

EFFECTS OF THE STATE ACCOUNTABILITY SYSTEM
ON SOCIAL STUDIES IN TEXAS SCHOOLS

A Record of Study

by

RICHELE BAILEY LANGLEY

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Chair of Committee,
Committee Members,

James Laub
Joyce Junetune
Michelle Kwok
William Rupley
Michael De Miranda

Head of Department,

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ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods study is an explanatory sequential design researching two elementary and two middle school campuses. It presents information on the amount of instructional time allotted to social studies in Texas schools. It also considers whether integrating social studies instruction with another subject is feasible and produces positive assessment results. The research presents quantitative and qualitative data, seeking to identify trends within 3rd, 4th, and 5th-grade classrooms around the subject of social studies. Data were drawn from interviews, observations, lesson plans, and surveys, as well as assessment results. Evidence was found that social studies is not garnering the instructional time needed in order to teach the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills as written. However, integrating reading and social studies does prove to help alleviate this issue. The results of this research informs educators of the need for dedicated social studies instruction and how to integrate the subject into a campus schedule.

DEDICATION

“Rejoice with your family in the beautiful land of life.” – Albert Einstein

For Randy, Blake, and Taylor

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Contributors

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All work conducted for this record of the study was completed by the student independently.

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CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

Leadership Context and Purpose of the Action

The Context

For many years, each of the 50 states has administered various standardized assessments to their students, including the SAT, ACT, and state-mandated tests, such as the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). High stakes testing was ushered into our country with the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001. At that time, NCLB required schools to test students for proficiency each year in reading and math in the 3rd through 8th grades, and once again in high school. The objective was to have all students be proficient by 2014, and there were strict penalties for not meeting this goal. Therefore, for almost 20 years, public schools in the United States have operated in the spotlight of accountability.

Accountability alone is not a bad thing; educators should be responsible for their students' learning. However, when accountability drives what is being taught to students, the idea of a well-rounded curriculum is invalid. The accountability system, with high stakes testing at its core, has changed the amount of instructional time spent on math, reading, writing, science, and social studies. Because the annual focus of high stakes testing is on math and reading, instruction in writing, science, and social studies are sure to suffer. Since social studies is the only core content area tested once from 3rd to 8th grade, it is the most likely to lose classroom instruction time.

National Context

For well over a century in the United States, business people, academics, politicians, and others have supported testing students to determine whether they are being taught the approved curricula. These tests are not simply formative or summative school assessments designed to determine if a student is learning what is being taught. Rather, these discussions have focused on high stakes tests, with consequences much more severe than a student taking home a failing grade on a weekly assessment. According to Nichols and Berliner in *Collateral Damage: How High-Stakes Testing Corrupts America's Schools* (2007), the New York State Department of Education made the following comments to the state's legislature, as the body contemplated establishing what would today be called a high stakes test:

It is an evil for a well-taught and well-trained student to fail in an examination. It is an evil for an unqualified student, through some inefficiency of the test, to obtain credit in an examination. It is a great and more serious evil, by too frequent and too numerous examinations, so to magnify their importance that students come to regard them not as a means in education but as the final purpose, the ultimate goal. It is a very great and more serious evil to sacrifice systematic instruction and a comprehensive view of the subject for the scrappy and unrelated knowledge gained by students who are persistently drilled in the mere answering of questions issued by the Education Department or other governing bodies (p 5).

What is most concerning about the statement above is that it was written in 1906.

Although there have been many initiatives addressing education in the United States since we became a nation, three promulgated after this 1906 proclamation have had a lasting impact on the educational system of our country: *A Nation at Risk*, No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA).

A Nation at Risk was written in 1983 by The National Commission on Excellence in Education, an 18-member commission that President Ronald Reagan directed to give input on education in the United States. The report offers a laundry list of deficits in the American

education system. These deficits put our nation's growth at risk in the "information age," a time when other industrialized nations were improving their education systems. Thirty-eight recommendations were made by the commission, the members of which included one teacher and no academic experts. One of the recommendations involved "standards and expectations." Even though *A Nation at Risk* is now seen as propaganda, it hurt public education in the United States and began to change the way our politicians and citizens thought about the education system, leading us toward our current system of accountability.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), a federal law in effect from 2002 to 2015, was designed to hold schools accountable for students' outcomes. It intended to "level the playing field" for students considered to be at a disadvantage in the education system, including minorities and those living in poverty, receiving special education services, and with limited English. Schools across the country were expected to give annual state assessments in reading and math in 3rd through 8th grade, and once in the 10th through 12th grades. "Sub-group" reporting was mandated. Schools were expected to have 100% of all students reaching proficiency or "passing the test" by 2014.

If a school did not meet its Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) goal, it was labeled as "needs improvement." If a school receiving federal funding did not meet its AYP after a specified number of years, its administrators could be fired, and teachers would have to reapply for their positions. In addition, parents were allowed to move their children from a "failing" school to other schools that had met AYP. NCLB ushered in and continued to inflate, requirements for teachers and administrators, incentivizing them to focus on those areas being assessed: reading and math.

As 2014 approached, it was obvious that 100% of the schools in the United States would not be able to get 100% of their students to proficiency. In fact, even schools with low populations of socioeconomically disadvantaged students and high populations of Caucasians struggled with the mandate. Children are not products; they have strengths and weaknesses, and the goal of 100% eventually was recognized by politicians as unattainable.

In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was issued as a reauthorization of NCLB. Some elements of NCLB remained, but much was changed. The focus of the ESSA is the equitable education of students who live in poverty, are racial and ethnic minorities, receive special education services, or have limited English skills. However, the ESSA offers more flexibility to each state on how best to achieve the school performance goals. Each state is required to develop an ESSA plan approved by the U.S. Department of Education. The state plan must include information about academic standards, state assessments, school accountability, improvement plans, and goals, as well as certain other elements. The ESSA requires annual reading and math assessments in the 3rd through 8th grades and once in high school, as well as a science assessment once each in elementary, middle, and high school. In this plan, writing is incorporated into the reading assessment.

The ESSA requires that each state measure school performance in four areas: academic achievement, academic progress, English language proficiency, and graduation rate. In addition, a fifth area must be chosen from one of the following: kindergarten readiness, advanced coursework, college readiness, discipline, or attendance. If a school does not perform to the standards that the state and the federal government have approved, it can be closed, or a Board of Managers can replace the district's current school board. Improvement

plans are mandated before these occurrences, and focus is on building capacity within the school to help it improve.

Situational Context

Research has shown that there are significant differences among urban, suburban, and rural schools. Policies, rules, and regulations developed on statewide or national levels are often based on large districts, and, more often than not, those that surround metropolitan areas. One example of a policy designed for one type of student, but blanket-applied to all, would be the mandate that all students attend university. This is problematic for several reasons. First, not all students desire the same thing, in this case, a college degree. Second, this would have grave consequences for our economy. In addition, some students do not have the intellectual capacity to succeed in college, regardless of the education they receive in kindergarten through 12th grade. Yet, the NCLB goal was for all students to attend college.

These types of agendas are often put into place by politicians who only consider school from their perspective. According to the United States Department of Agriculture, in 2015, the cut-point for being considered a socioeconomically disadvantaged campus was a school with more than 40% of its students in need of a free or reduced-price lunch. Of the 46 districts that I have worked with in rural east Texas, 45 had campuses considered socioeconomically disadvantaged, with the average of those 45 districts having 64% of their students labeled as economically disadvantaged. In addition, 48% of the students were labeled at risk, and 47% were minorities.

Teaching students living in poverty and those labeled at risk (i.e., at risk of not graduating from high school due to one of 13 factors) puts teachers at a disadvantage within the accountability system. On average, these students begin school two to three years academically

behind students who are not poor or at risk. Personally, I have witnessed a trend in which social studies is being set aside to free up more instructional time for teaching reading and math, in order to “catch these students up,” so that they can pass their assessment tests. In looking at the state STAAR data, it seems clear that this is a statewide trend.

Problem

The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR) were introduced as annual summative assessments in 2012. Since that year, 8th grade social studies has been the lowest scoring state assessment across all subject areas. The 8th grade social studies STAAR ranks lower than science in 5th and 8th grades, writing in 4th and 7th grades, and math and reading in all grades between the 3rd and 8th grades. Across the state, very little gain has been seen in STAAR scores over the past seven years, as compared to scores on the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) for the same time period.

Table 1 STAAR 8th Grade Score Averages.

Subject	2011-2012	2012-2013	2016-2017	2017-2018
Math	73%	76%	85%	86%
Reading	81%	83%	86%	86%
Social Studies	61%	64%	63%	65%

Retrieved from: *Texas Academic Performance Reports (2011-2018)*.

In the past seven years of 8th grade test scores, math has gained 13%, reading 5%, and social studies 4%. However, there is a gap of 21% between those approaching grade level in reading and math and those approaching grade level in social studies.

The ever-increasing stress of the accountability system has caused various district and campus leaders and teachers to make decisions that are not always in the best interest of the students. Some of these decisions have been illegal; however, what is more common are choices that are legal, but do not offer students the best education possible. School schedules reflect the importance placed on reading and math to the exclusion of other subjects.

Teachers spend a disproportionate amount of time studying the state assessments, once they are released, to make their instruction more closely resemble the STAAR. Teachers of elementary classes are leaving very little instruction time for social studies, even though they have as many standards to teach in that subject as they do in reading and math. In fact, in some grade levels, there are more social studies standards than in reading and math. In addition to teachers scheduling their day around reading and math instruction, campus master schedules are built with remediation time for these two subjects. Considering there are only approximately seven hours every school day, something must be set aside. Often recess is cut, but there are mandated amounts of time for Physical Education and lunch, as well as for teacher planning periods. Therefore, social studies is often the first core course to suffer because it is not tested until the 8th grade.

It is human nature to do the best at those things for which we will be held accountable. If parents leave a list of chores for their child, the child will likely work from that list before performing other duties because he or she will be held accountable for the listed chores. Our campuses are applying this same thought process to the curriculum. Even though the list is long and there are other things not on the list that still need doing, those subjects for which the campus is held accountable are what receive the greatest amount of time.

Relevant History

From 2002 to 2012, Texas assessed students using TAKS. This instrument evaluated students in reading, math, writing, science, and social studies. Reading and math were assessed each year in 3rd through 8th grades, and in high school, in what later was changed to End of Course Tests. Writing was assessed in the 4th and 7th grades, science in the 5th and 8th grades, and social studies in the 8th grade. The latter covered United States history from the birth of our nation through the Civil War. The End of Course Tests initially were to be administered in every core subject; however, it was determined that a total of 5 assessments in high school was too cumbersome, and those assessments were winnowed down to English I and II, Algebra I, Biology, and US History, the latter of which covered from the end of the Civil War to the present. Overall, scores on the TAKS test increased for most schools during the decade it was in place.

In 2012, the STAAR replaced the TAKS. The STAAR was designed to intensify the rigor of state assessments. Testing began in the 3rd grade would and purported to measure whether a student would be college and career ready upon graduation. Although these assessments were still given in the same grades and subjects as the TAKS, time constraints were placed on the STAAR. The TAKS test could last past a regular school day, whereas the STAAR must not be over four hours long. In the most recent legislative session (2019,) a 90-minute time limit was determined to be more appropriate for most of the students.

Along with the STAAR test has come increased accountability for Texas schools. Up to 27 sub-groups can be tracked by STAAR progress, categorizing students as “did not meet,” “approaches,” “meets,” or “masters” the material. In addition, the results of the assessment (as well as other factors, such as advanced course completion) are used to determine if students

are achieving college, career, or military readiness. The accountability system is divided into three domains, with Domains 2A and 3 addressing STAAR reading and math assessments. In Texas, schools are assigned an A, B, C, D, or F based on their students' STAAR scores, as well as whether their students are considered to be college, career, or military ready. If a school receives a D or F, it will then be categorized in "School Improvement," suffering ever-tightening sanctions until the school's STAAR scores increase or the Texas Education Agency closes the school or replaces the school board with a Board of Managers. This generally occurs after five to six years, but it has happened in some single-campus districts in as little as three years.

Significance

According to the *National Curriculum Standards for Social Studies 2010*, the aim of social studies is the promotion of civic competence, including the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life. The standards emphasize the importance of educating students who are committed to the ideas and values of democracy. Civic competence rests on the commitment to democratic values, and requires citizens to have the ability to use their knowledge about their community, nation, and the world; to apply inquiry processes; and to employ skills of data collection and analysis, collaboration, decision-making, and problem solving. Young people who are knowledgeable, skillful, and committed to democracy are necessary to sustaining and improving our democratic way of life, and participation as members of a global society (National, 2018, p. 1).

In light of the ongoing issues facing our schools (such as bullying and school shootings), as well as the political issues occurring at the state and national levels, teaching

our students civic competence has never been more important. It seems that high stakes testing, less time being spent on social studies instruction, and the above-mentioned societal issues are intricately intertwined. If we do not provide our students with the context of social studies, how will they learn civic competence? For social studies to perform its mission of promoting civic responsibility, students need to learn certain key facts and be able to think flexibly and act responsibly to address civic issues in a diverse and interdependent world (National, 2018). The accountability system is driving this problem. If this correlation is as direct as it seems, there is much more at stake for our nation than a campus receiving a poor grade. Accountability is necessary, but when the system that holds us accountable also weakens our society, the process must be redesigned.

Research Question

To what extent has the accountability system changed classroom instruction, including the amount of time spent on social studies, and general coverage of the required content? Understanding the perspective of campus principals and teachers is an important first step in determining if there are links among a lack of social studies instruction at the lower grade levels, the accountability system, 8th grade social studies scores, and broader social issues on campuses and in the general public.

Researcher's Role and Background

I have been an educator for 30 years. I have worked in school districts as a teacher, assistant principal, principal, special education director, curriculum director, and deputy executive director at an educational service center (ESC) in Texas. I have taught at an alternative school and led special education resource classes. I have worked for three districts: one about 45 miles north of Houston, one that was on the outskirts of Little Rock, Arkansas,

and one in rural East Texas. The range of my experience in education has allowed me to understand the different challenges that each district and campus face when regulations and policies are enacted.

Becoming the deputy executive director of an ESC has allowed me to expand my experiences to an even wider variety of educational settings. My smallest district has 98 students in a K-8 setting, and my largest has over 7,000 students and 12 campuses. My relationship with the districts and campuses is one of support. The ESC is non-regulatory, so the staff and faculty of my districts understand that I am not a part of any evaluative agency nor an envoy of the Texas Education Agency. The superintendents see me as a “go-to” person who can help answer questions and support their staff members in building stronger schools for their students.

Journey to the Problem

I first noticed a lack of instruction occurring in specific courses in the lower grades when I became a principal of a standalone 5th and 6th-grade campus. The accountability system calls for 5th-grade state science assessments. However, as students arrived from various campuses to start the 5th grade, I came to realize that many had not been taught the science TEKS to the breadth and depth the standards require. When I became the district curriculum director, I also came to realize that this was occurring to an even more crucial extent on our junior high campus, which faced four state 8th grade assessments; one of those, in social studies, had never been tested in the students’ school experience. At that time, I began to track the district and state social studies scores each year and found a continuing trend of lower social studies scores on the STAAR. When casually visiting with teachers and administrators of lower grades, only a few would admit to eliminating social studies

instruction to teach subjects for which they were being held accountable. Those who did admit to it said that anyone not doing so must either be at a very wealthy campus or have a majority of white students, who typically had higher reading and math scores.

Being the district curriculum director meant that, if a school failed to make Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), it was my responsibility to work with the principal and professional service provider (PSP) assigned by the Texas Education Administration (TEA) to get that campus out of the School Improvement category. Approximately 74% of my district's students were socioeconomically disadvantaged. This demographic was reflected in the one junior high in the district. This junior high was 7th and 8th grade only.

My first year as the curriculum director allowed me to help that junior high meet AYP. As I worked with the administration and teachers, it became evident that the students suffered from a lack of social studies knowledge. After administering formative assessments, we determined that the students were unaware of basic social studies standards that they should have been taught in the earlier grades. Most students knew what a pilgrim was because they had been allowed to dress as pilgrims and Indians for a Thanksgiving lunch in elementary school. However, they knew little to nothing about Plymouth, the colonies, or the organization of the local, state, and national government. All of these were to be taught before the students entering the 6th grade.

In 2013, my son became an 8th grade social studies teacher. At that time, I began hearing even more about his students' lack of knowledge regarding the tenets supporting the United States of America. As the years have passed, it has also become evident that our society is less than knowledgeable about the basic elements of our government. Our citizens

are struggling to understand the United States as a democracy, the reasons why we have laws, the importance of voting, and the fundamental right to be treated fairly.

This journey did not have an “a-ha” moment; it has been like a puzzle, placing piece after piece together to form the big picture that connects this to the educational world. I believe that connection is the accountability system. In developing this ROS through action research, I hope to help improve students’ education, and make people aware of this systemic issue that could have far-reaching implications.

Significant Stakeholders

The most significant stakeholders are the students. Improving their students’ education should be the goal of every educator. I do not work directly with students. However, I hope to provide an opportunity for their teachers, administrators, and parents to begin advocating for change by answering the overarching question of this research. The question is, what is the extent to which the accountability system has changed classroom instruction (including the amount of time spent on social studies), as well as the amount of content coverage that students receive? Because of this, teachers, administrators, and parents, as well as taxpayers in general, are also stakeholders.

Legislators and those working at the Texas Education Agency have a stake in remedying the situation. Only the legislature can enact laws that change the current accountability system. The Texas Education Agency, which implements these laws, must understand the effect of the current accountability system on our students. The data obtained from the STAAR does not seem to justify the substantial amount of time our teachers spend on math and reading, to the exclusion of other subjects in general, and social studies in particular.

Important Terms

Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP): This is a measurement defined by the federal No Child Left Behind Act that allowed the U.S. Department of Education to determine how every public school and district in the country performs academically, according to the results of standardized tests.

At-risk student: This is a student with a higher likelihood than his or her cohorts of dropping out of school before graduation.

Domain (within the Texas accountability system): One of three categories upon which Texas campuses and districts are rated. The three domains are Student Achievement, Student Progress, and Closing the Gap. The Student Progress domain is divided into two sub-parts: Academic Growth and Relative Performance.

Education Service Center (ESC): Non-regulatory service organizations that assist school districts in improving student performance, enable those districts to operate more efficiently and economically, and implement initiatives assigned by the legislature or commissioner of education.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA): A U.S. law passed in 2015 that attempts to improve education equity by providing federal funds to school districts serving students from lower-income families.

Formative Assessment: This is an in-process evaluation of a student's comprehension, learning needs, and academic progress during a lesson, unit, or course. Formative assessments allow adjustments to be made to lessons, instruction, and academic support.

No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB): An Act of the United States Congress that reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; it included Title I provisions applying to a disadvantaged student. The law was in effect from 2002 to 2012.

Professional Service Provider (PSP): Experienced educators who provide technical assistance to campuses with interventions required by the Texas Accountability System.

Socioeconomically Disadvantaged (Eco Dis): Any student eligible for free or reduced lunch under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program.

Subgroup or Sub-pop: A subordinate portion of a larger group whose members usually share some common differentiating quality.

Summative Assessment: Evaluation of a student's learning progress and achievement after a specific instructional period, usually at the end of a project, unit, course, semester, or year.

STAAR: State Assessments of Academic Readiness was begun in 2012 and is still in place as of 2020. It is based on state curriculum standards in core subject areas.

Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS): The fourth Texas state standardized test, previously used in 3rd to 8th and 9th to 11th grades, to assess students' attainment of reading, writing, math, science, and social studies, as required under the Texas education standards.

Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS): Texas educational standards for public schools from kindergarten to the 12th grade.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter I

As I conducted my research on the massive amounts of information on accountability systems, high stakes testing, and classroom instruction, and pair that research with face-to-

face investigations conducted on campuses, I found that there is a great chasm between what our government believes is important in a child's education and what actually is important. In 2017, Diane Ravitch stated that tests should be used for diagnostic purposes and not to rank and rate students, teachers, or schools. Standardized tests should be applied sparingly, and not annually (2017).

Via the State Board of Education, our state has clearly delineated what is to be taught. The TEKS provides guidelines for each subject in the required curriculum. However, there are also mandates that the legislature and Texas Education Agency place on districts and campuses, based on the accountability system. No individual can serve two masters, and, yet, this is what the system forces upon our schools. Through my research, I hope to provide information that supports the need for a more balanced and equitable education for all, one in which a subject is not neglected to the benefit of others. Not only is a well-rounded education for each child at stake, if the current situation does not change, but I am also fearful for the future of our democracy. To again paraphrase Ravitch, success in education will be when the public recognizes that high stakes testing has failed, and we need to change our idea of accountability (Raden, 2017).

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

I chose a thematic approach to organize my literature research over the topic of *The Effects of the State Accountability System on Social Studies in Texas Schools*. Historical content is integrated throughout to show the ever-changing views within our nation on the importance of social studies instruction. As I researched the literature, I found that there were various studies on the marginalization of social studies in education. However, there was little research on the effects of this marginalization on our schools and students or the teaching of culture and citizenship. The themes move from whether social studies is still important as a course, looking at time on task, and research showing evidence of policy effects, both state and federal, on the teaching of social studies.

In Texas, 8th grade social studies remains the lowest scoring subject in the accountability system. Research in high stakes assessments and the state accountability system, as well as the previously listed issues, are all pieces of this puzzle. When assembled, they will help answer the question of how the accountability system has affected time spent teaching elementary social studies.

Relevant Historical Background

For many years, leaders across the United States have proclaimed via research, speeches, and other modes of communication that educating our children is of utmost importance if our society is to remain a democracy. In 1916, the Committee on Social Studies of the National Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Education, made up of

teachers and administrators, released a report which has influenced the social studies curriculum to the present time. They adopted the term “social studies” as the designation for curricula dealing with man and society (Farrar, 1972).

As students entered the school system, social studies was integrated into reading, as well as being a stand-alone course to teach young children about their society. At the elementary level, the social studies curriculum was structured with the child, his/her family, and the classroom as the center (Fitchett, Heafner, & VanFossen, 2014). This content was to be studied first in a child’s educational life. As the child advanced through the grades, the learning expanded, and the perspective broadened to include the study of those in the surrounding communities, expanding out to include the state, nation, and world. The students would begin studying the present society in relation to past societies, and present events in relation to past events.

In the late 1950s, extensive funds were made available for the further development of the social studies curriculum from the National Defense Act. An emphasis on teaching concepts and facts, rather than isolated facts and ideas, became more prominent within the curriculum. Inquiry skills became important for students to be able to conduct investigations of issues within their society and to learn how to be able to choose alternative solutions to these problems to improve the world around them. Teaching good citizenship and loyalty to the country was giving way to the use of inquiry pedagogy from the social science discipline to evaluate what should be preserved and what should be changed in society (Farrar, 1972).

Three areas of focus emerged within the social studies curriculum: behavioral values and attitudes, procedural values, and substantive values (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Behavioral values began with classroom and school behavior and reached toward accepted

societal behaviors. Procedural behaviors focused on the methods of being a change agent and also knowing the systems involved in systematically making transformations. Substantive values were those that aimed at being an American, including an understanding of democracy and how decisions are made on a federal, state, and local level.

Through social studies, students are involved in open dialogue about issues. This opens a debate and involves problem-solving strategies. Social studies skills help us understand the difference between fact and opinion, as well as help us to listen to other's opinions. Social studies skills are needed to learn how to communicate through open rhetoric and debate (Byrd & Varga, 2018). Connecting social studies to our culture, citizens need to be able to use knowledge from our past to help make decisions for our futures. Knowledge of our history should allow us to be able to improve our future through changing policy and law. When we narrow our viewpoint and are not able to listen to or understand others through open debate, Americans will alter our nation, and not for the better.

In 2008, the National Council for the Social Studies found that, in the United States, seven themes need to be taught through social studies instruction:

(a) democratic principles and values: the very foundation of social studies; (b) diversity and inclusiveness: the organization affirms cultural diversity, combats discrimination, and recognizes multiple perspectives; (c) global interconnectedness: an understanding of the relationships between and among peoples and countries around the globe; (d) intellectual excellence: rigorous thought and inquiry; (e) open and reasoned, civil discourse: an environment conducive to airing a variety of opinions and views in a respectful manner; (f) pursuit of knowledge: the shared desire for continuous learning and improvement; and (g) altruism and commitment: compassionate, ethical, collaborative, and service-oriented citizens

(NCSS, 2008, pp.14-23). A society that is not educated about the history of our nation and the world does not truly have the facts to understand the past and, therefore, cannot make well-informed decisions about living in the present and preparing for the future.

Teachers have a duty to give each child the best education possible based on the standards known at that time. “The American climate surrounding current events forewarn that we can no longer afford to consolidate educational practices that focus on standardized testing” (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010, p.127). Every country in the world faces societal challenges. All people who interact with others understand that even one-on-one issues are formed from a much broader view that people have of a specific issue. Social media, which are being used in ever-increasing numbers often are biased; yet people take the content as overarching truths. This information can give citizens a distorted view of the social process.

So that citizens do not act on this distorted information, they must be taught, from their earliest school days, social studies concepts, ideals, and knowledge, which must be fully integrated into the K-12 curriculum. Through social studies, current events may be explored by using critical thinking and problem-solving skills that so many young people are lacking (Byrd & Varga, 2018). The role of a teacher is to guide students on being civically conscious citizens and to teach the democratic process in a way that creates adults who can make educated decisions. Social studies must return to the classroom with focused, intentional instruction so that our citizens can incorporate this knowledge into their everyday actions and attitudes.

In 2009, to describe roles of the teacher and student in an exemplary social studies instructional environment, the state of Kentucky, in conjunction with the Public Education Leadership Program, developed a list of characteristics and connections to standards and

research for teachers to use as a guiding document in highly effective instruction. At the core, the state agreed with the NCSS that social studies in education is to help students develop knowledge, skills, and values that will enable them to become effective citizens. An effective citizenship education program ensures that civic knowledge, skills, and values are taught explicitly and systematically at every grade level (Kentucky Department of Education, 2009).

Other states are beginning to realize that, simply because the Federal government is emphasizing specific core subject areas, there are other subjects that we must cover if we are going to give our students the futures they deserve. In states where social studies assessments are mandated in specific grades, the test questions usually are not focused through the diversity and multicultural lens of our citizenship. Thus, there are few conversations around inclusion and social justice (Byrd & Varga, 2018). In Texas, 8th grade U.S. History and high school U.S. History are the grades that are mandated for any type of social studies assessments, both giving historical context within their standards. However, none refers to the specific seven areas of general social studies curriculum that is found in the educational standards of K-5 social studies content. These are not the foundational standards upon which the United States of America was founded. As a nation, the focus must be on the student, not the test.

Despite its clear value, social studies has become more irrelevant in the core curriculum. In 2004, Pascopella surmised that “identifying reading, math, and science as the only subject areas being required for testing per the federal government, educators presumed that federal education policy trivialized the importance of teaching and learning of social studies in the schools” (p.50). Byrd and Varga (2018) concurred, quoting one secretary of

state, who said, “The marginalization of social studies in schools, while math and reading have been stressed in the curriculum, is misguided and in effect educational neglect (p.28).

As schools focus on science, math, and language arts based on what is taught on the national and state accountability systems, social studies is losing ground in the elementary schools. According to Owen (1997), there are five challenges for teachers in teaching social studies: (a) they had a negative past personal experience with social studies, (b) lack of interest, (c) not understanding social studies, (d) not enough time to teach social studies, and (e) finding classrooms where new teachers can observe social studies being taught. Teachers are not responsible for solving those problems; school district leaders should be focusing on these five issues so that teachers can place social studies in the proper place in a student’s educational career.

In the late 1980s, a task force of the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) stated that social studies was being marginalized and that continuing to do so would create societal issues in our future. By the turn of the century, as 2000 rolled around, elementary classes were showing ever decreasing time being allotted for social studies. Reading and math were seen as the focus of our national government, as No Child Left Behind focused on these two subjects. Several factors, including time focusing on social studies by grade level and high stakes testing, have contributed to social studies being placed on the “back burner,” continuing to stress that social studies is not important enough to be a featured core subject.

The idea of integrating social studies into other courses has been seen by some in a positive light. Other researchers report that this often diminishes the essential concepts. The focus becomes on the technical skills of reading or writing, rather than the social studies lesson. “It is important for elementary school teachers to spend specific time developing the

big ideas that underscore powerful social studies instruction” (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010, p.127). With Goals 2000, enacted under President Bill Clinton, and No Child Left Behind, enacted under President George W. Bush, federal politicians have helped in the dismantling of social studies by focusing on reading and math, and pushing other subjects aside (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Doing this creates the idea that the other these other subjects are more trivial, thus squeezing the time that was once spent on learning about our history and civic duties into a much smaller slice within the school day.

Action Research Oriented

Solving local issues via research by practitioners is action research. Delving into the issue of the effects of the accountability approach on our educational system, and, more, our students, is actionable research. Due to pressure from business and governmental entities, public schools seem to be choosing to decrease time spent on teaching some subjects over others. These cutbacks appear to be in science, extra-curricular courses, and social studies. The primary grade-level targets for this are in grades Kindergarten – 5th grades.

In Texas schools, the areas of reading and math have become an indicator of decision-making. This raises the questions:

- Do we need to teach social studies?
- If so, why might it be needed?
- If so, when should it be taught?
- Are our students learning the standards as written?
- Are there any effects from the answers to the prior four questions?

“Campbell’s Law indicates that, when the values within the school culture are under stress with pressures to perform within two content areas, the previously negotiated ethical

norms of the school would collapse” (Byrd & Varga, 2018, p. 27). The exclusion of all other subject areas in the curriculum, because they are not being tested, results in the unethical practice of exclusion of those subjects from the daily curriculum (DeJarnette & Sudeck, 2016). A deeper dive into the research offers perspectives on these questions.

Research shows that elementary school social studies is not being taught at the depth it has been taught in the past. As a result, some research has recommended that, instead, service-learning be embedded into the elementary curriculum. This incorporation would encourage teachers and students to develop a voice on social issues and increase their confidence that they can make a difference in society. Some research showed that embedding service-learning, based on social studies, into an instructional unit of English Language Arts (ELA) increased student engagement (DeJarnette & Sudeck, 2016).

However, other research showed that the integration of social studies does not go far enough. Without the specific, intentional teaching of social studies content, citizenship norms within schools and society may be at risk (Owen, 1997). Intentional teaching, integration of curriculum, and scheduling are specific strategies that can help our country rebuild the importance of social studies instruction. This will help our students learn life-long lessons, not only about their history but also about being a productive member of society and an active citizen.

Conceptual Framework

I have chosen a Mixed-Methods Sequential Explanatory Design framework to research *The Effects of the State Accountability System on Social Studies in Texas Schools*. The two phases of research, quantitative followed by qualitative, will allow me first to collect and analyze the longitudinal STAAR data from the Texas Academic Performance Report.

Once these data are analyzed, I will collect qualitative data from Texas campuses. The qualitative data are based on interview questions, survey questions, and observations. They will be analyzed to help explain the quantitative results obtained during the first phase. The quantitative data provide the grounds for the research problem, with the qualitative data being able to help explain why the problem is occurring.

The data from previous research continues to accumulate, pointing toward the accountability system affecting classroom instruction. While social studies programs are meant to prepare students to be able to identify, understand, and solve challenges facing their diverse nation in an increasingly interdependent world, the actual instruction time spent meeting these goals has steadily decreased over the past 15 years (Similowitz & Byford, 2015). The questions formed for the qualitative data seek answers about what teachers are doing in the classroom as relates to social studies instruction. This will be developed based on the data from the quantitative research of the STAAR 8th grade social studies results from the past eight years. Using this framework, the qualitative data will help explain the quantitative results.

Most Significant Research and Practice Studies

In 1977, Weiss surveyed 10,000 schools and found the amount of instructional time for reading, as well as math, was well above the amount of time spent on social studies. In a North Carolina Initiative to study social studies in the classroom, it was found that, due to high stakes accountability, social studies was losing instructional time in the classroom even faster than in prior years. However, for those teachers who saw the value in teaching social studies, the more time they devoted to it, the more they taught it, and the more they and their students enjoyed it and found it beneficial to their lives (Good et al., 2010). Lack of interest

by those adults on the front lines is not seen as the obstacle to social studies instruction; it is the system of accountability and the priorities of others that are building the barriers.

Research is limited thus far on the impact of high stakes testing on social studies instruction. According to Byrd and Varga (2018), “some testing directors in a 1990 study believed that focusing on testing standards was beneficial because it ensured that essential skills were being taught; however, others regretted that higher-order thinking skills and subjects like science and social studies suffered because of the emphasis on reading and math” (p.28).

Key findings in an 18-month observational study of testing effects on schools were that “(a) external testing reduces the time available for ordinary instruction; (b) in high stakes environments, schools neglect material that the external tests do not include; (c) external testing encourages the use of instructional methods that resemble testing” (Shepard & Dougherty, 1991, pp.14-15). Time used in preparing for tests, practicing for tests, and administering tests, takes weeks from classroom instruction (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Time on science, writing, and social studies was being lost as teachers focused on reading, writing, and math.

Research into the accountability system continues to find that high stakes testing is causing an expanded curriculum to be more focused on those content areas that are being tested. “Teaching to the test” has become a buzz phrase that is used more frequently when describing this occurrence. Teachers feel pressured to shape instructional time within their classes to match the content found on the test. Logically this makes sense, as teachers are teaching what is tested.

Decreased teaching in non-tested subjects and ever-increasing teaching of tested subjects have been found in several surveys. In a study by Renter in 2006, 71% of districts reported cutting at least one subject to increase time spent on reading and math as a direct response to high stakes testing. When punitive consequences were attached to test scores, teachers did match their pedagogy and content to the test norms (Au, 2009). Even when teachers know they are responsible for teaching all the standards, more often than not, they feel pressured to focus on those standards that will be on the state assessment.

Grant (2006) noted that research on the impact of high stakes testing on social studies teaching is limited. However, there is some evidence that the teaching of social studies has been affected by high stakes testing, although the nature of these effects varies depending on the local context and conditions. Research must continue to help determine the effects of marginalizing social studies in elementary school.

A study done by the Center on Educational Policy (CEP) found that 33% of the districts reported reducing social studies in response to high stakes testing. In several districts, no social studies was taught at all at some schools because students were taking up to three periods of reading and two periods of math per day (Renter, 2006). Although high stakes testing is in its second decade, there is continued debate over whether it is having a positive or negative effect on our educational system. One claim is that of curricular narrowing, as noted earlier. This is where the standards are purposefully left out of the school year so that more time can be spent on those standards that will be most likely found on the state assessments. These standards may be in a tested area, as well as in a non-tested area.

Educators study the state assessments to find out which standards are tested most frequently and will choose to spend more time on those areas, to the exclusion of other

standards, even within reading and math. Reback (2010) provided evidence that reading and math teachers in tested grades spend significantly more time on test preparation. Time spent on specific standards within reading and math has increased, while time spent on science and social studies standards has decreased in K-5. In addition, research shows that states that test in science and social studies have more instructional time devoted to those subjects in tested grades than states that do not test those subjects. Even though science is not receiving time equal to reading and math, social studies is still receiving even less.

In a 2005 study, VanFossen found that, out of a five-hour instructional day, K-3 grade teachers in Indiana spent less than 20 minutes on social studies instruction, while teachers in grades 4-5 spent less than 30 minutes. This will negatively affect a student's knowledge of history and civics. The National Assessment of Educational Progress found the lowest scoring subjects in the core areas were in social studies-related fields of history, civics, and geography. "Instructional time allocated for social studies has diminished over time due to high stakes mandates in the United States" (Fitchett et al., 2014, p. 9). In the not so distant past, policy began having an effect on time allocation for social studies, and that policy took the form of nation-wide assessments.

Since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), high stakes testing has placed an even greater strain on how social studies is taught. With the emphasis on reading and math in the accountability system, there has been less instructional time devoted to teaching the cornerstones of our democratic society: Character Education, Citizenship Education, and Diversity (Duplass, 2011). The United States built its foundation on an informed citizenry. Freedom of Speech is one of the most sacrosanct rights given by our Constitution. However, if we are not teaching our citizens about the Constitutional freedoms

each of us is entitled to, we are not able to continue to have informed conversations and fact-based decisions about our country's future.

In 2001, when NCLB was initiated, it required all states to create assessments for reading, math, and science from third through eighth grade. NCLB set the goal of 100% of all students reaching proficient levels on the state assessments by 2014. As a result, 71% of school districts reduced time spent on subjects other than reading and math. Even more alarming, 90% of high-poverty districts mandated a reduction in time spent on subjects other than reading and math (Hursh, 2008). This began the era of high stakes testing, and what some deemed "teaching to the test."

By 2006, NCLB had mandated that all 3-8 grade students be tested in reading and math annually and once in high school. By 2008, NCLB had mandated that students be tested at least once at the elementary, middle, and high school levels in science. Schools could lose funding if they failed to show academic improvement, even though their students and staff changed each year. Many schools and communities soon realized that the government was comparing apples to oranges within the accountability system. Yet it continued. The Center on Education Policy (CEP) conducted an independent study of the No Child Left Behind Act. One portion of the study was the issue of change in curriculum and instructional time.

Findings included:

- About 62% of districts reported they had increased time for English Language Arts and math in elementary schools, and about 20% reported doing the same for middle schools. The average amount of minutes per week of the increase was 43% for the two subjects combined, with ELA receiving 47% and math receiving 37% of the increased time.

- To accommodate the increased allotted time, 44% of the districts reported cutting time from one or more other subjects or activities. About 145 minutes per week were taken from these other areas and given to ELA and math.
- The redistribution of instructional time was found to be more prevalent in districts with schools identified as in need of improvement. Districts with at least one school in need of improvement reported at a higher percentage that they had decreased time in social studies, science, art, and music. Thus, those students in schools already struggling were getting less curricular instruction in these areas than students in higher-performing schools, creating greater inequality.

A total of 84% of the districts reported having made changes to the curriculum to put greater emphasis on tested content (McMurrer, 2007). Pressured by the assessment protocols of policymakers, teachers compromised social studies instructional time for test preparation (Wills, 2007). Studies show teachers giving less attention to social studies instruction, thus reinforcing the perception that No Child Left Behind decreased time for other content within the school day.

Some researchers suggest that the role of high stakes testing policy on social studies instructional time is insignificant. In 2009, Anderson surmised that, based on research studies (although few), before the 1980s, and after accountability began in the 1990s, neither instructional methods nor time allotted had changed. Anderson contended that the rate of instruction of social studies was 5% before accountability and 5.7% after. Anderson claimed that the accountability system was the scapegoat for social studies not progressing. Although some researchers question the impact of accountability, the majority asserted that high stakes testing, formed from NCLB, has intensified the trivialization of social studies.

The first verifiable plan for developing a social studies achievement tests was undertaken in the early 1930s. A.C Krey and Truman Kelley, along with a committee, attempted to develop an assessment. However, four years later, they were unsuccessful; an assessment had not been developed due to disagreement on several issues. Some of the reported issues involved the contention that social science instruction was too complex for precise statements to be made for test questions. The group differed over how to choose which test items to use, which, in turn, caused questions about the validity and reliability of the assessment (Grant, 2006). Even into the 1970s, an assessment of that magnitude had not been developed (Farrar, 1972). At that time, the recommendations were that if achievement tests were going to take place in social studies, then the test questions must be reliable and researched. Hopes were that any assessments in the future would reflect the objective of the programs and provide additional confidence that the tests could offer a considerable contribution to guide education in the social studies.

In K-12 education, the process of annual standardized testing and the use of test data to make decisions about student academic achievement have resulted, in some cases, in professionally unethical behavior. Using the results to judge students, teachers, and school leadership has created the urge in some to skew the data through various means. Sidorkin (2016) wrote that he believed that “people evaluated based on data, know how they are being evaluated, and consciously, or subconsciously, change their activity or manipulate the data; both often with negative consequences” (p.322).

A test is considered high stakes when “its results are used to make important decisions that immediately affect students, teachers, administrators, communities, schools and districts” (Au, 2009, p.44). Some of these decisions are student graduation, grade-level promotion, and

teacher and/or principal salary and tenure and promotion. If test scores are reported to the public, it puts the reputation of educators and educational systems under public scrutiny and judgment, which also is a result of high stakes assessing. *A Nation at Risk* was a 2000 Regan era report on the decline of education in the United States, which was later to be determined as false information. However, only two years before the No Child Left Behind legislation was enacted, all states, except Iowa, had mandated state assessments (Jones, 2003). High stakes testing has influenced many more areas in our society than just the classroom.

As a result, the way that teachers plan their daily instruction of all subjects has been significantly altered. In a study conducted by Shepard and Dougherty in 1991, teachers reported they were under enormous pressure to raise test scores. Reports of pressure coming from district administration, school board, and media created the need, in the teacher's minds, to focus more on reading and math instruction than they would if there were no mandated tests. "How teachers choose to use time is determined by many factors, including the curriculum, grade level, classroom context, management, and teacher disposition" (Fitchett et al., 2014, p.215). With an average school day being seven hours long, teachers must keep their day more structured than ever before, making choices that will forever alter a child's understanding.

Classroom and school level context shape how social studies is prioritized. Teachers in urban and poorer campuses lose more time from social studies instruction than peers on suburban and wealthier campuses because they believe their less advantaged students need more intervention in ELA and math. The additional instructional time for these tested subjects results in inequitable educational opportunities for socio-economically disadvantaged children, thus placing them even further behind their more affluent peers educationally.

Some studies do show that there are teachers who chose to spend time teaching social studies, regardless of testing and constraints. These teachers consciously chose to teach outside of the accountability constraints because they saw themselves as the gatekeepers of the curriculum who control what and how much they teach. The teachers who saw themselves in this light spent more time teaching social studies than their counterparts (Fitchett et al., 2014).

Teachers who encourage critical thinking and spend less time with a textbook tend to teach social studies more often and promote cooperative learning. More often than not, however, teachers are not spending an adequate amount of time to teach social studies standards due to increased accountability. Teachers look at worksheets, textbooks, and lectures as timesaving strategies. The widely polarizing Common Core Standards integrate social studies standards into ELA content in the lower grades, with a specific history and social studies strands for 6th-10th grades. Focusing on those tested areas within the accountability system squeezes out time for social studies. Elementary teachers rated social studies as the least important subject to teach of the core subjects. Teacher's opportunities to cover social studies are influenced by workplace attitudes and instructional decision-making (Fitchett et al., 2014). The amount of mandatory testing, grade level, and socio-economic status of students affect the marginalization of social studies in schools.

State accountability is not the same across the 50 states. In Louisiana schools, as part of a national pilot, teachers are exposing students to books containing passages about social studies. Students will be assessed in smaller tests throughout the year using tests that combine literacy and social studies content. Georgia is piloting a similar model, where students take "mini" assessments over content recently learned, and the scores from the mini-assessments

are averaged as one grade for an end of year state score. The states are also similarly providing more classroom instructional time to the subjects tested based on the student's grade level. There has been a small impact of increased time shown in science, but we have not seen an increase in time for social studies time (Cocke, Buckley & Scott, 2011).

The actual result of increased teaching time correlates to the grade level that is being tested in science and social studies. It does not span across the grade levels just because one grade level is tested. In Texas, 8th grade science and social studies state assessments continue to be the lowest scoring subject areas. Grade level also played a significant role in social studies instruction time, with intermediate grade levels spending significantly more time than lower grade levels on social studies. Scheduling of content-specific classes tended to have the greatest impact on the time for social studies. Lower grade levels more often have self-contained classrooms where all subjects are taught, while higher grade levels go to content-specific teachers. So, the instructional time is protected in the content by the schedule (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). Principals and other district leaders must make the most of scheduling for all subjects, not just the ones being tested. Alderson and Wall in 1993 hypothesized the influence of tests on teaching as:

- Tests influence teaching (a phenomenon termed “washback”)
- Tests influence what teachers teach and how teachers teach
- Tests influence the rate, sequence, degree, and depth of teaching
- Tests influence attitudes to the content and method
- Tests will have washback on all teachers
- Tests will have washback effects for some teachers but not others.

Grade level disparities in the time allotted to core subjects is not a recent trend. In grades K-2, there is less time allotted for social studies than in grades 3-5, and in grades 3-5, there is less time allotted than in grades 6-8. In reviewing past governmental policies, NCLB was found to have a greater impact on decreased instructional policy than any other policy before its inception. The average instructional time spent on social studies decreased by 30 minutes between 2000-2004. When looking at the historical context of social studies instruction within the school day, one can see that, what was once a subject that was focused on a better world for all, has slowly turned into a by-product of our instructional day. Teachers' emphases are often on maximizing test scores, rather than on meeting students' learning needs (Black & William, 2005). Further investigation should occur to determine the impact this downward trend is having on student learning and society and developing strategies for challenging the demised role of social studies within the elementary curriculum.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter II

Social studies is crucial to teach in early childhood and elementary years. In order to ensure that the young people of the United States become active, responsible citizens, who can maintain democratic values upon which this country was established, then social studies must be taught at each level of a student's education. Social studies should equip our students with an understanding of the past, and skills to help use what has been learned to help plan for the future. It should enable our students to become better citizens. Problem solving and decision-making skills should be taught, as well as skills in making judicious decisions. Students can integrate these skills into a framework that helps them, whether at play, in school, or a career.

A planned K-12 social studies program should grow human beings into citizens of a global community. These systems must begin at an early age so that children can evolve from an egocentric perspective to a more structured conceptual understanding of the world around them. An effective social studies program needs to be organized around concepts from history and the social sciences and must be consistently taught. Our democratic society is based on the concepts taught in these early grades. The behavior of our citizens, whether in the school community or the community that surrounds us, will only become stronger if these concepts are incorporated into the daily academic lives of our students.

Students view others from the lens of their own culture. They are learning little in school about the opportunities they have in a participatory political system. NCSS recommended that 20% of the school day be devoted to social studies instruction, and it must be seen as an essential part of the curriculum (NCSS, 2008). In elementary grades, social studies has been and continues to be marginalized within the state curriculum and de-emphasized by some administrators and teachers (VanFossen, 2005). The pressures of standardized tests and yearly progress have forced schools to reprioritize subjects. Institutions of higher education, when training future teachers, must continue to stress the need for social studies instruction and prepare their students for teaching the standards, so that the pillars of a democratic society will remain strong.

CHAPTER III
SOLUTION AND METHOD

Proposed Solution

Research has shown that social studies has become a marginalized subject (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010). From interviews with principals and teachers at select Texas schools, it is clear that this frequently occurs in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades. The Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS) provides grade-level standards regarding what Texas students should know and be able to do. The vertical alignment of social studies includes nine areas for elementary school instruction that also are taught and tested in 8th grade. In addition, there are 165 vocabulary words introduced in 3rd to 5th grades that emerge in later testing and directly connect to other scaffolded vocabulary words in higher grades. The goal of the present research is to develop a protocol for 3rd to 5th-grade teachers to use when teaching social studies TEKS and preparing their students for future social studies instruction.

After working with several principals and teachers, I developed a local solution to the problem of social studies not receiving the same instructional time that state-assessed courses tend to receive. Since reading is assessed in the 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, and teachers believe there is little time to spare in an already full school day, grade-level social studies stories should be incorporated into reading time. Doing so will allow for the teaching of social studies vocabulary, as well as lessons in the nine areas found in the 8th grade TEKS and tested by STAAR. Teachers can then combine reading and social studies assessments to determine if students are succeeding in both.

Study Context and Participants

Conducting this research in two school districts in northeast Texas will allow me to choose campuses that resemble the average Texas school. Campus racial and socio-economic demographics, along with state accountability results and grade configuration, were important areas for determining which campuses to study. Pine Elementary (PE) and Washington Elementary (WE) consist of kindergarten through 4th-grade students, Pine Middle School (PM) serves 5th and 6th-grade students, and Washington Junior High (WJH) houses 5th through 8th grade students (pseudonyms used).

Participating in the study at PE, and WE are two 3rd grade and two 4th grade teachers. The PM participants consist of six 5th grade teachers, while WJH includes three 5th grade teachers. The principals at all four campuses participated in the interview process. I clarified with participants that no identifying information would be released. Interviewing each principal allowed me to gather more information on the instructional expectations of teachers. Master schedules provided me with a better understanding of the composition of the school day. Each teacher participated in the interview process as well.

I studied the amount of instructional time spent on teaching social studies through observations and researching lesson plans and conducted interviews addressing teachers' actions and beliefs (see Tables 2 and 3). The objective was to help understand and compartmentalize what effect, if any, the accountability system has on social studies instructional time, as compared to other core subjects in 3rd to 5th grades. Determining the actual time spent helped participants develop a plan for teaching social studies through reading. Engaging with school staff members allowed for discussion of the options for action

research, so that ideas can be developed that are within teachers' abilities, but also require no additional time allotment.

I realize that there may be other variables within the education system that affect teaching social studies in 3rd to 5th-grade students, as well as on the 8th grade social studies STAAR test outcomes. Within a school system, it is impossible to isolate all factors affecting what causes a student to learn. However, the objective of this study was to determine whether social studies is receiving enough instructional time during the school year for students to learn the TEKS, and, if not, design a solution that would meet this benchmark.

The staff at each campus reported that they review programs, schedules, and staffing patterns each Spring to determine if any changes to the master schedule are needed for the upcoming school year. Even though the schedule for the 2019/2020 school year is underway, none of the teachers has expressed interest in possible changes to the schedule. I have confirmed with them that changing the process of teaching reading and social studies should not conflict with other instructional parameters. All understand that this research intends to provide information and ideas on how to incorporate social studies into the instructional day.

Table 2 Interview Protocol.

NO.	Teacher Interview Question	Purpose	Research Question (RQ)
1	How long have you been teaching?	This is a “comfort” question. It is easy to answer and allows the participant to have an “off the top of your head” answer.	
2	What grade levels and subjects have you taught?	<p>This is a “comfort” question. It is easy to answer and allows the participant to have an “off the top your head” answer.</p> <p>In addition, it gives the researcher background on the subject, allowing them to compare variations and similarities in answers given by teachers, based on their backgrounds.</p>	RQ 1: Do the teachers show any teaching commonalities?
3	Thinking back to your first and second years of teaching, how has your daily instruction schedule changed?	The researcher seeks to understand changes in the daily activities of the teacher over time.	RQ 2: What changes in time allocated to the subject has the teacher noticed?

Table 2 (continued)

NO.	Teacher Interview Question	Purpose	Research Question (RQ)
4	<p>Do you see a difference in the amount of time spent on each core subject area between then and now?</p> <p>What are some of the differences?</p>	<p>The researcher seeks to understand changes in the daily activities of the teacher over time.</p>	<p>RQ 3: What changes in time allocated to the subject has the teacher noticed?</p>
5	<p>Is there a difference in the amount of stress you feel now about having your students reach “master” on the STAAR versus getting your students to the mastery level of the state test when you first began teaching?</p> <p>What are the differences?</p> <p>Why do you think this has occurred?</p>	<p>The researcher seeks to determine if the accountability system has caused emotional changes in the subject.</p>	<p>RQ 4: What connections are there between the accountability system and the teacher’s behavior or ideas?</p>
6	<p>If you have only taught under the STAAR system, do you believe there is more instructional focus on the subjects assessed at this grade?</p> <p>How does that feel, sound, and look?</p> <p>Why do you think this has occurred?</p>	<p>The researcher seeks to understand how the subject’s instructional timeframe is determined.</p>	<p>RQ 5: What is the teacher’s perspective on the time allocated to core subjects?</p>

Table 2 (continued)

NO.	Teacher Interview Question	Purpose	Research Question (RQ)
6	During the school year, is there ever any discussion about the 8 th grade social studies STAAR?	The researcher seeks to determine if forethought regarding students' future courses is considered when developing the instructional day.	RQ 6: Does the campus vocalize a culture focused on the student's future educational needs?
7	Do you have formative assessments for all subjects?	The researcher seeks to determine if the same amount of importance is placed on each subject.	RQ 7: Are there artifacts that show that social studies is taught to the breadth and depth outlined in the TEKS?
NO.	Principal Interview Question	Purpose	Research Question (RQ)
1	How long have you been in education?	This is a "comfort" question. It is easy to answer and allows the participant to have an "off the top of your head" answer.	

Table 2 (continued)

NO.	Principal Interview Question	Purpose	Research Question (RQ)
2	How long have you been a principal?	This is a “comfort” question. It is easy to answer and allows the participant to have an “off the top of your head” answer.	
3	Thinking back to what you thought being a principal would be like vs. what it is actually like, what are some things you have found to be very different?	The researcher seeks to understand changes in attitude over time based on day-to-day experiences.	RQ 1: What connections are there between previous ideas about the work and the current reality?
4	Do you see a difference in any core beliefs you had before becoming a principal and those beliefs now? If so, what are some of the differences?	The researcher seeks to understand changes in the principal’s core beliefs over time.	RQ 2: Based on their behavior and ideas, what connections are there between the principal’s prior and current experiences?
5	Is there a difference in the amount of stress you feel now regarding having your students reach “master” on the STAAR versus getting your students to the mastery level of the state test when you first became a principal? What are the differences? Why do you think this has occurred?	The researcher seeks to determine if the accountability system has caused emotional changes in the subject.	RQ 3: What connections are there between the accountability system and the principal’s behavior and ideas?

Table 2 (continued)

NO.	Principal Interview Question	Purpose	Research Question (RQ)
6	Do you believe there is more instructional focus on the subjects assessed at this grade? Is your master schedule different from how you would prefer it to be if the accountability was arranged differently?	The researcher seeks to understand how the principal makes choices about instructional time.	RQ 4: What is the principal's perspective on time allocated to core subjects?
7	What would your ideal schedule look like if accountability were not a factor?	The researcher seeks to understand how the principal makes choices about instructional time.	RQ 5: What is the principal's perspective on the time allocated to core subjects?
8	Do you have formative assessments for all subjects?	The researcher seeks to determine if the same amount of importance is placed on each subject.	RQ 6: Are there artifacts that show that social studies is taught to the breadth and depth outlined in the TEKS?

Table 3 Survey Questions After Possible Solution Is Applied.

No	Question
1	What grade level do you teach?
2	What subjects are you responsible for teaching?
3	How long have you been a public-school teacher?
4	Prior to integrating reading with social studies, how much instructional time did you spend each week on social studies?

Table 3 (continued)

No	Question
5	Did integrating reading and social studies take instructional time away from any other subject? If so, which subject(s)?
6	Have formative assessments during this time included social studies standards?
7	Did you administer formal assessments in social studies prior to integrating reading and social studies?
8	What benefit do you see, if any, in integrating reading and social studies instruction?
9	Do you plan to continue to integrate reading and social studies instruction?

Proposed Research Paradigm

Using a mixed-methods study of explanatory sequential design, I collected and analyzed the data. First, I gathered quantitative data, that is, grades and formative assessments from social studies scores. I compared those scores to reading and math grades and formative assessment scores. In addition, STAAR social studies scores were compiled longitudinally and compared to STAAR reading and math scores. Once the quantitative data was fully explored, qualitative data was collected from teachers and administrators. It was analyzed to help determine the amount of instructional time that social studies is taught in 3rd to 5th grades, as compared to reading and math. Interpreting how the qualitative data explain the quantitative results led to a better understanding of whether the accountability system might be affecting the teaching and learning of social studies, and, if so, what solutions can be put into place to improve this imbalance.

Data Collection Methods

On any public school campus, time is constrained by the need to meet student and faculty needs. There are numerous mandates required for each subject, lunch breaks, teacher planning periods, assemblies, and other factors that affect the running of a school. Because of this, action research must fit within the confines of the school schedule. Although the schools to be studied were very willing to be a part of the study, all asked that I apply methods that would provide me with the necessary data without putting undue stress on the participants.

All four schools used DMAC, a web-based application that houses local and state assessment data. I extracted quantitative data from that application to gather information on student performance. Teachers provided me with six weeks of grade reports for all three subjects; students' names were masked. In addition to campus quantitative data, state STAAR reports made it possible for me to research longitudinal state averages for STAAR social studies, reading, and math scores. Qualitative data gathered via interviews, observations, and surveys allowed for the use of various instruments to help explain the quantitative data.

One-on-one interviews between the researcher and each subject was provided a confidential environment. The observation instrument used was a rubric implemented during classroom observations that focused on the environment, the amount of time spent on instruction, the topic being addressed, and whether that content connected directly to the lesson plan. The Google survey provided the participating teacher with an opportunity to offer more information on what is being taught, with the hope that using a variety of questions would elicit additional information not gathered during the face-to-face interview.

Justification of Use of Instruments in Context

The STAAR results informed the researcher of gaps that have occurred over time between tested core subjects. This longitudinal historical data from STAAR is the basis for this study. Focusing on lower grade levels will help to determine if the accountability system is affecting how teachers spend their instructional time. Within this action research, I instituted a solution to help improve what I perceive to be the problem. Collecting local assessment scores and grades will aid in determining differences in student performance before and after a change in social studies instruction time. Lesson plans were collected as artifacts provided written documentation regarding how the school day is structured, as well as patterns of instructional time.

In this action research study, I have chosen to use interviews, observations, and surveys, and an applied research methodology to help solve a specific, practical problem. The use of interviews ensured a high response rate because I could set the interview time to occur during the teacher's conference period. For each teacher in the study, a personal interview was scheduled before the classroom observation, helping me to develop a relationship with the subject and collect information about the amount of instructional time spent on specific core subject areas. In addition, I gathered information from participants about what and why they teach, and to determine if they are open to changing the "what" and "how" of their pedagogy.

Observations using a standard rubric for each subject allowed me to gather first-hand information about the classroom, including how instructional time is used. Focusing on the classroom setting as a part of the observation helped determine if teaching is directed more towards the standards, or if importance is placed on specific content. Choosing the use of non-participatory observations helped avoid bias stemming from working directly with the

students and teachers. The surveys collected at the end of the study were aimed at assessing whether the teachers believed that the proposed solution influenced daily instruction and student performance and whether they will continue with the proposed solution in the future (see Table 4 for a project timeline).

Data Analysis Strategy

I performed a descriptive analysis of the mean, percentage difference, and range of state assessment scores for social studies, reading, and math since 2012. This provided a summary of the data and helped uncover patterns. I compared local assessment results for social studies, before and after the proposed solution was introduced in the classroom. This allowed me to compare student achievement when social studies is taught as a stand-alone course, and once it is integrated with reading. Coding provided qualitative data to assist with identifying ideas, behaviors, and concepts. These, in turn, uncovered patterns and connections among the data. Patterns of common responses were explored, and a narrative analysis of the interviews, observations, and surveys focused on answering the research question.

Timeline

Table 4 Timeline for the Project.

TOPIC	Approximate Date of Completion
Submission of IRB application	Spring 2019
Obtain permission from superintendents to access campuses for study	Summer 2019
Complete Chapter 2	September 2019
Complete Chapter 1	October 2019
Meet with campus staff to obtain informed consent and begin scheduling interviews and observations	October 2019
Gather quantitative state data	October 2019
Complete Chapter 3	November 2019
Oral defense of Proposal to the Committee	December 2019

Table 4 (continued)

TOPIC	Approximate Date of Completion
Complete interviews, observations, and surveys	December 2019
Complete analysis of data	January 2020
Submit drafts of Chapters 4 and 5 to the Chair and Committee for review	February 2020
Submit a final copy of ROS to the Committee	May 2020
Oral defense of ROS to the Committee	May 2020
Complete	May 2020

Reliability and Validity Concerns or the Equivalent

Establishing reliability and validity are critical in research. This study used four settings with different teachers to facilitate an assessment of the consistency of the results and determine reliability. The validity of the state assessment data provided the state averages in various STAAR subjects and allowed for a comparison of eight years of data. The qualitative data collected from interviews and surveys showcased the views of teachers at a particular time during the school year.

The questions, observation rubrics, and surveys have been designed to be reliable and reproducible instruments. However, the subject's answers could change based on several variables, including the point in the school year, particular students in the classroom, number of years of experience teaching, and other situations that might influence the subject. However, for this Record of Study (ROS), all possible conditions affecting validity and reliability have been taken into consideration. The researcher believes the study to be accurate and hopes that additional research will be conducted on this subject.

Closing Thoughts on Chapter III

This explanatory sequential design record research will inform those within the study (as well as other educators) of the effects the accountability system on instruction time dedicated to social studies. The data was gathered to determine if the time allotted to teaching social studies is less than what is being given to reading and math. If so, the solution will be to integrate social studies instruction into reading. The goal is for social studies to receive more instructional time during the elementary school classroom day. Only time will tell if this focused instruction will make a difference in STAAR scores, but local assessments comparing pre- and post-integration will indicate if a more immediate change occurs. The accountability system should not cause the marginalization of any subject.

CHAPTER IV
ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Introducing the Analysis

The purpose of this research was to examine the effects of the state accountability system on the instruction time allotted to social studies in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades in Texas schools. In selecting a mixed-methods sequential design, I began by analyzing state and campus data and then moved to a qualitative analysis of observations and interviews. In addition to researching the amount of time spent on actual classroom instruction of social studies, I developed a plan to integrate social studies with reading instruction to determine if it would result in teachers providing greater coverage of social studies TEKS and whether that, in turn, would increase students' exposure to social studies knowledge. The research questions addressed were as follows:

1. Taking into account that the State Board of Education mandates that reading, writing, math, science, and social studies be taught at each grade level, how much time actually is allotted for social studies at each campus, per their respective master schedules.
2. Considering that the state accountability system assesses reading and math in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, writing in 4th grade, and science in 5th grade, how much time actually is spent teaching social studies?
3. Since the state accountability system compares all campuses, regardless of campus type or demographics, what is the school culture regarding teaching TEKS at each grade level?

4. With each school day being approximately 450 minutes long, including mandated lunch, physical education, and a 45-minute teacher planning period, can social studies and reading be integrated in a way that there is more time for social studies TEKS?
5. Since there is no STAAR assessment for social studies at these grade levels, will the integration of social studies into reading increase students' knowledge of social studies TEKS?

This chapter begins with statistics regarding the campuses visited. The demographics of the campuses are then compared to those of the state, including STAAR results, race, and socioeconomics, providing a framework for this research (see Table 4). The results of teacher and principal interviews, as well as observations and analysis of master schedules, lesson plans, and student test scores, also are included to formulate answers to the research questions.

Presentation of Data

Texas has over 1,200 school districts and more than five million students. This wide range of demographics makes it challenging to find an “average” school. For this research, I chose four campuses near where I live; together, these closely resemble the state average for schools. The following table includes the demographic and STAAR data for Pine Elementary School (PE), Washington Elementary School (WE), Pine Middle School (PM), and Washington Junior High (WJH), as compared to those of the state.

Table 5 Demographics of Sample – Group percentages for State and each campus.

Group	State	PE	WE	PM	WJH
<i>3rd Grade Reading</i>					
Approaches	76	95	65		
Meets	45	70	23		
Masters	27	48	15		
<i>3rd Grade Math</i>					
Approaches	79	95	75		
Meets	49	80	45		
Masters	27	38	15		
<i>4th Grade Reading</i>					
Approaches	75	82	77		
Meets	44	41	40		
Masters	22	15	18		
<i>4th Grade Math</i>					
Approaches	75	83	80		
Meets	48	45	41		
Masters	28	18	16		
<i>5th Grade Reading</i>					
Approaches	86			86	91
Meets	54			52	53
Masters	29			22	30
<i>5th Grade Math</i>					
Approaches	90			90	92
Meets	58			49	64
Masters	36			27	38
<i>Demographics</i>					
Socioeconomic	60	77	60	83	60
White	27	20	65	16	65
African American	12	6	5	11	5
Hispanic	53	71	25	70	25

Time Allotted to Social Studies per Campus

A school district that offers kindergarten through Grade 5 must provide instruction in the required curriculum. The district must ensure that sufficient time is included for teachers to teach and students to learn English language arts (ELA) and reading, mathematics, science, social studies, fine arts, health, physical education, technology applications, and, to the extent possible, languages other than English (TAC, 2015). This requirement gives districts flexibility in managing their school day. There is much research on the time needed for a student to learn content; however, the state of Texas does not mandate a minimum number of hours. It merely states that “sufficient time” must be provided.

The principals of the four campuses in my study provided me with copies of their master schedules. Each one was different. Table 6 compares the campus time allotments for the four core content courses and the entire school day.

Table 6 Master Schedule Time Allotment.

Campus	Daily Minutes	ELA	Math	Science	Social Studies
PE	420	250-minute block with math	250-minute block with ELA	Integrated into ELA & math block	Integrated into ELA & math block
WE	450	90 minutes	90 minutes	45 minutes	55 minutes
PM	425	90 minutes	90 minutes	90 minutes	45 minutes one day a week
WJH	455	90 minutes	90 minutes	45 minutes	45 minutes

Time Allotted to Social Studies per Teacher

My interviews with teachers lasted between 20 and 40 minutes per teacher. Three 3rd grade, four 4th grade, and five 5th grade teachers were able to participate in face-to-face interviews. Question 4 was: “Do you see a difference in the amount of time you spent on each core subject area when you began teaching versus the amount of time you spend now?” Each of the 12 teachers answered yes. They stated that more time was being spent on the subjects tested, including some remediation. The responses ranged from the exact amount of time as required by the master schedule to not following the master schedule at all.

Below are some of the comments from teachers at PE regarding the time allotted for teaching social studies:

I spend 30 minutes a day for social studies AND science. So really 15 minutes each, give or take.

I spend an hour and 10 minutes on social studies and science one day a week.

The teachers at WE responded as follows regarding the time allotted for teaching social studies

We spend 45 minutes a day on social studies unless we have to do I station.

We have 45 minutes scheduled, but it's more like 30 minutes a day.

Comments from teachers at PM on the same subject included:

I do 30 to 45 minutes, mostly on Fridays, but it's scheduled daily.

I teach social studies for one and a half hours per week.

45 minutes is scheduled a day, but we only get to it on Fridays for 30-45 minutes.

Finally, a representative comment from a teacher at WJH was:

I only teach social studies, so I always teach 45 minutes every day.

Teachers' lesson plans also were used to verify the amount of time spent on social studies in various classrooms. A random selection produced three 3rd grade, one 4th grade, and one 5th grade lesson plan to review. Of the five plans reviewed, two contained lessons for social studies. The 5th-grade plan contained a 45-minute lesson on urban areas, and the 4th-grade plan contained a 30-minute daily lesson on Native Americans.

Perceptions of School Culture Regarding Teaching TEKS as Mandated by the State Board of Education

I endeavored to determine if campus culture focused on students' future educational needs. Thus, one interview question was: "During the school year, is there ever any discussion about the 8th grade social studies STAAR?" Of the twelve teachers asked, only one answered in the affirmative, stating: "We do talk about the TEKS that will be covered in 8th grade, but we don't get all of the social studies TEKS taught. There are so many. Mainly we talk about 8th grade at the beginning of the year." Table 7 was derived from my 12 classroom observations.

Table 7 Examples of Culture of Instruction Based on Teacher Response.

Question	Answer
Do you see a difference in the amount of time spent on each core subject area between then and now?	"Yes, when I began teaching in the '90s, I had the ability to teach each subject as I wanted, based on equal time for each subject. I can't remember the last time I could really focus on all of the TEKS as written."
What are some of the differences?	"Yes, I just began teaching eight years ago, but every year our master schedule changes. There is more focus on our tested subjects; I really don't teach the TEKS for social studies or science; we just hit some of the BIG ones."

Table 7 (continued)

Question	Answer
<p>Is there a difference in the amount of stress you feel now about having your students reach “master” on the STAAR versus getting your students to the mastery level of the state test when you first began teaching?</p> <p>What are the differences?</p> <p>Why do you think this has occurred?</p>	<p>“This accountability system that gives points is inequitable to me. A child that passes at master is worth 3 points, and one that passes at approaches is worth 1 point. That child at approaches may have reached great strides to get there, and the teacher may have worked miracles helping him get there, but because he only met approaches, he only gets a point toward the system. I really don’t like this system as it doesn’t show a true picture of the child and the work.”</p> <p>“Well, I began teaching as TAAS was coming in. There are huge differences. Considering we are still using multiple choice-high stakes assessments, I think TAKS and the accountability system we had during that era was the fairest system. However, what I have realized is that in Texas, the teachers will never be told they are good enough. With each test, as we get the majority of our students to the level of success required by the state, the rules change.”</p>
<p>If you have only taught under the STAAR system, do you believe there is more instructional focus on the subjects assessed at this grade?</p> <p>How does that feel, sound, and look?</p> <p>Why do you think this has occurred?</p>	<p>“I was kind of sad when I began teaching three years ago. I had thought I could come into my 3rd-grade class and have wonderful lessons for all of my core subjects. We spend so much time on reading and math, especially reading, that I don’t have time to do great lessons on social studies and science like my teachers did with me in 3rd grade. I mean those were the lessons that I remember, not the lessons on how to multiply or how to compare to articles.”</p>
<p>During the school year, is there ever any discussion about the 8th grade social studies STAAR?</p>	<p>“No, other grade levels, than what we have at the school aren’t discussed.”</p> <p>“At the beginning of the year, we look over the results of the district’s scores, but after that one time, we don’t ever talk about them again.”</p>

Table 7 (continued)

Question	Answer
Do you have formative assessments for all subjects?	<p>“No, just the subjects we have STAAR tests.”</p> <p>“No, we only do Formative Assessments for reading and math.”</p> <p>“No, we don’t use formative assessments; we only do three benchmarks a year for our tested subjects. For science and social studies, we do an end of year assessment.”</p>

During classroom observations, one method I used to investigate school culture was to look for artifacts in the classroom. The results are in Table 8.

Table 8 Social Studies Classroom Artifacts Observed in the 12 Classrooms

Word Wall	Anchor Charts	Wall Art	SS Folders	Maps	Globe	No SS Artifacts
3 classrooms but no words listed for SS	All classrooms used anchor charts, but none pertained to SS	12 classrooms had wall art for all subjects except SS	3	3	5	

I interviewed three principals to obtain a better understanding of their school culture. Each mentioned that the STAAR should not be the most important aspect of education. One asked his teachers not to speak about the STAAR test. Two described teaching students at their current academic level and moving from there, but both also said that the STAAR “gets

in the way” of doing that. Although I did not mention the STAAR specifically, all three referenced it by name.

To determine whether the principals placed equal emphasis on each core subject, I asked the teachers to participate in the study if formative assessments were administered in each grade and for each topic. In response, I received a range of answers. Formative assessments were used to evaluate students during instruction to determine if they were learning the material. Teachers used these short, frequent assessments to identify what still needed to be taught to achieve mastery. Table 9 shows the range of answers given by the 12 participants interviewed when asked if formative assessments were used for all core areas.

Table 9 Formative Assessments for Social Studies.

Formative assessments not given	Formative assessments given at the end of each unit	Formative assessments given every 6 weeks	Formative assessments at various times	No formative assessment but benchmark	Formative assessment at the end of every month
4	2	2	1	2	1

Integration of Social Studies with Reading

Planning meetings were held to determine whether teachers were willing to integrate social studies with reading. Research has shown that teachers who integrate reading and writing skills into core content instruction create a learning experience that is more understandable for students, thus optimizing learning time. For example, in ELA, students may practice reading non-fiction texts relevant to social studies, gaining experience in both at the same time.

Grade-level teacher meetings were held at each campus to discuss how best to integrate reading and social studies for a minimum of six weeks. All campuses used TEKS Resource

that chunks the TEKS for all grade levels and subjects. The Instructional Focus Document and TEKS Alignment were used to determine which social studies TEKS would be covered in the subsequent six weeks, and which would most easily fit into a reading integration unit. Lesson plans were designed to guide teachers through the process. Pre- and post-assessments were administered to help determine whether the integration of social studies and reading allowed students to gain additional knowledge. Teachers recorded answers to the following:

1. Did integrating the two subjects take more time to plan than would teaching a stand-alone subject?
2. Was social studies instructional time increased by integration?
3. Will you continue to integrate in the future?

Fourteen teachers agreed to participate. However, before the beginning of the six-week period, two decided not to take part. The 12 remaining reported the following information about the three questions outlined above (see Table 8).

Table 10. Responses to the Integration of Courses.

Participant number	Did integrating the two subjects take more planning than teaching a stand-alone subject?	Was social studies instructional time increased by integration?	Will you continue to integrate in the future?
1	Yes.	Yes, but it didn't seem like they were learning the material as deeply.	Not sure.
2	Yes, but I only integrated when I could.	Some.	When I can.
3	No.	Yes.	Yes.
4	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
5	Some.	Perhaps slightly.	Yes, until February.

Table 10 (continued)

6	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
7	Yes.	Yes.	Probably not.
8	Yes.	No. We already have 45 minutes, so it really helped more with reading.	I will try.
9	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
10	Yes.	Yes.	Yes.
11	Yes. It would be easier to plan at the beginning of the year.	Yes.	Yes, but I want to do a whole year plan next year.
12	Yes.	Yes. We do so little SS. It had to increase.	Yes!

Teachers were asked to share pre- and post-assessment results. For the pretest, a 10-question assessment was given to evaluate the materials used with students the previous six weeks, that is, before integration. The post-test was a 10-question assessment covering the TEKS taught during the integration period. The teachers were concerned about divulging individual grade; so, I asked them to give me their class averages. Table 11 details the results of the pre-test and post-test.

Table 11 Pre- and Post-integration Assessment Results.

Teacher	Pre-test Results	Post-test Results
1	87	85
2	80	82
3	70	71
4	72	77
5	88	85
6	92	92
7	68	70

Table 11 (continued)

Teacher	Pre-test Results	Post-test Results
8	88	89
9	79	81
10	83	86
11	89	90
12	70	77

Results of the Research

Three of the four school leaders developed master schedules that favored subjects assessed by the state accountability system. The most equitable master schedule had a longer school day overall. The master schedule with the least amount of time for social studies allotted 45 minutes one day a week. This made it nearly impossible for a teacher to cover all the TEKS social studies requirements.

Most teachers viewed their master schedules as something to reference, and not necessarily as rules that had to be followed. Teachers at PM, which set aside 45 minutes one day a week for social studies, admitted to often spending less than the scheduled time because there were more pressing issues. The lesson plans examined verified that instructional time for social studies was limited at most of the campuses. WJH was the lone campus where social studies instructional time was protected. This was because the school was departmentalized, and the classrooms were not self-contained. In addition, the master schedule was such that no subjects were blocked or integrated. In PE, where ELA, math, and social studies were integrated into one 250-minute block, the teachers spent less time on social studies because they believed their students needed more reading and math.

The culture at each campus showed a love for children and the importance of their education. However, the stress created by the state accountability system was evident in the amount of instructional time spent on the tested subjects. In addition, during interviews, both

teachers and principals spoke of the stress related to students' performance on the STAAR. Interviewees talked about the need to educate the whole child and meet their young charges at their particular academic level. They also confessed that, if a subject was not tested, it was often eliminated to remediate students in tested subjects. The classrooms contained no artifacts that promoted the tenets of social studies.

To promote more instructional time for social studies, teachers were asked to integrate reading and social studies instruction for six weeks. At the end of the six weeks, 11 of the 12 teachers responded that it took more time to plan for integration; one said it did not. In addition, 11 said that the instructional time increased. However, one of the teachers did not believe students learned the material as deeply when integrating. Another confessed that any time was better than the small amount previously allocated. Regarding continuing integration after the six weeks, eight responded yes and four no. The results of the pre-test and post-test showed that nine classrooms increased scores after integrating social studies with reading, one remained unchanged, and two showed a decrease. Overall, 24 points were gained after social studies and reading were integrated.

The results show that social studies is not being taught as written in the TEKS. The time allotted at most campuses is insufficient to cover the content. Although the educators may have good intentions, the looming state accountability assessments pressure teachers and principals to focus on the STAAR for each grade level. Although the integration of social studies and reading had positive results, the time to plan meant additional work for teachers. If time during the summer was allowed for planning, and teachers did not have to spend their limited time on it during the school year, integration could possibly be implemented more easily. In addition, the tests were short and covered what had been taught, leading to questions

regarding whether this format would be of benefit versus one longer annual state assessment such as the STAAR.

Interaction between the Research and Context

Each campus has a personality of its own. Because of this, I chose to interview the principals before entering the classrooms. I also sent multiple emails to teachers before my visits to make sure they knew exactly what to expect. Since I had planned on asking teachers to integrate social studies and reading, I verified that I would not be visiting math teachers. Teachers have limited time, and I did not want to spend time with those who would not be taking part in the research.

I was overwhelmed by the interview responses. The teachers seemed deeply appreciative of being asked their opinion and to discover that someone cared about the stress they were under due to the accountability system. The teachers and principal who chose not to complete the study had emergency meetings and personal issues that created conflicts in the schedule. The first-year teacher, who was not able to take part in the study, was disappointed and asked if I could come back next year. The resistance to continuing integration past the six-week trial seemed to come from the increased time in planning. However, most teachers saw potential in integration and, if given more planning time, believed it would help them cover more social studies TEKS. Yet, this was not the case for all of them; some believed social studies TEKS were inappropriate for integration due to the context in which the subject must be taught.

The results of this research were made available to the teachers and principals who participated. The teachers were surprised to find the overall increase in post-test scores. As a result, conversations have continued with the principals about possible changes to planning

for the 2020-2021 school year. Principals were surprised to discover that social studies had been cut so severely and planned to work with their teachers on ways to allow for more time to be devoted to the subject. Further study is needed to determine a long-term solution to ensuring that social studies is taught as mandated by the State Board of Education. The social studies TEKS underwent streamlining last year. However, with minimal protected instructional time, the subject is still not being taught as written.

Summary of Chapter IV

Although the integration of social studies and reading was shown to be a success overall, it is evident that, for any changes or new programs to be effective, preplanning is needed. Adding to a teacher's already full day is not conducive to a positive school environment. This research has shown that the state accountability system affects social studies instruction based on the subjects being tested each year. Principals and teachers spend more time on the subjects for which they will be held accountable. It is necessary to continue to study scheduling, planning, integration, and state assessment changes to determine what steps can be taken to ensure that social studies will be taught.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

When I began this Record of Study (ROS) to determine the effects of the state accountability system on the instruction of social studies, I suspected that elementary students might not be receiving full coverage of the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), as designed. I wanted to research options that might help teachers use their time more efficiently and teach more social studies.

This ROS research verified that in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grades, social studies currently is receiving less instructional time than other core content subjects. I found that the amount of instructional time spent on social studies at one campus was less than 1% of a school week, as opposed to reading, which received 21% of the school week. The only campus that had protected social studies instruction was a departmentalized junior high school that taught social studies for 45 minutes a day. The other three campuses had set aside a variety of times for social studies, often changing it based on other needs of teachers and students.

After reviewing information gathered from interviews, observations, surveys, and artifacts, I began my action research, developing a plan to integrate social studies with reading. The integration period was six weeks. At the end of the six weeks, there was a 24-point gain in student scores after the implementation of lessons integrating reading and social studies. In post-intervention interviews, however, three teachers felt that planning for integration was time-intensive and were not sure if they would continue using this approach in the future. However, nine believed they would continue, and some planned on developing a process for integration during the summer for use in the 2020-2021 school year.

Results in Relation to the Extant Literature

In 2004, Pascopella surmised: “identifying reading, math, and science as the only subject areas being required for testing per the federal government, educators presumed that federal education policy trivialized the importance of teaching and learning social studies in the schools” (p. 50). This trivialization has occurred. Through interviews with principals and teachers, I found that there was an understanding of the need for social studies instruction. The educators expressed a deep-rooted concern that there could be behavioral, societal, and political consequences from students not being taught the subject. However, once this was voiced, each interviewee went on to say that there simply was not enough time to cover all the mandated courses, especially if the goal was mastery for each child. Thus, courses tested by the accountability system seemed more critical than social studies, making the subject appear insignificant.

It is a mistake to marginalize social studies in schools to devote more time to and math and reading. One Secretary of State called it “educational neglect” (Byrd & Varga, 2018, p. 28). Based on this ROS, such educational neglect is prevalent. The social studies TEKS includes 165 vocabulary words that are to be taught in 3rd, 4th, and 5th grade that appear again in 8th grade.

One classroom strategy used to introduce, teach, and remind students of new vocabulary words is a word wall. As a word is introduced, the teacher places the word on the wall, so that students have a visual reminder of it. If the word is used in other contexts, teachers can refer to it. In the 12 classrooms, I observed, none had a word wall with any of the 165 words the students were expected to learn. This does not mean that the students were not exposed to the vocabulary. However, when this type of artifact is missing, and there is very little

instructional time for social studies, educational marginalization is substantiated. Previous research reported that “findings in an 18 month observational study of testing[’s] effects on schools were: (a.) external testing reduces the time available for ordinary instruction; (b.) in high stakes environments, schools neglect material that the external tests do not include; (c.) external testing encourages use of instructional methods that resemble testing” (Shepard & Dougherty, 1991, pp. 14-15). Each of these factors was seen repeatedly in my investigation, and at each campus. The departmentalized campus with 45-minute segments for each subject illustrated how “scheduling of content specific classes tended to have the highest impact,” and in this case, on how social studies was being taught (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010).

This ROS also gathered evidence of the implications of integrating two content areas, as well as administering shorter assessments; both showed positive results. In Louisiana, students have access to books with social studies content. Georgia has begun a pilot where mini-assessments are administered, and scores averaged at the end of the school year. These mini-assessments have taken the place of one large assessment at the end of the year. This ROS includes additional research on both practices. Supplementary trials could lead to improved instruction and assessment practices in our schools.

Personal Lessons Learned

I am the leader of a school and district who feels the impact of content not being taught at lower grade levels, and I find this ROS to be reflective of a personal, as well as societal, conflict. A review of the past four years of 8th grade STAAR data reflects what I believe to be a negative trend in what is being taught in our schools (see Table10).

Table 12 Four Years of 8th Grade STAAR Data.

	'18-'19	'17-'18	'16-'17	'15-'16
State				
Social Studies	69	65	63	63
Reading	86	86	86	87
Math	88	86	85	82
Science	81	76	76	75
Pine MS				
Social Studies	70	53	63	57
Reading	83	80	80	83
Math	90	86	84	77
Science	80	63	60	67
Washington JH				
Social Studies	64	70	69	64
Reading	87	95	92	93
Math	93	95	93	94
Science	66	73	73	71

It is frustrating that the trend illustrated in Table 10 continues. Yet, it appears that nothing at the state level is being done to make it change. Social studies are the only subject that has never broken into the 70th or 80th percentile of the state average. Our school system includes many variables that affect assessment scores. However, this trend, along with previous studies, indicates that a system of high stakes assessments harms students' accessibility to a well-rounded education. This ROS helps verify what I have has concerned me for over a decade.

I have seen teachers working harder than ever, principals becoming instructional leaders (and not just building managers), and students actively engaged in learning. Reflecting upon this prompted me to question when government leaders will recognize that all the research,

strategies, and practices that we see are working should actually be recognized as measures employed in the classroom. It is time that what we know are best practices that take precedence over policy.

Implications for Practice

There are two outcomes of this ROS:

1. There is evidence that social studies is not garnering the instructional time needed to teach the TEKS.
2. The integration of reading and social studies, along with shorter assessments, are promising practices for alleviating this issue.

In a school setting, the findings from this ROS should be used to help campuses determine whether social studies is receiving the time and attention needed to give students the most well-rounded education possible. School leaders must put aside a school's "score" to ensure students are receiving the content needed to develop into well-educated citizens. Teachers should use this research as a basis for reflecting on their own practices to ascertain whether there are ways to cover more social studies TEKS, while still covering the TEKS for math, ELA, and science. School leaders should use the results of this ROS as a means of opening communication with parents, board members, and government leaders with the ability to change how our system is organized. Accountability is needed; however, this ROS shows that high stakes testing as designed has several negative consequences.

In the context of this field of study, this ROS has gathered data supporting the need for ongoing research on the impact high stakes testing has on our society. Key social studies themes include:

- Culture
- Time, Continuity, and Change
- People, Places, and the Environment
- Individual Development and Identity
- Individuals, Groups, and Institutions
- Power, Authority, and Governance
- Production, Distribution, and Consumption
- Science, Technology, and Society
- Global Connections
- Civic Ideals and Policies

Research must continue on how our education system might improve our understanding of these ten themes. Could the lack of social studies instruction have broader implications, ones that result in troubling behavioral, societal, democratic, and other issues for our country? Are students learning about their rights and the rights of others? Research needs to continue in this area not only for our students but for society as a whole.

Lessons Learned

I began organizing this ROS in September and working with participants in October. If I could have chosen a different time frame, I would have begun organizing in July and working with participants in August. I found no issues with the observations, interviews, and surveys. However, the action research portion would have benefitted from being conducted earlier in the school year. If I am able to continue this research, I will meet with teachers in August and help them develop integration plans from the beginning, continuing through the

school year, and use shorter assessments throughout the year to determine mastery of the content covered in the integrated courses.

Many people were involved in this ROS. I am glad that I chose to do my research on four different campuses because one participant had to leave the study due to other demands. If I had chosen fewer campuses, the limited number of participants would not have given me enough data to demonstrate impact. When I began framing my ROS, my vision was too broad. After many discussions with professors and cohort members, I was able to narrow my focus. I hope to continue this research so that I can expand and focus my work to determine better if the reduction in the time being spent on social studies is having a broader impact on society.

Lastly, I have learned the importance of networking. Working with other researchers, teachers, principals, district leaders, and educators has proven invaluable. Whether these people were a part of the research or not, the insights and thought processes others have offered have been priceless. I tend to work in isolation, but I found that involving others in this ROS has added a depth to this research that I could not have achieved alone.

Recommendations

For this topic, I would suggest a longer period of research to determine if teachers could properly manage the integration of two subjects and allow for more time to be spent on planning. In addition, several assessments (versus two) would provide more data, possibly changing the outcomes. A longer period of research would also allow for conversations throughout the year with teachers and principals to determine which TEKS received full coverage and which were overlooked.

Recommendations for basic processes when beginning a ROS include developing a successful method for organizing data. There are as many methods of collecting and organizing data as there are researchers. I found that using expandable folders and filing anything that I used, or thought I might use, was helpful for organization. This allowed me to identify incremental pieces of information more easily throughout the process. In addition, pre-planning was integral to my methodology. In the summer, I contacted the superintendents of the campuses I visited, well before the start of my research in September. However, I would recommend that others following this path begin in August. By the time I had completed my interviews and observations, students were about to begin the third six-week term, and teachers were preparing for the end of the semester. I would recommend that those conducting action research with students initiate their work as close to the beginning of the school year as possible. Also, they should become comfortable with asking questions of their professors, committee members, and chair, other students, and assistants. The research process does not come naturally, and the only way to learn is by doing. However, guidance along the way is essential to success.

Closing Thoughts

There are many theories regarding what constitutes a sound educational system. Throughout the history of the United States, there has been any number of versions of “schooling.” Since the 1980s, the United States has used high stakes tests to determine if students are receiving an equitable education. However, high stakes assessments are now driving what is being taught, rather than evaluating what has been taught. Our democratic principles depend on education, not only in reading and math but also in those areas that contain the knowledge and skills needed by an informed and involved citizen.

I saw effective instruction and strong teaching practices. I met teachers who are committed to their students and co-workers and students who were kind and willing to learn. As adults, we must ensure that teachers are allowed to teach the whole child. We must continue to push our government leaders to do what is right for the children, and not just what a company or political group motivates them to do.

As a result of this ROS, I will develop a flyer that provides an easy to read synopsis of the literature and action research and present it to various staff members of the Texas Education Agency. I have already reached out to an Associate Commissioner about the data collected in this ROS. The STAAR assessments for reading and writing are soon to be rewritten, and I have offered this research, as well as my ongoing assistance with integrating these two subjects into a single assessment.

In addition, I will continue to research the marginalization of social studies and organize that work as information for others to use in the future, ideally offering best practice advice on scheduling, integration of curricula, and assessment methods.

As stated above, accountability is not a negative. Educators must be responsible for educating their students. However, when accountability drives what is being taught, it is impossible to create a well-rounded curriculum. Civic competence relies on adults committing to teaching the citizenry about the necessity of democratic values. I hope that, through this research and the continued work of others on this topic, decision-makers will recognize the need for a more balanced and equitable education for all, one in which all subjects are included and taught for the benefit of the child, the State, and the nation.

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APPENDIX A

ARTIFACT

Effects of the State Accountability System on Social Studies in Texas Schools



What does the research say?



Time Spent on Social Studies Instruction

75% of the campuses studied provided 95% more instruction time for STAAR assessed courses than social studies.



School Culture

Lesson Plans, school schedules, and classroom artifacts showed a lack of focus on social studies in 84% of the participating classrooms.



On the Horizon

- * Integration of social studies and ELA TEKS?
- * Mini state assessments throughout the year for core subjects?

"The marginalization of social studies in schools and the concurrent stressing of math and reading in curricula is misguided; in effect, one Secretary of State called it educational neglect" - Byrd & Varga, 2018.

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rlangley@tamu.edu



Richele Langley
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