

# Social Studies Advisory Committee 2021-2022 Recommendation

## Introduction

The Social Studies Advisory Committee (SSAC) makes the following recommendation to the School Board. The Advisory Committee for English Learners (ACEL), English Language Arts Committee (ELA), and World Languages Advisory Committee (WLAC) all support this recommendation.<sup>1</sup>

The SSAC members are: Cragg Hines, Kerri Hirsch (APS liaison), Heather Keppler, Amina Luqman, Caroline Rogus (chair), Phillip Rotondi, Paula Cordero Salas, Tralonne Shorter, and Todd Truitt. All committee members approve of this recommendation.

## SSAC Recommendation

APS should increase the amount of Social Studies instruction at the elementary school level. Research shows that students who receive an additional thirty minutes of Social Studies instruction each day outperform students who have less Social Studies instruction in grades 1-5 on 5th grade reading assessments.<sup>2</sup> In order to see such results, APS elementary schools need to (1) teach Social Studies for the recommended additional amount of time and, in order to achieve that time commitment, (2) purposefully integrate the Social Studies instruction into the English Language Arts and World Language curricula.<sup>3</sup>

## Rationale for the Recommendation

APS joins many school districts nationwide in its ongoing search for strategies to improve literacy outcomes for its learners.<sup>4</sup> Because literacy is integral to state-based assessments in APS,<sup>5</sup> when scores for those assessments drop—or remain low for students in traditionally underserved communities—APS educators often increase the amount of Reading instruction time in order to improve outcomes. Given that there are only so many hours in the school day, increasing Reading time might then result in less

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<sup>1</sup> In its 2018 Recommendation to the School Board, WLAC recommended supporting the SSAC initiative “to prepare globally competent APS graduates,” noting: “World Languages and Social Studies should collaborate to create a strong partnership for curriculum development that will prepare APS graduates for successful career and community engagement in a diverse world.” Memorandum to School Board from WLAC,



prepares students for a lifetime of learning.<sup>14</sup> Social studies learning can provide opportunities for students to better understand their own experiences, their community, and their cultural history.<sup>15</sup> Thus, integrating Social Studies into literacy instruction in English and World Languages can provide more opportunities not only for literacy skills acquisition but for civic engagement as well.

Furthermore, increased attention to Social Studies curriculum and instruction in APS will provide another key benefit: better preparing the future generation for civic engagement. The need for civil discourse on difficult topics is greater than ever in our society.<sup>16</sup> To avoid future apathy towards our governance, young learners should be encouraged to be part of the story of our democracy and to see themselves as part of a greater shared experience.<sup>17</sup>

By integrating Social Studies instruction into lesson plans for Reading in all languages taught in APS schools, APS teachers can give their students the recommended additional thirty minutes of Social Studies instruction without sacrificing Reading instruction time. Indeed, implementing the SSAC Recommendation will likely help improve Reading outcomes for APS elementary school students, thereby enhancing APS effectiveness across disciplines.

### **Budgetary Implications**

Because the SSAC Recommendation utilizes existing curriculum and teachers, the impact on the budget is negligible.

### **Strategic Plan Alignment**



Kindergarten Class of 2010–11, which samples over 18,500 students in their kindergarten year and follows them through 5th grade. This longitudinal, nationally representative study collects semiannual or annual measures on students, their parents, teachers, and schools, including annual assessments in reading and math. It enables us to assess reading progress associated with school experiences from kindergarten through 5th grade. In our analysis, we focus on students for whom there was information on all student-level measures, as well as information on teacher-reported classroom time spent on different subjects. Our analytic sample included 6,829 students.

The results of our analysis are striking. The Early Childhood Longitudinal Study shows that social studies is the only subject with a clear, positive, and statistically significant effect on reading improvement. In contrast, extra time spent on English Language Arts (ELA) instruction has no significant relationship with reading improvement.

These results confirm that growing students' knowledge of the world through subjects other than ELA may be more effective in developing literacy than additional reading instruction. There is little doubt that background knowledge is critical for a reader to make sense of a particular text. Knowledge that helps build a broad vocabulary forms the foundation of true literacy. A number of studies show that students comprehend more, perform better at immediate recall, and acquire more additional information when they already possess strong background knowledge of a topic. Cognitive psychologist Daniel Willingham explains the connection in his book *The Reading Mind*. "[Writers] always omit a great deal of information needed to make sense of what they write," Willingham explains, so "[the reader] must have the right information in memory to make the inferences that bridge the meaning of what he reads."

## Analysis of the Federal Early Childhood Longitudinal Study

The data from the federal Early Childhood Longitudinal Study mentioned above show that students in classrooms where more time was spent on social studies made more progress in reading over a one-year period. An additional 30 minutes of social studies instruction per day was associated with a 15 percent of a standard deviation increase in reading ability over other students, a modest but sustained effect over this period. Girls, students from less-afluent families, and students from families where English was not the main home language saw even greater effects of social studies instruction on reading ability.

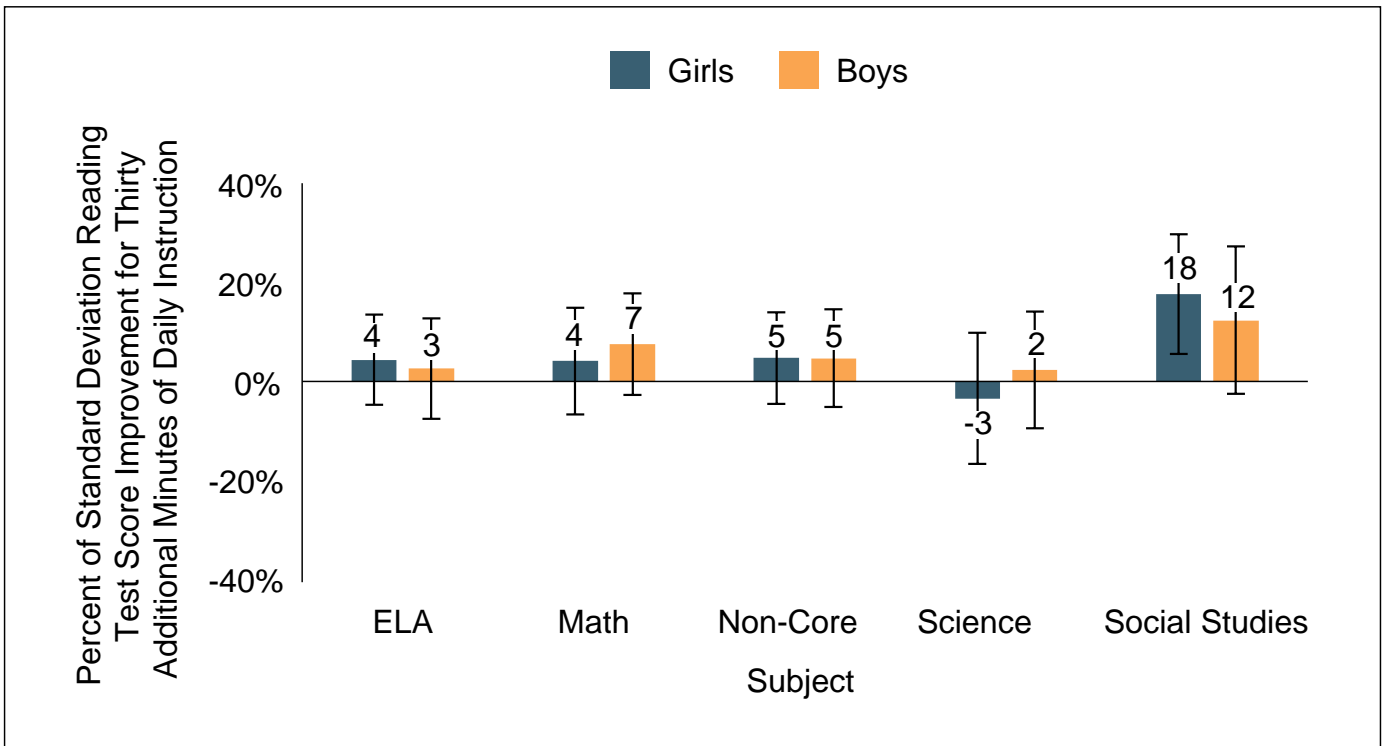
Figure 3. Proportion of Instructional Time Spent on ELA Compared to Social Studies and Science

Figure 4. Time Devoted to Social Studies and Greater Reading Growth

More instructional time devoted to social studies is correlated with greater reading growth from first through fifth grade

In fact, social studies is the only subject with a clear, positive, and statistically significant effect on reading improvement for all students, and students from less-advantaged families, and students from families where English was not the main home language. On average, students who receive an additional 30 minutes of social studies instruction per day (roughly equivalent to moving from the 10th to the 90th percentile of social studies instruction time) in grades 1–5 outperform students with less social studies time by 15 percent of a standard deviation on the fifth-grade reading assessment, even after controlling for multiple measures of kindergarten reading ability and a host of student, school, and teacher factors.

Figure 5. Time Spent on Social Studies and Greater Progress in Reading by Girls and Boys  
 For both boys and girls, additional social studies time is associated with greater progress in reading.



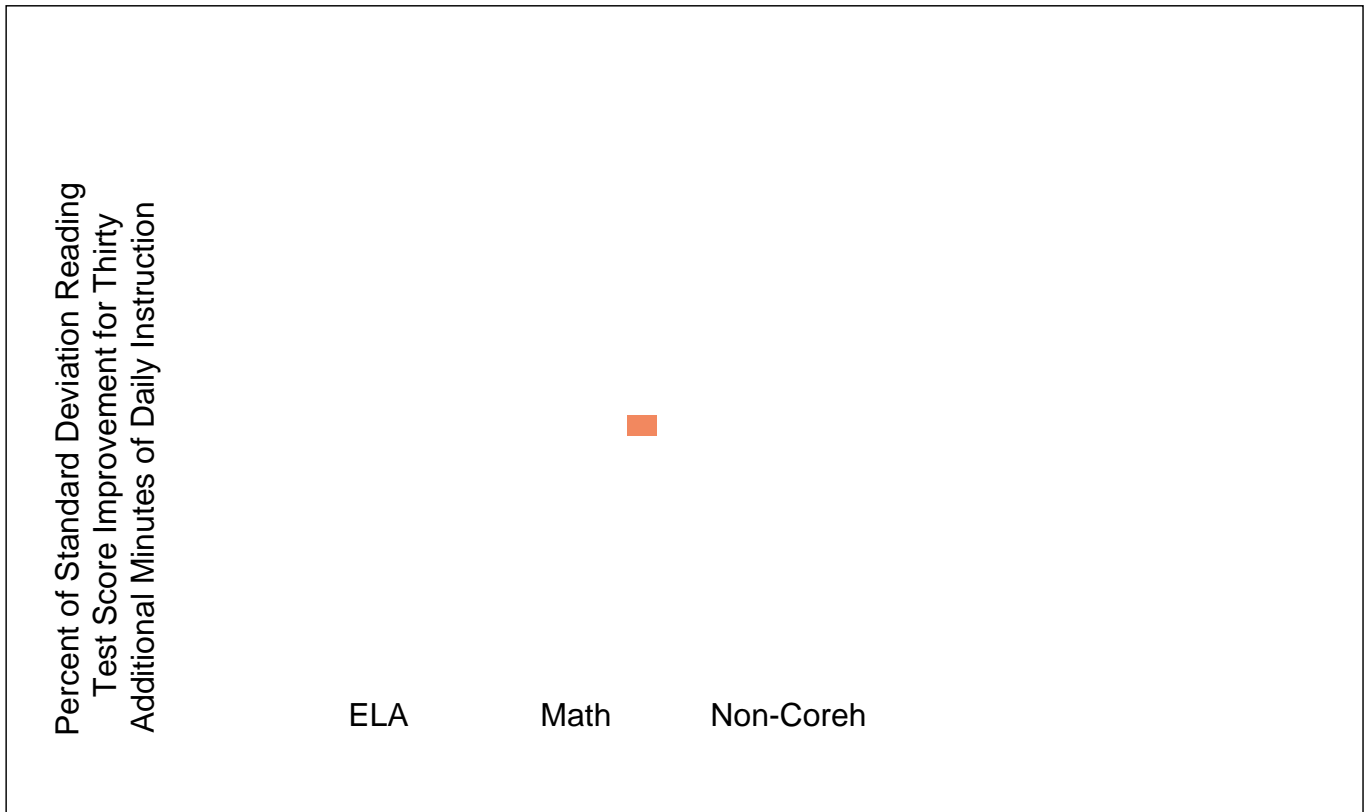
Note: The analytic sample includes 6,731 students. Effects are in standard deviations of fifth-grade assessment scores. Error bars represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

We also found that students from lower-income families who had an additional 30 minutes of daily instruction in social studies made greater progress in reading than students from



Figure 6. Time Spent on Social Studies and Greater Progress in Reading for Students from Families with Different Income Levels

More instructional time in social studies is related to greater reading growth from first through fifth grade for all students, but only for those whose families are in the top income quartile.



Note: The analytical sample includes 6,311 students. Indicators of socioeconomic status (for example, “parent”) reflect quartiles of the family income distribution. Effects are in standard deviations of fifth-grade assessment scores. Note that the 17 percent of a standard deviation effect for students in the “below average income” quartile is only statistically significant at the 90 percent confidence level. Error bars ( ) represent 95 percent confidence intervals.

This all has consequences for students. Not only does the marginalization of social studies likely harm young learners' literacy, but it probably also contributes to longstanding gaps in reading achievement. Since the effects of social studies instruction are strongest for students at lower family income levels, more social studies instructional time may contribute to more equitable student outcomes.

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in the Bayou state—but, if fruitful, such