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## From the Field: How Oregon Social Studies Teachers are Preparing Students for the 21st Century

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# From the Field: How Oregon Social Studies Teachers are Preparing Students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century

Gayle Y. Thieman and Kenneth T. Carano

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*Much of the recent data on the state of social studies teaching has focused on the impact of NCLB on the decline of instructional time. The purpose of this study was to investigate the current status of K-12 social studies curriculum and instructional practice, as reported by classroom teachers. The survey investigated the impact of mandated testing, major goals and concepts, teachers' instructional strategies, and technology integration. This paper presents findings from Oregon teachers with comparison to data from the 2010-2011 National Study on the State of Social Studies (S<sub>4</sub>) and the content and skills advocated by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.*

## **Purpose and Theoretical Framework**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has dramatically affected K-12 social studies education. Since the enactment of NCLB, K-12 social studies educators nationwide have witnessed a decline in instructional time (Bailey, Shaw, & Hollifield, 2006; McMurrer, 2008). Even in states where social studies is included in state-mandated testing, decreases in social studies instruction have occurred (Rock et al. 2006). Recent studies of longitudinal data of elementary social studies confirm the deleterious effects of NCLB suggesting social studies is becoming overshadowed by reading and math, and social studies teachers are assuming more responsibility to promote students' literacy skills (Fitchett & Heafner, 2010; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Pace, 2011).

Au (2007), Gerwin and Visone (2006), Rock et al. (2006), and VanFossen (2005) concluded the presence of high-stakes testing also has shaped teachers' instruction. Often, both novice and veteran teachers tailor their teaching to the content requirements of the test, rather than to meaningful learning of core concepts (Grant, 2007). Consequently, students are taught lower-level intellectual skills, raising concerns about social studies' viability to prepare students for the future (Zomosky, 2008). In a qualitative study of a fourth and a fifth grade social studies classroom, Willis (2007) concluded that the two teachers "curtailed, constrained or abandoned" their use of "discussions, assignments, and activities that promoted students' higher order thinking" due to "reduced instructional time for social studies" (pp. 2041-42) and the presence of high-stakes testing in math and reading.

These studies suggest a decline in the importance of K-12 social studies education and raise questions about the discipline's purpose and the strategies that teachers employ during social studies instruction. According to the National Council for the Social Studies, "the primary purpose of social studies is to help young people develop the ability to make informed and reasoned decisions for the public good as citizens of a culturally diverse, democratic society in

an interdependent world (NCSS, 2010). Parker (2010) explains, “Social studies is at the center of a good school curriculum because it is where students learn to see and interpret the world—its peoples, places, cultures, systems, and problems, its dreams and calamities—now and long ago” (p. 3). Others argue an important purpose of social studies education is to provide all youth with a common core of knowledge (Finn, 2005; Leming, Ellington, & Porter-Magee, 2003).

Merryfield (2000) suggests that globalization has permanently altered the knowledge and skills young people need to become effective citizens, and Kennedy (2007) argues the scale of current economic, technological, political, and cultural transformations is unprecedented, generating webs of interconnectivity across societies (p. 268). Students should understand these global interconnections if they are going to attain their full potential and develop the skills to interact effectively with people different from themselves (Tye, 2009).

Friedman and Hicks (2006) articulate the need to “research and evaluate the impact of the use of technology and technology enhanced instruction within classrooms” (p. 250). However, successful technology integration remains a challenge in social studies instruction, despite the National Council for the Social Studies Position Statement on Media Literacy (2009) that advocates social studies teachers include the use of media and technology in their instruction.

The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2011) addresses these global and technological changes by framing the skills students need as citizens living in an increasingly interconnected world, identifying core subjects, social studies content, learning and thinking skills, and literacy (see Appendix I Framework for Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century). The framework lists economics, geography, history, and government/civics as core subjects.

The 21<sup>st</sup> century content element refers to the need to draw from multiple areas to find solutions for today’s issues (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011), including global awareness, financial literacy, and civic literacy. Merryfield (2000) outlines global awareness as the understanding of human beliefs and values, global systems, global issues and problems, global history, and cross-cultural understanding. Financial, economic, business, and entrepreneurial literacy provides students grounding in economic concepts and helps them to prepare for the global marketplace (Marks & Davis, 2006). Civic literacy is an essential skill for effective participation in a democracy (Zarnowski, 2009), helping students understand their individual rights and responsibilities and make decisions that promote social justice (Hart, 2006).

The 21<sup>st</sup> century learning and thinking skills element focuses on the higher order cognitive proficiencies students need to be effective and independent lifelong learners (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011). *Critical Thinking* involves the capacity of active investigative thinking and problem solving through the application of learning and innovation skills to a specific area of inquiry (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011). This skill entails synthesizing along with the ability to detect bias and unstated assumptions to support the decision-making skills students need as citizens (Merryfield & Wilson, 2005). *Creativity and Innovation* involves problem solving, constructing new ways of doing things, and initiating change. Zhao (2009) points to this skill area when he states that risk-taking and creativity have been the secret behind the US economic advantage over many other countries. *Communication and Collaboration* skills are intertwined, as communication involves explanation, negotiation, and other forms of intense human interaction. Communication proficiencies, such as clearly articulating ideas through speaking and writing, are related to the collaboration skills of

working effectively with diverse groups, the ability to compromise to accomplish a common goal, and assuming shared responsibility for work (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011). *Information literacy* is about accessing information efficiently and effectively, evaluating information critically and competently, and using information accurately and creatively. A media literate person is one who integrates awareness, analysis, reflection, and action to understand the nature of media messages (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2011). *Information communication and technology (ICT) literacy* is the ability to use technology to develop 21<sup>st</sup> century content knowledge and skills. ICT literacy includes being able to problem solve, analyze, communicate, and collaborate effectively through using digital media, such as editing entries for a wiki, writing blogs, or instant messaging (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 2011).

Finally, the Framework for Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century includes life skills needed to work with diverse groups of people and enter a workforce that is rapidly changing (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century, 2011). *Social and cross-cultural skills* are especially relevant to social studies curriculum, teaching the ability to perceive one's culture from other vantage points and value mutual respect and understanding among the world's people (Appiah, 2006).

### **Research Questions**

Building on the work of VanFossen (2005), social studies researchers established the National Survey of the State of Social Studies (S<sub>4</sub>) to investigate the current status of K-12 social studies curriculum and instructional practice, as reported by classroom teachers. This study examines Oregon data from the national survey and focuses on the impact of mandated testing, social studies content, and instructional strategies to teach 21<sup>st</sup> century skills. Research questions that guided this study were:

1. How much instructional time is devoted to social studies within and across grade levels in Oregon public elementary and secondary schools, compared to the national findings?
2. How has mandated testing in subjects other than social studies influenced instructional time for social studies in Oregon, compared to the national findings?
3. What are the major goals and key concepts of the social studies curriculum in Oregon, compared to the national findings?
4. How often and in what types of instructional activities are Oregon K-12 students engaged, compared to the national survey?
5. How is technology used to enhance student learning, compared to the national survey?
6. How does social studies education in Oregon, as reported in the S<sub>4</sub> survey compare to the content and skills called for by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills.

### **Methodology**

A quantitative case study design was used to examine the professional characteristics and attitudes of US educators and their social studies teaching practices (Creswell, 2008). The survey instrument was developed by social studies teacher educators who are members of the National Council for the Social Studies. It consisted of Likert-type items, ranking items, select type items, and two open-ended discussion questions. Items related to respondent demographics, the context and characteristics of classes, instructional practices, social studies concepts, and professional development needs. An on-line survey was sent to an anonymous sample of K-12 public social studies teachers between April 2010 and March 2011. The 11,265

respondents to the national S<sub>4</sub> survey included educators from public, private, charter, and parochial schools as well as full and part time teachers and other educators.

The Oregon survey data (collected in the spring of 2010) represent a sample of convenience using non-duplicated emails of 7,858 individual K-12 educators from three listservs: Oregon Department of Education, Classroom Law Project, and the Oregon Council for Social Studies. The response rate of 10.6% represented 834 survey completers. The Oregon data in this paper represent responses from 742 public school, full and part time teachers: 218 elementary, 269 middle school, and 255 high school teachers.

Specific demographics of the Oregon survey completers are detailed in Table 1. In general, the majority of elementary teachers were female while the majority of secondary teachers were male. Oregon teachers are overwhelmingly white; less than seven percent of the surveyed teachers represent diverse cultural groups. However, 14% of the teachers reported that a majority of their students are non-white, and an additional 20% of the teachers reported that 30-50% of their students represent diverse racial/ethnic groups. The majority of Oregon teachers in this survey are veteran educators with more than nine years experience. Twenty percent of the survey respondents teach in urban schools, 35% in suburban schools, and 45% in rural schools.

Table 1  
*Demographics of Oregon Survey Respondents*

Characteristic						
Teaching Position	Elementary	29.4%	Middle School	36.3%	High School	34.4%
Teacher Gender	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
	18%	82%	39%	61%	60%	40%
Teachers Race/Ethnicity	Amer Indian	1.1%				
	Asian	.9%				
	Black	.4%				
	Hispanic	1.3%				
	White	93.6%				
	Other	2.7%				
	Percent of Teachers Who Report Students Who are Non-White					
	0-10%	40.2%				
	15-25%	25.7%				
	30-50%	20.2%				
	51+%	13.9%				
Years Teaching Experience	<1-3	7.2%				
	4-9	20.1%				

10-15	26.7%
15-25:	28.9%
25-45:	17.0 %

School Type	Urban	20%	Suburban	35.3%	Rural	44.8%
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## Findings

### Instructional Time for Social Studies

How much instructional time is devoted to social studies within and across grade levels in Oregon public elementary and secondary schools, compared to the national findings? Comparing the Oregon data to the national S<sub>4</sub> data clearly shows less time for social studies instruction and a greater negative impact of mandated testing in Oregon than the nation as a whole. Oregon elementary teachers reported an average of 2.8 hours per week devoted to social studies instruction. While 46% teach social studies during a particular time of day, 13% rarely teach social studies or only when instructional time is left over from other subjects. Nationally, elementary teachers instruct social studies an average of 3.4 hours per week, which is over 20% more time than Oregon teachers.

### Impact of Mandated Testing in Oregon

How has mandated testing in subjects other than social studies influenced instructional time for social studies in Oregon, compared to the national findings? Sixty-nine percent of Oregon elementary teachers reported that instructional time for social studies has decreased due to mandated testing in other content areas while 28.6% reported no change, and 2.4% reported an increase in instructional time. The impact was lower nation-wide.<sup>1</sup>

We see a similar pattern when comparing Oregon to national data at the secondary level.<sup>2</sup> Sixty-one percent of Oregon middle school teachers and 63% of high school teachers reported a decrease in instructional time for social studies, while 37% of middle school and 33% of high school teachers reported no change.<sup>3</sup> The impact of mandated testing in subjects other than social studies affected Oregon teachers more severely than teachers nation-wide.

### Major Goals and Key Concepts of the Social Studies Curriculum

What are the major goals and key concepts of the social studies curriculum in Oregon, compared to the national findings? Table 2 summarizes the social studies topics that were taught most often. Oregon teachers agreed that the most important purpose of social studies is preparing good citizens, and 97% agreed that the primary goal is to help develop students' critical thinking and decision-making skills. However, only about one third of elementary

<sup>1</sup> Nationally 56% of elementary teachers nationally reported decreased time for social studies as a result of mandated testing in other subjects, while 38.2% reported no change, and 5.3% reported an increase in instructional time.

<sup>2</sup> The survey question about the impact of mandated testing for middle level and high school teachers was poorly worded, allowing teachers to choose "they do not give a mandated social studies test". We analyzed the data for secondary teachers without this option.

<sup>3</sup> Nation-wide almost 54% of middle school teachers and 46% of high school teachers reported a decrease in instructional time for social studies due to mandated tests, while slightly more than 41% of secondary teachers reported no change.

teachers reported teaching civic responsibility and discussing core democratic values at least weekly.<sup>4</sup> Only one in ten elementary teachers reported their students learn about the US Constitution or fundamentals of local, state, or federal government this often. While about 40% of middle school teachers reported often discussing core democratic values and civic responsibility, about half the high school teachers reported doing so. Only one fourth of middle school teachers reported their students often learn about the US Constitution or the fundamentals of local, state, federal government; high school teachers reported a higher frequency for these topics.

While current events was the highest rated topic reported by Oregon elementary teachers, middle and high school teachers emphasized U.S. and world social and political history ahead of current events and citizenship. While not one of the most frequent topics, issues of race and class were taught more often than economics or religious diversity by teachers at all grade levels.

Table 2  
*Social Studies Concepts in Oregon by Grade Level (Daily or 1-2 Times per Week)*

Social Studies Concepts	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Discuss core democratic values	<b>29%</b>	45%	51%
Learn about the US Constitution	10%	26%	40%
Fundamentals of local, state, &/or federal	13%	24%	33%
Civic responsibility	<b>37%</b>	41%	52%
Issues of race and class	25%	<b>47%</b>	<b>59%</b>
Social history of US/world	<b>35%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>74%</b>
Political history of US/world	27%	<b>61%</b>	<b>75%</b>
Diversity of religious views	15%	24%	24%
Basic economic concepts	17%	23%	37%
Integrate current events	<b>44%</b>	<b>53%</b>	<b>71%</b>
Historiography (historical methodology)	NA	NA	21%

<sup>4</sup> The survey asked teachers to report frequency: almost daily, 1-2 times/week, 2-3 times/month, 2-3 times/year, never. In this study we use the terms “at least weekly” and “often” to represent a combined score of “almost daily” and “1-2 times/week.”



The national data paint a similar picture of curriculum emphases. Elementary teachers reported most frequently teaching civic responsibility and current events followed by social history of the US/world and core democratic values. Middle school teachers were most likely to teach social and political history of the US/world, current events, and core democratic values; issues of race and class were ranked lower nationally than in Oregon. Nationally, high school teachers prioritized political and social history of the US/world, current events, and issues of race and class.

**Instructional Activities**

How often and in what types of instructional activities are Oregon K-12 students engaged, compared to the national results? Table 3 outlines the instructional strategies reported by elementary, middle, and high schools teachers in Oregon. Elementary teachers reported most often engaging their students in whole class discussions, cooperative learning, working with maps or globes, and completing writing assignments. A smaller percentage reported their students develop group projects. There were striking differences between middle school and high school teachers. Participating in whole class discussion and cooperative learning were most often reported by middle school teachers, followed by maps or globes, writing assignments, and examining photographs and primary sources. By contrast, two thirds of high school teachers reported using lectures, while a smaller percentage reported cooperative learning, writing assignments, and primary sources. Across all grade levels teachers reported the frequency of role playing/simulations in the bottom tier of instructional activities.

Table 3  
*Instructional Strategies in Oregon by Grade Level (Daily or 1-2 Times per Week)*

Social Studies Instructional Strategies	Elementary	Middle School	High School
Participate in whole class discussion	<b>87%</b>	<b>91%</b>	Not an option on HS survey
Participate in cooperative learning	<b>65%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>58%</b>
Work with maps or globes	<b>43%</b>	<b>52%</b>	30%
Complete writing assignments, e.g., essays or reflections	<b>32%</b>	<b>44%</b>	<b>54%</b>
Develop group projects	29%	28%	21%
Examine photographs or primary sources	22%	37%	<b>45%</b>
Listen to a lecture	15%	36%	<b>66%</b>



Complete Textbook-based Worksheets	21%	31%	28%
Use Computer-Based Social Studies Applications	11%	15%	15%
Watch videos or film	12%	15%	29%
Participate in role-playing/simulations	20%	18%	12%

A similar trend was seen in the national data.<sup>5</sup> However, Oregon elementary and middle school teachers emphasized writing assignments more than teachers nation-wide.

**Use of Technology to Enhance Student Learning**

How is technology used to enhance student learning, compared to the national survey? While over half of Oregon teachers reported adequate technology in their classrooms, many of them did not use technology as a tool for learning. There seemed to be a relationship between grade level and technology use. While 61% of elementary teachers reported their students rarely or never used computer-based social studies applications, 54% of middle school and 48% of high school teachers reported this lack of use. Conversely on most indicators, high school teachers reported the highest use of technology, followed by middle school, and then elementary teachers. This was despite the fact that a higher percent of Oregon elementary teachers (67%) reported fast reliable Internet connection and computers in the classroom than middle school (60%) and high school (56%) teachers. Table 4 provides a detailed look at how teachers engaged their students with technology in social studies lessons.

Table 4  
*Use of Technology by Grade Level (Daily or 1-2 Times per Week)*

	Elementary	Middle School	High School
1. Teachers use technology to engage students			
to develop students’ higher order skills and creativity	<b>36%</b>	<b>38%</b>	<b>47%</b>
to facilitate experiences that address content standards	<b>37%</b>	<b>37%</b>	<b>48%</b>
with interactive multimedia presentations	<b>23%</b>	<b>39%</b>	<b>54%</b>

<sup>5</sup> Nationally, elementary teachers emphasized whole class discussion, cooperative learning, working with maps/globes and primary sources. Middle school teachers prioritized whole class discussions, followed by cooperative learning, maps/globes, lecture and writing assignments. High school teachers focused on lectures, cooperative learning, primary sources, and writing assignments.

with digital images/primary sources	<b>28%</b>	<b>46%</b>	<b>59%</b>
with digital media, digital camera, cell phone, ipod	13%	13%	20%

2. Students use internet

during Social Studies	22%	19%	22%
to find primary sources	14%	14%	19%
to collect information	<b>28%</b>	<b>17%</b>	<b>25%</b>
to complete Web-quest or inquiry activity	8%	6%	8%
to take virtual field trip	4%	2%	3%
to communicate with others in US	2%	5%	4%
to communicate with students outside US	0	0	0
to develop Web 2.0 projects	2%	<1%	3%

Only about one fourth of Oregon elementary teachers reported often using digital images and primary sources or interactive multimedia presentations for instruction. A similar percent of elementary teachers reported their students use the Internet at least weekly to collect information for reports or projects, but only half as many teachers reported their students use the Internet to examine primary source materials.

Less than half of Oregon middle school teachers reported often using digital images/primary sources or interactive multi-media presentations for instruction, and a much smaller percent reported their students use the Internet to collect information or to examine primary sources. Over 50% of high school teachers reported using digital images/primary sources or interactive multi-media presentations at least weekly, but only one fourth of the teachers reported their students used the Internet to collect information for reports or projects or to examine primary sources.

While only 13% of elementary and middle school teachers engaged students in using digital media (camera, cell phone, iPod) at least weekly, 20% of high school teachers did so. The majority of teachers at all levels reported their students rarely or never used the Internet to complete a Webquest, participate in a virtual field trip, communicate with others, or develop Web 2.0 projects. The national data revealed a similar pattern of grade level differences in

access and use of technology; however, Oregon teachers reported lower access overall to technology than teachers nation-wide.<sup>6</sup>

### **Implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Knowledge and Skills**

How does social studies education in Oregon, as reported in the S<sub>4</sub> survey compare to the content and skills advocated by the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills? The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2011) lists four core social studies subjects: government/civics, geography, history, and economics, all of which were addressed by the S<sub>4</sub> survey (see Table 2). At all grade levels, teachers reported teaching civic responsibility and discussing core democratic values more frequently than learning about the Constitution and local, state, or federal government. While geography was not specifically listed on the survey, elementary and middle school teachers ranked “working with maps or globes” third while high school teachers ranked this instructional strategy fifth. Elementary teachers reported integrating current events most frequently while teaching social history third and political history fifth. However, secondary teachers reported teaching U.S./world social and political history and integrating current events more frequently than any other topic. Historiography was included as a survey item only for high school teachers, and 21% reported teaching it at least weekly. Teaching basic economics concepts was reported in the bottom tier of topics, specifically seventh for elementary, last for middle school, and eighth for high school.

While the S<sub>4</sub> survey did not use the specific *21<sup>st</sup> Century Content* terms of “global awareness,” “financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy,” or “civic literacy” it is possible to infer the importance of this content to Oregon teachers (see Table 2). Across all grade levels, global awareness was most likely to be included when students worked with maps or globes and teachers integrated current events. While some teachers emphasized diversity of religious views, this topic was ranked in the bottom tier. As noted previously, the frequency of teaching basic economic concepts was rated very low; thus, it is unlikely Oregon students are developing economic literacy. To the extent that discussing core democratic values and civic responsibility enhances civic literacy, Oregon students have the opportunity to develop this essential skill.

Almost 100% of Oregon teachers agreed that the primary goal of social studies is to help students develop *critical thinking and decision-making skills*, a key component of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and Thinking Skills. As discussed earlier, teachers were less likely to engage their students in role playing/simulations, which is one method of helping students demonstrate critical thinking (See Table 3). *Creativity and innovation* is another 21<sup>st</sup> century attribute. While more than one third of Oregon teachers reported applying technology to develop students’ higher order skills and creativity at least weekly, no more than 8% reported their students use the Internet to complete a Webquest or other inquiry activity this often (see Table 4).

*Communication and collaboration skills* are essential *21<sup>st</sup> Century Learning and Thinking Skills*. Elementary and middle school teachers reported using whole class discussion as their most frequent instructional strategy, and it would probably have been ranked highly by high school teachers (this

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<sup>6</sup> Nationally almost 75% of elementary teachers reported fast reliable Internet and classroom computers while only 67% of middle and 64% of high school teachers reported such access. Despite this level of classroom technology only 17% of elementary, 19% of middle school, and 23% of high school teachers reported student use of technology at least weekly during social studies instruction. In general there was a relationship between grade level and technology use with high school teachers reporting more frequent use of technology related activities than middle school or elementary teachers.

item was missing on the high school survey). Completing writing assignments was ranked fourth by elementary and middle school teachers and third by high school teachers. However, less than 3% of Oregon teachers across all grade levels reported their students develop a Web 2.0 communication project such as podcasts or wikis; less than 5% reported their students use technology to communicate with others such as experts, and virtually no teachers reported their students use technology to communicate with students from another country. Across all grade levels, teachers ranked engaging students in cooperative learning second highest; thus we may infer Oregon students have the opportunity to develop collaboration skills.

*Information and media literacy skills* were indirectly considered on the S<sub>4</sub> survey. Teachers reported engaging students in lessons that use digital images or primary sources materials, and their students use the Internet to collect information for reports or projects and to find and examine primary source materials. We can infer that some students are developing the ability to effectively access information; however, we cannot determine the degree to which students are learning to critically evaluate and use information accurately and creatively.

*Information communication and technology (ICT) literacy* involves using digital tools to enhance content knowledge and skills, such as problem solving, data analysis, communication and collaboration. Only one third of elementary and middle school and one half of high school teachers reported they apply technology to develop students' higher order skills and creativity and facilitate technology enhanced experiences that address content standards at least weekly (see Table 4). Moreover, the percentage of teachers who reported their students often use specific digital tools was less than 10%.

Finally, *cross-cultural skills* involving mutual respect and understanding of diverse peoples were indirectly assessed on the S<sub>4</sub> survey. About one fourth of Oregon elementary teachers reported they discuss issues of race and class with their students at least weekly; only 15% discuss diversity of religious views that often. A higher percent of secondary teachers (47%, middle school; 59% high school) reported discussing issues of race and class in class at least weekly, but only one fourth of secondary teachers reported discussing diversity of religious views that often. Across all grade levels the survey revealed a missed opportunity to promote cross-cultural understanding. The overwhelming majority of students (91%, elementary and 86% secondary) never use the Internet to communicate with students from another country.

## **Discussion**

### **Instructional Time and Mandated Testing**

NCLB has undoubtedly influenced instructional time for social studies. According to the Center on Education Policy (McMurrer, 2008), since the enactment of NCLB the average decrease for social studies as a percentage of total instructional time was 32%. Thus it comes as no surprise that the Oregon and national data in the S<sub>4</sub> study confirmed previous findings about decreasing time for social studies instruction, particularly at the elementary level. Moreover, Oregon teachers reported less time for social studies instruction and a greater negative impact of mandated testing than for the nation as a whole.

### **Curriculum Priorities**

Multiple studies, noted previously, indicate that high-stakes testing has influenced teachers' instruction as well as curricular priorities. According to the Forum for Education and Democracy (2007), "Through its exclusive emphasis on standardized test scores, [NCLB] has both narrowed the

curriculum in many schools and led to a focus on lower level intellectual skills as opposed to the higher-order thinking skills our democracy requires". Oregon teachers in this study overwhelmingly supported citizenship education as a core purpose of social studies. The survey data suggest that in the meager time allocated for social studies, Oregon elementary teachers emphasized current events and civic responsibility, and to a lesser extent, social history and core democratic values. On the other hand secondary school teachers prioritized social and political history, current events, and issues of race and class above civic responsibility and core democratic values and substantially above economic concepts.

### **Instructional Strategies**

Preliminary analysis of the Oregon findings is inconclusive on what citizenship education entails. There are multiple definitions of civic education, including outcomes proposed by the Civic Mission of Schools (2003), the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2011), and the National Educational Technology Standards (NETS-S) (2007). A synthesis of these organizations' expectations for citizenship skills (Thieman, 2011), suggests:

- Responsible citizens are informed; they are able to access, research, manage, evaluate and use information.
- Informed citizens understand complex public issues and diverse perspectives.
- Competent citizens think critically and creatively, evaluate and make informed decisions.
- Effective citizens communicate with diverse audiences.
- Committed citizens work collaboratively to solve problems.

Given this definition of civic education, we examined Oregon teachers' reports of instructional practices. Over one third of elementary and middle school and almost half of high school teachers reported often using technology to develop students' higher order skills and creativity. However, only a small percentage of Oregon teachers reported engaging their students in role playing and simulations. The survey results were also ambiguous about the extent to which Oregon teachers are helping their students to be informed citizens who understand complex issues and multiple perspectives. While integrating current events was rated first by elementary and third by secondary teachers, the percentage that reported their students often accessed primary sources was much lower. A positive finding is the priority given to teaching issues of race and class. Although rated sixth by elementary teachers, it was the fourth most frequent topic in secondary classrooms. A dismal two to five percent of Oregon teachers reported their students communicate with diverse audiences in the U.S. and virtually none outside the U.S. On a more positive note, the second highest rated instructional strategy was cooperative learning across all grade levels, implying that Oregon teachers prioritize collaborative work. However high schools teachers reported using lectures most frequently, and across all grade levels Oregon teachers reported using textbook-based worksheets. This would suggest an emphasis on content knowledge, rather than higher order thinking and inquiry.

### **Instructional Use of Technology**

While the majority of Oregon reported adequate technology in their classrooms, far fewer reported their student use technology at least weekly. In general there was a relationship between grade level and technology use. The data also suggest Oregon teachers were most likely to use technology to teach lessons with digital primary sources and interactive multi-media presentations.

If the core purpose of social studies education is to prepare good citizens who are informed, understand complex issues, and are able to think critically and creatively, communicate and collaborate we would expect to find that teachers use technology for more than interactive multimedia presentations. We would expect to find students examining primary source materials, completing inquiry activities, communicating with others and developing Web 2.0 projects. Less than half the Oregon teachers reported their students use the Internet at least weekly to examine primary sources. Far fewer teachers reported their students use the Internet to complete inquiry activities, communicate with others, or develop Web 2.0 projects. These data confirm previous studies (Friedman, 2008; Friedman & Van Fossen, 2010) that most teachers and students use the Internet for lower order purposes (gathering information or multimedia) versus higher order uses (completing an inquiry-oriented Webquest and comparing information from websites with different viewpoints).

### **Implementation of 21<sup>st</sup> Century Knowledge and Skills**

According to the S<sub>4</sub> survey, civics, history and to a lesser extent geography are taught in Oregon schools; however, economics and entrepreneurial literacy are minimally addressed. The civic responsibility component of civic literacy is strongly supported by survey responders; however, it is not clear the degree to which students are also developing civic decision-making skills. While critical thinking and decision-making are highly espoused by Oregon teachers in the S<sub>4</sub> survey, specific instructional strategies to ensure students develop these skills are not universally implemented. Most teachers report using traditional practices to support students' communication and collaboration skills; however, relatively few take advantage of the opportunities to use technology to facilitate these skills. Likewise teachers say they support developing students' creativity and innovation skills, but relatively few report specific strategies to promote these skills.

### **Follow-Up Research**

There has been a change in state educational policy since the Oregon teachers responded to this survey in 2010. Oregon teachers are working with new social studies standards for the 2012-2013 academic year. According to Andrea Morgan, Oregon Department of Education Social Sciences Curriculum Education Specialist (personal communication, 2012), these standards are largely focused on concepts and skills students need to be successful in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, by focusing on big ideas and lasting understandings rather than discreet content. These new standards are also aligned to the Common Core State Standards for literacy in social studies and include instructional expectations linked to the National Council for the Social Studies. The new standards were designed to facilitate more instructional depth and encourage greater student-centered learning than the previous standards. Also the focus on concepts, allows local districts to have greater control over the specific content to use when providing standards-based instruction. Appendix 2 compares a sample of 2001 standards to the 2012 revised standards.

In addition the Oregon Department of Education (2012) received an NCLB waiver from the U.S. Department of Education to allow

a major shift in school accountability in Oregon – ...toward a more customized, authentic, and evidence-based approach to improving the performance of individual students, schools, districts, and the state. The waiver strengthens



accountability for the performance of students who have historically been underserved, while removing many of the unintended consequences of NCLB that resulted in narrowing of the curriculum, over-reliance on standardized testing, and little progress on closing Oregon's achievement gap.

We plan a follow-up survey of Oregon teachers in 2013 to ascertain the degree to which implementation of the new Oregon curriculum standards has impacted social studies teachers' curriculum priorities, instructional strategies, integration of technology and development of 21<sup>st</sup> century content and skills. We also want to examine whether instructional time for social studies changes after the NCLB waiver is fully implemented. In addition we plan focus groups with teachers and classroom observations to supplement teacher reported data in the S<sub>4</sub> survey.

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Appendix I

Framework for Learning in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Elements and Skill Areas Adapted from The Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (2011)

Category	Skill Areas
Core Subjects	English, reading/language arts, world languages, arts, mathematics, economics, science, geography, history, government/civics
21 <sup>st</sup> Century Content	a. global awareness b. financial, economic, business and entrepreneurial literacy c. civic literacy d. health and wellness awareness e. environmental literacy
Learning and Thinking Skills	a. critical thinking and problem solving skills b. communication skills c. creativity and innovation skills d. collaboration skills e. information and media literacy skills f. contextual learning skills
ICT Literacy	a. ability to use technology to develop 21 <sup>st</sup> century content knowledge and skills

Appendix II

Oregon Social Sciences Standards Comparison Example of Historical Knowledge. Adapted from Oregon Department of Education (2012).

2001 Benchmark Standards	2011 Grade Specific Standards (9-12)
<p><b>WORLD HISTORY</b></p> <p>SS.HS.HS.05 Understand the causes, characteristics, lasting influence, and impact of political, economic, and social developments in world history.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.01 Understand how innovations in industry and transportation created the factory system, which led to the Industrial Revolution and transformed capitalism.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.02 Understand how the Agricultural Revolution contributed to and accompanied the Industrial Revolution.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.03 Understand the concepts of imperialism and nationalism.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.04 Understand how European colonizers interacted with indigenous populations of Africa, India, and Southeast Asia, and how the native populations responded.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.05 Understand the major consequences of imperialism in Asia and Africa at the turn of the century.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.06 Understand Japanese expansion overseas and the consequences for Japan and Asia during the 20th century.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.07 Understand the impact of the Chinese Revolution of 1911, and the cause of China's Communist Revolution in 1949.</i></li><li>• <i>SS.HS.HS.05.08 Identify and understand the causes and consequences of the Russian Revolution of 1917, and the impact on politics in nations around the world.</i></li></ul>	<p><b>Historical Knowledge</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• HS.1. Evaluate continuity and change over the course of world and United States history.</li><li>• HS.2. Analyze the complexity and investigate causes and effects of significant events in world, U.S., and Oregon history.</li><li>• HS.3. Explain the historical development and impact of major world religions and philosophies.</li><li>• HS.4. Investigate the historical development and impact of major scientific and technological innovations; political thought, theory and actions; and art and literature on culture and thought.</li><li>• HS.5. Examine and evaluate the origins of fundamental political debates and how conflict, compromise, and cooperation have shaped national unity and diversity in world, U.S., and Oregon history.</li><li>• HS.6. Analyze ideas critical to the understanding of history, including, but not limited to: populism, progressivism, isolationism, imperialism, communism, environmentalism, liberalism, fundamentalism, racism, ageism, classism, conservatism, cultural diversity, feminism, and sustainability.</li><li>• HS.7. Analyze the history, culture, tribal sovereignty, and historical and current issues of the American Indian tribes and bands in Oregon and the United States.</li></ul>