



Progress Memo

To:	Advisory Council on Teaching and Learning & APS Department on Teaching and Learning
From:	Social Studies Advisory Committee
cc:	Kerri Hirsch
Date:	December 4, 2020
Re:	Progress memo on Social Studies

1. What is working well for teaching and learning?

Topic: Some excellent online discussions with engaged students	Information source: Anecdotes from parents and students
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Description:

Parents and students have reported some teachers using the online environment effectively for engaging discussions. When teachers have figured out the best ways to harness the online environment, the results can be engrossing for students.

Topic: Some creative methods for moving the instruction offline so that students are not just sitting in front of a screen	Information source: Anecdotal evidence from teachers, parents, and students.
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Description:

- assignments to do things outside of school. For example, a MS photography class where students took photos at the recent Women’s March.
- relating academic topics to real life situations and family life
- Social studies topics are so relevant to our lives right now, especially civics
- The **portfolio method** is very effective for creative offline instruction

Topic:
Some teachers have been able to teach the moment (election, pandemic, BLM, etc.)

Information source:
Anecdotal evidence from teachers, parents, and students.

Description:

- Reminder from Social Studies about teaching hard history thoughtfully (but not shying away from topics just because of discomfort)
 - Civil discourse and discussions are especially important skills to teach in the current fraught political climate
 - Some teachers express discomfort having hard discussions while under potential parent view during the remote class
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2. What is not working well for teaching and learning?

Topic: Canvas, MS Teams, other platforms/apps/websites frustrating

Information source:
anecdotal evidence, discussions with community members

Description:

- Hard to do breakout rooms in MS Teams
 - Canvas continues to be difficult to use; teachers are not using it consistently
 - Some apps timeout or malfunction; sometimes they are used for assessment and can't be redone even with a problem
 - Assignments not always posted in time for Monday's asynchronous learning
 - Assignments are not always posted in the same place in Canvas, you have to go searching, turning in documents different ways, lack of consistency
 - Lack of cameras turned on leads to lack of student interactions and engagement (or the other way around)
 - Lack of interaction with teachers (Middle and High School)
 - Lack of a way to have student-student interactions and student-teacher private interactions
 - Lack of small group work and differentiation (perhaps some days should be just devoted to more small group work) -- small groups seem to work much better
 - Synchronous time taken up with navigating technology versus instruction
 - Can we facilitate small, in-person, outdoor meetups?
 - Need more flexibility for teachers to reach out to students.
 - Can feel repetitive
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Topic: No-print policy causing problems for some students and families

Information source:
anecdotal evidence,
discussions with community
members

Description:

- Some students with IEPs need textbooks and they aren't available in some courses
 - Families of younger children would like more materials that can be completed without needing technological assistance (such as packets, workbooks)
 - Even print-friendly materials (such as pdfs) would be helpful
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Topic: Concern that Social Studies is getting pushed aside and not getting time, especially at elementary level

Information source:
Anecdotal evidence
Washington Post, "School reading classes still in a slump without more social studies," Oct. 11, 2020
Education Week, "Does Social Studies Build Stronger Readers? A New Study Suggests So," Sept 25, 2020

Description:

Even in the best of (non-Covid) times, Social Studies is often in danger of being treated as an "extra" subject that can get sacrificed when there is a time crunch or other curricular demands being made. We feel that this is short-sighted. Current events show that it is more crucial than ever for students to understand critical thinking, evidence evaluation, and the value of engaged citizenship. Furthermore, recent studies suggest a strong correlation between time spent on social studies and reading comprehension.

Links to sources:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/education/school-reading-classes-still-in-a-slump-without-more-social-studies/2020/10/10/7237c0b6-08a8-11eb-a166-dc429b380d10_story.html

https://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/teaching_now/2020/09/does_social_studies_build_stronger_readers.html?cmp=soc-edit-tw

<https://fordhaminstitute.org/national/resources/social-studies-instruction-and-reading-comprehension>

3. What are implications and/or solutions for teaching & learning for the longer term?

Mindful of the frustrations and limitations of distance learning, the Social Studies department is encouraging teachers to focus on skills over content. We want to encourage this approach going forward.

Desire for less screen time creates more opportunities for project-based learning. We encourage teachers to consider assignments that have creative, non-screen-based components.

There needs to be a focus on making the technology less complex and time-consuming. Too much instruction time is spent helping students (and, sometimes, teachers) navigate technology. When Social Studies is already in danger of getting pushed aside, its limited time on the schedule should not be spent trying to figure out an app or showing everyone how to submit an assignment.