grade Level

Of the 1,528 teacher respondents, 46.5% indicated that they taught at the elementary level, 21.7% at the middle school level, 25.8% at the high school level, and 4.8% reported that they taught both middle and high school.

Grade Level	Teachers (n = 1,528)
Elementary school	46.5 %
Middle school / Junior high school	21.7 %
High school	25.8 %
Middle and High school	4.8 %

AEA Representation

Teachers from all AEAs were represented in the responses, and the responses were distributed roughly according to size of each AEA, as would be expected. Heartland AEA had the highest percentage of teacher respondents, with 21.5% of all respondents teaching within Heartland’s region.

AEA	Sample by AEA Region (n = 1,528)	Proportion of IA teachers in AEA Region (n = 42,975)	Difference between sample and teacher population by AEA region
Heartland	21.5 %	22.3 %	-0.8 %
AEA 267	15.1 %	11.6 %	+3.5 %
Grant Wood	11.5 %	13.5 %	-2.0 %
Northwest	0.9 %	7.5 %	-6.6 %
Keystone	9.8 %	9.1 %	+0.7 %
Mississippi Bend	9.5 %	9.1 %	+0.4 %
Great Prairie	8.1 %	8.5 %	-0.4 %
Green Hills	8.0 %	10.2 %	-2.2 %
Prairie Lakes	6.7 %	8.1 %	-1.4 %

Public or Private School Type

Overall, 90% of teacher respondents reported that they taught in a public school.

District Size

Consistent with district sizes in the state, the plurality of teachers reported that they were from small districts. Almost half (41.5%) of teachers indicated that they taught in a district with 999 students or less (small district), 21.8% in a district with 1,000 to 2,499 students (medium district), and 23.5% in a district with 2,500 or more students (large district). Roughly one out of every ten (13.2%) teachers either did not know their district size (9.5%).

District Size	Teachers (n = 1,528)
Small (0 to 999 students)	41.5 %
Medium (1,000 to 2,499 students)	21.8 %
Large (2,500 or more students)	23.5 %
Not sure or missing	13.2 %

IOWA CORE IN SOCIAL STUDIES RELATED RESULTS

Iowa's academic standards in social studies were adopted in 2008. Research points to high levels of student learning when rigorous standards are implemented with fidelity. Because of this, a key component of the study was teacher knowledge of and familiarity with the Iowa Core in Social Studies and teacher perceptions of the impact of the standards on classroom instruction and student learning.

National experts point to a significant decrease in the amount of instructional time devoted to social studies at the elementary level in the last ten to fifteen years. This is significant because if there is a substantial decrease in the amount of instructional minutes, standards cannot be implemented with fidelity and, in turn, students cannot receive foundational instruction within the social studies to prepare them for social studies beyond the elementary years. Within the study, elementary teachers were asked how much time, in minutes, they spent teaching social studies in a typical week. Overall, elementary teachers reported a mean social studies teaching time of just under two hours per week and a median of 90 minutes per week. Most elementary schools in the state are in session for around 7 hours per day for five days of the week. Given this, we can assume that school is in session for an average of 35 hours per week. If social studies is only taught for an average of just under 2 hours per week, it is only taught for 5.7% of the instructional week.

Teachers and superintendents were also asked to identify whether their districts had a scope and sequence in social studies. The purpose of a scope and sequence is to identify, at the district level, the standards to be met and the curriculum that will be used for each course and grade level. Given that the Iowa Core in Social Studies is grade banded, not grade specific, it is left up to districts to decide at what grade level each standard will be addressed in the grade band. Less than half of superintendent respondents indicated that their district had a social studies scope and sequence or pacing guide for elementary school. However, almost seven out of ten (69.0%) reported that their district had a social studies scope and sequence for middle school, and eight out of ten (80.7%) had a social studies scope and sequence for high school. Overall, only 35% of superintendent respondents reported that their district has a scope and sequence for social studies.

Has a Social Studies Scope and Sequence for:	Superintendents (n = 81)
Elementary school	47.0 %
Middle school	69.0 %
High school	80.7 %

Rigorous standards and curriculum require both continuity across grades and a commitment to critical thinking, analytical reasoning, and a depth of understanding in the classroom. The survey asked teachers to report on the frequency of a variety of instructional practices relating to these important instructional aims. While almost all teachers across grade levels (89.4% of

elementary, 92.7% of middle, and 98.6% of high school) report that students engage in whole class discussions very frequently (1-2 times per week or almost daily), other practices are less prevalent, and fluctuate across school levels. For example, only 16.1% of elementary, 26.2% of middle school, and 20.8% of high school teachers very frequently assign group projects; 13% of elementary, 31.9% of middle school, and 51.2% of high school teachers reported that they very frequently expose students to primary source documents; and 15.7% of elementary, 42.7% of middle school, and 53.3% of high school teachers very frequently require students to practice essay or reflection writing.

Research around best practices in social studies supports frequent examination of primary source documents and this work supports implementation of the standards with fidelity. According to these data, however, we are not seeing widespread implementation of these instructional best practices.

During social studies instruction, how often do your students engage in the following?				
Cooperative learning assignments	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	10.1 %	23.2 %	15.5 %	11.0 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	37.7 %	50.6 %	52.8 %	47.9 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	34.5 %	21.1 %	24.6 %	31.5 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	10.0 %	4.5 %	6.6 %	8.2 %
Never	5.2 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
Don't know / Not sure	2.5 %	0.3 %	0.5 %	1.4 %
Whole class discussion	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	53.3 %	58.1 %	58.6 %	54.8 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	36.1 %	34.6 %	35.0 %	43.8 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	6.2 %	6.6 %	5.6 %	1.4 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	1.5 %	0.3 %	0.3 %	0.0 %
Never	1.3 %	0.0 %	0.5 %	0.0 %
Don't know / Not sure	1.5 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Complete textbook-based worksheets	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	1.4 %	3.0 %	2.5 %	4.1 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	18.3 %	28.0 %	22.1 %	23.3 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	28.8 %	35.8 %	35.8 %	32.9 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	23.3 %	16.9 %	20.1 %	17.8 %
Never	26.3 %	15.7 %	19.5 %	20.5 %
Don't know / Not sure	1.8 %	0.6 %	0.0 %	1.4 %
Listen to lecture on social studies-related content	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	6.2 %	5.4 %	15.2 %	15.1 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	20.7 %	33.4 %	51.5 %	45.2 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	25.6 %	35.5 %	25.4 %	31.5 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	23.1 %	15.1 %	6.6 %	8.2 %
Never	21.9 %	9.9 %	1.3 %	0.0 %
Don't know / Not sure	2.5 %	0.6 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
Develop group projects	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	2.0 %	2.4 %	1.3 %	4.1 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	14.1 %	23.8 %	19.5 %	17.8 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	38.3 %	55.7 %	52.0 %	52.1 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	30.5 %	15.4 %	24.6 %	20.5 %
Never	13.2 %	2.4 %	2.5 %	5.5 %
Don't know / Not sure	2.0 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Work with maps or globes	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	4.8 %	10.5 %	5.1 %	12.3 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	22.8 %	35.2 %	24.6 %	39.7 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	46.8 %	43.7 %	44.9 %	37.0 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	20.8 %	9.3 %	20.1 %	6.8 %
Never	3.2 %	0.9 %	4.8 %	4.1 %
Don't know / Not sure	1.5 %	0.3 %	0.5 %	0.0 %
Use computer-based social studies applications	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	2.7 %	12.0 %	12.2 %	19.2 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	10.8 %	28.0 %	25.9 %	30.1 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	22.8 %	33.4 %	33.5 %	27.4 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	25.6 %	19.3 %	18.5 %	9.6 %
Never	33.9 %	6.3 %	7.4 %	11.0 %
Don't know / Not sure	4.2 %	0.9 %	2.5 %	2.7 %
Watch videos or film	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	0.4 %	3.6 %	3.6 %	8.2 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	19.0 %	28.3 %	37.1 %	32.9 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	50.9 %	51.5 %	49.2 %	50.7 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	22.8 %	15.1 %	9.4 %	8.2 %
Never	5.3 %	1.2 %	0.8 %	0.0 %
Don't know / Not sure	1.5 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Answer questions/define terms from the textbook	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	3.4 %	7.8 %	2.8 %	2.7 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	21.9 %	30.4 %	30.5 %	32.9 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	27.7 %	32.8 %	32.7 %	31.5 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	17.9 %	18.7 %	18.5 %	19.2 %
Never	26.7 %	9.6 %	15.0 %	12.3 %
Don't know / Not sure	2.4 %	0.6 %	0.5 %	1.4 %
Participate in role playing/simulations	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	1.5 %	1.5 %	0.8 %	0.0 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	14.3 %	13.3 %	9.4 %	11.0 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	28.6 %	40.4 %	38.6 %	43.8 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	30.1 %	30.7 %	36.5 %	24.7 %
Never	22.5 %	13.3 %	14.2 %	17.8 %
Don't know / Not sure	3.0 %	0.9 %	0.5 %	2.7 %
Examine primary source documents	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	1.3 %	4.2 %	8.1 %	8.2 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	11.7 %	27.7 %	43.1 %	42.5 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	25.5 %	45.5 %	34.0 %	27.4 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	25.0 %	18.1 %	14.0 %	19.2 %
Never	28.0 %	3.9 %	0.8 %	2.7 %
Don't know / Not sure	8.6 %	0.6 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Writing assignments such as essays and reflections	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	1.1 %	6.6 %	7.9 %	11.0 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	14.6 %	36.1 %	45.4 %	45.2 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	35.6 %	44.3 %	39.1 %	31.5 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	25.0 %	11.1 %	7.1 %	9.6 %
Never	21.1 %	1.5 %	0.5 %	2.7 %
Don't know / Not sure	2.5 %	0.3 %	0.0 %	0.0 %
Use technology applications to enhance learning	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)	MS / HS (n = 73)
Almost daily	7.6 %	25.9 %	31.0 %	43.8 %
Frequently (1-2 times per week)	22.4 %	37.3 %	36.5 %	31.5 %
Occasionally (2-3 times per month)	30.8 %	27.4 %	25.4 %	19.2 %
Rarely (2-3 times per year)	20.5 %	7.5 %	4.6 %	4.1 %
Never	15.9 %	1.2 %	2.5 %	1.4 %
Don't know / Not sure	2.8 %	0.6 %	0.0 %	0.0 %

Teachers were also asked to report on their familiarity, preparedness and the alignment of their instruction with the Iowa Core in Social Studies and the literacy standards specific to history/social studies. Across school levels roughly half (range from 42.9% to 53.3%) of teachers reported that they were *somewhat familiar* with the Iowa Core in Social Studies and felt *somewhat prepared* to teach the essential concepts/skills, while only a quarter to a third of middle and high school teachers (range from 26.2% to 39.1%) and fewer than one in 10 (8.6%) elementary school teachers said they were *very familiar* and *very prepared*. When asked, overall, how aligned each teacher considered the current content of their social studies classes was to the Iowa Core in Social Studies, 54.4% of elementary teachers, 70.5% of middle school teachers, and 69.3% of high school teachers reported that it *needs some realignment* or is only *somewhat aligned*.

It is noteworthy that only 8.6% of elementary teachers were very familiar with the Iowa Core in Social Studies and overall, elementary teachers reported low percentages in the very familiar category when asked about the Iowa Core, in general.

How familiar are you with the Iowa Core in Social Studies?	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 – Very unfamiliar	23.7 %	9.3 %	7.1 %
2 – Somewhat unfamiliar	19.0 %	8.4 %	10.4 %
3 – Somewhat familiar	46.9 %	46.4 %	42.9 %
4 – Very familiar	8.6 %	35.2 %	39.1 %
5 – Don't know/Not Sure	1.8 %	0.6 %	0.5 %

In your opinion, how prepared are you to teach the Iowa Core in Social Studies?	Elementary (n = 708)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 – Very unprepared	18.9 %	4.8 %	7.6 %
2 –Somewhat unprepared	23.7 %	14.8 %	8.9 %
3 –Somewhat prepared	45.6 %	53.3 %	46.7 %
4 – Very prepared	8.6 %	26.2 %	34.0 %
5 – Don't know/Not sure	3.1 %	0.9 %	2.8 %

Overall, how aligned would you say the current content of your social studies classes is compared with the Iowa Core in Social Studies?	Elementary (n = 707)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 – Need significant realignment	12.0 %	3.9 %	1.0 %
2 –Need some realignment	20.7 %	16.0 %	12.2 %
3 –Somewhat aligned	33.7 %	54.5 %	57.1 %
4 – In complete alignment	9.2 %	20.2 %	23.9 %
5 – Don't know/Not sure	24.5 %	5.4 %	5.8 %

Overall, teachers report slightly lower levels of familiarity, preparedness, and alignment with the Iowa Core Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies than with the Iowa Core in Social Studies. This could be explained by the fact that the Iowa Core Literacy Standards for History/Social Studies were not adopted until 2010, while the Iowa Core in Social Studies standards were adopted in 2008 and districts have had more time to implement these standards.

How familiar are you with Iowa Core Literacy Standards for History and Social studies?	Middle School (n = 326)	High School (n = 391)
1 – Very unfamiliar	4.9 %	7.7 %
2 – Somewhat unfamiliar	12.9 %	16.6 %
3 – Somewhat familiar	55.2 %	48.6 %
4 – Very familiar	24.2 %	22.8 %
5 - Don't know/Not sure	2.8 %	4.3 %

In your opinion, how prepared are you to teach the Iowa Core Literacy Standards for History and Social Studies?	Middle School (n = 326)	High School (n = 391)
1 – Very unprepared	4.9 %	7.2 %
2 – Unprepared	19.9 %	20.7 %
3 – Prepared	54.0 %	48.3 %
4 – Very prepared	17.8 %	18.2 %
5 - Don't know/Not sure	3.4 %	5.6 %

Overall, how well aligned is the content of your current social studies classes with the Iowa Core Literacy Standards for History and Social Studies?	Middle School (n = 323)	High School (n = 388)
1 – Need significant realignment	3.4 %	2.8 %
2 – Need some realignment	21.1 %	19.1 %
3 – Somewhat aligned	51.7 %	50.8 %
4 – In complete alignment	12.1 %	12.9 %
5 - Don't know/Not sure	11.8 %	14.4 %

Distinct from questions of familiarity, preparation, and alignment, teachers were asked to report on the influence and positive impact of the Iowa Core in Social Studies on their instructional practice. Middle and high school teachers reported an *influence* or *strong influence* on their instructional practice (85.8% among middle school teachers, and 79.5% among high school teachers) at a rate similar to their reported familiarity and preparation with the Iowa Core in Social Studies (an average of 80.6% among middle school teachers, and 81.4% among high school teachers). However, while nearly three out of four (73.5%) elementary school teachers report that the Iowa Core has an *influence* or *strong influence* on their instruction, only half report being *somewhat* or *very familiar* (55.5%) or *somewhat* or *very prepared* (54.2%) to teach the Iowa Core. These numbers suggest that there may be some confusion among elementary teachers around the incorporation of the standards.

Roughly half of the teachers reported that they were at least *somewhat satisfied* with the Iowa Core in Social Studies (44.8% of elementary school teachers; 57.2% of middle school teachers; 56.1% of high school teachers). Only 4.1% of elementary teachers, 7.2% of middle school teachers, and 8.6% of high school teachers reported that they were *very satisfied* with the Iowa Core in Social Studies.

How satisfied are you with the Iowa Core in Social Studies?	Elementary (n = 707)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 – Very dissatisfied	4.2 %	9.9 %	10.7 %
2 – Somewhat dissatisfied	11.3 %	20.8 %	23.1 %
3 - Somewhat satisfied	40.7 %	50.0 %	47.5 %
4 - Very satisfied	4.1 %	7.2 %	8.6 %
5 - Don't know/Not sure	39.6 %	12.0 %	10.2 %

Teachers were also asked to provide a narrative reflection on their views of the strengths and weaknesses of the Iowa Core in Social Studies. With regard to strengths, 12.1% indicated that it provides guidance, 10.4% indicated that the Core's broadness or flexibility was a strength, and 7.9% mentioned that having standards consistent across schools, districts, and/or students was a strength. While some teachers considered the broadness or flexibility of the Iowa Core in social studies to be a strength, 17.8% of teachers mentioned this as a weakness. A few teachers also stated that too many standards (5.6%) and a lack of grade-specific standards (5.5%) were weaknesses.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN SOCIAL STUDIES

Ongoing professional development is integral to support teachers in implementing the Iowa Core and continually improving teacher instruction in order to improve student learning. Data collected by the UNI study reveal that there is a lack of professional development available to social studies teachers in the state. According to the What Works Clearinghouse, it takes an average of forty-nine hours of quality professional development to improve student achievement. In addition, the Iowa Professional Development Model outlines the research-based process in which this professional development should take place.

Among teachers in this study, less than half (42.1%) reported that professional development in social studies had been made available to them in the past three years. Within grade level, less than one in five elementary school teachers (12.9%) reported that they had access to social studies professional development. More than half of middle school teachers (59.6.2%) and more than three-quarters of high school teachers (75.7%) reported that social studies professional development had been made available to them in the past 3 years.

Social studies professional development available within the past 3 years?	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 – Yes	12.9 %	59.6 %	75.1 %
2 – No	74.1 %	31.3 %	19.8 %
3 – Don't Know/Not Sure	12.9 %	9.0 %	5.1 %

Roughly three out of every 10 superintendents (32.5%) reported that there had been no social studies professional development opportunities within their district within the last three years.

Number of Social Studies PD Offered in the Past 3 Years	Superintendents (n = 83)
0	32.5 %
1-4	32.5 %
5-10	15.7 %
More than 10	7.2 %
Don't Know/Not Sure	12.0 %

Roughly three out of 10 superintendents (30.1%) reported that their district did not offer any social studies professional development, while roughly four out of every 10 (42.2%) superintendents indicated that their district offered some other type of professional

development. The most common types reportedly made available were conferences (27.7%), workshops (25.3%), and other types (42.2%), identified mainly as meetings such as professional learning community meetings or in-services (62.5%).

Types of Social Studies PD Currently Offered	Superintendents (n = 83)
Workshop	25.3 %
College course	1.2 %
Book-study group	4.8 %
Conference	27.7 %
Other	42.2 %
No social studies PD offered	30.1 %
Don't Know/Not Sure	7.2 %

Teachers were also asked to identify factors influencing whether they participated in social studies professional development, or not. Teachers identified how much the following reasons impacted their participation in professional development:

To what degree have each of the following been factors in deciding whether or not to participate in a social studies professional development opportunity?

Lack of time	Elementary (n = 106)	Middle School (n = 213)	High School (n = 306)
1 – Not a factor	17.0 %	17.4 %	10.5 %
2 – Minor factor	22.6 %	32.4 %	30.7 %
3 – Major factor	48.1 %	44.6 %	56.5 %
4 – Don't Know/Not Sure	12.3 %	5.6 %	2.3 %
Limited opportunities specific to SS	Elementary (n = 106)	Middle School (n = 213)	High School (n = 306)
1 – Not a factor	9.4 %	24.4 %	19.9 %
2 – Minor factor	16.0 %	29.1 %	38.2 %
3 – Major factor	56.6 %	37.6 %	38.6 %
4 – Don't Know/Not Sure	17.9 %	8.9 %	3.3 %

To what degree have each of the following been factors in deciding whether or not to participate in a social studies professional development opportunity?

Lack of district support or school support	Small (n = 288)	Medium (n = 140)	Large (n = 189)
1 – Not a factor	67.0 %	57.9 %	37.0 %
2 – Minor factor	21.2 %	25.7 %	31.2 %
3 - Major factor	8.3 %	7.9 %	21.2 %
4 - Don't Know/Not Sure	3.5 %	8.6 %	10.6 %

Across school levels the majority of teachers reported that there was not enough professional development available. This sentiment was strongest among elementary school teachers (78.9%), and still high among middle and high school teachers (60.2% and 57.1% respectively). If more was made available, most said they would participate (79.6% of elementary teachers, 83.2% of middle school teachers, and 85% of high school teachers). For those who indicated that they would not participate if more social studies professional development was available, the most common reasons given were that other subjects were of higher priority (33.3%) and a lack of time (26.8%).

Number of opportunities available within your district for social studies professional development	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 – Too few	78.9 %	60.2 %	57.1 %
2 – About right	6.9 %	27.1 %	35.3 %
3 – Too many	0.0 %	2.7 %	0.8 %
4 – Don't Know/ Not Sure	14.2 %	9.9 %	6.9 %

If more social studies professional development opportunities were made available, how likely would it be that you would attend?	Elementary (n = 711)	Middle School (n = 332)	High School (n = 394)
1 - Very unlikely	3.9 %	6.0 %	3.0 %
2 - Somewhat unlikely	8.9 %	6.6 %	8.1 %
3 - Somewhat likely	48.9 %	41.3 %	47.2 %
4 - Very likely	30.7 %	41.9 %	37.8 %
5 – Don't Know/Not Sure	7.6 %	4.2 %	3.8 %

District superintendents (68.7%) and all AEA Education Service directors also agreed that there were too few professional development opportunities in social studies made available. Echoing the teachers again, AEA directors cited other subject areas being a priority over social studies as a major reason for the lack of social studies specific professional development. Likewise, 72% of district superintendents cited this as a major barrier to professional development.

In addition to the survey questions, teacher respondents were also given the opportunity to respond to an open-ended question which asked, “What can the Iowa Department of Education do to better support social studies in Iowa?” When responses were examined, three main themes emerged. First, a theme emerged around a desire to increase access to social studies resources and professional development. Out of 960 total teacher comments, 352 respondents provided answers related to greater access to resources or professional development in social studies. This represents 37% of the total comments provided. Some comments included:

- “Provide teachers within the state more opportunities for social studies professional development and greater access to social studies resources aligned to the Iowa Core in Social Studies.”
- “I would like to see more professional development for social studies available. It has only been in the last year that I have really seen or heard about any opportunities.”

Second, respondents commented on the need for better standards in social studies. Out of 960 total teacher comments, 163 respondents commented about the need for better standards. This represents 17% of the total comments. Comments included:

- “Have clear cut standards for each grade and specify what should be taught at each level.”
- “Revise the standards to make them clear. They are very abstract right now.”

Third, comments revolved around a frustration that social studies was not deemed a priority. Out of 960 total teacher comments, 142 respondents emphasized a desire for the Iowa Department of Education to make social studies a greater priority. This represented 15% of the total comments. Comments included:

- “Make it more of a priority. STEM, Math, Science, and English are always discussed in detail, but social studies is an after-thought in most discussions.”
- “With the focus on math and reading, and science, social studies has falls to the side. Districts don’t devote enough time to it. There haven’t been any professional development opportunities on it in my district and it has been deemed a part of the day that is ‘okay’ for students to miss”

REFERENCES

- Reviewing the evidence on how teacher professional development affects student achievement. (n.d.). In K. Suk Yoon, T. Duncan, S. Wen-Yu Lee, B. Scarloss, & K. Shapley (Comps.), *Issues and Answers* (Vol. 33). REL Southwest.

APPENDIX

Social Studies Statewide Evaluation 2014-2015 - AEA Education Services Director Sample - <https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/content-areas/2015/11/social-studies-statewide-evaluation-2014-2015-aea-education-services>

Social Studies Statewide Evaluation 2014-2015 - K-12 Teacher Sample - <https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/content-areas/2015/11/social-studies-statewide-evaluation-2014-2015-k-12-teacher-sample>

Social Studies Statewide Evaluation 2014-2015 - District Superintendent Sample - <https://www.educateiowa.gov/documents/content-areas/2015/11/social-studies-statewide-evaluation-2014-2015-district>