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## The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri: An Analysis of Elementary Instructional Time and High School Standardized Assessment Scores

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by

Stephanie Lovette

August 18, 2021

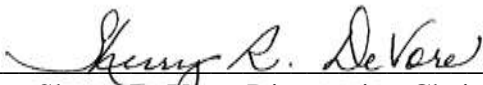
A Dissertation submitted to the Education Faculty of Lindenwood University in  
partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
School of Education

The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri: An Analysis  
of Elementary Instructional Time and High School  
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This Dissertation has been approved as partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Doctor of Education  
Lindenwood University, School of Education

  
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8-18-2021  
Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree.

Full Legal Name: Stephanie Lizette Lovette

Signature:  Date: 8/18/21

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## **Abstract**

Social studies education plays a vital role in an evolving American society. Through social studies, students are equipped with skills to become active and informed citizens in a democracy (National Council for Social Studies, 2017a). With the implementation of the No Child Left (NCLB) Act in 2001, educational reforms have increasingly emphasized student performance in mathematics, communication arts, and science (Libresco, 2015). As a result, instructional time has been drastically shifted to these subjects (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). This mixed-methods study was conducted to explore the impact of NCLB and subsequent federal education policies on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri. As part of the study, the number of instructional minutes spent in elementary social studies in Missouri public schools was examined to determine if there was a significant correlation between elementary social studies instructional minutes and high school state assessment scores in American Government. Surveys and interviews were conducted to gather teacher perspectives on the role of social studies education in American society. The results of the study indicated a significant difference between elementary instructional minutes in mathematics, communication arts, and social studies, but not a significant difference between science and social studies. A significant correlation was not found between the elementary minutes of social studies instruction and high school student performance on mandated assessments in American Government. During the interviews, Missouri secondary social studies teachers expressed alarm at the marginalization of social studies in elementary schools and what it could mean for society in the long term. The scope of the study was limited, however, and more studies are encouraged to further examine the effects of social studies marginalization.

## Table of Contents

Abstract .....	iii
List of Tables .....	vii
List of Figures .....	viii
Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Background of the Study .....	3
Theoretical Framework .....	4
Statement of the Problem.....	8
Purpose of the Study .....	9
Research Questions .....	10
Null Hypotheses.....	10
Alternative Hypotheses .....	10
Significance of the Study .....	11
Definition of Key Terms .....	11
Limitations and Assumptions .....	12
Summary .....	13
Chapter Two: Review of Literature .....	15
The Role of Social Studies in Society.....	15
Social Studies and Contemporary Issues .....	18
The Complexity of Social Studies .....	20
Why Teach Social Studies in Elementary School?.....	21
Social Studies and Standards-Based Educational Reform.....	22
Campbell’s Law and Social Studies .....	27

Marginalization of Social Studies in Teacher Education.....	28
Instructional Practices.....	30
Assessment.....	31
Changes in Instructional Time.....	32
Content Integration.....	34
Missouri Guidelines.....	35
Teacher Perceptions.....	36
Social Studies Across the States.....	37
The Future of Social Studies.....	39
Summary.....	41
Chapter Three: Methodology.....	44
Problem and Purpose Overview.....	44
Research Questions and Hypotheses.....	44
Research Design.....	45
Population and Sample.....	46
Instrumentation.....	46
Data Collection.....	48
Data Analysis.....	49
Ethical Considerations.....	50
Summary.....	51
Chapter Four: Analysis of Data.....	52
Participants.....	54
Minutes of Instruction Survey Results.....	56



Methods of Instruction .....	59
Elementary Teacher Perceptions on the Role of Social Studies .....	65
Secondary Data .....	68
Secondary Teacher Interviews .....	69
Inferential Statistics .....	76
Summary .....	78
Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions.....	80
Findings.....	82
Conclusions.....	85
Implications for Practice .....	86
Recommendations for Future Research .....	88
Summary .....	90
References.....	92
Appendix A.....	108
Appendix B .....	110
Appendix C .....	111
Appendix D.....	112
Appendix E .....	114
Appendix F.....	115
Appendix G.....	116
Appendix H.....	117
Appendix I .....	118
Vita.....	119

## List of Tables

Table 1. <i>Elementary Teacher Participation Information by District</i> .....	56
Table 2. <i>Average Weekly Minutes of Instruction per Grade Level &amp; Content Area</i> .....	58
Table 3. <i>Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on American Government EOC by District</i> .....	70
Table 4. <i>ANOVA Results of Elementary Instructional Minutes</i> .....	78

## List of Figures

Figure 1. <i>Elementary Teachers' Years of Service</i> .....	58
Figure 2. <i>Determinants of Social Studies Instructional Time</i> .....	59
Figure 3. <i>Courses Students are Pulled From for Individualized Instruction</i> .....	60
Figure 4. <i>Social Studies Taught as Stand-Alone Subject Versus Content Integration</i> .....	61
Figure 5. <i>Instructional Methods Within Social Studies</i> .....	62
Figure 6. <i>Social Studies Content Taught in Elementary Grades</i> .....	63
Figure 7. <i>Elementary ELA Standardized Assessments</i> .....	64
Figure 8. <i>Elementary Mathematics Standardized Assessments</i> .....	64
Figure 9. <i>Elementary Science Standardized Assessments</i> .....	65
Figure 10. <i>Elementary Social Studies Standardized Assessments</i> .....	65
Figure 11. <i>Teacher Responses Regarding the Importance of Elementary Social Studies</i>	66
Figure 12. <i>Teacher Responses Regarding Their Satisfaction With Time Spent on Elementary Social Studies</i> .....	67
Figure 13. <i>Teacher Responses Regarding the Importance of Secondary Social Studies</i> ...	68
Figure 14. <i>Teacher Responses Regarding the Importance of Social Studies to Democratic Participation</i> .....	69
Figure 15. <i>Secondary Teacher Participant Information by District</i> .....	71
Figure 16. <i>Scatterplot Showing the Correlation Between Weekly Instructional Minutes in Elementary Social Studies and the Percentage of High School Students who Scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC Assessment</i> .....	79

## Chapter One: Introduction

Is social studies a dying subject? Has the curricular home of critical thinking and citizenship education become decreasingly relevant in today's society? Experts in the content field are pondering these questions as they analyze the role of social studies in an era focused on science, math, and communication arts (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Heafner & Fitchett, 2015).

There is no shortage of research on the emphasis of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) in math and communication arts (Libresco, 2015). As a result, many elementary schools across the nation have drastically reduced instructional time in history, geography, and civics more than any other subject (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017; Manzo, 2005). The subsequent common core state standards included social studies by combining it with English language arts in the *Common Core State Standards for English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Studies, Science, and Technical Subjects* (Kenna & Russell, 2014).

As part of the educational reform movement, mandatory assessments are administered in mathematics, communication arts, and science (Howell, 2015; Walker, 2014). Regarding social studies assessments, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) offers assessments in the areas of U.S. History, Geography, and Civics (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2020a). Although the NAEP results provide a glimpse of what students are learning in these content areas, not all schools are represented in the NAEP assessments (NCES, 2018). In light of the inconsistency in social studies assessments at the state level, some school districts have taken matters into their own hands by developing their assessments (Libresco, 2015).

Despite these attempts to include social studies in the educational reform movements, social studies teachers feel increasingly undervalued and their subject marginalized (Farkas Duffett Research Group, 2012; Fitchett et al., 2014b). According to a survey conducted by Farkas (2012), two-thirds of teachers surveyed felt social studies has been depreciated for math and language arts, while nearly all of the teachers (93%) cited mandatory state testing as the reason (p. 3). Fitchett et al. (2014a) found that teachers with more autonomy spent more time teaching social studies than teachers with less control over the curriculum.

As problematic as the teachers' concerns are, there are more significant issues at stake with the marginalization of social studies (Scott & Suh, 2015). Since the inception of public schooling in the United States, the underlying role of education has been to prepare students to become informed, democratic citizens (Bolton, 2008; National Council for the Social Studies [NCSS], 2017a). However, according to Scott and Suh (2015), there is a gap in civic engagement between generations. Youth and young adults are often unaware of their civil rights, since participation in civic activities is on the decline for this age group (Scott & Suh, 2015).

In light of the decreased instructional time in social studies, educators and policymakers must be prepared to address difficult questions (Hutchens & Eveland, 2009). Are educators creating a generation of students without the skills to think critically, demonstrate civic responsibility, or otherwise contribute to a democratic society (Gould, 2011)? If so, at what cost?

The central focus of this study is to examine the effects of decreased instructional time in elementary social studies on content knowledge at the high school level. The

number of instructional minutes in Missouri public elementary schools has been collected. Then the scores from the End-of-Course (EOC) examinations in American Government and American History were obtained. Using these data, the EOC scores were compared with instructional time in elementary social studies to determine if there was a significant correlation between the two variables.

### **Background of the Study**

Over the past several decades, American educational reforms have increasingly focused on student achievement, as revealed by the emphasis on standardized testing (Bolton, 2008). There has been much research on the effects of federal policies, such as NCLB and the subsequent Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA; Center on Educational Policy, 2008; Farkas, 2012; Libresco, 2015). In many areas, schools have seen much improvement (ESSA, 2017). High school graduation rates are at an all-time high, dropout rates are the lowest they have ever been, and more students are going to college than ever before (ESSA, 2017).

The majority of research is on the improvement of mathematics and communication arts scores (Denton & Sink, 2015). In recent years, science has been added as a tested subject as part of the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) initiative, although science is not assessed as heavily as mathematics and communication arts (Howell, 2015; Walker, 2014). Even though social studies is considered one of the four core subjects, including science, mathematics, and communication arts, it has consistently been relegated to the back burner regarding the four core subjects (Instructional Time, 2008; Denton & Sink, 2015; Farkas, 2012).

As a result of the increased focus on mathematics and communication arts nationwide, instructional time has increased in those subjects at the expense of art, music, physical education, and social studies (Farkas, 2012). The most considerable discrepancy in instructional time is at the elementary level (Fitchett et al., 2014; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). The NCSS (2017b) recommended elementary schools allocate adequate daily instructional time for social studies (p. 188). However, research indicates many schools do not meet these guidelines (Strachan, 2015). In Missouri, social studies instructional time at the elementary level is significantly lower than math and science (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education [MODESE], 2017b). The MODESE (2017b.) recommends 150 minutes of social studies instructional time weekly, as compared to 300 minutes in mathematics and a combined 750 minutes in reading and language arts (para. 1).

### **Theoretical Framework**

The theoretical framework for this study was based on a combination of the social sciences and social education theoretical analyses (Thornton, 2005). In the social education theory, Dewey argued social studies curriculum may be considered an interdisciplinary approach to current social problems, such as environmental degradation, economic inequality, and globalization (Thornton, 2005). The social sciences school of thought defined the field as distinct subjects such as history, geography, economics, and government (Thornton, 2005). Thornton (2005) combined these two theories in an historical and theoretical analysis of social studies curriculum, instruction, and teacher education. Thornton (2005) argued disciplinary methodologies and subject matter are both necessary for the in-depth study of contemporary social dilemmas.

There has long been a debate about the role of social studies in American society (Bolton, 2008; Thornton, 2005). As early as 1780, the purpose of public schooling was to educate citizens to participate in democracy; to socialize them in the history, values, and culture of American society; and to promote good citizenship (Bolton, 2008). The importance of education was championed by President George Washington in a 1796 address, in which he urged the creation of universities for "educating the youth in the science of government" (Kosar, 2013, para. 2) to ensure the permanency of the Union.

Until the late 19th century, social studies courses were taught as a social science by focusing on history in an attempt to promote social welfare (Smith et al., n.d.). During the reform movements of the late 19th century through the early 20th century, the ideological purpose of social studies education shifted to a holistic approach (Fallace, 2015). In the 1920s, the League of Nations encouraged comparative research on stereotypes and portrayals of people of different nationalities and ideologies (Grever & Van der Vlies, 2017). Educational reformers of the early 20th century, such as John Dewey, Harold Rugg, and William Bagley sought to change the way social studies was taught by focusing more on the subject as integrated social education, as opposed to distinct social sciences (Fallace, 2015).

Perhaps no one has been a more significant advocate of social studies education than Harold Rugg (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009; Pahl, 2001). Highly regarded as a pioneer of social studies education, Rugg was one of the first proponents of consolidating the subjects of history, geography, economics, and civics into a social studies curriculum centered on contemporary and relevant problems (Evans, 2007; Kissling, 2015). Rugg and his brother Earle founded the NCSS in 1921 (Pahl, 2001). Rugg's work has strongly



influenced current textbooks and resources in classrooms (Kissling, 2015). Rugg's rationale for creating a social science curriculum was prompted by the events of the era: World War I, industrialization, urbanization, the changing roles of women, decreasing morals, the changing role of the government, and other issues of the time (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Nearly a century later, the times may have changed, but the question remains the same: How does one create a society of informed citizens who can participate in political discourse and be civic-minded in a diverse world (Brennan, 2017)?

Rugg firmly believed that social studies plays a prominent role in the development of the whole child (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009; Evans, 2007). Rugg's educational philosophy was centered on addressing what he termed the "American Problem: To bring forth on this continent—in some form of co-operative commonwealth—the civilization of abundance, democratic behavior, and integrity of expression and of appreciation which is now potentially available" (as cited in Kissling, 2015, p. 141). Rugg argued education should be the primary means through which people understand public issues, become empowered, and, therefore, become involved in reform movements and politics (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Propelled by this belief, Rugg strongly advocated for the inclusion of social studies curriculum and instruction in general education (Pahl, 2001). Within social studies, Rugg reformed the curriculum to encompass history and a variety of the social sciences, such as economics, civics, and sociology (Kissling, 2015; Pahl, 2001).

Although Rugg believed youths were unlikely to achieve the mental and social maturity to critically investigate social concerns until 11th or 12th grade, he advocated for social studies instruction in earlier grades to work toward this goal (Boyle-Baise &

Goodman, 2009). Rugg argued that an intelligent understanding of society is the most essential training needed by elementary and secondary students (Pahl, 2001). Social studies education should be taught as early as third grade, according to Rugg (Kissling, 2015). The importance of educating elementary students in social sciences was not a concept limited to Rugg (Manzo, 2005). Many scholars believe beginning the process at an early age will give students a greater appreciation of the roots of American democracy and better equip them to take a more critical look at the nation's history and policies later in their schooling (Fitchett et al., 2014a; Manzo, 2005).

Modern advocates of social studies instruction also pointed to the role it plays in society (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; NCSS, 2017a, 2017b). The most basic of these skills is the ability to make rational decisions, individually and as a society (Millard, 2015). Such skills are as essential as reading, writing, mathematics, and science (Millard, 2015; NCSS, 2016). The official position statement of the NCSS (2017b) is: "The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world" (para. 3).

The Bradley Commission (1988) identified two aims of social studies: (a) personal growth of the individual and (b) preparation for public life as democratic citizens. In recent years, there has also been an increased emphasis on inquiry-based pedagogy, an essential component of history education through such skills as investigation and interpretation of the past (Kenna & Russell, 2014; NCSS, 2016). History through inquiry promotes the democratization of ideas essential to society (Fitchett et al., 2017). Students should be taught to think critically and analyze sources to

solve problems, as opposed to merely recalling facts (NCSS, 2016). Researchers argued students in early grades do not receive many opportunities to learn and practice historical thinking skills due to time restraints and, as such, are taught surface-level recall facts (VanSledright et al., 2006).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Sixteen years after the implementation of NCLB, the effects are still felt in schools across the nation (Brennan, 2017; Denton & Sink, 2015; Millard, 2015). Several national surveys of public school teachers revealed startling results about the narrowing of the curriculum (Farkas, 2012; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). In a 2012 study conducted by Farkas Duffett Research Group, two-thirds of teachers responded that instructional time and resources were shifting away from subjects, such as science, art, music, foreign language, and social studies to focus on math and language arts (p. 3). Thirty-six percent of teachers in all grade levels reported social studies received fewer resources and instructional time than before NCLB, with elementary teachers reporting the most drastic decrease at 59% (Farkas, 2012, p. 1). Of the four core subjects, students received the majority of instructional time in English, followed by mathematics (Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). When students are struggling in math or language arts, they are pulled out of social studies more often than any other subject (Farkas, 2012).

According to the Education Commission of the States, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was an attempt to strengthen education in civic learning and engagement (Millard, 2015). As part of this legislation, signed into law by President Obama in 2015, civics, government, history, geography, and economics were identified as part of a well-rounded education (Brennan, 2017). Proponents of the ESSA call for "comprehensive literacy instruction," as opposed to isolated reading skills (Dennis, 2016,

p. 396). Under the ESSA, science and social studies can integrate with reading and writing (Fitchett et al., 2014b; Nowell, 2016).

However, social studies is not a tested subject in many states (ECS, 2017). Those states which assess student achievement in social studies only do so once in high school, as opposed to math and communication arts, which are evaluated annually from Grades 4 through 8 and during the junior year of high school (Millard, 2015). As varied as the subjects of social studies, only American Government is assessed in the majority of the states, with American History a voluntarily tested subject (Millard, 2015).

There is much debate over the importance of accountability and state testing as appropriate measures for improving student achievement (Black, 2017; Fitchett et al., 2014). Some states with mandated testing produced higher student achievement, whereas others found little evidence of a relationship (Pace, 2011). In an analysis of American History assessments administered by the NAEP, a correlation was found between increased accountability practices and higher scores on national assessments (Fitchett et al., 2017). Researchers found consistent testing extrinsically motivates students and sustains long-term knowledge (Fitchett et al., 2017).

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the impact of the educational policies of NCLB and subsequent federal policies on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools. The study began with obtaining quantitative results of total instructional minutes spent in Missouri public elementary social studies, followed by an examination of the EOC assessment scores in Missouri public high schools. An analysis of the data was made to determine if there is a difference in the

number of instructional minutes spent in elementary social studies and elementary science, mathematics, and English language arts. A correlational analysis was conducted between instructional minutes in elementary social studies and high school American Government assessment scores. In the qualitative phase of the study, interviews of Missouri secondary social studies teachers to gain their perceptions on the role of social studies in post-NCLB America were conducted.

### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study:

1. From the sample of Missouri public elementary schools, what is the difference in the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, and science?

*H1<sub>0</sub>*: There is no difference between the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science.

*H1<sub>a</sub>*: There is a difference between the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science.

2. From the sample of Missouri public schools, what is the correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination?

*H2<sub>0</sub>*: There is no correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination.

*H2<sub>a</sub>*: There is a correlation between minutes of classroom social studies instruction and the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination.

3. How do teachers from Missouri public secondary schools perceive the role of social studies instruction compared to mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction?

### **Significance of the Study**

The overarching goal of this study was to add to the body of literature on the effects of federally mandated emphasis on math and literacy on other subjects, particularly social studies. This study is significant because it identified gaps in the literature and demonstrates a need for further study (Fitchett et al., 2014). While there have been numerous studies on the effects of federal mandates on instructional time, there are no known studies concerning the relationship between instructional time in elementary social studies and Missouri statewide assessment scores (Fitchett et al., 2014; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017; Pace, 2011). Analyzing the relationship between elementary instructional time and high school assessments was imperative to determine if more instructional time should be directed to social studies in earlier grades.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

For the purpose of this study, the following terms are defined:

#### ***End-of-Course Exam***

The EOC exams are mandatory standardized tests given annually to Missouri secondary students to assess their mastery of the Missouri Learning Standards

(MODESE, 2017a). The EOC exams are required upon the completion of the following courses: Algebra I, English II, American Government, and Biology I (MODESE, 2017a).

### ***Every Child Succeeds Act***

The ESSA (2017) was signed into law by President Obama in 2015 and replaced the NCLB Act in school accountability measures. Most notably, the ESSA gives power back to the states while providing greater flexibility for state and local educational leaders (ESSA, 2017).

### ***No Child Left Behind***

The NCLB Act was signed into law in 2001 by President George W. Bush, and this act established rigorous educational standards for public schools nationwide. Additionally, the federal government issued funding to schools that administered standardized assessments tied to those standards (NCLB Act, 2002).

### **Limitations and Assumptions**

The following limitations were identified in this study:

#### ***Sample Demographics***

The focus of the study was whether public schools within the state of Missouri emphasize social studies education; therefore, the population for this study was a census of all 518 public school districts in the state of Missouri and their teachers (MODESE, 2019). According to Fraenkel et al. (2019), samples are extracted from the population. For this study, a sample of 30–50 participants was deemed sufficient to generalize to the total population of educators (Creswell, 2014). The school districts were selected through a systematic sampling of every 20th district. According to Fraenkel et al. (2019), systematic sampling is the selection of every  $n$ th individual in the population. The study

did not include test scores and elementary instructional time for private or charter schools within Missouri.

### ***Instrument***

The instruments of choice for the study were surveys and interviews, with questions generated by the researcher and based upon a combination of the social sciences and social education theoretical analyses regarding the role of social studies education (Thornton, 2005).

The following assumptions were accepted:

1. The responses of the participants were offered honestly and without bias.
2. A correlation between instructional time and assessment scores do not equal causation.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, the extent to which elementary instruction in social studies has been marginalized was presented. Federal mandates have greatly impacted instructional time (Fitchett et al., 2014a). An increased emphasis on mathematics and communication arts has resulted in drastically reduced instructional time in history, geography, and civics at the elementary level (Heafner & Fitchett, 2014; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017; Manzo, 2005).

The role of social studies education was also explored. The importance of social studies cannot be overemphasized (Farkas, 2012). Knowledge of the various subjects incorporated within the social studies discipline serves many purposes in addition to teaching students about democratic ideals that shape the nation (NCSS, 2017b). These purposes include, but are not limited to, social reform, civic literacy, examining multiple viewpoints, teaching tolerance and empathy through cultural literacy, understanding



abstract concepts, and developing problem-solving skills (Buchanan, 2015; Guardian of Democracy, 2011; NCSS, 2017a; NCSS, 2017b).

The theoretical framework upon which the current study was based was presented. The theoretical framework for the study was a synthesis of several schools of thought regarding the need for a strong social studies curriculum. The social education theory posits that social studies curriculum should serve as an interdisciplinary approach to social problems, whereas the social sciences theory asserts the need for distinct social studies courses such as history, government, and economics (Thornton, 2005).

The purpose of the current study was to explore the impact of the educational policies of NCLB and subsequent federal policies on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools. The study began with an analysis of instructional minutes spent in Missouri public elementary social studies, which was then be compared to EOC assessment scores in Missouri public high schools. An analysis was made to determine if there was a correlation between instructional minutes in elementary social studies and high school American Government assessment scores. Subsequently, the primary researcher conducted interviews of Missouri secondary social studies teachers to gain their perceptions on the role of social studies in post-NCLB America.

In Chapter Two, a review of literature is presented. The role of social studies education in American society is examined from both a historical and a contemporary lens, while the need for social studies instruction at the elementary level is explored. A brief synopsis of federal education reform movements is presented. Furthermore, instructional practices and assessments among the content areas are compared.

## **Chapter Two: Review of Literature**

Social studies education has become increasingly marginalized in the era of high-stakes testing (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). In an attempt to adhere to federal mandates, school administrators and educational policymakers have concentrated efforts on increased instructional time and improved instructional practices in the heavily tested subjects of mathematics, communication arts, and science (Libresco, 2015). While considered one of the four core academic subjects, social studies has seen a drastic decrease in the number of instructional minutes in elementary schools (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015).

In this chapter, an array of literature will indicate the role of social studies education in American society. An examination of the literature will indicate the changes which social studies instruction has undergone in recent years. The role of social studies in a contemporary American society was explored. An additional aim was to identify the effects marginalization has had on teachers, students, and a democratic society.

### **The Role of Social Studies in Society**

The role of social studies in American society is one that has evolved (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Kelly, 2014). The field has been an ideological battleground as policymakers debate its purpose, role, and pedagogy (Ross, 2014; Schul, 2015). However, one purpose of social studies has remained consistent: it has long been the curricular home of citizenship education and preparation of the nation's future citizens (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Hutchins & Eveland, 2009; Kosar, 2013). Many scholars agree that social studies instills within students traits such as civic competence (Bolton,

2008; Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009; Fitchett et al., 2014b; NCSS, 2017a). According to the NCSS (2017a):

Civic competence rests on a commitment to democratic values and rests on the abilities to use knowledge about one's community, nation, and world; apply inquiry processes; and 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 participating as members of a global community. (para. 4)

Civic competence is defined as the knowledge, intellectual processes, and democratic dispositions required of students to be active and engaged participants in public life (NCSS, 2017a).

A byproduct of civic competence is civic participation, in which individuals with a solid understanding of social studies are adequately prepared for public life as democratic citizens (Bolton, 2008). According to the Bradley Commission (1988), history education is:

. . . vital for all citizens in a democracy, because it provides the only avenue we have to reach an understanding of ourselves and of our society, in relation to the human condition over time, and of how some things change and others continue. (para. 1)

The purpose of social studies education is to develop in young people the knowledge, skills, and dispositions to be active and informed citizens (Brennan, 2017). A firm understanding of social studies promotes public discourse (Gould, 2011). Knowledge of

social studies provides individuals the ability to understand public issues, view political engagement as a means of addressing common challenges, and participate in civic activities (Bolton, 2008). Subsequently, knowledge of social studies promotes civic equality and holds elected officials accountable (Gould, 2011).

Some reformers, such as Rugg, viewed social studies as an avenue for social reform in which individuals could grasp, criticize, and improve the conditions of one's life (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009; Nelson, 1978). The world is diverse and multicultural (Buchanan, 2015). As such, a knowledge of social studies instills cultural literacy and tolerance by helping individuals to view multiple viewpoints and to develop empathy toward other cultural groups (Buchanan, 2015; Fitchett et al., 2017).

According to the Bradley Commission (1988), a solid foundation in history facilitates the two paramount aims of education: "The preparation of people for private lives of personal integrity and fulfillment, and their preparation for public life as democratic citizens" (para. 3). Some scholars argue that evaluating the foundational principles of the United States is crucial for understanding how Americans as a society collectively identify and perceive the past (Fitchett et al., 2017). Contemporary political leaders recognize the role of studying history in instilling patriotism and civic responsibility (Vinovskis, 2015).

Within schools, there are many non-civic benefits of a highly effective civics program (Gould, 2011). These benefits include learning 21st-century competencies for college and career readiness, reducing drop-out rates, and improving school climate (Gould, 2011). According to the Civics Education Initiative, students "gain experience in respectful dialogue and build 21st-century competencies related to collaborative problem-

solving, communication, and teamwork" through engaging in discussions of real-world issues and events (as cited in Railey & Brenna, 2017, p. 2). Using inquiry-based instruction, students are taught how to seek evidence to guide their thinking and develop critical thinking skills and problem-solving skills (NCSS, 2016). The ability to understand abstract concepts and analyze and contextualize sources is also a vital skill learned in social studies (Fitchett et al., 2017).

### **Social Studies and Contemporary Issues**

With the immense popularity of social media in recent years, the ability to discern facts from opinion has been challenging. News outlets have become increasingly biased, with editorial and op-ed articles often misrepresented as factual (Ireton & Posetti, 2018). Critical thinking skills such as analyzing, corroborating, and contextualizing sources are crucial to understanding contemporary issues and participating in a democratic society (Fraker et al., 2019).

In recent years, societal issues have brought to light the need for a strong, consistent social studies program. In 2016, a National Football League quarterback began protesting the national anthem before games in an effort to shed light on what he described as the country's oppression of "black people and people of color" (Costello, 2019, p. 48). American citizens quickly chose sides—some denouncing him as traitorous while others supported his First Amendment right to protest (Costello, 2019).

Police officer-involved deaths of African-American citizens such as Eric Garner, Freddie Grey, and Michael Brown have led to nationwide protests with "I can't breathe" and "Hands up, don't shoot" as rallying cries (Cuenca & Nichols, 2014; Dungca et al., 2020). Protesters have called for defunding the police and have become violent in many

cases through riots, vandalism, looting, and assaults (Ciccolini, 2020). The nation has become polarized as citizens debate the legality of the protests. Additionally, there are many questions regarding whose responsibility it is to restore law and order: local, state, or federal officials? When is a protest no longer protected by the First Amendment of the Constitution? What constitutional principles apply?

The U.S. government's response to the global COVID-19 pandemic has also been the topic of debate across the nation. Did the government overreact too soon or react too late? Should there be a nationwide mask mandate, or is this decision best addressed at the local or state level (Schwellenbach, 2020)? Is a mask mandate a violation of individual freedoms? Is a ban on social gatherings, such as at a church, a violation of the First Amendment (Schwellenbach, 2020)?

Each election year, there is no shortage of debates on the relevance of the Electoral College. Following the 2016 election in which Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton won the popular vote, and Republican candidate Donald Trump won the electoral vote, the relevance of the Electoral College was once again at the forefront of discussions (Bitecofer, 2017). By all accounts, the 2020 presidential election was an extremely contentious race (Douglas, 2020). In addition to the previously cited topics, the election itself was fraught with controversies (Douglas, 2020; Rosen, 2020).

The global COVID-19 pandemic has significantly changed voting procedures (Annala, 2020). A drastic increase in mail-in ballots has led to debates concerning election integrity (Annala, 2020). Another issue related to the 2020 election was the Supreme Court vacancy left by the death of Associate Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg six weeks prior to the election (Rosen, 2020). There was much disagreement across the

political spectrum regarding the timing of the replacement nominee, including if the current President Donald Trump should move forward with filling the vacancy or should the voters have been allowed to decide at the polls in November (Douglas, 2020).

A solid understanding of social studies concepts, such as civics, the role of police in society, federalism, the electoral process, and the Bill of Rights, can help citizens wade through uncertain times (Byrd & Vargas, 2018; Cuenca & Nichols, 2014). Byrd and Varga (2018) asserted, “If the goal as a nation is to have enlightened thinkers tackling our most important issues, those of a social nature, then it is imperative for social studies to return to the forefront” (p. 32). Further, social studies allow students to acquire knowledge, skills, and attitudes that will be key in addressing contemporary societal issues (Garcia & Michaelis, 2011).

In many cases, schools are highly likely the only environment where students encounter balanced views within a safe environment that is conducive for learning (Karabulut, 2012; Vitulli & Santoli, 2018). According to Cuenca and Nichols (2014), the role of educators is to “prepare students to examine the forces that shape their lives” (p. 249). Classrooms provide an open discussion of contemporary issues, which allows students to create informed personal beliefs (Karabulut, 2012; Vitulli & Santoli, 2018). One significant impact is that students who actively engage in discussions are likely to vote in the future, follow the news, and have confidence in their capability to influence others (McCully & Barton, 2007).

### **The Complexity of Social Studies**

In the K–12 education realm, social studies is perhaps the most varied of the four primary content areas. According to the NCSS (2017a), the subject is defined as:

...the integrated study of the social sciences and humanities to promote civic competence. Within the school program, social studies provides coordinated, systematic study drawing upon such disciplines as anthropology, archaeology, economics, geography, history, law, philosophy, political science, psychology, religion, and sociology, as well as appropriate content from the humanities, mathematics, and natural sciences. (para. 3)

The content within World History and American History, in particular, are extremely vast and complex; therefore, these subjects are often taught over the course of two years. In Missouri, World History from 10,000 BCE–1450 CE is taught in middle school (Grades 6–8), while World History from years 1450 CE to the present is taught in high school (Grades 9–12) (MODESE, 2016). American History from before European discovery through 1870 is taught in middle school, while American History from 1870 to the present is taught in high school (MODESE, 2016).

### **Why Teach Social Studies in Elementary School?**

Social studies instruction at the elementary level has significant implications for students (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Elementary social studies curriculum in the primary grades helps young students learn to think critically at an early age and to become active and responsible citizens (NCSS, 2017b). Social studies allows students to develop their own voice, as well as raise social awareness among students (Winstead, 2011). Historical thinking at the elementary level requires students to consider the past in new ways and become emotionally involved (Buchanan, 2015).



Students with a solid foundation in elementary social studies education are better prepared to deal effectively with problems and issues that are discussed in high school social studies classes (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009). Additionally, students exposed to a variety of instructional modes are more likely to retain content than those merely taught to recall facts (Fitchett et al., 2017). In a 2006 conference, “Does Social Studies Have a Future,” the College and University Faculty Assembly of the National Council for the Social Studies (CUFA) argued that the subject’s future was dependent on elementary teachers, teacher educators, and researchers (Bolick et al., 2010). As such, scholars challenged researchers and teachers to pay greater attention to elementary social studies (Bolick et al., 2010).

### **Social Studies and Standards-Based Educational Reform**

The increased emphasis on assessment practices related to standards-based education reform has been felt across all content areas (Bolton, 2008; Brennan, 2017; Fitchett et al., 2014). However, the subject of social studies has received less attention than the other three content areas (Bolton, 2008; Brennan, 2017). According to Brennan (2017):

America's recent preoccupation with raising academic performance has all but overpowered a task of equally vital importance: educating our young people to become engaged members of their communities, not just as wage earners and taxpayers, but as citizens-people who participate in the civic life of their communities. (p. 2)

A heavy emphasis on math and literacy, and more recently on science, engineering, and technology, has left social studies on the back burner (Libresco, 2015).

With *A Nation at Risk* (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 1983), policymakers introduced the standards-based education reform movement. Signed by President Ronald Reagan, the reform movement was a call to raise educational standards (USDOE, 1983). The next major attempt to improve education was America 2000 (USDOE, 1991). President George H.W. Bush attempted to implement new educational reform but was unsuccessful (Bolton, 2008). Under President Bush's leadership, the federal government awarded grants to those who developed voluntary national standards in seven subjects: science, history, geography, the arts, civics, foreign languages, and English (USDOE, 1991). Although largely unsuccessful, America 2000 laid the foundation for the subsequent Goals 2000 (Bolton, 2008; Kenna & Russell, 2014).

In 1994, President Bill Clinton signed into law his version of an educational reform policy, Goals 2000: Educate America Act of 1994 (1994; National Center for History in the Schools, 1996). This program expanded upon the successes of prior policies but provided funding for state leaders to create their standards (Bolton, 2008; Goals 2000, 1994). However, Goals 2000 had no real guidelines nor clear incentives to establish rigorous standards (Bolton, 2008; Kenna & Russell, 2014). The nation's first set of history standards was introduced in 1994 but was widely criticized (Bolton, 2008; National Center for the History in the Schools, 1996). Improving America's Schools Act of 1994 was signed the same year, through which states were mandated to develop content and performance standards in mathematics and reading (Kenna & Russell, 2014)

The NCLB Act was perhaps the most notable educational reform program (Bolton, 2008; Dennis, 2016; Kenna & Russell, 2014; Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011). Implemented in 2001, NCLB expanded the role of the federal government in education

through increased accountability (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011). Perhaps the most significant benefit of NCLB is that the policy put into place measures that exposed achievement gaps among traditionally underserved students and spurred an important national dialogue on education improvement (ESSA, 2017).

However, there were negative effects of the NCLB program (Dennis, 2016). There is a lack of evidence that increased testing of NCLB improved reading achievement (Dennis, 2016). Researchers argued NCLB had more negative effects on low-income learners, as the program set an unrealistic goal of all students reaching 100% proficiency level in math and reading (Dennis, 2016). Some researchers felt the title itself was an oxymoron, in that schools will hold students back if not successful on federally mandated tests (Dennis, 2016). Other researchers questioned the idea of standards-based reform when NCLB was based in actuality on assessment scores (Kenna & Russell, 2014). The lack of consistency among states was also an area of concern, as states were allowed considerable autonomy to develop state-specific standards, test score proficiency levels, and statistical measurement formulas (Maleyko & Gawlik, 2011). Yet another area of concern was the effect on rural education, as researchers ponder the correlation between accountability mandates and academic performance of predominantly poverty-stricken students (Powell et al., 2009).

Race to the Top (RTT) was signed into law by President Barack Obama as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (Howell, 2015; USDOE, 2009). By deploying \$3.45 billion in funds to states and shining a spotlight on weaknesses in educational policies, RTT stimulated reform that had stalled under previous mandates (Howell, 2015, p. 60). The controversial Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were

introduced as part of the RTT program (Howell, 2015). The CCSS Initiative was a state-led effort to develop college and career readiness standards (Breakstone et al., 2013; Kenna & Russell, 2014). Proponents in California argued the CCSS spurred "more state legislation for education reform in the first eight months of RTT than the entire eight years of NCLB" (Howell, 2015, p. 64).

Although the CCSS had benefits, the initiative also had plenty of weaknesses (Huck, 2018). One area of concern was the content area of social studies does not have separate standards under CCSS (Huck, 2018). Instead, the English Language Arts standards include a strand for "literacy standards in history and social studies, science, and technical subjects" (Kenna & Russell, 2014, p. 77) with the expectation students will develop literacy skills within those content areas.

Additionally, social studies teachers lack adequate resources to implement the standards (Breakstone et al., 2013; Huck, 2018). Under the current standards, students are expected to analyze primary and secondary sources, cite textual evidence to support arguments, and develop written historical arguments; however, the assessments are solely multiple-choice (Breakstone et al., 2013). Teachers have argued if students are to master standards set by the CCSS Initiative, assessments need to align with state standards (Heafner, 2018; Huck, 2018).

Although previous standards were designed to be rigorous, they were never implemented consistently across the nation (Kenna & Russell, 2014). By 2011, 45 states, four territories, and the District of Columbia had fully adopted the standards (Kenna & Russell, 2014, p. 77). In a later study, *The State of Secondary Social Studies*, Kenna and Russell (2014) found all 50 states had developed standards for social studies. However,

there is no high-stakes testing associated with the standards. Therefore, little may change in teaching practices (Breakstone et al., 2013; Kenna & Russell, 2014).

In 2015, President Obama signed the ESSA to replace NCLB (Brennan, 2017; Dennis, 2016; ESSA, 2017; Kenna & Russell, 2014). With the implementation of this policy, power is returned to the states by granting greater autonomy for state and local educational leaders (Black, 2017; ESSA, 2017). Although states were granted more flexibility to create their own standards, the increased emphasis on high-stakes testing reflects continued federal control (D'Souza & Kullberg, 2018). Social studies education relevancy is noted by the ESSA, as it identifies civics, government, history, geography, and economics as part of a well-rounded education (Brennan, 2017). Under the ESSA, "comprehensive literacy instruction" is required as opposed to isolated reading skills (Dennis, 2016, p. 396). There is still a push for an increased focus on literacy, with science and social studies integrated with reading and writing remains (Kenna & Russell, 2014).

Under President Trump, the ESSA was amended in 2017 to shift even greater control back to the state and local leaders, citing the Tenth Amendment's limited role of the federal government in educational matters (USDOE, 2017). For the fiscal year 2020, President Trump proposed budget cuts to programs affecting social studies across the nation (NCSS, 2019). Of specific concern to social studies' educators was the president's elimination of the K–12 American History and Civics Grants and Academies (NCSS, 2019). According to the *U.S. DOE Fiscal Year 2020 Budget Summary* (2019), "the program has limited impact, with American History and Civics Academies grants

reaching only a small number of teachers and students (each academy may serve no more than 300 teachers or students annually)” (p. 50).

In recent years, there has been evidence that many states' social studies standards are moving toward student-centered learning (Kenna & Russell, 2014). In Missouri, legislators implemented the Show-Me Standards in 1996 as a knowledge and skill-based curriculum blueprint for educators (MODESE, 1996). The Show-Me Standards were later followed by content-specific Missouri Learning Standards, most recently updated in 2016 (MODESE, 2016). However, teachers are overwhelmed by the sheer number of standards and are just scratching the surface to teach them all (Kenna & Russell, 2014). As a result, teachers believe students do not get an "authentic understanding" of social studies (Kenna & Russell, 2014, p. 78).

### **Campbell's Law and Social Studies**

In examining the overall effect of the decreased social studies education on American society, scholars cite Campbell's Law (Byrd & Varga, 2018; Nichols & Berliner, 2008). Coined by social scientist Campbell in 1976, Campbell's Law states, "The more a quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor" (Nichols & Berliner, 2008, p. 42).

According to researchers, the manifestation of Campbell's Law has significantly harmed public education as a whole (Koretz, 2019; Nichols & Berliner, 2008). The increased emphasis on high-stakes testing as a byproduct of NCLB leads to dishonest practices such as cheating and data manipulation (Koretz, 2019). Additional negative

effects include narrowing of the curriculum, teaching to the test, and demoralizing educators (Nichols & Berliner, 2008).

In their 2018 study, Byrd and Varga examined the long-term effects of Campbell's Law on education by posing if the current national unrest could be a manifestation of Campbell's Law. Byrd and Varga (2018) argued the emphasis on ELA and mathematics at the expense of social studies has led to a "distorted view of the social processes" (p. 31). According to the authors, social studies should be fully integrated throughout the K–12 curriculum in an effort to avoid this manifestation of Campbell's Law (Byrd & Varga, 2018).

### **Marginalization of Social Studies in Teacher Education**

With the increased emphasis on literacy and STEM subjects, marginalization of social studies is not isolated to K–12 educational programs (An, 2016). Education majors in college are not taught social studies pedagogy with the same fidelity as other subjects (Ohn, 2013). Many elementary teaching candidates lack social studies knowledge (An, 2016). Marginalization in teaching methods courses is evident through many forms, such as preconceived subject bias, limited content exposure, and the advocacy of "sneaking social studies in via content integration" (Bolick et al., 2010, p. 17). The result is some universities have graduating teachers who were less than ideally qualified to teach social studies (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010).

Additional concerns were raised by the employment of social studies teachers from a wide range of backgrounds (Savage, 2019). Although more research is needed to determine the effects of such policies, it is worth noting the potential negative impact of hiring teachers who do not have a strong social studies background (Savage, 2019). To

remedy the gap, the National Council for History Education has released a set of expectations for teacher candidates to effectively teach history (National Council for History Education, n.d.).

Marginalization is evident in teacher certification tests, as well (An, 2016). In some states, elementary teacher candidates are not tested on social studies knowledge, only literacy and mathematics (An, 2016). Reports indicate teaching candidates have no interest in obtaining content knowledge in social studies (Rubin & Justice, 2005). The "reliance on high stakes testing in reading and math as the primary measurement of student and school improvement reinforces the negative perception of, and disinterest in, social studies" (An, 2016, p. 20) for teacher candidates taking social studies methods classes. Pre-service teachers who participated in less social studies instruction than other core areas stated they feel unprepared, according to Fitchett et al. (2014). Within the student-teacher field experience, teacher candidates report feeling cajoled by cooperating teachers to neglect social studies and provide more time for other subjects (Fitchett et al., 2014).

State licensing departments and public-school administrators are also guilty of contributing to the problem (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Many secondary schools assign unqualified teachers to teach social studies; some states certify social studies teachers without the teachers ever taking a college course in history (Bradley Commission, 1988). There is also concern that all grade-level teacher candidates need additional training to fit the requirements of CCSS (Bradley Commission, 1988). These trainings should emphasize nontraditional teaching methods such as inquiry, literacy, critical thinking, and primary and secondary source analysis (Kenna & Russell, 2014).



## **Instructional Practices**

Within the K–12 school setting, there has been disagreement regarding social studies curriculum (Barber et al., 2014; Denton & Sink, 2015). Public school teachers are acutely aware of the narrowing of the curriculum (Farkas, 2012; Manzo, 2005). Most teachers surveyed stated schools are narrowing the curriculum by shifting instructional time and resources toward math and language arts and away from subjects such as art, music, foreign language, and social studies (Fitchett et al., 2014; McMurrer, 2008).

The problem is more prevalent in elementary schools than middle- or high schools (Thacker et al., 2018). Most teachers surveyed believed state testing in math and language arts is driving the curriculum narrowing (Huck, 2018). Teachers reported the emphasis on math and communication arts has led to other outcomes, such as tested subjects receiving priority for technology and other resources (Farkas, 2012). Mandated assessments create a culture of compliance, restricting performance measures, and limiting teacher flexibility in instruction (Fitchett et al., 2014).

Within the social studies content area, teaching history is driven by an emphasis on informational coverage, which skims the surface of the many standards through learning facts as opposed to in-depth study (Farkas, 2012; Kenna & Russell, 2014). For this reason, teachers feel pressured by standards-based educational reform to narrow content to only factual recall (Kenna & Russell, 2014). For many teachers, the sheer volume of standards makes it hard to teach the material deeply (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Due to time constraints, they must often choose between skill acquisition or content (Farkas, 2012).

Some researchers say the variable which appears to have the most significant effect on instructional practices is not the standards, but the high stakes assessments tied

to standards (Farkas, 2012). For many teachers, there is no assessment linked to CCSS (Huck, 2018; Kenna & Russell, 2014). Consequently, teachers find themselves teaching to the test, as opposed to teaching the standards (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Despite the implementation of more standards, instructional practices have changed very little since the adoption of standards-based reforms (Kenna & Russell, 2014).

### **Assessment**

Assessment is another area of inconsistency within the social studies content (Fitchett et al., 2014b; Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013). There are currently no federal mandates for testing history or other social studies content (Fitchett et al., 2014b). However, many states administer the NAEP to measure student achievement in Grades 4, 8, and 12 (Koretz, 2019; Lazer, 2015; NCES, 2014). Additionally, the majority of states have also adapted a 100-question civics test created by the Civics Education Initiative as a graduation requirement (Fraker et al., 2019).

The NAEP assessments are administered on a regular basis in the content areas of mathematics, reading, science, technology and engineering, arts, and social studies (Koretz, 2019; NCES, 2020a). Within social studies, the NAEP measures knowledge of civics, geography, economics, and U.S. history in separate tests (NCES, 2018). The NAEP civic assessment (2018) measures “the civics knowledge and skills that are critical to the responsibilities of citizenship in the constitutional democracy of the United States” (para. 1). Students’ knowledge of democracy is also assessed in the U.S. History test (NAEP, 2018). Overall, the 2014 and 2018 civics assessment scores remained stable while showing growth from 1994, when the test was first administered (NAEP, 2020).

The average scores for U.S. History were slightly lower than in 2014, yet higher than the scores from 1994 (NAEP, 2020a).

Studies have indicated students who were exposed to primary sources, historical writing, and other forms of hands-on instruction score significantly higher on U.S. History NAEP tests than students who were not (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Kenna & Russell, 2014). Nevertheless, many instructional practices remain traditional, such as lectures and worksheets (Kenna & Russell, 2014). The incorporation of performance-based activities and active learning into instructional practices can be challenging if assessments are not evaluating those same higher-order thinking skills (Kenna & Russell, 2014). Social studies proponents argue there is a strong need for a common social studies assessment that assesses the 21st-century competencies of creativity, critical thinking, communication, and collaboration (Kenna & Russell, 2014; NCSS, 2017a).

Few states, however, mandate testing in elementary social studies (Thacker et al., 2018). Currently, fewer than 20 states require an end-of-year assessment in social studies at the elementary level (Ciullo, 2015, para. 1). Elementary schools in states with social studies assessments spend 30 more minutes per week on social studies than those in states without social studies assessments (Fitchett et al., 2014a, p. 9).

### **Changes in Instructional Time**

There have been many studies in which the effects of standards-based education reform on instructional time were examined (Center on Education Policy, 2005; Fitchett et al., 2014; Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). Research has consistently shown social studies receives the lowest priority among core subjects (Fitchett et al., 2014; NCES, 2007). The intense focus on reading and math takes time and energy away from other essential subjects, gifted and talented, and performing arts (CEP, 2005).

The magnitude of changes in instructional time is significant (Denton & Sink, 2015). Nearly two-thirds of self-reporting elementary teachers state they have increased mathematics instruction by 75 minutes weekly, while nearly 20% of teachers state they have increased mathematics instruction by 150 minutes (Center on Education Policy, 2008, p. 1). Instructional time in communications arts has drastically increased as well, with 80% of teachers nationwide reporting an increase of 75 minutes weekly and over half of them reporting an increase of 150 minutes (CEP, 2008, p. 1). In grade-specific analyses, it was found that students in third and eighth grade spend more time on English than any other subject, followed by math (Hoyer & Sparks, 2017, p. 4).

Social studies, one of the four core subjects, has been greatly impacted by the emphasis on mathematics and communication arts (Britt & Howe, 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). In a study conducted for the Center on Educational Policy, researcher McMurrer found more than half of the teachers reported they eliminated at least 75 minutes previously allocated to social studies each week and transferred those minutes to math and communication arts (CEP, 2008, p. 1). Student teachers reported social studies instruction time was between 0–90 minutes per week, with an average of 60 minutes per week (Denton & Sink, 2015, p. 8). The K–3 teachers spent less than 20 minutes of the five-hour school day on social studies instruction, while teachers in grades 4–5 spent less than 30 minutes (Denton & Sink, 2015, p. 5).

Fitchett et al. (2014b) found that social studies instruction decreased by 48 minutes per week in grades 3–5 in the previous 10 years (p. 47). From a total of 4 hours 22 minutes of core instruction, third-grade teachers reported they allocated 45 minutes per day to social studies, while their principals reported 51 minutes allocated to social

studies (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015, p. 85). Social studies instructional time between third-fifth grades decreased up to 60 minutes per week (Denton & Sink, 2015, p. 1).

### **Content Integration**

There has been much interest in integrating social studies with communication arts, particularly in elementary school (Barber et al., 2014; Denton & Sink, 2015). Some scholars argue that content integration is beneficial to a democratic society by developing the whole child (Huck, 2018). According to Knudsen (as cited in Huck, 2018), social studies, by definition, is an integrated content encompassing a multitude of subjects, including government, history, economics, geography, and sociology. Denton and Sink (2015) cited studies that showed that despite the limited research, content integration results in “higher-level thinking, unified sense of process, real-world application, heightened motivation, and depth of understanding” (p. 4).

Elementary teachers admittedly use integration as the primary means of social studies education (Denton & Sink, 2015; Fitchett et al., 2014). Some teachers integrate social studies with other subjects, primarily reading and language arts, while others have reluctantly eliminated social studies due to time constraints (Winstead, 2011). Although there has been relatively little literature on Common Core reform and social studies, there has been renewed interest in content integration with the combination of ELA and Social Studies in CCSS (Barber et al., 2014; Huck, 2018). Additionally, there is no consistent curriculum for the integration of social studies in elementary (Barber et al., 2014).

There have been attempts to develop a solid integrated curriculum (Barber et al., 2014; Denton & Sink, 2015). Barber et al. (2014) created an intervention program to help infuse literacy instruction into social studies titled *United States History for Engaged*

*Reading (USHER)* and was successful in increasing reading comprehension skills, reading self-efficacy, and engaging middle school students in content-specific reading. Denton and Sink (2015) also presented a strategy that preserves social studies as a core subject by creating a curriculum that integrated social studies content with common core math and literacy standards. However, researchers argued integration actually defeats the purpose of integration by eliminating any substantive social studies content apart from reading and significantly reduces or eliminates skills acquisition (Thacker et al., 2018).

### **Missouri Guidelines**

In Missouri, the *Missouri Recommended Minutes of Instruction for Elementary Schools* is available for public schools across the state (MODESE, 2017b). According to the MODESE (2017b) guidelines, students in first, second, and third grades should receive 30 minutes of social studies instruction daily for a total of 150 minutes weekly (para. 1). Students in fourth through sixth grades and self-contained seventh and eighth grades should receive 40 minutes of social studies instruction daily for a total of 200 minutes weekly (MODESE, 2017b, para. 1). Likewise, the recommendations for instructional time in elementary science are 40 minutes daily and 200 minutes weekly (MODESE, 2017b, para. 1). In comparison, reading and language arts instruction should be for 150 minutes daily for students in Grades 1–3 and 120 minutes for fourth through sixth-grade students (MODESE, 2017b, para. 1). Math instruction should account for 60 minutes daily in Grades 1–6 (MODESE, 2017b, para.1).

Additionally, the MODESE (2017b) recommended the incorporation of reading and language arts into other subjects. Finally, the state guidelines allow for 30 additional minutes in primary grades and 45 extra minutes in upper elementary grades for

"additional activities that are in the best interest of the youngsters" (MODESE, 2017b, para. 4). State guidelines allow teacher discretion in determining what constitutes the best interest of students for this purpose.

### **Teacher Perceptions**

Slightly over half of elementary, middle school, and high school teachers nationwide have agreed the primary purpose for teaching social studies is to develop responsible citizens (Passe & Fitchett, 2013). However, teachers in elementary schools place less educational value on social studies than teachers in higher grades, where social studies is included in state-mandated assessments (Vogler et al., 2007). Elementary teacher perceptions appear to be contradictory, however (Denton & Sink, 2015; Heafner, 2018; Thacker et al., 2018).

For example, lacking pedagogical knowledge and experience, many elementary teachers enter classrooms with little to no confidence in social studies instructional practices, limiting students' access to social studies content (Thacker et al., 2018). While teachers report they taught social studies concepts and knowledge, the amount of social studies content taught was unclear (Denton & Sink, 2015). Furthermore, there is no evidence the teaching of historical thinking, inquiry, and civic responsibility—the core mission of social studies—was occurring at the elementary level (Heafner, 2018; Thacker et al., 2018). In one study, elementary teachers revealed many obstacles to teaching such skills, including lack of clarity on social studies standards, lack of time and resources, and lack of administrative support (Stanley, 2017).

Elementary teachers and students view social studies as the least important of core subjects (Fitchett et al., 2014). Time constraints are the largest determinant of social

studies taught in elementary grades (Heafner, 2018). Teachers struggle to achieve effective implementation due to what they cite as lack of administrative support, lack of standardized assessments in social studies, and lack of clear understanding of the goals of elementary social studies education (Denton & Sink, 2015). Furthermore, less than one in three elementary teachers viewed social studies as important to the primary goal of civic education (Denton & Sink, 2015).

Autonomy is also a factor in social studies instructional time, as teachers in low-income schools report the loss of autonomy and professional identity as a result of the focus on literacy and mathematics (Dennis, 2016). However, those teachers who have more autonomy reported they spend more time on social studies (Fitchett et al., 2014b). One researcher discovered one of four factors must occur for social studies to be taught with fidelity at the elementary level: (a) teachers are given complete autonomy of their time, (b) teachers prioritize social studies despite pressure otherwise, (c) social studies is tested, or (d) the administration designates time and resources to social studies (Anderson, 2014).

### **Social Studies Across the States**

Accountability mandates may serve an important role in historical content knowledge development (Fitchett et al., 2017). While not a perfect tool for historical understanding, accountability offers the most significant and most representative sample of students' historical knowledge in the United States (Fitchett et al., 2017). An extensive study published by the ECS (2017) revealed significant disparity among the states' social studies curriculum and assessments across the nation.



In the area of graduation requirements, most states (30) require 3 or 3.5 social studies credits (ECS, 2016a, pp. 2–20). Seven states and the District of Columbia require 4 or more social studies credits (ECS, 2016a, pp. 1–20). Seven states require 2 or 2.5 social studies credits, while three require 1 or 1.5 credits, and three states have unclear graduation requirements for social studies (ECS, 2016a, pp. 3–19). In Missouri, students are required to take 3 credits in social studies, one of which must be American History, and one half must be Government (ECS, 2016a, p. 9; MODESE, 2017a, p. 6).

Regarding mandatory assessments, 28 states require some form of social studies cumulative assessment at the high school level (ECS, 2017, pp. 1–3). Missouri requires the Government EOC exam (MODESE, 2017a). Missouri schools may also administer an optional American History EOC exam (MODESE, 2017a). Thirteen states require some form of social studies assessment in Grades 3–8 (NCES, 2020b). Missouri does not require social studies assessment in Grades 3–8 (MODESE, 2017a).

Of the various subjects which comprise the social studies discipline, U.S. Government is assessed at the state level the most (ECS, 2017). Many state accountability systems include civics, citizenship education, or social studies in general (ECS, 2016b). Sixteen states have social studies criteria as part of their accountability systems (ECS, 2016b, pp. 1–5). In Missouri, the school accountability report card and student achievement are both measured in part through the statewide assessment system, which includes mandatory testing in Government and voluntary testing in American History (ECS, 2016b; MODESE, 2017a). Fitchett et al. (2017) discovered the number of schools with a required high school history test saw an average increased performance on the NAEP–U.S. History compared to students in non-tested buildings.

## **The Future of Social Studies**

Educational policy in the 21st century is an ever-evolving concept centered around high-stakes testing and common standards (Fitchett et al., 2014a). Proponents of social studies understand the importance of math, science, and literacy (Britt & Howe, 2014). However, many experts in the field agree there is a great need to combat a perceived image problem for the social studies discipline (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013). There is much resistance from influences such as politicians who view social studies education as historically outdated and unnecessary and reformers who do not believe social studies education can bring about societal change (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013).

By all indications, standards-based assessments are here to stay (Fitchett et al., 2017). Many advocates agree there is a need to have mandatory testing in social studies subjects (Britt & Howe, 2014). Proponents call for the inclusion of social studies in state-wide testing, which will ensure social studies is given the same instructional time as other subjects (Britt & Howe, 2014; Kenna & Russell, 2014). Opponents argued that the inclusion of social studies in state-mandated assessments contradicts the role of social studies in fostering social progress (Pickup, 2017).

Another suggestion to preserve social studies education is to develop a solid integration curriculum to improve literacy (Denton & Sink, 2015; Middleton, 2016). In recent years, there has been a trend to integrate social studies more thoroughly with communication arts by incorporating historically-based reading comprehension activities (Barber, 2014; Denton & Sink, 2015). Social studies advocates do not discount the importance of aligning social studies standards with literacy strategies, particularly in early grades (Britt & Howe, 2014). Policymakers can potentially support practices that

promote discipline-specific literacy skills in history and other social sciences (Fitchett et al., 2017). Furthermore, reading complex texts and engaging in critical discourse through narrative formation enables students to articulate learning in sophisticated ways that mirror the high-level learning demands and career expectations of contemporary society (Fitchett et al., 2017).

Within the past decade, there has been a trend in modernizing social studies education through the implementation of various initiatives (Hammond & Oltman., 2019; Hartshorne et al., 2019; Parker & Lo, 2016). One such strategy involves integrating social studies curriculum with STEM (Hammond & Oltman., 2019; Hartshorne et al., 2019). An example of a social studies/STEM integration would be for students to examine how a particular advancement in technology affects the lives of people and contributes to the rise of empires (Claymier, 2014). Increasingly, social studies curriculums are focusing more on inquiry or problem-based learning strategies (McRae-Jones, 2017; NCSS, 2016).

Another instructional strategy is inquiry-based learning, in which students are taught to use 21st-century skills such as creativity, collaboration, and critical thinking (Framework for 21st Century Learning, n.d.). Such strategies lead to a deeper understanding of content which can be adapted to new situations (Parker & Lo, 2016). The NCSS has introduced the C3 Framework, which is described as an “approach for reframing the study of civics around inquiry in hopes that anchoring citizenship on the compelling questions of social studies might help students acquire deeper understanding and operationalize civic ideas” (Fraker et al., 2019, para. 1).

Having a solid, consistent curriculum framework will assist in improving student performances (Brennan, 2017; Britt & Howe, 2014). According to Fitchett et al. (2017),

“By understanding the characteristics of success, rather than highlighting deficiency, ambitious history education can promote practices that bolster underperforming student populations” (p. 19). To this end, the NCSS (2017b) released revised and updated curriculum standards in early 2017 focused on 10 themes central to social studies education.

### **Summary**

Since the implementation of NCLB, elementary schools have significantly decreased the amount of instructional time in social studies (Farkas, 2012; Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). While more recent reform attempts have alleviated the demands of NCLB, social studies instructional time still lags behind mathematics, reading, language arts, science, and technology (Brennan, 2017; Denton & Sink, 2015; Millard, 2015). Combined with inconsistency among the states regarding high school social studies curriculum and graduation requirements, there is a concern that schools are producing a generation of citizens who lack the necessary skills to participate in a democratic society (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Hutchens & Eveland, 2009).

Concerns regarding the current and future state of social studies in the United States are not a recent phenomenon. Earlier studies such as those by Bolick et al. (2010), Fitchett & VanFossen (2013), and Fitchett et al. (2014) indicated the shift in focus within the education system. The focus has increasingly shifted towards language arts and mathematics, which have been provided significantly more instructional time than social studies (Libresco, 2015). Therefore, the reduction in instructional time for social studies has highlighted the need for reform (Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Fitchett et al., 2014; Winstead, 2011). Further indications of marginalization are evidenced by the lack of

mandatory assessments in social studies across the United States (Dee & Jacob, 2010; Powell et al., 2009).

The area of concern is that marginalization is occurring despite the importance of the subject in different facets of society at large (Brennan, 2017; Fitchett & VanFossen, 2013; Gould, 2011; Hutchens & Eveland, 2009; Kosar, 2013; NCSS, 2017b). Among the critical areas of social studies today is in its ability to address contemporary issues within the American society (Ciccolini, 2020; Costello, 2019; Ireton & Posetti, 2018) in light of the prevailing COVID-19 pandemic (Schwellenbach, 2020) and the most recent presidential election (Annala, 2020; Rosen, 2020). While the subject has its complexities (NCSS, 2017a), it remains important and should be taught in schools (Boyle-Baise & Goodman, 2009; Buchanan, 2015).

Social studies education is critical to the development of the whole student, as it increases awareness of social issues and how to address them (Hartshorne et al., 2019). It also promotes participation in social activities as part of an individual's civil duty to the country (Hartshorne et al., 2019). Consequently, there is an increased need to reform social studies to suit the standards-based educational reform under NCLB (Fitchett et al., 2014b). While an appropriate and universally accepted strategy has not been developed, measures must be developed to include social studies in the 21st-century policy-making decisions (McCully & Barton, 2007).

However, there is still a need to determine the true position of social studies in Missouri, hence the question: Where does the state of Missouri fit within the broader context? In Chapter Three, the methodology for the current study is explained, research

questions are presented, the population and sample are identified, the data collection and analysis process are described, and ethical considerations are addressed.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

Chapter Three includes the problems and purpose of the study and the research questions and hypotheses. The research design is explained, the population and sample are established, and instrumentation is described. The process for data collection and analysis is listed as well as ethical considerations related to the study.

#### **Problems and Purpose Overview**

The purpose of this mixed-methods study was to explore the impact of the educational policies of NCLB on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools (Creswell, 2014; Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). The study began with quantitative analyses of total instructional minutes spent in elementary social studies, followed by an examination of the EOC assessment scores for American Government in Missouri high schools for school years 2017, 2018, and 2019. Then, data were analyzed to determine the correlation between elementary instructional minutes and high school assessment scores.

In the second phase of the study, the objective was to understand the effect the decreased priority of social studies has had on teacher morale. This phase consisted of surveys and interviews of Missouri social studies teachers concerning their perceptions of the role of social studies in post-NCLB America.

#### **Research Questions and Hypotheses**

The following research questions and hypotheses guided the study:

1. From the sample of Missouri elementary schools, what is the difference in the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, and science?

*H1<sub>0</sub>*: There is no difference between the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science.

*H1<sub>a</sub>*: There is a difference between the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science.

2. From the sample of Missouri public schools, what is the correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the Government EOC examination?

*H2<sub>0</sub>*: There is no correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the Government EOC examination.

*H2<sub>a</sub>*: There is a correlation between minutes of classroom social studies instruction and the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the Government EOC examination.

3. How do teachers from Missouri public secondary schools perceive the role of social studies instruction compared to mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction?

### **Research Design**

The current research is a combination of quantitative and qualitative methods (Creswell, 2014). Using this methodology, quantitative data regarding instructional minutes and test scores were collected and analyzed. The design of the current study also included a survey of elementary classroom teachers of their instructional methods and the



amount of time allocated to social studies. Face-to-face interviews with secondary social studies teachers were conducted to gauge their perception of the findings of the elementary survey, as well as the role of social studies within society.

### **Population and Sample**

The population for this study was all 518 public school districts in the state of Missouri (MODESE, 2019). At the time of this study, there were 508 superintendents, 1,252 elementary principals, and 1,229 elementary teachers in Missouri public school system (MODESE, 2019). According to Creswell (2014) and Fraenkel et al. (2019), samples represent a portion of the population, while a census reveals data from the entire population. For this study, a sample of 30–50 participants was deemed sufficient to generalize to the total population of educators (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

For the quantitative portion of the study, a random sample of elementary building principals was selected to survey to obtain the minutes of social studies instruction in Grades 3–6. A purposive sample of 30–50 elementary teachers from Grades 3–6 was then selected to respond to a survey. Creswell (2014) described purposive sampling methodology as one in which the researcher selects individuals who will best help them understand the research problem and the research questions. To gather the qualitative data, two teachers from the participating districts were purposively selected from Grades 9–12 to interview for the purpose of obtaining their perceptions.

### **Instrumentation**

Secondary data were obtained by gathering EOC Government assessment scores from an online database on the MODESE website for 2017, 2018, and 2019. Missouri elementary school principals were emailed to request data to determine the number of

minutes spent on social studies instruction in the elementary schools. Further quantitative data were obtained by a *Qualtrics* digital survey of elementary teachers (see Appendix A). The 15 survey questions were constructed by the researcher and were designed based on a literature review of instructional focus in elementary classrooms (Fitchett et al., 2014).

Qualitative data were gained from interviews conducted with secondary social studies teachers. The researcher created the interview questions (see Appendix B), with the design guided by a literature review of teacher perceptions about the current role of social studies education (Nowell, 2016). The interview consisted of 12 questions and was conducted via email.

When conducting research, reliability and validity are two important considerations to ensure quality results (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2019). According to Fraenkel et al. (2019), reliability is the degree to which scores obtained with an instrument are consistent with whatever the instrument measures. To assure reliability, field tests of the survey and interview questions with a pilot group were conducted. Survey questions were administered to elementary teachers in a local school district, and interview questions were administered to secondary teachers in the same school district (MODESE, 2019). The teachers in the pilot group were not part of the actual sample.

Validity is the degree to which correct inferences can be made based on results from an instrument (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2019). The validity of a study is dependent on the instrument, the instrumentation process, and the characteristics of the group studied (Fraenkel et al., 2019). The researcher utilized several methods to ensure the validity of the study. The surveys and interviews were conducted electronically to

make the conditions as simple and convenient as possible for the participants. The formats of the survey and interview questions were checked for clarity and ambiguity (Fraenkel et al., 2019).

### **Data Collection**

The first phase of research was to collect archival data from the MODESE: the American Government EOC data from 2017, 2018, and 2019 were collected and disaggregated for all public school districts in Missouri. Three years of data could establish a theme for validation purposes (Creswell, 2014).

The second phase of research was to determine the number of instructional minutes allotted for elementary social studies. Contact information for the 518 public school districts was obtained from the Missouri Department of Education's School Directory (MODESE, 2018). Once approval was received from the Lindenwood IRB (see Appendix C), an email query was sent to 50 Missouri public school district superintendents to request permission to gather data from their principal and teachers (see Appendix D). Once permission was received, a letter of participation, consent form, and link to the survey were emailed to the elementary principals (see Appendix E). Principals were asked to provide the number of instructional minutes allocated for elementary social studies. Based on the response from the elementary principals, a letter of participation, a consent form, and a link to the survey were then distributed via *Qualtrics* to elementary teachers in responding districts (see Appendix F and Appendix G).

The third phase of the study consisted of email interviews of secondary social studies teachers within the same districts. A letter of participation was emailed to the secondary teachers (see Appendix H). The secondary teachers who agreed to participate

in the interviews were provided informed consent (see Appendix I) and a copy of the interview questions prior to the interview session. Data obtained from interviews provided more in-depth information on instructional practices and the social studies curriculum. Also obtained through the interviews were the teachers' views on the status of social studies within the educational realm and individual perceptions of the role of social studies within society.

### **Data Analysis**

The first step was to analyze the number of minutes spent on social studies instructional time in elementary schools from the data obtained from the survey. Social studies minutes were compared to the number of minutes spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction for each of the sample districts. A parametric ANOVA test of sample size 30–50 allowed for a comparison of the mean instructional times of the four subjects: social studies, mathematics, English language arts, and science (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2019).

Next, scores from secondary EOC examinations in Government were extracted from the MODESE. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to determine if there was a correlation between increased minutes of classroom social studies instruction as reported on surveys by the districts and the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the Government EOC examination in those same districts. A correlation coefficient was produced, and if the variables were significantly linearly related to +1.00 or -1.00, it was assumed a relationship exists between minutes of social studies instruction and student proficiency on the Government EOC (Creswell, 2014; Fraenkel et al., 2019). According to Fraenkel et al. (2019), a positive correlation

would exist if high scores on the Government EOC examination are found to be related to increased minutes of classroom instruction.

Finally, to examine teacher perceptions of the role of social studies education in comparison to their perceptions of mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction, data were collected from a survey of elementary teachers and interviews of secondary social studies teachers. An explanatory method was utilized (Fraenkel et al., 2019). In the explanatory method, the results of the qualitative analysis were used to expand upon the results of the quantitative study (Fraenkel et al., 2019). Frequencies and percentages were calculated from the survey responses to Likert-type statements and reported. The qualitative responses from interviews were coded for similarities in themes, and data were reported as frequencies of the responses to each theme (Creswell, 2014).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Safeguards were in place throughout the data collection and analysis process. All participants received an Informed Consent Form detailing the purpose of the research, any possible risks, and the opportunity to opt-out of the study at any time. All physical data and documents were placed in a secure location. All electronic data and documents were password protected. All data and documents will be destroyed three years upon completion of the research project. In dealing with student achievement scores, all identifiers were removed to ensure all participants remained anonymous. Once the interview transcription was completed, the transcription was presented to the participants for review before being finalized.

**Summary**

In Chapter Three, the purpose of the study was addressed, and the research questions and hypotheses were identified. The purpose of the study was to explore the impact of the educational policies of NCLB on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools. The methodology was presented, which consisted of a synthesis of mixed methods and parametric methods to guide the study. Additionally, the instrumentation, population, sample, and data collection procedures were discussed. The methods of analyzing the data were then addressed. Finally, steps to address ethical considerations were delineated.

In Chapter Four, an overview of the study is presented. Findings are submitted, followed by a discussion of the data analyses. Archival and survey data are displayed to provide a visualization of the findings. A summary of interview responses is also offered.

## Chapter Four: Analysis of Data

In the post-NCLB era, there is little dispute regarding the increased emphasis on language arts, mathematics, and science (Libresco, 2015). Federal mandates have resulted in more time and resources allocated to these subjects at the expense of social studies, the fourth core subject (Heafner & Fitchett, 2015). At the elementary level, social studies has experienced a drastic decrease in instructional minutes due to the emphasis on the heavily tested subjects of ELA, mathematics, and science (Hoyer & Sparks, 2017).

The importance of a solid social studies program cannot be understated. Since its founding, the role of the American school system has been to educate youth to participate in a democratic society (Bolton, 2008). Additional benefits of a strong social studies program include the development of critical thinking, problem-solving, contextualization, and inquiry-based skills (NCSS, 2017b).

This mixed-methods study was conducted to explore the extent of decreased instructional minutes in elementary social studies and its impact on student performance on secondary mandated assessments. An additional aim was to explore the effect of educational policies of NCLB and subsequent federal policies on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools. This study adds to the existing body of research on the effects of federally mandated emphasis on math and literacy on other subjects, particularly social studies. Analyzing the relationship between elementary instructional time and high school assessments is imperative to determine if more instructional time should be directed to social studies in earlier grades. The information gained in this study may be beneficial to policymakers, government officials, and educational leaders seeking ways to improve civic participation in a democratic society.

The study began with the collection of archival data from the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MODESE), followed by an examination of the EOC assessment scores in Missouri public high schools. The American Government EOC data from 2017, 2018, and 2019 were collected and disaggregated for all public school districts in Missouri. In the second portion of the study, quantitative results of total instructional minutes spent in Missouri public elementary social studies were obtained. The data were analyzed using an ANOVA to address research question one: *From the sample of Missouri public elementary schools, what is the difference in the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, and science?* The purpose of this portion of the research was to determine if there was a difference in the number of instructional minutes spent in elementary social studies and elementary science, mathematics, and English language arts.

A Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was conducted to address research question two: *From the sample of Missouri public schools, what is the correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination?* This analysis was used to determine if there was a correlation between increased minutes of classroom social studies instruction as reported on surveys by the districts and the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the Government EOC examination in those same districts.

In the qualitative phase of the study, interviews of Missouri secondary social studies teachers were used to answer research question three: *How do teachers from*



*Missouri public secondary schools perceive the role of social studies instruction compared to mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction?* The purpose of the interviews was to gain teacher perceptions on the role of social studies in post-NCLB America. Frequencies and percentages were calculated from the survey responses to Likert-type statements and reported. The qualitative responses from interviews were coded for similarities in themes, and data were reported as frequencies of the responses to each theme.

### **Participants**

Of the 518 school districts in Missouri, 31 superintendents granted permission to conduct the study. From this number, 28 superintendents followed through with the request to relay information to building administrators. A sample of 28 yielded a margin of error of 18%, with a confidence level of 95%.

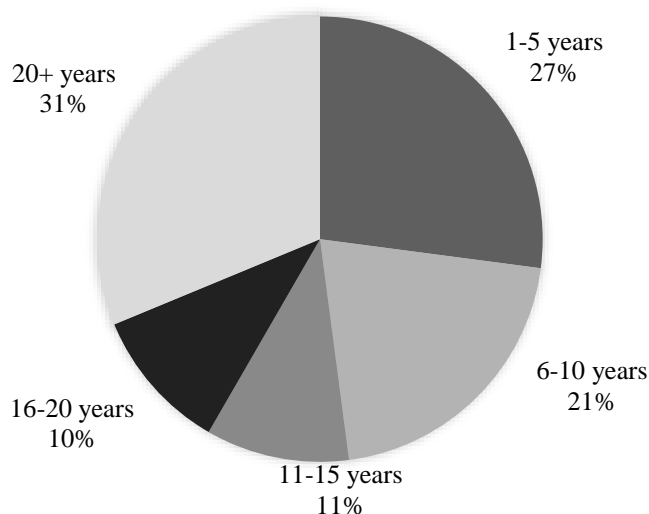
### ***Participant Subgroups***

The sample was divided into two groups: elementary teachers and secondary teachers. There were 48 elementary teachers from across the state who participated in the survey. Thirteen districts were represented in the survey, and there were eight responses in which no school district was identified (see Table 1). Three responses were disqualified since the teachers' grade levels were lower than third grade. Therefore, the qualifying number of elementary teachers was 45. Data from secondary teachers are presented later in the chapter.

**Table 1***Elementary Teacher Participant Information by District*

District	Number of Participants	Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6
District A	2	0	0	0	2
District B	1	0	1	0	0
District C	2	1	1	0	0
District D	6	0	3	2	1
District E	2	0	0	0	2
District F	1	0	0	1	0
District G	6	3	0	1	2
District H	2	0	2	0	0
District I	11	5	2	1	3
District J	1	0	1	0	0
District K	1	0	0	1	0
District L	2	0	0	2	0
Unidentified	8	1	3	0	4
Total	45	10	13	8	14

Years of service varied greatly among the elementary teachers who were surveyed; teachers who had been teaching for over 20 years accounted for 31.25% of teachers surveyed, while 27.08% had only been teaching for five years or less. The remaining teachers had been teaching for 6–10 years (20.83%), 10–15 years (10.42%), and 16–20 years (10.42%), respectively (see Figure 1).

**Figure 1***Elementary Teachers' Years of Service***Minutes of Instruction Survey Results**

The primary goal of the survey was to determine the number of weekly instructional minutes spent on elementary social studies. This information was collected in addition to the number of minutes of weekly instruction in English/Language Arts, mathematics, and science. Not all 45 elementary teachers answered the question; therefore,  $n = 33$ .

Based on survey responses, third-grade teachers spent an average of 675 minutes weekly on ELA instruction while spending 430 minutes weekly on mathematics instruction. Science instruction accounted for 90 minutes of weekly instruction, followed by 87 minutes of weekly social studies instruction (see Table 2). At the fourth-grade level, the difference between ELA and mathematics decreased, although considerably less time was spent on science and social studies. An average of 443 minutes was spent weekly on ELA instruction, while mathematics instruction accounted for 369 minutes

weekly. An average of 153 minutes was reportedly spent on science instruction and 135 minutes of weekly social studies instruction at the fourth-grade level.

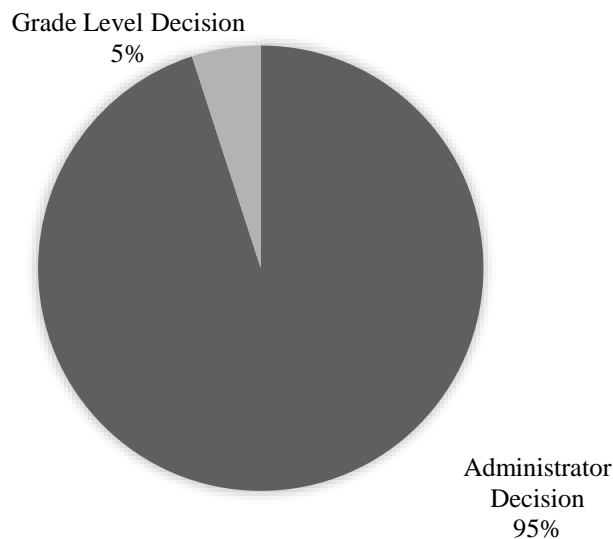
Fifth-grade teachers reported spending an average of 443 minutes on ELA instruction each week, followed by 318 minutes on mathematics, 208 minutes on science, and 175 minutes on social studies. Sixth-grade teachers spent an average of 414 minutes weekly on ELA instruction and an average of 336 minutes weekly on mathematics instruction. Science instruction accounted for 293 average minutes of weekly instruction, followed by 250 minutes of weekly social studies instruction.

**Table 2**

*Average Weekly Minutes of Instruction per Grade Level & Content Area*

Grade Level	ELA	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
Third	675	430	90	87
Fourth	443	369	153	135
Fifth	443	318	208	175
Sixth	414	336	293	250
Overall Average	494	363	186	162

When asked what determined the number of instructional minutes spent on elementary social studies, the vast majority of responses were similar. Of those teachers, 95% responded the decision was predetermined by district or building administrators due to master schedules and state-mandated testing. A significantly lower percentage of teachers surveyed (5%) cited grade level decisions based on state standards and time left in the day to teach social studies content and skills (see Figure 2).

**Figure 2***Determinants of Social Studies Instructional Time*

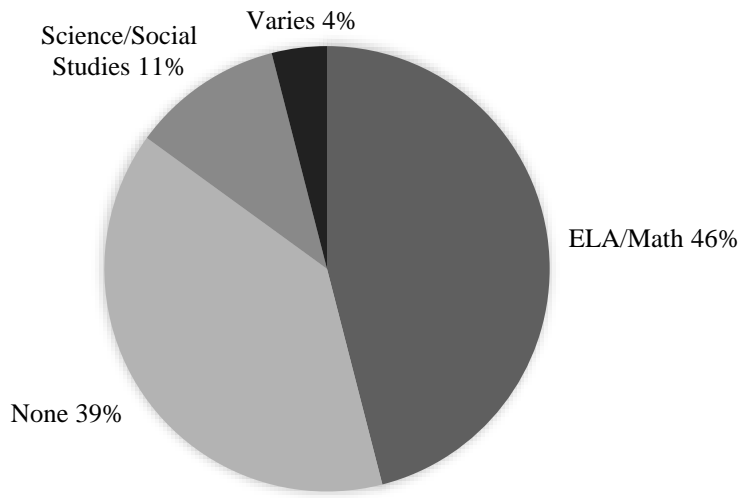
Respondents were then asked about remediation services for elementary students.

Figure 3 shows the teachers' responses to the following question: *When students are pulled out of class for individualized instruction in reading or math, which subject(s) do they miss?* Almost half (46%) of the teachers responded that students were pulled from the subject (math or ELA) in which they need remediation, while 39% responded that students did not miss core classes, 11% were pulled from science or social studies, and 4% were pulled from various classes.

Of the 39% who reported students missed no core classes, over half of the teachers (53%) noted that their schools have intervention time built into their school schedule. One teacher responded that students were originally pulled from science and social studies, but that policy had recently changed due to the amount of content they were missing. Students were now pulled from the second half of the subject for needed intervention.

**Figure 3**

*Courses Students are Pulled From for Individualized Instruction*



**Methods of Instruction**

An additional aim of the study was to ascertain the methods of instruction in elementary social studies. Teachers were asked if social studies was taught as a stand-alone subject in elementary grade levels or if it was integrated into ELA. The vast majority of teachers (72%) responded they taught social studies as a stand-alone subject, while 28% integrate social studies with ELA (see Figure 4).

**Figure 4**

*Social Studies Taught as Stand-Alone Subject Versus Content Integration*

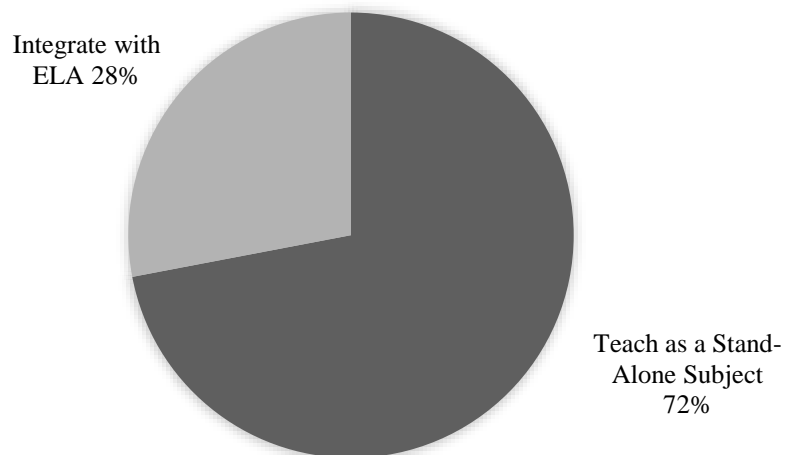
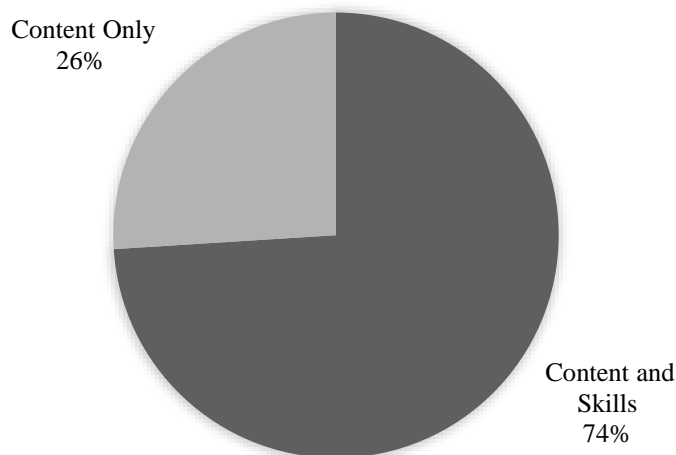
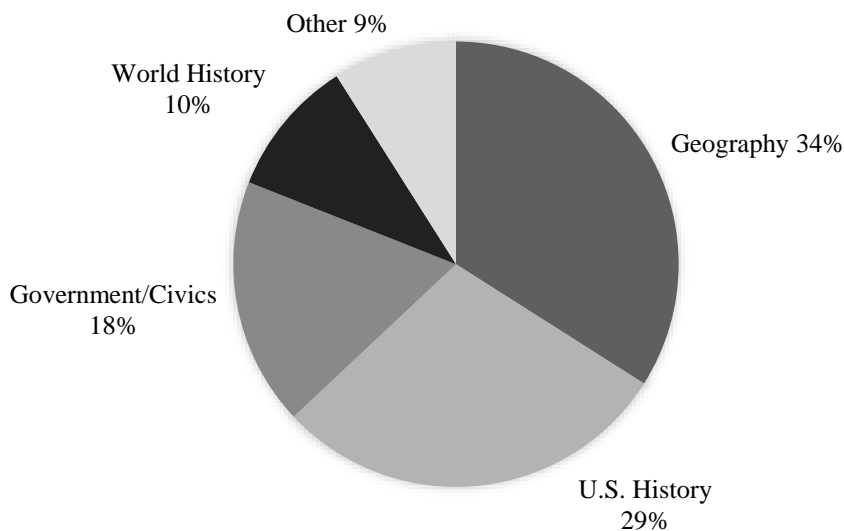


Figure 5 shows teacher responses to the question regarding instructional methods in teaching social studies. The majority of teachers (74%) taught a combination of content and skills, such as analyzing graphs, charts, maps, primary and secondary sources. Only 26% of the teachers focused on social studies content.

**Figure 5***Instructional Methods Within Social Studies*

Teachers were asked to identify which subjects within the social studies realm were taught in their elementary classroom. The most commonly taught subject was Geography (34%), followed by American History (29%), Government/Civics (18%), World History (10%), and Other (9%). Of the teachers who responded with Other, Missouri History (44%) was taught the most, followed by Economics (33%) (see Figure 6). One respondent did not specify which subject they taught, and another respondent stated, “I teach all of these subjects.”

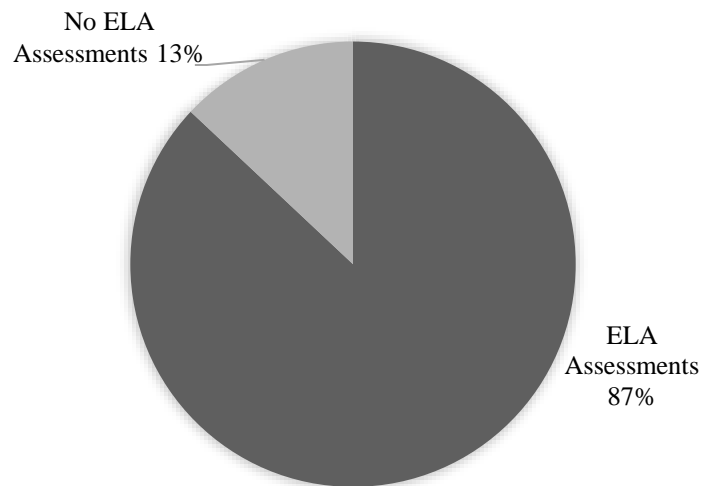


**Figure 6***Social Studies Content Taught in Elementary Grades*

Figures 7, 8, 9, and 10 show elementary teacher responses to the following question: *Please indicate if your elementary school offers standardized assessments in the following subjects: ELA, mathematics, science, and social studies.* Most teachers (87%) reported that standardized assessments were administered at the elementary level in ELA and mathematics. A lower percentage (44%) reported that standardized assessments were administered at the elementary level in science, while only 9% noted that standardized assessments were administered in social studies.

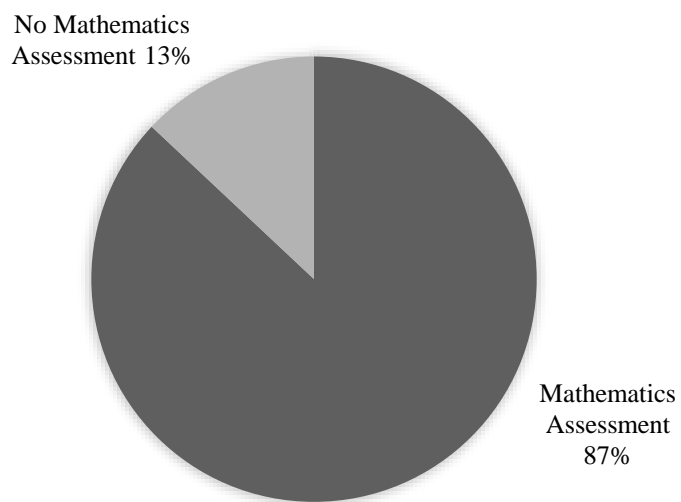
**Figure 7**

*Elementary ELA Standardized Assessments*



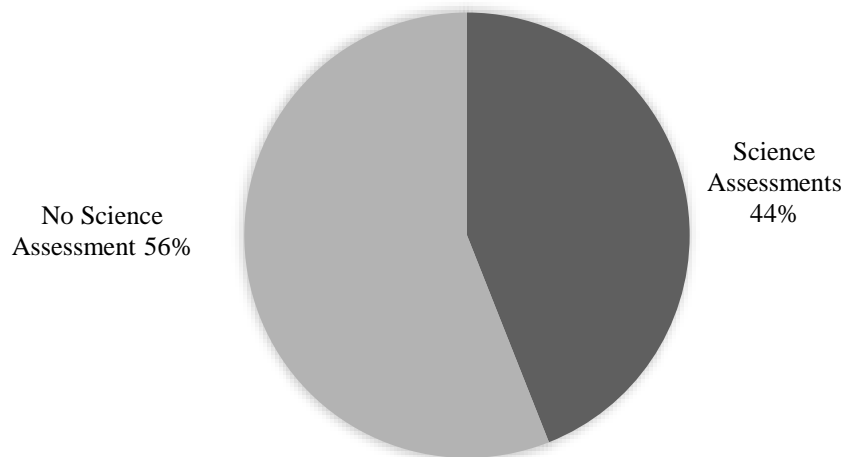
**Figure 8**

*Elementary Mathematics Standardized Assessments*



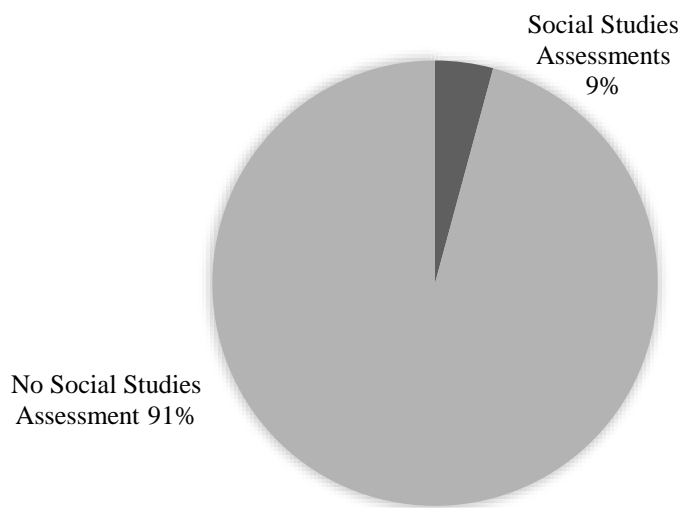
**Figure 9**

*Elementary Science Standardized Assessments*



**Figure 10**

*Elementary Social Studies Assessments*



### Elementary Teacher Perceptions on the Role of Social Studies

Elementary teachers were then asked a series of questions regarding their perceptions of the role of social studies in education and in society. Figure 11 represents teacher responses to the question: *How important do you feel social studies education is at the elementary level?* Over half (58%) of the respondents believed that social studies education is very important at the elementary level, while 20% of the respondents believed that social studies education is extremely important at the elementary level. Of the teachers surveyed, 16% responded elementary social studies is moderately important, while 6% responded that it is slightly important.

**Figure 11**

*Teacher Responses Regarding the Importance of Elementary Social Studies*

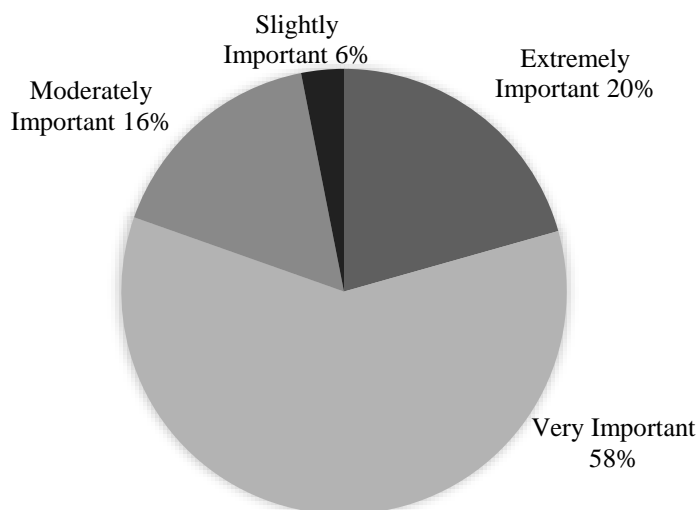


Figure 12 represents elementary teacher responses to the question: *How satisfied are you with the amount of time spent on social studies at the elementary level?* There was no real consensus in the responses to this question, as the responses were evenly split between satisfied and dissatisfied. Few teachers (4%) reported being extremely satisfied

with the amount of time spent on elementary social studies, while significantly more (44%) were either slightly or moderately satisfied with the amount of time spend on elementary social studies.

Few teachers (4%) reported being neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the amount of time spent on social studies in elementary school. The remainder of the teachers surveyed reported varying degrees of dissatisfaction with the amount of time spent on elementary social studies. Some teachers (14%) were slightly dissatisfied, some (22%) were moderately dissatisfied, and some (12%) were extremely dissatisfied with the amount of time spent on social studies in the elementary grades.

**Figure 12**

*Teacher Responses Regarding Their Satisfaction With Time Spent on Elementary Social Studies*

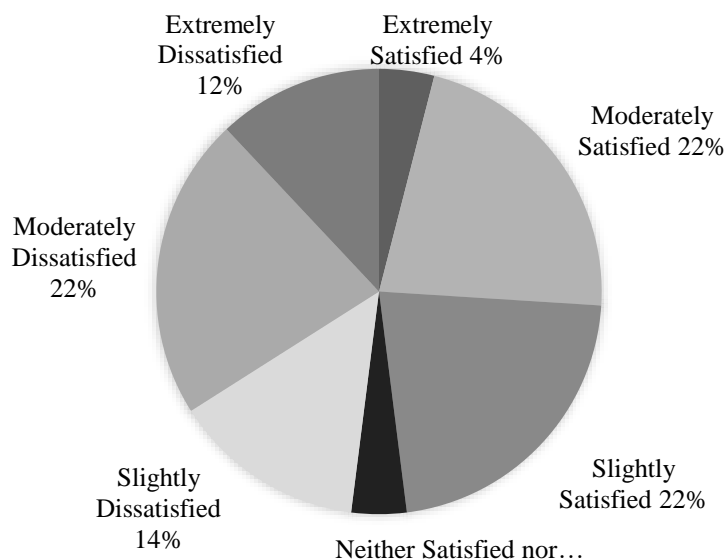


Figure 13 represents elementary teacher responses to the question: *How important do you feel social studies education is at the secondary level?* All teachers surveyed reported that social studies education is important at the secondary level. Over half (55%) of the respondents believed that social studies education is extremely important at the

secondary level, while 41% felt that secondary social studies education is very important. A small percentage (4%) of teachers reported that social studies education is moderately important at the secondary level.

### Figure 13

*Teacher Responses Regarding the Importance of Secondary Social Studies*

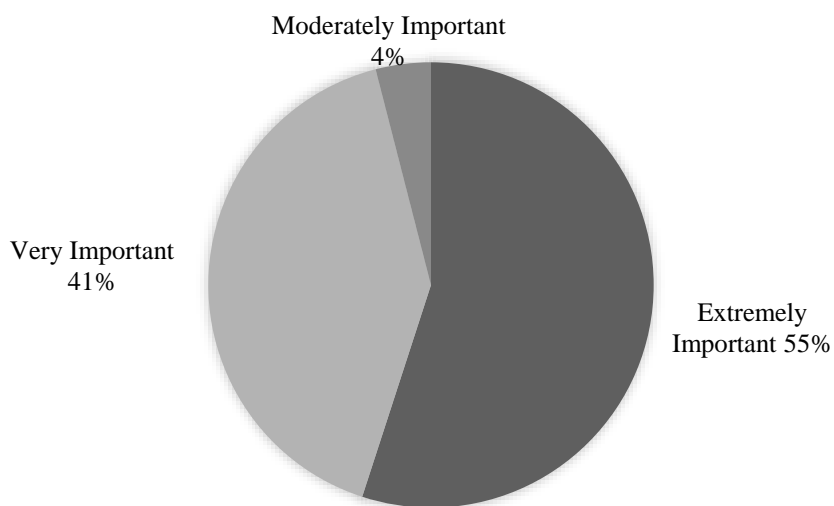
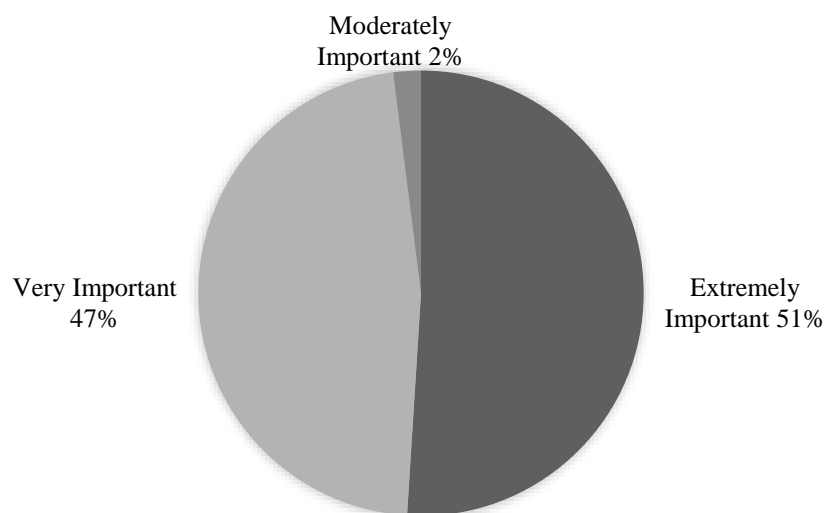


Figure 14 shows teacher responses to the question: *How important do you feel a child's social studies education is to their participation in a democratic society?* All teachers surveyed believed that a child's social studies education is important to their participation in a democratic society. Over half (51%) of respondents believed that a child's social studies education is extremely important to their participation in a democratic society, while 47% felt that it is very important. Only 2% of respondents believed a child's social studies education is moderately important to participate in a democratic society.

**Figure 14**

*Teacher Responses Regarding the Importance of Social Studies to Democratic Participation*



### **Secondary Data**

Based upon responses from elementary teachers, archival data for their school districts were then collected from the MODESE. The EOC assessment scores were retrieved in American Government, which is the only social studies subject tested under state mandates. Some districts included in the study had multiple elementary schools that feed into one secondary school.

Table 3 illustrates the percentage of students from participating school districts scoring Proficient and Advanced on the American Government EOC from participating districts from years 2016-2018. There were no EOC data for the academic year 2019, due to the field testing of a new assessment vendor. There were no EOC data for the academic year 2020, as U.S. public schools were forced to close due to the worldwide COVID-19 pandemic.

**Table 3**

*Percentage of Students Scoring Proficient or Advanced on American Government EOC by District*

District	2016	2017	2018
District A	48	57.1	75
District B	62	49.1	58.7
District C	30.7	45.5	0
District D	0	0	0
District E	58.3	67.2	0
District F	63.6	63.6	59.3
District G	74.5	72.9	68.3
District H	54.4	53.7	60.3
District I	70.1	71.9	68.8
District J	0	60.9	73.3
District K	64.3	84.7	50
District L	68.8	70.2	70.2
Average	49.6	58.1	48.7

### **Secondary Teacher Interviews**

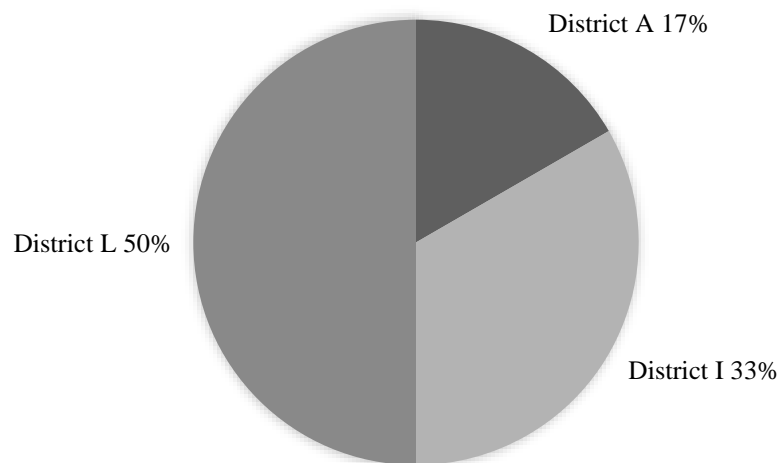
Six secondary social studies teachers from three school districts participated in an interview conducted by the researcher (see Figure 15). One teacher was interviewed from District A, two teachers from District I, and three teachers from District L were interviewed, respectively. The interviews were conducted via email instead of in-person interviews due to concerns regarding the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of secondary



teachers interviewed reflected approximately 13% of school districts in which elementary teachers were surveyed and less than 1% of the school districts in Missouri.

**Figure 15**

*Secondary Teacher Participant Information by District*



Data from elementary schools were presented to corresponding secondary social studies teachers. Then the secondary teachers were asked a series of questions regarding social studies data from their districts' elementary schools and their perceptions on the role of social studies in American society. Research question three was addressed in this phase of the study: *How do teachers from Missouri public secondary schools perceive the role of social studies instruction compared to mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction?*

Overwhelmingly, the secondary teachers expressed dissatisfaction with the instructional minutes spent on social studies in their respective elementary schools.

Participant 3 stated:

To be frank, I am shocked to see the disparity between the minutes that these subjects are taught. While I understand that students' ability to read and write will

help lead to success in all other areas, I do not feel you can do social studies or science justice in 30 or 200 minutes a week, respectively. Respondents supported content integration if it was the only method by which social studies was taught in elementary schools.

Participant 4 explained, “I feel teachers can teach social studies when they are teaching reading, science, or even math. It works the best with teaching reading as they can work on comprehension skills and learn social studies at the same time.”

The first question (How important do you feel social studies education is at the elementary level? Please elaborate on why you feel this way) was focused on the role of elementary social studies as perceived by secondary teachers who teach the subject as their sole content. Participant 2 stated:

I feel it is extremely important for young students to be educated on the basic principles of our government and our nation’s founding history. The main purpose of mass education in our nation is to ensure an educational public that will uphold democracy and create productive citizens. Without a basic understanding of the fundamentals of history and civics, our students will be at a huge disadvantage once they reach the secondary level.

Participant 3 elaborated:

I feel social studies education at the elementary level is extremely important, definitely more so than most people probably do. It is imperative that we give young students a firm grasp of how societies work, as well as why groups of people live the way they do. You only have one chance to impress the importance

of these matters on young students, and the elementary level is the best place to make that happen.

All interviewees viewed social studies as important at the elementary level.

The second question (How important do you feel social studies education is at the secondary level? Please elaborate on why you feel this way.), while similar to the first question, was focused on the role of social studies at the secondary level. Participant 2 shared:

I feel that it is extremely important. As I mentioned before, the sole reason our nation has created and maintained mass education is to ensure we have an educated population before they enter the voting booth. To understand how human societies developed, progressed, and sometimes declined is something that should be taught to every citizen before they earn the right to vote. Likewise, they should also be taught the basics of American Government, how the branches work, and the main principles of the Constitution. Citizens have an awesome responsibility when it comes to choosing our leaders and policy makers for the future that going into a voting booth with little to no understanding of the government process can be detrimental to our nation in the long run.

Respondent 4 added:

At the secondary level, I feel social studies is crucial. For one, they're learning more than just history. They're learning about the workings of our government and the importance of participation in being a valuable citizen. They're also learning about other cultures and historical events that have happened in the past that are critical to how and why things are the way they are today. If students are

not exposed to world history, they will undoubtedly and unknowingly be ethnocentric and potentially easily persuaded by those with more power in society.

All interviewees viewed social studies as important at the secondary level.

The next question (To what extent do you feel that social studies education is important in American society? Please elaborate on why you feel this way.) was posed to understand secondary teacher perceptions regarding the role of social studies education on society at large. Respondent 2 stated:

Every American should have a thorough education in American and World History plus government education in order to have an educated voter population who is tolerant, educated in the Constitution and the expectations and requirements of Congress and the branches of government. The United States and its Constitution was created in an effort to ensure the people could never be governed by a tyrannical government again. Without an educated population, we could lose all that we have worked so hard to achieve.

Respondent 6 explained:

Social studies education is very important to our society. Without social studies, I feel like students would not be able to function in society. They need a basic understanding of how our government works, what our history is, and how to digest and understand information that is happening in our world and society. It also gives them the tools to seek the truth and not to listen to the first voice telling them something. We as a nation let others think for us more than at any other time that I've been alive. We've backed ourselves into these left and right corners, and

we think there are no areas where we can all agree. We think it's not ok for others to hold views different from our own, and we want to punish those who do. That's very un-American. Whether you are left, right, or center, we should be able to listen to others' views, no matter how much we disagree, and try to understand their perspective and why they hold such views. We should be seeking to talk with each other.

All respondents agreed that social studies education is vital for a democratic society.

The purpose of the next question (In comparison with other departments within your building, does the social studies department receive the same amount of time for collaboration, funds for resources, and professional development?) was to gauge the equitable distribution of resources among the four core subjects. All social studies teachers responded favorably to the question about equal collaboration time.

Two of the six respondents stated the social studies department received the same amount of funds for resources as other departments in their high school. One teacher shared the department did not receive the same amount of funds, while three teachers were unsure. Five teachers stated the social studies department received the same amount of professional development as other core departments, while one teacher was unsure.

The aim of the following question (Since the implementation of NCLB, do you feel that social studies is increasingly placed on the back burner in education? Why or why not?) was to gain teacher perspectives of the impact of NCLB on social studies education. Also, this question was asked to determine if secondary social studies teachers feel social studies education has been marginalized since the implementation of the policy. All teachers interviewed believed that social studies education has been

marginalized as a result of the implementation of NCLB. Respondent 1 explained, “I believe that because social studies is the last discipline to have the EOC revised.”

Respondent 4 added:

Yes, I feel the focus/stress has been on English and Math. I wholeheartedly disagree with NCLB. There are more factors at play than just what teachers are doing in their classroom that result in students not meeting criteria/benchmarks for moving forward. And again, those skills can be reinforced through social studies.

Respondent 6 elaborated:

I started teaching in 2010 and have only a basic understanding of how education has changed since NCLB. From what I have read and what I know having been in the public school system when it was first implemented, there has been a decrease in the amount of time spent on social studies, due to the push to raise test scores in the other three big areas of language arts, science, and math. There is no testing of social studies, seventh grade through 10th grade, which shows that the state of Missouri does not consider it near as important as other areas.

A follow-up question (Does this concern or alarm you? Why or why not?) was asked concerning the role of social studies post-NCLB. Respondent 5 stated, “I believe it is alarming because we need an informed citizenry in order to make the best decisions for the country/our futures going forward.” Respondent 6 described the concern in greater detail:

Yes, it concerns me. I’m concerned that SS will one day be integrated into language arts to make room for more time in the other three big areas. Unless SS

is tested and emphasized just like the other subjects, it will always be put on the back burner and not taken seriously by schools whose funding is partly based on good test scores. Without SS being tested, what reason is there to teach it? That's a question a lot of schools are asking.

All teachers responded affirmatively to the question, expressing great concern about the impact of NCLB on social studies education.

The last question (What other concerns do you have about social studies education in public schools?) was designed to be broad to allow social studies teachers to speak freely about the role of social studies in post-NCLB education. All of the respondents expressed extreme concern about the role of social studies education in the future, fearing the subject will be entirely eliminated from the K–12 curriculum. As a result, there will no longer be an informed populace which then could jeopardize American democratic society. Participant 6 also expressed concern about teacher bias in the classroom, which prevents students from analyzing multiple perspectives and formulate their own educated opinions.

### **Inferential Statistics**

An ANOVA was applied to find the difference between the mean elementary instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean elementary instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science. The difference in the mean weekly instructional minutes in Grades 3–6 was significantly different among the four core subjects, as demonstrated in Table 4. The mean instructional time spent in ELA was 507.3 minutes weekly, while the mean instructional time spent in mathematics was 356.6 minutes weekly. The mean weekly instructional time spent in

science (173.5) and social studies (152.1) was significantly less than the other two core subjects. The  $f$ -ratio value was 55.45318, and the  $p$ -value was  $<.00001$ . Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H1_0$ ) was rejected.

**Table 4**

*ANOVA Results of Elementary Instructional Minutes*

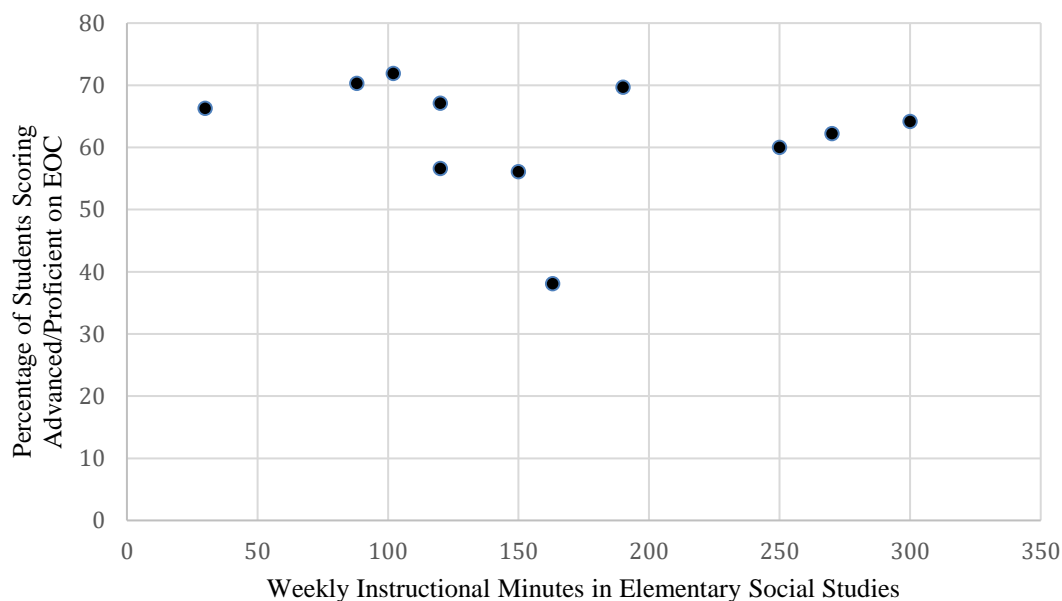
Measure	ELA	Mathematics	Science	Social Studies
$N$	33	33	33	33
$M$	507.3	358.6	173.5	152.1
Range	850	510	270	270
$SD$	197.1	104.4	94.6	89.6

A Pearson correlation analysis was then conducted to determine if there was a correlation between increased minutes of elementary social studies instruction as reported on surveys by the districts and the percentage of high school students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination in those same districts. District D was excluded from the analysis as there were no EOC scores reported from this district during this time. Therefore,  $n = 11$  in this analysis. The  $p$ -value of the sample was calculated at 0.619365. The Pearson revealed an  $R$ -value of -0.1696, which revealed a negative correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instructional minutes and the percentage of high school students scoring Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC assessment (see Figure 16). However, the correlation was very weak. Therefore, the null hypothesis ( $H2_0$ ) was not rejected.



**Figure 16**

*Scatterplot Showing the Correlation Between Weekly Instructional Minutes in Elementary Social Studies and the Percentage of High School Students who Scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC Assessment*



### Summary

Presented in Chapter Four were the quantitative and qualitative data collected from school districts across Missouri. American Government EOC assessment scores were tabulated from participating districts. A survey of elementary teachers revealed instructional time and strategies implemented in elementary social studies. Data from elementary teachers were then shared with secondary social studies teachers to gather teacher perceptions about the status of social studies in post-NCLB education and the role of social studies in American society.

An ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean instructional minutes spent on elementary core subjects. The data yielded a significant difference in the amount of instructional minutes spent in core subjects in Missouri elementary schools. To determine

if a correlation existed between instructional minutes in elementary social studies and secondary assessment scores, a Pearson was utilized. Data yielded a negative correlation between elementary instructional minutes in social studies and student performance in American Government EOC assessments at the high school level. Interview data from the qualitative phase of the study revealed that secondary social studies teachers are extremely dissatisfied with the amount of instructional time spent in elementary social studies and are increasingly concerned about the diminishing role of social studies in American society.

Chapter Five includes a summary of the study, as well as a review of the findings. Responses to the three research questions are presented, along with a discussion of the conclusions. Chapter Five also includes implications for further practice and study limitations. Finally, recommendations for future research on this topic are presented.

## Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

The focus of this mixed-methods study was to examine the effect of educational policies of NCLB and subsequent federal programs on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools. During this study, instructional minutes in elementary social studies were compared with instructional minutes in elementary ELA, mathematics, and science. American Government EOC scores from corresponding school districts were then analyzed for a correlation to elementary social studies instructional minutes. Secondary social studies teachers were then interviewed to gain their perceptions on the role of social studies in post-NCLB America. After analyzing the data, the findings were then used to answer the research questions.

The background for this study was based on prior research that examined the impact of federal educational policies on social studies instructional time (Denton & Sink, 2015; Fitchett et al., 2014a). As a result of the emphasis on high-stakes testing, social studies continues to be increasingly marginalized across the United States (Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). Elementary instructional minutes significantly trail fellow core subjects such as ELA, mathematics, and science (Fitchett et al., 2014).

Across the nation, students in elementary school spend more time on English than any other subject, followed closely by mathematics (Hoyer, 2017). Since the implementation of NCLB, weekly instruction in ELA and mathematics has increased by 75 minutes on average and as much as 150 minutes in many cases (CEP, 2008, p. 1). Science has recently been added as a tested subject as part of the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) initiative (Howell, 2015). Science has received more

instructional time than social studies, as a result (Howell, 2015). However, science is not assessed as heavily as mathematics and communication arts (Walker, 2014).

The literature also reveals the importance of a solid social studies program to a democratic society. At the most basic level, social studies is taught to increase students' skills, such as to make rational decisions, individually and as a society—skills are as essential as reading, writing, mathematics, and science (Millard, 2015; NCSS, 2016). According to the NCSS (2017a), “The primary purpose of social studies is to help young people make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in an interdependent world” (para. 3). Due to time restraints, students in early grades do not receive many opportunities to learn and practice critical thinking skills such as source analysis, corroboration, and contextualization (VanSledright et al., 2006). In many states, elementary social studies does not have separate content standards but is integrated with ELA standards (Huck, 2018).

Teacher perceptions on the marginalization of social studies were also revealed in the literature review. Most teachers surveyed recognize that schools are narrowing the curriculum, shifting instructional time and resources toward math and language arts and away from other subjects (Fitchett et al., 2014; Thacker et al., 2018). Teachers feel the emphasis on math and communication arts has led to these subjects receiving priority for professional development, technology, and other resources (Farkas, 2012). Within the social studies content area, there is a disparity between the increased volume of content standards and the decreased amount of instructional minutes afforded the subject (Kenna & Russell, 2014).

In the following sections, the findings of this study are presented according to the research questions that guided this study. Also discussed in this chapter are the conclusions drawn from research findings. Implications for practice are offered, and suggestions are provided as recommendations for future research.

### **Findings**

In this study, the impact of the educational policies of NCLB and subsequent federal policies on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools were explored. From a population of 518 school districts, representatives from 28 districts participated in the study. The sample was stratified, with 45 elementary teachers participating in the survey and six secondary teachers participating in the interview segment of the study.

In the first step, a survey of elementary teachers was conducted to determine the number of minutes spent on elementary instruction in the four core subjects: social studies, mathematics, English language arts, and science. A parametric ANOVA was conducted to compare the mean instructional times of the four subjects. Scores from secondary EOC examinations in Government were then extracted from the MODESE. A Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis was then conducted to determine if there was a correlation between increased minutes of classroom social studies instruction as reported on surveys by the districts and the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the Government EOC examination in those same districts.

Finally, interviews were conducted with secondary social studies teachers to determine their perspectives on the role of social studies in the Missouri education system, as well as in American society. An explanatory method was utilized in which the

results of the qualitative analysis were used to expand upon the results of the quantitative study. Data from elementary survey responses were shared with secondary social studies teachers. The qualitative responses from interviews were coded for similarities in themes, and data were reported as frequencies of the responses to each theme.

### ***Research Question One***

From the sample of Missouri public elementary schools, what is the difference in the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, and science?

*H<sub>0</sub>*: There is no difference between the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science.

*H<sub>a</sub>*: There is a difference between the mean instructional time spent on social studies instruction and the mean instructional time spent on mathematics, English language arts, or science.

Results from the survey data revealed a significant difference between the mean instructional time spent on the four core subjects in elementary school; therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected, and the alternative hypothesis was supported. The mean instructional time for ELA was 507.3 minutes weekly, while the mean mathematics instructional time was 356.6 minutes weekly. The other core subjects fared much worse, at 173.5 minutes of weekly instructional time in science and 152.1 minutes in social studies.

### ***Research Question Two***

From the sample of Missouri public schools, what is the correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination?

*H2<sub>0</sub>*: There is no correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of secondary students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination.

*H2<sub>a</sub>*: There is a correlation between minutes of classroom social studies instruction and the percentage of students who scored Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC examination.

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis revealed a negative correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instructional minutes and the percentage of high school students scoring Proficient or Advanced on the American Government EOC assessment ( $R = -0.1696$ ). However, the correlation was very weak. Therefore, the null hypothesis (*H2<sub>0</sub>*) was not rejected.

### ***Research Question Three***

How do teachers from Missouri public secondary schools perceive the role of social studies instruction compared to mathematics, English language arts, or science instruction?

Research question three was answered by reviewing responses to an interview of six secondary social studies teachers from three school districts. Participating teachers were presented with data from elementary teacher surveys regarding elementary instructional minutes in the four core subjects. Teachers were then asked a series of

questions regarding their perceptions of the role of social studies in American society. All six interviewees expressed extreme disappointment with the time spent in elementary social studies within their district. Participant two stated, “Without a basic understanding of the fundamentals of history and civics, our students will be at a huge disadvantage once they reach the secondary level.”

### **Conclusions**

The purpose of this study was to examine the minutes of instruction in elementary social studies and determine if there was a correlation between time spent in elementary social studies and student performance on high school mandatory assessments in American Government. An additional aim of the study was to garner teacher perspectives about the role of social studies in American society. These perspectives were part of a broader goal of investigating the effect of educational policies of NCLB and subsequent federal policies on the marginalization of social studies in Missouri public schools.

Data were gathered and organized into three phases. First, survey data were gathered from elementary teachers regarding elementary instructional practices. The data were then analyzed using an ANOVA test to determine the difference in mean elementary instructional minutes to answer research question one. Next, archival data were collected from the MODESE and analyzed using a Pearson Product Moment Correlation test to answer research question two. Finally, qualitative data from secondary teacher interviews were coded to identify categories and themes in response to research question three.

As a result of the findings, the following conclusions were drawn:



- A statistically significant difference exists between elementary minutes of instruction in ELA and social studies.
- A statistically significant difference exists between elementary minutes of instruction in mathematics and social studies.
- A statistically significant difference does not exist between elementary minutes of instruction in science and social studies.
- A statistically significant correlation does not exist between minutes of instruction in elementary social studies and student performance on high school American Government standardized assessments.

Qualitative data from this research indicate that secondary social studies teachers as a whole have expressed displeasure with the amount of time spent in elementary social studies. Secondary social studies teachers are extremely concerned about the decreased emphasis on social studies in the post-NCLB era of education. According to respondents, the ability to think critically about issues in a modern democratic society is the most important skill garnered by social studies programs.

### **Implications for Practice**

The review of literature, findings, and conclusions of this research highlighted the gap in instructional time among the four core subjects. However, the data indicated no significant correlation between decreased elementary instructional time in social studies and student performance on high school level American Government standardized assessment scores. Despite these findings, the body of literature reveals a lack of understanding of the importance of social studies, as well as its purpose in modern American society (Brennan, 2017; Denton & Sink, 2015). As a result of the literature

review and data analysis, suggestions are provided to reexamine the amount of time spent in elementary social studies, as well as instructional strategies used within the subject across all grade levels.

The review of literature revealed that elementary social studies is often integrated with ELA (Huck, 2018). This strategy can be useful for covering social studies content, but it is generally surface-level knowledge used primarily for literacy purposes. Social studies skills, often known as historical thinking skills, require much more time than can be provided through content integration. Educational leaders must allocate time for elementary social studies courses to teach social studies content in a meaningful way, as well as teach the following historical thinking skills:

- to analyze a variety of sources such as primary and secondary texts, photographs, maps, charts, and tables
- to make inferences from such sources
- to understand varying perspectives in a multicultural society
- to corroborate sources
- to contextualize information
- to participate in civil discourse
- to be civic-minded

When students can obtain a foundation in these skills during their formative years, they are better able to strengthen those skills throughout secondary school with the ultimate goal of contributing to a more productive, civil society. Additionally, the sheer number of subjects and accompanying standards taught with social studies is simply too

much to be integrated with ELA. For these reasons, allocating more instructional time for social studies as a stand-alone subject is imperative.

The literature review also revealed that students are pulled from social studies more than any other subject to receive intervention in ELA and mathematics (Farkas, 2012). This takes valuable time away from practicing historical thinking skills. Because students are already struggling to grasp the concepts during whole-class instruction, educational leaders may consider providing direct intervention during the corresponding subjects' instructional time.

The need for more pre-service training in elementary social studies was also noted in the literature review (An, 2016; Fitchett et al., 2014). Teaching candidates feel unprepared to teach social studies at the elementary level because they do not receive proper education, training or modeling of content pedagogy. Additional concerns addressed in the research reveal the hiring of unqualified teachers to teach social studies at the secondary level (Kenna & Russell, 2014). All of these actions facilitate the false notion that social studies is not as important as the other three core subjects. State licensing agencies, university educational programs, and public-school administrators should take proper steps to ensure that secondary teachers are qualified to teach social studies and that elementary teachers are properly taught social studies pedagogy in the classroom and their field experiences.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Continued research on the effects of decreased instructional minutes in elementary social studies is necessary to obtain further data on this topic. The importance of a strong elementary social studies program is well documented (Fitchett et al., 2014b;

Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). However, research identifying how decreased social studies instruction at the elementary level has impacted student understanding of historical thinking skills in later grades is lacking.

It would be useful to replicate this research with comparable studies to determine if the findings are similar. More research is necessary to focus on what specific skills are taught at the elementary level and how the growth of students is measured in those specific skills. An analysis of social studies grade-level and content level standards would be beneficial in future studies.

This study was limited in several ways. This study was conducted in the midst of a global pandemic, which could explain the low number of responses. Several superintendents expressed to the researcher that their primary focus was on meeting the immediate needs of their students, teachers, and staff during this unprecedented time. School districts across the state of Missouri, as well as across the nation, closed down in March 2020 and grappled with the feasibility of safely opening schools for the following year in August 2020. This was compounded by the need of many districts to develop plans for alternative methods of instruction as alternatives for in-seat instruction.

The format of the survey did not allow for elementary teachers to explain instructional strategies in detail, so there was no way of knowing the depth of learning taking place in elementary social studies. Furthermore, the format of the study did not allow for an analysis of Missouri Learning Standards, which may reveal additional information about instructional strategies and social studies assessments at both elementary and secondary levels. Additional limitations were the result of gaps in

statewide standardized assessments, and further investigation into the reasons for the discrepancy is warranted.

### **Summary**

Educational policy has undergone many changes as a result of the NCLB accountability mandates (Denton & Sink, 2015; Fitchett et al., 2014). In an effort to increase student performance in ELA and mathematics, these subjects experienced an emphasis on increased instructional time and standardized assessments at the expense of other subjects (Hoyer & Sparks, 2017). Social studies weekly instructional time has been reportedly decreased by up to 75 minutes nationwide, while ELA and mathematics have experienced an increase of up to 150 minutes of weekly instructional time (CEP, 2008, p. 1).

Social studies marginalization is an area of concern among educators due to the role it plays in society. Student understanding of concepts such as civic responsibilities and duties, critical thinking, and civil discourse are vital to participate in a democratic society (NCSS, 2017b). The pressure to teach to the test often results in surface-level teaching, as opposed to facilitating a deep understanding of these concepts.

The purpose of the current study was to explore the impact NCLB policies have had on social studies education within Missouri. The study consisted of three segments. First, a survey was conducted of elementary teachers regarding instructional time considerations. Next, archival EOC assessment scores from participating districts were extracted from MODESE. The scores were then analyzed for a correlation with elementary instructional minutes in social studies. Finally, secondary teacher interviews

were conducted to gauge their perceptions of the current role of social studies in society. The participants included 45 elementary teachers and six secondary teachers.

The survey data were analyzed using a parametric ANOVA test to compare mean elementary instructional times among the four core subjects. A Pearson correlation analysis was then employed to explore a possible correlation between instructional minutes of elementary social studies and student performance on American Government EOC assessments. A qualitative analysis of interview responses was then conducted and reported.

The findings revealed a significant difference between mean instructional time among the four core subjects in elementary school. The greatest gap was between ELA with 507.3 minutes weekly and social studies with 152.1 minutes weekly. Therefore, the null hypothesis was rejected. The results of the Pearson analysis revealed a negative yet weak correlation between minutes of elementary social studies instruction and the percentage of students scoring Advanced or Proficient on the American Government EOC assessment. The null hypothesis, in this case, was not rejected.

While the findings were statistically insignificant, researchers and policy-makers are encouraged to continue to explore the impacts of federal educational policies on elementary instructional time. Specifically, the impact on decreased instructional time in elementary social studies and its effect on civic reasoning and participation in a democratic society in later years should be studied. An informed populace who can think critically and participate civilly in an increasingly complex society underscores the importance of a robust social studies program.

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## Appendix A

### Elementary Teacher Survey Questions

1. Please provide the name of your school district.
2. What grade level do you teach?
3. How many years have you been teaching?
4. Please indicate the number of minutes spent in your elementary grade level on **weekly** instruction in the following core subjects:
  - a. English/Language Arts
  - b. Mathematics
  - c. Science
  - d. Social Studies
5. Do you teach social studies as a stand-alone subject, or do you integrate social studies with English language arts?

Stand Alone	Integrate with ELA
-------------	--------------------
6. What determines how many instructional minutes you spend on social studies?
7. When teaching social studies, which topic(s) within the content area do you cover?
  - a. Geography
  - b. American History
  - c. Government/Civics
  - d. World History
  - e. Other: \_\_\_\_\_
8. When teaching social studies, do your instructional methods focus on content, skills, or both?

9. When students are pulled out of class for individualized help with reading or math, which subject(s) do they miss?

10. Please indicate if your elementary school offers a standardized assessment in the following subjects:

f. English/ Language Arts

g. Mathematics

h. Science

i. Social Studies

11. How important do you feel social studies education is at the elementary level?

Very Important

Somewhat Important

Not Important

12. How satisfied are you with the amount of time spent on social studies at the elementary level?

Very Satisfied

Somewhat Satisfied

Not Satisfied

13. How important do you feel social studies education at the secondary level?

Very Important

Somewhat Important

Not Important

14. How important do you feel a child's social studies education is to their participation in a democratic society as an adult?

Very Important

Somewhat Important

Not Important

15. Would you be willing to answer more in-depth questions in an interview?

Yes No



## Appendix B

### Secondary Teacher Interview Questions

1. How important do you feel social studies education is at the elementary level?  
Please elaborate on why you feel this way.
2. How satisfied are you with the amount of time spent on social studies at the elementary level? Please elaborate on why you feel this way.
3. How important do you feel social studies education is at the secondary level?  
Please elaborate on why you feel this way.
4. To what extent do you feel that social studies education is important in American society? Please elaborate on why you feel this way.
5. In comparison with other departments within your building, does the social studies department receive the same amount of:
 

a. time for collaboration	Yes	No	Unknown
b. funds for resources	Yes	No	Unknown
c. professional development	Yes	No	Unknown
6. Since the implementation of No Child Left Behind, do you feel that social studies is  
increasingly placed on the back burner in education? Why or why not?
7. Does this concern or alarm you? Why or why not?
8. What other concerns do you have about social studies education in public schools?

**Appendix C**  
**IRB Approval Letter**

Aug 12, 2020 10:35 AM CDT

RE:

IRB-20-174: Modification - The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri: An Analysis of Elementary Instructional Time and High School Standardized Assessment Scores

Dear Stephanie Lovette,

The study, The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri: An Analysis of Elementary Instructional Time and High School Standardized Assessment Scores, has been Approved as Approved.

The submission was approved on August 12, 2020.

Here are the findings:

**Regulatory Determinations**

- This modification entails the addition of site approval letters. As this is an administrative requirement, this modification does not affect the previously approved risk determination or the ongoing approvability of the research.

Sincerely,

Lindenwood University (lindenwood) Institutional Review Board

## Appendix D

### Lindenwood University

#### Permission Letter: Superintendent

Date:

Dear \_\_\_\_\_,

I am conducting a research study titled, *The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri*, in partial fulfillment of the requirement for a doctoral degree at Lindenwood University.

The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of instructional minutes in elementary social studies on standardized assessment scores in high school social studies courses, particularly American Government. A second purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions about the role of social studies in education. It is hopeful the findings from this study will contribute to an increased awareness of the importance of social studies instruction at all grade levels.

I am seeking your permission to survey elementary teachers regarding the number of instructional minutes in core subjects, followed by questions related to social studies instructional methods. Specifically, questions will focus on the number of minutes spent on social studies instruction, if social studies is taught as a stand-alone subject or integrated with language arts, and elementary teachers' perceptions on the role of social studies in education.

I also request permission to share the results of the elementary teacher survey with secondary social studies teachers and to interview these teachers in greater depth about their perception of the role of social studies in education.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. The school district's name, as well as the participants, will remain anonymous in the dissertation or future publications of this study. Any identifying information acquired for the study will be maintained in a secured, locked cabinet and/or password-protected to assure confidentiality.

Please do not hesitate to contact me (SL280@lindenwood.edu) with any questions or concerns about participation in the study. Please reply to this email as documentation of your consent. A copy of this letter and your email consent should be retained by you for future reference.

Yours truly,

Stephanie Lovette  
Doctoral Candidate  
Lindenwood University

**Permission Form**

I, \_\_\_\_\_, grant permission  
to \_\_\_\_\_, the primary researcher, to \_\_\_\_\_

By signing this permission form, I understand that the following safeguards are in  
place:

1. I may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.
2. The identity of the school district, and the participants, will remain anonymous  
in the dissertation or any future publications of the study.

I have read the information above, and any questions I have posed have been answered  
to my satisfaction.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix E

### Letter of Introduction to Principals

Date:

Dear Principal,

As a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University, I am extending an invitation to your teachers to participate in a study.

I am conducting a research study titled, *The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri*, to fulfill part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration at Lindenwood University. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of instructional minutes in elementary social studies on standardized assessment scores in high school social studies courses, particularly American Government. A second purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions about the role of social studies in education.

Participation in this study is voluntary. The survey of elementary teachers will take approximately 10 minutes. The interview of secondary social studies teachers will take approximately 20 minutes. The identity of the participants will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation and any future publication of this study.

If you are interested in participating, please see the attached informed consent.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participating in the research. I can be reached at SL280@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Sherry DeVore at sdevore@lindenwood.edu.

A copy of this letter should be retained for future reference. Thank you for your time.

Stephanie Lovette  
Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix F

### Letter of Introduction to Elementary Teachers

Date:

Dear Elementary Teacher,

As a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University, I am extending an invitation to you to participate in a study.

I am conducting a research study titled, *The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri*, to fulfill part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration at Lindenwood University. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of instructional minutes in elementary social studies on standardized assessment scores in high school social studies courses, particularly American Government. A second purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions about the role of social studies in education.

Participation in this study is voluntary. The survey will take approximately 10 minutes. The identity of the participants will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation and any future publication of this study.

If you are interested in participating, please see the attached informed consent.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participating in the research. I can be reached at SL280@lindenwood.edu. You may also contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Sherry DeVore at sdevore@lindenwood.edu.

A copy of this letter should be retained for future reference. Thank you for your time.

Stephanie Lovette  
Doctoral Candidate

## Appendix G

### Survey Consent Form for Elementary Teachers

# LINDENWOOD

## Survey Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a survey conducted by Stephanie Lovette under the advisement of Dr. Sherry DeVore at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to explore the impact of instructional minutes in elementary social studies on standardized assessment scores in high school social studies courses, particularly American Government. A second purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions about the role of social studies in education.

It will take about 10 minutes to complete this survey. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time by simply not completing the survey or closing the browser window. There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

### **WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?**

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Stephanie Lovette [SL280@lindenwood.edu](mailto:SL280@lindenwood.edu)

Dr. Sherry DeVore [sdevore@lindenwood.edu](mailto:sdevore@lindenwood.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or [mleary@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mleary@lindenwood.edu).

By clicking the link below, I confirm that I have read this form and decided that I will participate in the project described above. I understand the purpose of the study, what I will be required to do, and the risks involved. I understand that I can discontinue participation at any time by closing the survey browser. My consent also indicates that I am at least 18 years of age.

You can withdraw from this study at any time by simply closing the browser window. Please feel free to print a copy of this information sheet.

## Appendix H

### Letter of Introduction to Secondary Teachers

Date:

Dear Secondary Teacher,

As a doctoral candidate at Lindenwood University, I am extending an invitation to you to participate in a study.

I am conducting a research study titled, *The Marginalization of Social Studies in Missouri*, to fulfill part of the requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Administration at Lindenwood University. The purpose of this study is to explore the impact of instructional minutes in elementary social studies on standardized assessment scores in high school social studies courses, particularly American Government. A second purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions about the role of social studies in education.

Participation in this study is voluntary. The interview will take approximately 30 minutes. The identity of the participants will remain confidential and anonymous in the dissertation and any future publication of this study.

If you are interested in participating, please see the attached informed consent.

Please do not hesitate to contact me with any questions or concerns about participating in the research. I can be reached at SL280@lindewood.edu. You may also contact the dissertation advisor for this research study, Dr. Sherry DeVore at sdevore@lindewood.edu.

A copy of this letter should be retained for future reference. Thank you for your time.

Stephanie Lovette  
Doctoral Candidate



## Appendix I

### Interview Consent Form for Secondary Social Studies Teachers

# LINDENWOOD

## Research Information Sheet

You are being asked to participate in a research study conducted by Stephanie Lovette under the advisement of Dr. Sherry DeVore at Lindenwood University. We are doing this study to explore the impact of instructional minutes in elementary social studies on standardized assessment scores in high school social studies courses, particularly American Government. A second purpose of this study is to determine teacher perceptions about the role of social studies in education.

It will take about 30 minutes to complete this interview. Your participation is voluntary. You may choose not to participate or withdraw at any time. There are no risks from participating in this project. We will not collect any information that may identify you. There are no direct benefits for you participating in this study.

We will do everything we can to protect your privacy. We do not intend to include information that could identify you in any publication or presentation. Any information we collect will be stored by the researcher in a secure location. The only people who will be able to see your data are: members of the research team, qualified staff of Lindenwood University, representatives of state or federal agencies.

### **WHO CAN I CONTACT WITH QUESTIONS?**

If you have concerns or complaints about this project, please use the following contact information:

Stephanie Lovette [SL280@lindenwood.edu](mailto:SL280@lindenwood.edu)

Dr. Sherry DeVore [sdevore@lindenwood.edu](mailto:sdevore@lindenwood.edu)

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or concerns about the project and wish to talk to someone outside the research team, you can contact Michael Leary (Director - Institutional Review Board) at 636-949-4730 or [mleary@lindenwood.edu](mailto:mleary@lindenwood.edu).

### **Vita**

Stephanie Lovette graduated from the University of Texas at Arlington with a BA in Criminal Justice in 1999. She went on to receive her certification in Secondary Education from Southeast Missouri State University in 2006. In 2012, she received a MA in Educational Administration from Southeast Missouri State University. Stephanie has also completed graduate coursework in American History and in American Government.

Stephanie is currently an educator in Southeast Missouri. In her teaching capacity, she has led professional development workshops and participated in various district-wide educational initiatives. Stephanie has also worked with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education on projects to improve K-12 assessment tools and create a rigorous and accessible social studies program for Missouri students.