



Ohio

Council for the Social Studies

House Education Primary and Secondary Education Committee

House Bill 239 – Opposition Party Written Testimony

May 27, 2020

Dr. Brad Maguth, President, The Ohio Council for the Social Studies

Chairman Jones, Ranking Member Robinson and members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee,

Thank you for this opportunity to provide opposition testimony on House Bill 239, as it is currently written. My name is Brad Maguth, and I am a tenured Professor of Social Studies Education at The University of Akron. I am also the President of the Ohio Council for the Social Studies (OCSS), the state's premier voice for K-16 social studies professionals. OCSS was founded in 1956, and ever since, has been dedicated to advancing the vital role of the teaching and learning of social studies in our classrooms and communities. Our membership represents K-12 classroom teachers, college and university faculty, curriculum designers and specialists, social studies supervisors, and leaders in the various disciplines that constitute the social studies. We publish standards-based instructional resources and professional development, manage the state's flagship journal in social studies (*The Ohio Social Studies Review*), conduct statewide research in the teaching and learning of social studies, and advocate for and celebrate social studies teachers. Efforts are currently underway in planning our 64th Annual Conference, the state's largest gathering of social studies teachers, themed, *Preparing Energized and Engaged Democratic Citizens through Social Studies*.

Two days after Memorial Day, we are here to represent OCSS's position on House Bill 239. Let us be clear, we believe there is no subject more at the center of preparing youth for this nation's most important office in a democracy, that of "Office of Citizen", than social studies. Through high-quality social studies, youth are better prepared for college, career, and civic life (National Council for the Social Studies 2013). Critical learnings in social studies include:

- U.S. and Ohio constitutional foundations necessary to sustain and strengthen our mode of self-government- one made-up of the people, by the people, and for the people. We also remember and reflect on those patriots that fought to defend these ideals, including honoring the memory of those that did not return
- the contributions of key figures in our nation and world's march towards freedom, justice, and prosperity; this includes the Ohio legislators whose offices and chambers many of you now occupy
- and, such critical skills as how to confront fake-news, and reach across deep divisions to build a more just and peaceful state, country, and planet.

Overall, testing in social studies accounts for the lowest amount of instructional time in any core subject area (10%), far less than the 74% dedicated to Math and Language Arts. In 2012, all elementary and middle grades social studies state exams were defunded and suspended. OCSS is deeply concerned by enacted legislative policies that have reduced social studies assessments and learning opportunities in schools. Misguided legislation that chose winner and loser core subject areas has led to the marginalization of the teaching and learning of history, government, economics, and geography in schools. Nationally, since the enactment of *No Child Left Behind*, 44% of school districts have reduced instructional time in social studies (Council for Chief

State School Officers 2018). In Ohio, findings from our *2020 State of the Social Studies Survey* suggest school leaders place greater emphasis, instructional time, and resources into those tested subjects; namely, Math, English, and Science than Social Studies. The effects of this disinvestment in historical thinking and civic-mindedness ripple through our communities, in the majors and careers youth select, in the voting booths and attitudes residents hold towards politics and government, and in the overall quality of civic dialogue and engagement.

Research notes this marginalization is most apparent in districts that serve a high percentage of students of color. The crowding out of social studies, especially, in elementary and middle school grades, is a cost too high for a pluralistic democracy that depends on an educated and civically engaged citizenry to thrive (Levinson 2014). Our organization has witnessed first-hand through member testimonies and conducted empirical research, how the discontinuation of state social studies assessments has led to decreased instructional time, resources, and lowered its status in schools. After the legislature voted to suspend the 5th grade Ohio Achievement Assessment in 2010, our higher education SIG members utilized stratified random sampling to interview 51 elementary school principals in both urban and nonurban settings from across the state on the effects of this legislation. We learned more than half (54%) of the principals reported reductions in the teaching and learning of social studies in their elementary buildings in response to this action. Simply put, what is tested by the State is valued, invested in, and taught in local classrooms.

OCSS calls upon federal and state lawmakers to stop this cycle of curricular neglect and make a long-term financial commitment to the teaching of social studies in *all* grades, in *all* schools, and to *all* students. This includes investing in high-quality social studies assessments and teacher professional development. More specifically, our proposal includes:

- blending content from the American Government End of Course (EOC) exam and American History EOC exam to create one stand-alone social studies high school graduation exam
- moving beyond the current AIR state exams that mostly measure low-level thinking and towards more substantive, home-grown, inquiry-based performance assessments
- applying cost-savings from the elimination of a high school social studies graduation towards meaningful social studies professional development in the elementary and middle grades.

This proposal is in-line with the expressed wishes of our membership, to reduce the overall testing burden while tackling the documented decline and marginalization of social studies across our beloved state. Rest assured, OCSS looks forward to working with members of the House Primary and Secondary Education Committee on this issue as well as other partners to save and strengthen social studies in all classrooms and communities.

Mr. Chairman, thank you for your consideration. I am available to respond to any questions you may have.

References

Council for Chief State School Officers. 2018. *The marginalization of social studies*. Washington, DC. Retrieved at <https://ccsso.org/resource-library/marginalization-social-studies>.

Levinson, Maria. 2014. *No citizen left behind* Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

National Council for the Social Studies. 2013. *The college, career, and civic life (C3) framework for social studies state standards: Guidance for enhancing the rigor of k-12 civics, economics, geography, and history*. Silver Spring, MD. Retrieved at <https://www.socialstudies.org/sites/default/files/c3/C3-Framework-for-Social-Studies.pdf>