

Making Learning Gains with Social Studies: Response to Pandemic-Interrupted Education

Now more than ever, we need robust social studies instruction in public schools in order to reckon with the many issues that this year has made unavoidable. As many are focused on remediating “learning loss” from the past year, social studies must have a prominent role in the “build back better” conversation.

As a result of the overlapping pandemics of COVID-19 and structural racism, young people’s intellectual, emotional, and social lives must be the focus of our classrooms and schools. In this moment, it is essential that students have regular opportunities to investigate the world, make sense of it, and envision better futures. They must have practice using the tools of democracy and civic power. That is what we do in social studies.

Before the pandemic, [social studies had been pushed to the margins](#) of the curriculum, particularly in elementary and middle schools. Because it is usually not tested, social studies has been treated as ancillary literacy instruction or entirely left out of students' daily instruction. Yet, social studies not only [improves students' literacy skills](#) and their ability to "read the word," but it also helps students "read the world" and make sense of it.

History, civics, geography, ethnic studies, and economics bring essential value to students: the ability to investigate the [“reality of history being made and also making us.”](#) It prompts us to wonder how our world has come to be and what it is not yet. This is why social studies must be centered in the K-12 classroom.

To realize these goals, we ask schools and districts to:

- Make social studies a core component of any summer or school year plans that respond to “learning loss” and plans for the return to in class instruction.
- Ensure social studies have a rich, cohesive curriculum that is valued as an essential component of every culturally relevant and/or sustaining classroom.
- Require dedicated daily instructional time for social studies instruction, not just in secondary classrooms, but also across all elementary and cored middle grades.
- Dedicate significant time and resources to teachers’ professional learning about social studies pedagogies and the histories of the communities they serve.

The Big City District-University Social Studies Group is a collective of social studies district leaders and university education faculty in some of the largest cities across the country, who meet regularly to collaborate and articulate core values, share ongoing work, and examine ways to address common challenges in the teaching of social studies in K-12 schools.