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HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE  
CONTEXT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

KRISTINA M. KELLEHER-BIANCHI

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,  
University of Massachusetts Boston,  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2020

Urban Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies Program

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KRISTINA M. KELLEHER-BIANCHI

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## ABSTRACT

# HIGH SCHOOL TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF SOCIAL STUDIES IN THE CONTEXT OF ACCOUNTABILITY

May 2020

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Directed by Professor Wenfan Yan

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe urban public high school social studies teachers' perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing and its influence on their professional identity within the context of Massachusetts' school accountability policies. This study gave nuance to larger quantitative studies by allowing policy and school leaders to hear directly from teachers who mediate the influence of accountability policies on students. It examined these questions: What were public school teachers' understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school? What were high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing? How did teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure? Earlier research indicated that social studies curriculum narrowing influenced high school teachers through reduced time and

emphasis on social studies, shifts in how social studies was taught, and de-valuing of social studies teachers' professional identity.

This was important because high school social studies education was where students learn the knowledge, skills, and mindsets to become engaged, democratic citizens and global economic leaders. If urban students were not learning these necessary skills and knowledge then these communities maybe more likely to continue to be marginalized in the future. My theoretical framework drew on the theories of neoliberalism and hidden curriculum to understand the context this curriculum narrowing occurred in. I also used theories of teacher identity to understand teachers' professional identities. High school social studies teachers were in a unique position to describe the influence of secondary social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability systems. This study used a phenomenological approach to collect and analyze teachers' accounts of how curriculum narrowing affected their autonomy as professionals and the opportunities urban students have to be prepared to be democratic citizens.

## DEDICATION

*To my husband and my parents*

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Finally, thank you to all the social studies teachers who participated in my dissertation study, making this dissertation possible. Hearing your stories inspired me in ways I never anticipated. It is your day to day work in classrooms that is preparing the next generation of citizens in our commonwealth and country.



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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### **Statement of the Problem**

In the last two decades many accountability measures have been introduced at the state and national level with the stated intent of ensuring an adequate education for marginalized students.<sup>1</sup> More research is needed on how these accountability measures actually influence the urban high schools these marginalized students attend and, especially, the secondary social studies education these students receive. This study contributed to helping fill this research gap by adding a qualitative study of high school social studies teachers. Social studies education is delivered through the social studies teachers who work at public high schools. These teachers' perceptions of their professional identities likely influence their daily classroom practice and therefore the social studies education these teachers could provide to marginalized students. Urban social studies teachers in public schools are in a unique position to describe the relationship among accountability measures, social studies curriculum narrowing, and their professional identities. I define curriculum narrowing as a reduction in breadth of instructional content (Berliner, 2011).

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<sup>1</sup> In this study, I define marginalized as a group of people who are treated as insignificant or peripheral (Marginalized, n.d.). In the U.S., low-income communities, immigrant communities, and communities of color are often marginalized.

Under the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), states were required to develop K-12 school accountability systems that established impossible improvement goals of 100% proficiency by 2014. Schools have adjusted their teaching to “teach to the test,” including a narrowing and altering of the curriculum taught in schools. The larger story of “what is happening to raise test scores and the implications for teaching and learning and equity” needs to be examined (Lipman, 2004, p. 42). Much work on this topic has already been done. Au (2007) used a qualitative metasynthesis to examine 49 qualitative studies addressing the impact of high-stakes testing on curriculum. He found that because of standardized testing, curriculum has been narrowed to the subjects tested, students’ introduction to knowledge has been fragmented, and teachers are being forced into using more lecture-based, teacher-centered pedagogical approaches (Au, 2007, p. 264). The curriculum narrowing was particularly notable in social studies, since NCLB requires testing in math, reading, and science but not in social studies or civics, “the areas of the curriculum most tied to the democratic mission of schools” (Kahne & Westheimer, 2014, p. 354).

In this study, I define social studies as the academic content, concepts, and skills in history, geography, economics, civics and government “that are essential to the study of democracy, and to the development of educated and responsible citizens” (Massachusetts Department of Education, 2003). The 2003 social sciences and history frameworks in Massachusetts was heavily focused on history in high school. It required two years of World History and two years of United States History in grades 8-12 and also suggested two electives, one in economics and one in American government. However, they also provided concepts and skills that should be taught in grades 8-12 that include history, geography, government, civics, and economics (Mass DOE, 2003). The 2018 revision to the frameworks

has a new focus on “education for civic life in a democracy” and connections to the Common Core Literacy standards but leaves the United States History I and II and World History I and II courses for high school largely unchanged (Mass. Dept. of Elementary and Secondary Ed., 2018b).

Social studies curriculum narrowing has been shown to be a frequent result of teaching in preparation for standardized tests due to accountability pressure. For example, McMurrer (2008) found that in districts that increased time for ELA or math and reduced time in other subjects, 53% cut at least 75 minutes per week of social studies instructional time (p. 1). In my study, social studies curriculum narrowing is generally defined as reduction in time for social studies or refocusing of social studies curriculum on literacy or standardized test preparation. Even former Supreme Court justice Sandra Day O’Conner noted, “one unintended effect of [NCLB]...is that it has effectively squeezed out civics education because there is no testing for that anymore and no funding for that” (Schisel, 2008). Social studies curriculum narrowing is likely more acutely felt in urban schools that are held accountable for multiple minority subgroups, more often labeled as underperforming, and face greater accountability pressure (Forte, 2010). Many urban schools are under increased pressure to teach to the standardized state tests.

Curriculum narrowing because of high-stakes testing and accountability matters because it influences how much and the kind of social studies education students get in public schools. A rich social studies education provides students with knowledge of the country, government, and world they live in, the skills to successfully build their own understanding through source analysis, and the ability advocate for change for themselves and their community. Curriculum narrowing may limit students’ ability to be successful

future citizens, activists, business leaders, and scholars. Research has indicated that social studies curriculum has been influenced by teaching to the test through reduced time and emphasis on social studies within the school (Heafner & Fitchett, 2012), shifts in how social studies is taught (De Oliveira, 2008), and de-valuing of teachers' professional identities (Au, 2011). These are all forms of social studies curriculum narrowing due to accountability pressure that are discussed further in chapter 2 and that may be happening in urban schools.

### **Research Purpose and Rationale for the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe urban public high school social studies teachers' perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing and its influence on their professional identity within the context of Massachusetts' school accountability policies. In the age of accountability, the civic mission of schools may be getting lost and teachers needed to be heard on this important topic. As a country, "we say that we value a democratic society," and yet "the very institutions expected to prepare democratic citizens—our schools—have moved far from this central mission" (Kahne & Westheimer, 2014, p. 353). Instead, there was often headlines "of 'state takeovers' of schools that fail to raise test scores in math or reading, but it is unimaginable that any school would face such an action because it failed to prepare its graduates for democratic citizenship" (Kahne & Westheimer, 2014, p. 353). Yet, today many urban public schools may be failing to prepare their students for democratic citizenship. In 2003, and in the decade since, the federal Department of Education's spending on civic education was less than one-half of one percent of its overall department budget. Moreover, the vast majority of school funding was getting directed to literacy, mathematics, science and vocational education instead of civic preparation (Kahne & Westheimer, 2014, p. 353). The research and policy making communities in

Massachusetts and beyond needed to hear from social studies teachers about how this loss of the civic mission of schools was influencing their professional identity and therefore the social studies education they were providing to students.

Talking to urban social studies teachers was important to fully understand how accountability influences equitable social studies education. The education research community knows that teachers are “curricular-instructional gatekeepers and in this way largely determine the character of the curriculum and teaching to which their students have access” (Thornton, 1994, p. 236). Teachers mediated state and district curricular mandates for students. Urban teachers were in a unique position to see how the structures of schools and accountability systems were influencing their teaching and also be able to see how these changes to their teaching were influencing marginalized students’ educational opportunities. Therefore, my study drew on teachers’ perceptions because teachers were the ones who are actually implementing curriculum and pedagogical choices that are affected by curriculum narrowing. Therefore, it was social studies teachers who scholars, policy makers, and school leaders need to hear from.

Urban social studies teachers’ perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing within the context of Massachusetts’ school accountability policies and its influence on their professional identity was a timely research topic because recent accountability legislation at the federal and state level had significant influence over what was taught in public schools as well as how it was taught. It was also particularly timely because Massachusetts was considering re-introducing a social science and history test as a graduation requirement (Mass. Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2018a). Finally, this study was important because the reduction of emphasis on social studies instruction was a matter of

equity. The following section will explore how inequity continues to be a central systemic part of the U.S. education and educational accountability system as well as the importance of social studies education for *all* students.

**Inequity.** As Michael Katz (2001) wrote, current economic and social policies have “stratified Americans into first- and second- class citizens and undermined the effective practice of democracy” (p. 2). One of the stated purposes of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was to help close achievement gaps between the poor and the wealthy and students of color and white students. These achievement gaps, and efforts to close them, are important issues in urban education today because they indicate long-standing inequalities in the United States. Scholars have long recognized the significance these racial and economic achievement gaps (see DuBois, 1903; Washington, 1903; Woodson, 1933). Gloria Ladson-Billings (2006) has argued for changing the term to “education debt” to better encompass the educational, historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral components of the gap between whites and people of color. Closing these gaps has also long been a major focus of federal education policy. In fact, the first substantial federal education legislation, the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA) focused on equity. “Enacted at the height of the civil rights movement and as part of America's ‘War on Poverty,’ the ESEA was a federal civil rights statute at its core, designed to level the playing field and expand educational opportunity for poor children and children of color” (Hewitt, 2011, p. 169). The majority of funds appropriated through the original ESEA, 75-85%, went to the needs of low-income children through Title I programs. The legislation specifically recognized the impact of “concentrations” of poverty on schools (Urban & Wagoner, 2014, p. 296).

Unfortunately, despite continued efforts at federal and state levels for education reform, an achievement gap along racial and class lines still exists in the United States (Hunter & Bartee, 2003; Murphy, 2010). For example, “by the time African American and Hispanic students graduate from high school, ‘They will have the same skill level in reading as a white student in Grade 8’ (Spradlin et al, 2005, p. 3, as cited in Murphy, 2010, p. 72). Also, “on average, black students complete high school with less mathematical knowledge than white eighth graders possess” (Lubienski, 2002, p. 276, as quoted in Murphy, 2010, p. 72). These racial gaps are tied to poverty, and particularly high concentrations of poverty such as in the inner city, making the achievement gap, and attempts to remedy it such as NCLB, very important to urban education (Murphy, 2010, p. 93). These educational inequalities also reflect larger inequalities in society (Anyon, 2005) and schools may be reproducing these inequalities instead of alleviating them.

Another group of students that scholars are concerned about receiving an unequal education under NCLB is English Language Learners (ELLs). English Language Learners are more than 20% of public school students in the U.S. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006, as cited in Gandara & Rumberger, 2009, p. 750) and are disproportionately served in urban schools. And while this was one group NCLB was targeted to support, there is little evidence that it helped ELLs. Kate Menken (2010) wrote, “9 years after the law’s passage, ELLs have yet to reap the promised benefits of this educational reform; instead, the quality of schooling for ELLs may indeed have worsened, rather than improved, during the NCLB era” (p. 122). NCLB’s Title III entitled “the English Language Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic Achievement Act” replaced the Bilingual Education Act first added to ESEA in 1968. The law categorized students who have not yet become proficient in English as



Limited English Proficient students (also known as English Language Learners - ELLs). As the name of the Title implies, this is a temporary category and students are no longer labeled this when they have demonstrated proficiency in English.

Schools serving large number of ELLs are disproportionately penalized by NCLB. NCLB creates “a disincentive for schools to serve ELLs at all” (Menken, 2010, p. 126). NCLB also “stigmatize EL students as a source of problems for their schools” (Fuller, 2004, as cited in Gandara & Rumberger, 2009, p. 765). This may contribute to ELLs push out. In Massachusetts, ELs are six percent of the state’s student population but almost 20% of the state’s dropouts (Glatter, 2017). As Menken (2010) argues “perhaps no group has been more punished by NCLB than ELLs. In spite of the law’s promises, ELLs are being left behind in large numbers as they are required to pass linguistically complex tests in a language they are in the process of acquiring” (p. 127). The pressure on schools to get ELLs to pass content exams that are not linguistically appropriate for their current English level may increase social studies curriculum narrowing. As schools spend more time on test preparation for ELLs, ELLs may be losing out on social studies educational opportunities and therefore the skills they need to be effective voices in the American democracy for themselves and their communities in the future.

My study of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability was particularly needed because of the further inequality created when urban schools face greater accountability pressures and therefore have more acute curriculum narrowing (Berliner, 2011). This curriculum narrowing, particularly in social studies, leads to reproduction of existing social inequalities when low-income, minority, and immigrant students, who disproportionately attend urban schools, are stripped of their opportunities to prepare for

global employment and civic engagement. Researchers have found that high-stakes, standardized tests “reproduce race-based and economic class-based inequalities that generally correlate with those present in society at large” (Au, 2008, p. 639). One way inequality was reproduced is that under the NCLB Act of 2001, and its successor the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015, “schools that serve large and diverse student populations are more likely to be identified for improvement even if their most-challenged students are doing better than similar students who attend smaller, less diverse schools” (Kim & Sunderman; Mintrop & Sunderman; Simpson, Gong, & Marion, as cited in Fotre, 2010, p. 79). This is sometimes termed “the diversity penalty.”

How the “diversity penalty” of No Child Left Behind operates varies by state, since states are allowed to set a minimum group size ( $n$ ) for the calculation of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) in the 37 separate indicators a high school can be judged on if it is large and diverse enough. These indicators include both assessment performance and assessment participation rates for nine sub-groups in both English and mathematics, plus graduation rates. These student subgroups include: racial and income categories, as well as English Language Learners and Students with Disabilities, categories students are placed in because they are not proficient in English and not making adequate progress in the general curriculum because of a recognized disability, respectively. Failing to make AYP in even one indicator can trigger sanctions for a school and the sanctions grow more punitive if schools fail to make AYP for multiple years, even if different years the school fails to make AYP on different indicators.

Massachusetts appears to be a state where accountability hits urban, poor schools the most. The 77 schools that the Massachusetts Department of Education intervened in between

2000 and 2004 shared many characteristics. They were all urban. They all served disproportionate numbers of low-income, racially and ethnically minoritized, English Language Learners (ELL), and immigrant students (McQuillan, 2008, p. 3). Therefore, it is fair to say that Massachusetts urban schools, which are more diverse, likely face more significant accountability pressure and are more likely to be deemed in need of improvement than suburban school districts. These inequities mean that urban schools face greater accountability pressure than suburban schools and therefore are more likely to narrow curriculum to increase instructional time in tested areas.

Pressure put on schools that serve predominantly poor students to perform well on state tests “results in an apartheid system of schooling” where wealthy students receive a fuller education than the narrow one received by the poor (Berliner, 2011, p. 292). This is in part because there is less accountability pressure in wealthy schools. Pace (2008) compared teachers in disadvantaged areas to teachers in more advantaged suburban areas and found “that the suburban teachers were scarcely affected by No Child Left Behind legislation and adequate yearly progress reports” (as cited in Milner Bisland, 2015, p. 438). Erksine (2014) confirmed, “teachers whose schools were not tied to federal funding or whose students lived in economically advantaged areas did not have much to say about NCLB mandates” (p.39). On the other hand, a study by the Council for Basic Education (2004) found that 30% of elementary school principals said their school cut time on social studies for accountability purposes, but that number jumped to 50% of principals in schools with large minority populations (as cited in Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005, p. 14). Sadly, it appears NCLB may be helping to create a country of public schools in which “the well-to-do who understand the value of liberal learning may be the only ones able to purchase it for their

children...Rich kids will study philosophy and art, music and history, while their poor peers fill in bubbles on test sheets” (Finn & Ravitch, 2007, as cited in Berliner, 2011, p. 292).

This is the exact opposite of what civil rights leaders envisioned when they pushed for NCLB and the same accountability system and standards for *all* students with the explicit purpose of helping those who had often received less education and lower standards (Rhodes, 2012). Instead, “high-stakes testing and policies such as NCLB that are erected around the tests contribute to this persistence by hurting, rather than helping students—poor students and students of color in particular” (Au, 2009b, p. 140). Unfortunately, “curriculum narrowing to improve test scores of poor and minority students may... end up magnifying the achievement gaps between them and their middle class peers” (Berliner, 2011, p. 299). Not enough is being done about this and instead “the danger is that much educational research garnering support and legitimacy from policy-makers today works to reproduce inequality and obscure injustices” (Nolan, 2009, p. 31).

This study aimed to highlight the inequality and injustice of urban social studies education today. In this study, I aimed to “lay these inequitable outcomes at the feet of deliberate public policy decisions and normalized institutional practices...without occluding the agency of youth, their families, or their educators” (Fine, 2009, p. 187) By focusing on listening to teachers who teach in urban schools and serve marginalized students on social studies curriculum narrowing I hope I have contributed in a small way to a body of literature on the racial and socio-economic achievement gap and therefore helped provide educators and policy makers with information that can help them understand what worked and did not work in closing those gaps.

**Importance of 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, as cited in de Oliveira, 2008). I define democracy as a government in which the power is “vested in the people and exercised by them...indirectly through a system of representation... involving periodically held free elections” (Democracy, n.d.). In the U.S., this includes the systems of government set up by federal, state, and local constitutions that allow citizens to democratically elect their lawmakers and leaders at all these levels. I define democratic society as “a form of society which favors equal rights, freedom of speech, and a fair trial and tolerates the views of minorities” (Civics and Citizenship, n.d). Effective social studies education in K-12 schools is essential for all students as it is the only school subject that specifically teaches this students’ the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain American democratic government, and its accompanying democratic society, and to prepare students to be influential members of an increasingly global community. In my view, social studies education is especially important for marginalized, urban students who have the uphill battle to fight for the inclusion of their communities in U.S. society.

As a white middle class woman concerned with social justice, I chose to become an urban history teacher in Massachusetts because I understand the importance of social studies and see it as particularly necessary for marginalized students. The concept of marginality I am drawing on here is structural marginality, “the political, social, and economic powerlessness of certain disenfranchised and/or disadvantaged segments within societies” (Mancini Billson, 1988, p. 185). This kind of marginality might best be understood by seeing it as the “lack of participation of individuals and groups in those spheres in which, according

to determined criteria, they might be expected to participate” (Germani, 1980, p. 49, as quoted by Mancini Billson, 1988, p. 185). In the United States, low-income communities and communities of color are often considered marginalized and often “discussed in terms of crime, violence, ghettoization, and unyielding poverty” (Mancini Billson, 1988, p. 185). I believe that to help move their communities out of the margins and create change, low-income, black and brown students need to understand how social, governmental, and economic systems in U.S. society operate and came to be and that a robust social studies education is necessary to acquire this knowledge. These marginalized students are disproportionately served in urban schools. For example, in the Boston Public Schools, a large urban district in Massachusetts, in 2013, 78% of students were classified as “low-income,” 40% were Hispanic and 35% were Black. In urban schools, teachers, like me, are struggling to give marginalized students the rich social studies classes they need despite the pressures of state tests. In my view, if marginalized students do not get a full social studies education, they will remain or become further marginalized because they will not be prepared to engage in society and advocate for themselves and their communities.

It is important for schools to teach the societal norms that allow the U.S. democratic system of government to be successful, especially respect for the rule of law, tolerance for diversity of opinion, and a tradition of citizen activism. The Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework recognized this:

We are convinced that democracy’s survival depends upon our transmitting to each new generation the political vision of liberty and equality that unites us as Americans... liberal and humane values are neither revealed truths nor natural habits. There is no evidence that we are born with them. Devotion to human dignity and

freedom, equal rights, justice, the rule of law, civility and truth, tolerance of diversity, mutual assistance, personal and civic responsibility, self-resistance and self-respect—all these must be taught and learned and practiced. They cannot be taken for granted. (Mass. DOE, 2003, p. 1)

The curriculum frameworks further asserted that “the critical thinking we wish to encourage must rest on a solid base of factual knowledge” and “citizens in our society need to understand the current condition of the world and how it got that way” (Mass. DOE, 2003, p. 2). This is why the factual knowledge, critical thinking skills, and democratic mindsets of social studies education are so vital. America’s future citizens must understand the past for a positive future.

At a national level as well, one sees clear recognition of the importance of social studies from both political parties. In March, 2016, Democratic President Obama selected a former social studies teacher John B. King, Jr. to be his Secretary of Education. Soon after, the U.S. Department of Education released new guidance encouraging schools to ensure a well-rounded education including social studies. “Literacy and math skills are necessary but not sufficient for success in college, careers, and life,” King urged (Department of Education, 2016). Speaking at the National Press Club on Oct. 19, 2016, Secretary King argued that schools and colleges have a special responsibility to prepare students for their role in democracy and that as the U.S. becomes more and more diverse this responsibility should remain preeminent. He shared disturbing news from the National Assessment of Education Progress, also known as the Nation’s Report Card, that “only one in five 8<sup>th</sup> graders and 12<sup>th</sup> graders have a working knowledge of the constitution, the presidency, the congress, the courts, and how laws are made.” He expressed particular concern about students of color and

low-income students. He reported that “only 1 in 10, *1 in 10*, African American, Hispanic, and low income students have a working knowledge of how government functions.”

Secretary King asked America’s schools and colleges to be “bold and creative in educating for citizenship.” He argued that “a robust and relevant civics education” includes understanding of the constitution, the legislative process, history, and civics skills. Secretary King further urged schools to “make preparing your students for their citizenship duty just important as preparing for college and careers.”

Less than a month later, Republican Senator Ben Sasse, speaking at the Federalist Society on November 18, 2016, channeled President Ronald Reagan in asserting that “in any free republic, you are always only one generation away from the extinction of freedom.” Sasse urged the importance of educating the next generation, stating, “if you don’t pass on the meaning of America to...the people who are supposed to be ruling America in ten, twenty, thirty years, don’t understand what America is, don’t understand the American idea, then freedom will slip away.” He told the meeting that they were advancing “a founder’s understanding of separation of powers, limited government, of checks and balances, these are beautiful things that our people do not understand.” Sasse further went on to support his point by citing the fact that “41 percent of Americans under age 35 think the first amendment is dangerous because you might use your freedom of speech to say something that might hurt someone else’s feelings.” He continued “those freedoms are what the first amendment is about, the idea that any American might think the first amendment goes too far, says that we as a people haven’t done the first thing of teaching it.” Sasse also added, “the data is actually much worse...if you ask the general voting public can you name some of the freedoms in the first amendment... 57% can name freedom of speech...19% named freedom of



religion...none of the other three freedoms in the first amendment break ten percent.” About educating for citizenship, he concluded, “there are fundamental things that we are not getting done and there is a crisis.”

Using the statistics above, one can see that American K-12 schools are not doing an adequate job teaching social studies to the next generation. This is an urgent problem because students need the knowledge and skills from social studies to become engaged citizens. Policy leaders in Massachusetts are starting to recognize this problem. The Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education Acting Commissioner Jeff Wulfson has also recognized the importance of focusing on civic education in his November 17, 2017 memorandum outlining the process for proposed revisions to the *2003 Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Framework*. He specifically cited a survey done by the Board’s Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement in 2015, which found that 60% of Massachusetts superintendents rated their district’s level of civic learning as insufficient.

There is also national recognition that American schools are not adequately teaching social studies, perhaps because of accountability pressure. Social studies “is one of the few subjects in which students can develop their voice, and gain civic competence” (Winstead, 2011). Already in 2005, the American Youth Policy Forum and the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development cautioned against the narrowing of the curriculum because of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and said an unintended outcome of the legislation could be an eclipsing of the civic and public mission of public schools (as cited in Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005, p. 14). As former Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O’Connor stated, “knowledge about our government is not handed down through the gene pool. Every generation has to learn it, and we have some work to do” (Schisel, 2008).

In order to do the best job addressing this failing of the civic mission of public schools scholars need to hear from those doing the work. Scholars and policy makers need to hear from teachers about their goals for their students' social studies education and how state accountability systems have shifted those goals. An important goal of many social studies teachers like me is to prepare their students to be active, empowered, passionate democratic citizens capable of affecting change in their communities. This is particularly important for the students in urban communities who are disproportionately part of groups that have historically been marginalized in the ostensibly democratic American society and who surely need knowledge and skills to engage in the U.S. democracy to fight those injustices. This is a concern of urban parents as well, who are asking for their children to get preparation for citizenship out of their education. For example, the Committee for Safe Passage, a group of African American parents in a housing project in Chicago, said they want a school to “develop young leaders who can work for the environmental rights of community residents, as well as for the needs of society as a whole” (Committee for Safe Passage Newsletter, March 2010, as quoted in Lipman, 2011, p. 167). Since high school social studies classes are the last educational opportunity urban students will have to strengthen their civics knowledge before they can vote and engage in the global economy, policy makers and scholars needed to hear from social studies teachers about curriculum narrowing and how it influenced their professional identity and teaching.

### **Background and Context**

**Accountability.** No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, was major federal legislation that imposed accountability policies on schools from coast to coast. Accountability is defined as

“the quality or state of being accountable...an obligation or willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one’s action” (Accountability, n.d.). A stated goal of NCLB and the larger educational “accountability” movement was to raise the overall achievement level of the United States and to hold schools “accountable” for their students’ achievement. NCLB and state accountability systems aim to do this by applying pressure, herein after referred to as accountability pressure, to schools and school districts by measuring, publishing, and incentivizing their performance on certain metrics, especially and most significantly student achievement testing results. In this way, NCLB represented a major shift in thinking in the role of the federal government in local public school education provisioning from an equity focus through providing funding earmarked for low-income students to a focus on excellence and accountability for all students. This is an important issue in urban education because it has significantly influenced how states evaluate and control the public schools that operate within their borders.

NCLB’s accountability system was designed with the purported purpose of improving all American schools and ensuring that achievement gaps between races, economic groups, disability, and language learner status were closed. In NCLB, this was to be accomplished by requiring states to develop the same high standards for all students and using high stakes tests in math, English language arts, and science, administered in annually in grades 3-8 and once in high school, to ensure all schools were enabling all students to reach those same high standards. The emphasis on the same standards for all students was so large that in Section 111 of the law, which describes the accountability plans states must create, the word “same” appears 12 times and the word “all” appears 11 times (NCLB, 2001). The results of these high stakes assessments were required to be used to create a state accountability system in

which all students and nine sub-groups of students had to make AYP towards the goal of 100% proficiency in all groups by 2014. Schools that did not meet AYP faced increasing consequences including public school choice, providing supplemental educational services, corrective action, and restructuring. This accountability pressure changed the way school administrators operate their schools and exert bureaucratic control over their teachers (Au, 2009b, p. 90).

President Obama built on the legacy of NCLB both with Race to the Top (RTT) and the Every Student Success Act (ESSA). Race to the Top (RTT) was a competitive grant program launched in 2009 as part of President Obama's American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. RTT directed states to develop and adopt a common set of "high-quality standards" and common "high quality assessments" which it defined as "assessment designed to measure a students' knowledge, understanding of, and ability to apply, critical concepts through the use of a variety of item types and formats" (USDOE, 2009, p. 13). Common Core State Standards and the PARCC are examples of what came out of RTT. Furthermore, to get RTT funding, states had to make students' scores on state tests count as 20% of teacher evaluations (Hursh, 2013, p. 582). Diane Ravitch (2012) explained the influence of these provisions when she said, "Obama stated 'teachers should stop teaching to the test.' But RTTT... forces teachers to teach to the test. To do otherwise is to risk being publicly shamed and fired" (as cited in Hursh, 2013, p. 584).

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), signed into law by President Obama on December 10, 2015, made some reforms to NCLB's accountability system. While states still have to submit accountability plans to the federal Department of Education, they were then allowed pick their own goals. However, these goals still must address proficiency rates on

state tests, English-language proficiency, and graduation rates as well closing achievement gaps (Klein, 2016). To comply with ESSA, states still need to test students in grades 3-8 annually and then once again in high school and provide that data for schools broken down by subgroups. States must identify and intervene in schools that are in the bottom five percent in the new accountability systems as well as in high schools where the graduation rate is less than 67%. States also need to identify schools where sub groups of students are struggling. These interventions are supposed to include districts working with school staff to come up with an evidence-based plan for improvement with states monitoring turnaround efforts. If a school still struggles after four years, the state is supposed to step in with its own plan, which includes a direct state take over (Klein, 2016).

Massachusetts “has been recognized as a national leader in school reform for more than a decade” (Borg, 2016). Massachusetts consistently ranks first in the nation on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (Education Week Research Center, 2016). How did this come to be? Massachusetts’ standards based reform efforts in the 1990s started much the same way they began in other states. In the early 1990s, the Massachusetts Business Alliance for Education commissioned a report, *Every Child a Winner*, on needed changes to make Massachusetts students prepared for the current and future job market (Mass. DESE, 2014). Coming from the business community, the report clearly focused on the economic rather than the civic mission of schools. The report “became the basis of the Education Reform Act of 1993” said David Driscoll, the state education commissioner from 1988 to 2007 (Borg, 2016). Driscoll further stated that the report “said that kids should be held accountable to very high standards and we should test and make sure they meet those standards” (Borg, 2016). The legislation was also in response to a 1993 decision by the

Supreme Judicial Court in *McDuffy v. Robertson* that held that Massachusetts had failed to provide an education for all its children (Schneider, 2007).

The landmark 1993 legislation, a standards-based reform effort, included high academic standards with curriculum guidelines, development of tests to measure whether students were meeting the standards, a high school graduation requirement tied to those tests, increased standards for teachers and changes to school financing (Mass. DESE, 2014). It also focused on whether minority students, low-income students, and special education students were closing achievement gaps (Borg, 2016). The assessments that came out of the 1993 legislation are known as the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS). Massachusetts implemented its current school accountability system in 1999, predating NCLB (McQuillan, 2008, p. 3). Massachusetts had one of the first accountability systems approved under NCLB (McQuillan & Salomon-Fernandez, 2008). Then the Achievement Gap Act of 2010 amended the state accountability system and positioned Massachusetts to secure substantial Race to the Top funding, including through instituting a new educator evaluation system (Mass. DESE, 2014). In 2018, Massachusetts again slightly redesigned its district and school accountability system. While it remained largely unchanged, additional indicators beyond student test scores were added and the numbering system for type and level of support the department would provide to schools based on their performance have been retitled. Since the interviews for this study were conducted before this new system was completely in place, this study utilized the old, number based system for describing the levels of support the state provided and rated schools using.

**History and social science curriculum frameworks and MCAS.** Federal accountability legislation never mandated testing in social studies, yet Massachusetts had

intended to include a History and Social Science MCAS in its testing program and high school graduation requirement. Between the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 (MERA) and today, the state had made four different history and social studies curriculum frameworks and piloted multiple exams including multiple choice and essay questions (Martell, 2013). At least three times, the state has delayed implementation of making passing a social studies state test a graduation requirement (Martell, 2013).

MERA required “broad public participation in the creation of the frameworks” in English, math, science and technology, and history and social sciences (French, 1998, as cited in Martell, 2013). The Massachusetts Department of Education estimates about 50,000 people participated in some way in making the original draft social studies curriculum frameworks, including in many public hearings and study groups (McDermott, 2003, as cited in Martell, 2013). This original draft curriculum completed in 1995 was called Uncovering Social Studies (Martell, 2013). In the mid-1990s, Republican Governor William Weld appointed a number of conservatives to the board of education, including John Silber as chairman in 1996. Under his leadership, the board revised the curriculum frameworks moving away from constructivist views that earlier drafts favored (Martell, 2013). The new draft of the social studies curriculum frameworks were constructed largely by conservative board members and practitioners they selected who shared their political views. This 1997 version of the social studies frameworks was Eurocentric and focus on lists of facts, people, places, dates, and events. In 2002, in a time of post 9-11 nationalism and patriotism, the Board of Education again revised the frameworks, this time shifting the focus of the high school courses from world history to United States history (Martell, 2013) This version was officially published in 2003 and remains in effect until the 2018 revisions.

Beginning in 2014, a small group appointed by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE), began suggesting revisions to the 2003 frameworks (Stotsky, 2016). Sandra Stotsky, one of the main authors of the 2003 frameworks, is concerned about the “stealth” process by which these revisions are being made. Stotsky expressed concern that the “Working Group on Civic Learning and Engagement” was appointed by BESE chair Maura Banta and does not include public school history and government teachers or academic historians and political scientists (Stotsky, 2016). Stotsky (2016) was also concerned that the suggested revisions shift the focus of the frameworks from the founding principles, their roots, and application, to an emphasize on political activism and “the grievances of various subgroups in American society.”

The public comment draft of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Frameworks released in January 2018 include a list of participants from the review panel for the frameworks, which includes 16 K-12 public school teachers. The since adopted frameworks outlined a “renewed mission: education for civic life in a democracy” (Mass. DESE, 2018a). The 2018 frameworks also included 10 new guiding principles outlining what effective history and social science curriculum should develop in students including social and emotional skills, the ability to make logical arguments and think for them, and the ability to think historically. The guiding principles also argued that effective history and social science curriculum incorporates diverse perspectives (Mass DESE, 2018b).

The Pioneer Institute expressed similar concerns to Stotsky about the substance of the public comment draft of the 2018 revision of the Massachusetts History and Social Science Curriculum Frameworks released in January 2018 (Vander Hart, 2018). David Randall, Will Fitzbaugh, and Jane Robbins, authors of the Pioneer Institute public comment on the draft,



stated that the “revised version of the standards has declined in content and coherence. Sadly the 2018 Revision of the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework eviscerates the 2003 framework” (as cited in Vander Hart, 2018). Their specific concerns include lack of coherent sequencing, overuse of unreadable education-school jargon that is hard for teachers to understand and bring into their classrooms, overemphasis on “politically correct protest movements,” and abbreviation of European and American history to what they see as deficiency. The Pioneer Institute also expressed support for the addition of civics component to the MCAS test.

In 2006, the Board of Education added a History and Social Science MCAS to the high school graduation requirement beginning with the class of 2012 (Mass. DOE, 2007, p. 6). And pilot testing for History and Social Science MCAS occurred between 2005 and 2008 (Martell, 2013). These “highly rated” social studies standard and assessment were going to become fully implemented when in 2009 the Patrick administration cancelled it going forward, saying they could not afford the \$2.4 million cost for administering the test (Dukakis & Birmingham, 2016). In 2011, the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education decided to delay implementing the history and social science graduation requirement until three history and social science MCAS tests had been administered statewide (Martell, 2013). This decision was not without controversy.

Michael Dukakis, former Massachusetts Governor, and Thomas Birmingham, former President of the Massachusetts Senate, wrote an editorial in the *Boston Globe* on March 14, 2016, arguing that “a basic purpose of American public education is to teach students how to exercise the rights and responsibilities associated with active citizenship in a democracy” and that national testing shows that this is not happening. They urged “to change that,

Massachusetts should revive the requirement that public school students pass a US history MCAS test to graduate from high school” (Dukakis & Birmingham, 2016). They highlighted the fact that “what isn’t tested isn’t taught” and pointed out that, here in Massachusetts, entire middle-school social studies departments have been eliminated (Dukakis & Birmingham, 2016). Dukakis and Birmingham (2016) further pointed out that Massachusetts often tops the nation and the world on testing in English, Math, and Science. Yet, Massachusetts has never been in the top 10 states in the national “We the People: The Citizen and the Constitution” contest. This a major problem in their eyes. They reject the ever more common idea that education is solely an economic endeavor and argue that “public education... must also prepare them to be active civic participants in America’s greatest experiment in democracy” (Dukakis & Birmingham, 2016).

In September 2016, Deputy Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education Jeff Wilson said within the next two years the state has to decide on a number of issues concerning high school testing. According to Wilson, this includes “What science subjects we’ll be including, whether we should add history and social science to the competency determination ... lots of issues that we have been discussing with the field.” Mitchell Chester, the education commissioner, said officials would “probably” determine within about a year if the state would add passing a history and social sciences test to the graduation requirement (Metzger, 2016). Events of the 2016 presidential election has encouraged some to become more active in campaigning for this cause. The Republican Editorials of MassLive.com, argue that “the horrendous discourse of the 2016 presidential campaign exposed the alarming lack of knowledge in American history as it applies to the society we live in today” (Republican Editorials, 2017). The Republican Editorials argue that for

students to have a working knowledge of facts and meaningful social studies skills, and to elevate from social studies from second-class subject status, the motivation of a social studies MCAS and graduation requirement is necessary (Republican Editorials, 2017). By the close of 2019, the state had not implemented a history and social science MCAS yet.

On November 28, 2017, President of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies Kerry Dunn, spoke at a meeting of the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education discussing the recent work to update the commonwealth's social studies curricular frameworks. She stated, "we believe that the passage of the new History and Social Studies frameworks will be closely followed by a state-wide history/social studies assessment." This highlights the timeliness of this study. Dunn further pointed out that "it is critical to communicate—quickly and preferably at the same time that the new Frameworks are released—to districts what grade the assessment will occur in and what content/skills it will emphasize. We request that they be communicated as an 'expectation' instead of as a soft 'recommendation.'" Dunn also highlighted the influence of accountability related curriculum narrowing when she said:

The sad fact is that history and social studies have not been a priority of the DESE for many years, and, as a result, schools, particularly those struggling with ELA and math accountability measures, have often limited students' opportunities to learn about and consider their city/ town, state, country, and our complicated world. A strong statement from the Commissioner to all superintendents and principals that every K-12 student in Massachusetts needs to have history/social studies on his/her schedule that it should be taught in alignment with our state frameworks, and that, at the 6-12 level, it must be taught by a correctly certified teacher would go a long way towards

improving the prospects of all students to receive a well-rounded education that truly prepares them to be active, responsible citizens. (Dunn, 2017)

This highlighted that Massachusetts social studies teachers today recognize that accountability assessments influence their teaching. It further highlighted how urgent it was to hear from social studies teachers about curriculum narrowing to help policy makers make the best decisions for the Commonwealth's students as they are considering adopting a new social studies assessment.

***Social studies instruction.*** Urban social studies teachers likely perceive themselves to be part of a larger community of practice of social studies teachers with whom they align their ideas, beliefs, or practices (Wenger, 1998, p. 182). Social studies teachers get brought into this community through their teacher education programs as well as their professional development and collegial work once they begin teaching. Members of this community share ideals, goals, and expectations of the social studies teaching profession.

In the 1800s history, geography, and civics were regularly among the core subjects taught in schools and in the early 1900s they were joined by psychology, sociology, anthropology, economics, and political science (Jorgensen, 2014, p. 3). The National Education Association issued a *Preliminary Statement* in 1913, called “good citizenship” a vital topic of study (Jorgensen, 2014, p. 3). In 1916 the report of the *Committee on Social Studies of the National Education Association's Commission on the Reorganization of Secondary Schools* finally defined social studies by writing “the social studies are understood to be those whose subject matter relates directly to the organization and development of human society, and to man as a member of social groups” (as cited in Jorgensen, 2014, p. 4).

Thornton (1994) argued that “there is widespread agreement that the proper aim of social studies is ‘citizenship’... but it is here that the consensus ends: What does citizenship mean and what, in turn, does this mean for curriculum and instruction?” (p. 224). Thornton, building on the work of Robert Barr, James Barth, and Samuel Shermis (1977), organized the dominant philosophies around teaching social studies in three main groups based on how they see the relationship between social studies education and citizenship. The first was “citizen transmission” where the focus was on transmitting essential factual and procedural knowledge of American culture and mainstream value to the new generation of citizens. This approach was most associated with the recitation pedagogy (Thornton, 1994, p. 226). The second approach was based on the assumption that learning simplified versions of the disciplines of social studies will help form good citizens. This approach attempted to be transformative but “usually appears to be more mimetic” in pedagogical approach (Wexler, Grosshans, Zhang, & Kim, as cited in Thornton, 1994, p. 228).

Thornton’s third approach was a critical approach that was “designed to promote a transformation of some kind in the learner” through developing critical thinking (Thornton, 1994, p. 233). Informed skepticism was the key for critical thinking (Thornton, 1994, p. 233). If one wanted to prepare future citizens for a democracy, Shirley Engle and Anna Ochoa (1988) argued, students must be taught to think and value for themselves in addition to citizenship transmission (as cited in Thornton, 1994, p. 233). Similarly, Kincheloe (2001) argued that “critical democratic social studies teachers, for their students’ sake, must...encourage their students to be uncomfortable with authoritarian pronouncements of truth in social studies texts, and help them become researchers of multiple perspectives on the data provided” (p. 272). In my study, I examined what social studies teachers wanted to

prioritize their students to get out of their classes. Regardless of which camp social studies teachers fall into about how to best prepare students for future citizenship roles, accountability pressure in their school may influence their ability to teach up to their pedagogical ideals and therefore their identity.

A major thinker in social studies education that many social studies teachers today look to for guidance in how to teach social studies, particularly history, is Sam Weinburg. To understand the ideal history pedagogy he envisioned one must understand why he sees history as important. Weinburg (2005) argued that history can “humanize” students in a way no other class can (p. 5). Weinburg (2001) further pointed out that,

History educates (‘leads outward’ in the Latin) in the deepest sense. Of the subjects in the secular curriculum, it is the best at teaching those virtues once reserved for theology—humility in the face of our limited ability to know, and awe in the face of the expanse of human history. (p. 24)

To Weinburg, social studies education contained at least two parts. The first was learning historical knowledge. That citizens need historical knowledge to understand the current world has long been recognized. Even a century before the birth of Christ, Cicero, while addressing the Roman Senate, proclaimed, “Not to know what happened before one was born is always to be a child” (as cited in Weinburg, 2001, p. 28). This need is still recognized today, “our understanding of the present relies in large part upon how we view the past, and this is a vital issue of concern to us all, whether or not we are trained historians” (Claus & Marriot, 2012, p. 4).

According to Weinburg and others, good teaching of history also involved building students’ significant, complex critical thinking skills. To construct an understanding of the

past, students must first learn how to find and understand historical evidence. “The successful resolution of all historical problems depends upon the appropriate use of evidence” (Claus & Marriot, 2012, p. 4). To truly understand the past, good history teachers also have to help students “bracket what we know in order to understand the thinking of people in the past” (Weinburg, 2001, p. 10). This act of avoiding “presentism—the act of viewing the past through the lens of the present” involved high levels of critical thinking (Weinburg, 2001, p. 19). Then, once students understand the past, they also have to put the past in context and understand the continuity between the past and the present. This was skill that required deep knowledge of the past and present as well as higher-order thinking to be able to build the connections and context. As Weinburg (2001) wrote “context, from the Latin *contexere*, means to weave together, to engage in an active process of connecting things in a pattern” (p. 21). Building these historical thinking skills increased students’ ability to think complexly about other subject areas as well and prepared them well for higher-order thinking across the curriculum in the future, a skill especially needed for college and graduate level work. But these historical thinking skills are important not just for students’ individual academic success but also for future generations’ success as a diverse, democratic society. “Our ‘inability to perceive the experience of others,’ as [Primo Levi] put it, applies to the present no less than the past. This is why the study of history is so crucial to our present day” (Weinburg, 2001, p. 23). Weinburg clearly articulated many important reasons and goals for social studies education. In my study, I explored why urban social studies teachers cared about teaching social studies. I asked teachers how their teacher professional identity shaped and was shaped by their perception of their own and their school’s prioritization of these goals.

Similarly, Zevin (2007) argued that social studies “teachers play many roles in the classroom” (p. 36). One was the didactic role, which was about giving students information, like through lecture or readings (Zevin, 2007, p. 36-37). This included providing students with specific information such as historical facts or the structures of the government. This was what was most often well outlined in, and debated during the creation of, state social studies curriculum frameworks. Another role teachers play was reflective. The Reflective role was about developing students thinking and problem solving skills, for example, having students create and test hypotheses (Zevin, 2007, p. 38). A third type of roles teachers play was affective roles, where students look at events or issues that make them discuss their values, beliefs, and feelings (Zevin, 2007, p. 40). The reflective and affective roles are particularly concerned with teaching thinking. And “thinking is best taught by direct and systematic instruction” (Zevin, 2007, p. 105). My study asked teachers about the roles they wanted to and got to play in their classrooms and how this informed and was informed by their professional identity and their accountability context.

Zevin (2007) recognized that there are still significant debates between the goals of social studies instruction. He explained that there was “an important dividing line separates those who see the subject as a major agent in reinforcing American values and traditions and those who view the subject as a means of fostering independent decision making and social activism” (p. 392). As Zevin recognized, those in the second category, are often followers of John Dewey, who are particularly concerned with building students who have open-mindedness and can construct their own conclusions based on the evidence (as cited by Zevin, 2007, p. 392). There are also continued debates about which values social studies education should be teaching students. Conservative education scholars such as E. D. Hirsch



and Chester Finn argue “that the schools should inform and indoctrinate students to conform to ‘proper’ values—that is, patriotism, positive work values, good manners, and, most recently, excellence of character” (Zevin, 2007, p. 392). And those more liberal thinkers “also press for the social studies to direct students’ values, but in the direction of social justice and community responsibility” (Zevin, 2007, p. 392). Zevin found it unlikely that further research could settle these debates. Instead, opinions about what the goals of social studies education should be are based on one’s values and commitments, concerns that are part of one’s identity. In my study, I asked teachers about what they think the purpose of social studies education should be, how this influences their professional identity, and how this was influenced by accountability pressure. However, debate over what should be the focus of social studies instruction sometimes obscure the importance of social studies instruction in national conversations.

Zevin (2007), again relying on Dewey, pointed out that these “opposing schools of thought may be looking at different elements of the total problem, thereby stressing their antagonisms rather than the search for a solution to educational problems” (p. 396). While the debates about the how, why, and what of social studies should be taught will likely continue, “it represents what is probably a false dichotomy” (Zevin, 2007, p. 396). Instead, educators should focus on providing students “social studies teaching and learning that is exciting, sound, intellectually provocative, meets the needs of the student audience, and is defensible on both practical and philosophical grounds” (Zevin, 2007, p. 396). He further pointed out that it is not just about getting students knowledge but also understanding, because students “will undoubtedly try to convert whatever is taught into meaningful

information” (Zevin, 2007, p. 396). My study aimed to add to the body of research that can help ensure that all students are able to get this kind of meaningful social studies education.

In 2014, the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Frameworks for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History was made through a collaboration of fifteen professional organizations including the National Council for the Social Studies and the American Historical Association. The primary purpose of these frameworks, therein after referred to as the C3 Frameworks, was “to provide guidance to states on the concepts, skills, and disciplinary tools necessary to prepare students for college, career, and civic life...and support for rigorous student learning.” (p. 17). The core of the C3 Frameworks is the inquiry arc, which is well aligned to the work of Weinburg and Zevin. The four dimensions of the arch include “(1) developing questions and planning inquiries, (2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools, (3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and (4) communicating conclusions and taking informed action” (p. 17). The frameworks outline the scope of the disciplinary knowledge and tools for civics, economics, geography, and history but they do not outline particulars of curriculum and instructional content and levels these “important decisions” to each state “in the of local social studies standards” (p. 14). The frameworks also do not address other areas of social studies including the behavioral and social sciences. The C3 Frameworks do provide connections to the Common Core Anchor Standards for literacy and mathematics and devoted two pages of the 110 in the document to this topic. The frameworks do consistently argue for the importance of citizenship and civic engagement, something most in the field can agree is a priority, as Thornton recognized. The C3 frameworks argue for their inquiry arc by highlighting that “active and responsible citizens identify and analyze public

problems; deliberate with other people about how to define and address issues; take constructive, collaborative action; reflect on their actions; create and sustain groups; and influence institutions both large and small” (p. 19).

Kahne and Westheimer (2014) also recognized the importance of citizenships and civic education. They argued that “if democracy is to be effective at improving society, people need to exert power over issues that affect their lives” and that a democratic citizens’ effectiveness in doing this was limited by their social studies education. A robust social studies education, they argue, teaches students knowledge of democratic processes as well as skills for civic engagement such as ability to attain and analyze information and practice talking and learning with people who have different perspectives (Kahne & Westheimer, 2014, p. 358). Kahne and Westheimer (2014) further pointed out that if Americans collectively “believe that democratic processes...are our best hope for securing a just and dynamic future, then social studies educators have an important role to play” (p. 368). This role has to be further explored and understood in the current educational climate, where policy and district decision makers are focused on high-stakes exam outcomes and not civic mindedness (Ohanian, as cited in Kahne & Westheimer, 2014, p. 368).

Some argue that the purpose of social studies was not only to create future democratic citizens but to create global citizens. Dower (2003) defined an “active” global citizen as a person who “has the following moral perspective: all human beings have certain fundamental rights and all human beings have duties to respect and promote these rights” (p. 7). Dower further explained that for the global citizen “her ethical perspective provides her with both a basis for criticizing what governments and companies do” (p. 7) and that global citizens have a personal commitment to “pursue an agenda in some chosen area such as poverty

alleviation, protecting the environment, working for peace and against the denial of human rights” (Dower, 2003, p. 7). In my study, I investigated how urban social studies teachers perceive being a social studies teacher influences to their professional identity. I asked about what they think the most important goals of social studies education are and how that contributes to their professional identity as a social studies teacher as well how accountability pressure in their urban schools interplays with their ability to direct their practice towards these goals.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to describe how public high school social studies teachers perceive accountability pressure, curriculum narrowing, and their professional identity. Specifically, I studied the following three questions: What were public school teachers’ understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school? What were high school teachers’ experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing? How did teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure?

### **Significance**

This study was needed because policy makers and school leaders needed to hear from urban high school social studies teachers, those directly in a position to understand how curriculum narrowing was influencing their professional identity, the curriculum in their individual classrooms, and the context of urban schools’ accountability pressures that devalue social studies. These teachers are the final public school teachers marginalized students have before they enter the workforce and become full, voting, citizens in American democratic government. It was important to hear from teachers directly about how the context they are teaching in was influencing their professional identity and teaching practice.

And “all reality, as meaningful reality, is socially constructed” (Crotty, 1998, p. 54), therefore it was not enough to look at numbers but teachers’ voices must be heard in telling the story of curriculum narrowing. If scholars did not hear from the teachers themselves, scholars risk only seeing how the reform was supposed to be implemented, and missing the actual influence it was having on teachers implementing curriculum in their classrooms. As Palmer (1998) wrote “reform will never be achieved by renewing appropriations, restructuring schools, rewriting curricula, and revising texts if we continue to demean and dishearten the human resource called the teacher on whom so much depends” (p. 3).

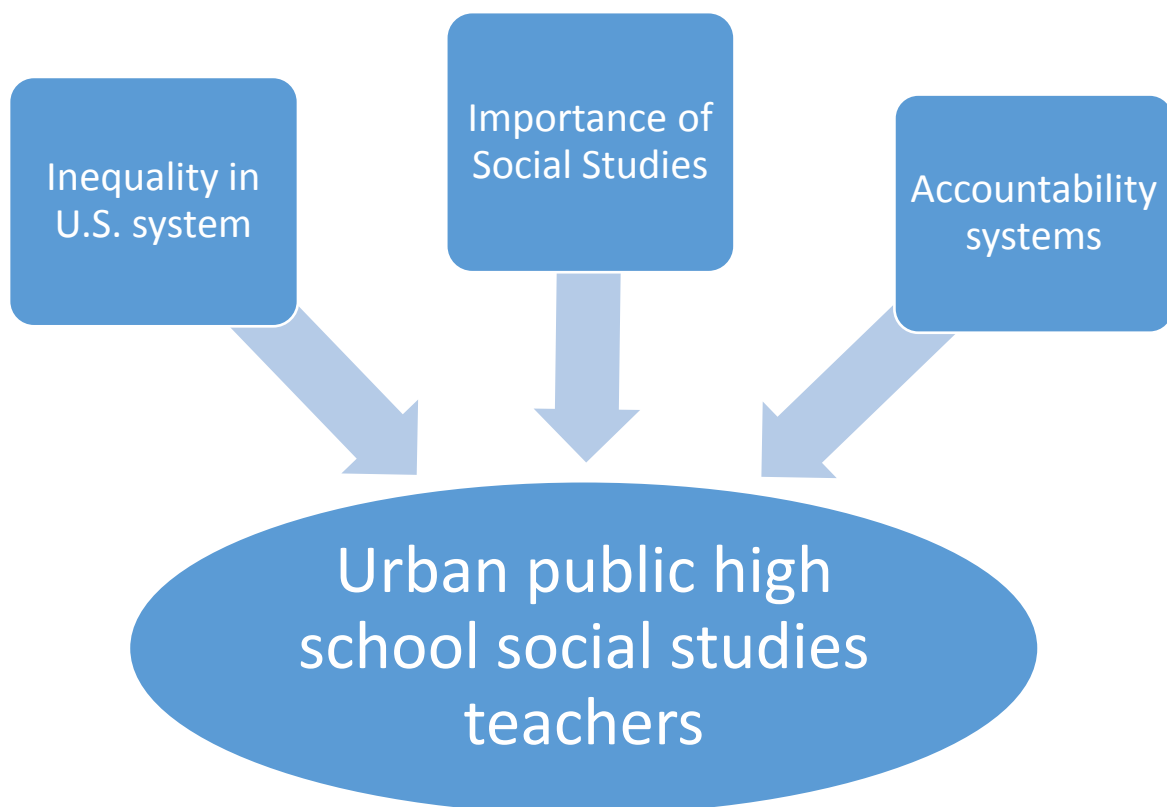
What was missing from the current knowledge base on accountability was teachers’ perceptions of how Massachusetts’ accountability policies influence social studies curriculum narrowing and the accompanying changes in social studies teachers’ professional identities. As Thornton (1994) recognized, those involved in education reform “would benefit from a fuller appreciation that decisions about either curriculum or instruction in isolation from the other are less likely to effect the desired changes in practice” (p. 243). If reformers really want to improve schools they need to talk to the teachers who are doing the work of instruction. “The enactment of a curriculum is best analysed as a process by which a teacher negotiates meaning and action in relation to specific aspects of the system in which they teach” (Orr, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 478). That was why this study looked at how social studies teachers perceive how accountability pressure influenced social studies’ teachers’ identities because “professional identity, which is mediated by the different aspects of the system, mediates practice and the enacted curriculum” (Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 478).

In a world focused on positivist research paradigms that privilege experimental and quasi-experimental designs, “that which is often not immediately observable—power relations and the socio-historical and economic forces that shape institutional life and the actions of individual agents, for example—goes unexamined” (Nolan, 2009, p. 30). Both educators and policy makers needed to hear from teachers themselves to understand how Massachusetts state accountability was actually influencing teachers. Scholars needed to understand how the teachers themselves are constructing their understanding of social studies curriculum narrowing because they are the ones experiencing it first hand. This knowledge will allow policy makers and educators to make better decisions about state accountability policies.

## **Conclusion**

Urban high school social studies teachers were in a unique position to understand the influence of secondary social studies curriculum narrowing related to accountability systems and inequality in the U.S. education system (see Figure 1). This study did important work in collecting and analyzing these voices. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe urban public high school social studies teachers’ perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing and its influence on their professional identity within the context of Massachusetts’ school accountability policies. One group of stakeholders who benefit from this study are policy leaders who want to understand how accountability pressure related to implementation of social studies curriculum in Massachusetts’ high schools to improve accountability policies. This was particularly timely because Massachusetts is reconsidering whether to implement, and require for high school graduation, a social studies test (Metzger, 2016).

Another stakeholder for this study is social studies teachers and school leaders who need to understand the complex relationship between accountability and social studies curriculum in order to be able to attempt to ameliorate any negative influences. I hope that the results of this study help them think carefully about how social studies education is occurring in their own buildings. The most important stake holders of this study are the public school students of Massachusetts, and therefore the future citizenry, who deserve to understand how their ability to be active, engaged, successful citizens in the American democracy may be influenced by accountability pressure. They could use the results of this study to advocate on behalf of high school social studies education.



*Figure 1.* Conceptual framework for importance of talking to the population of this study.

## CHAPTER 2

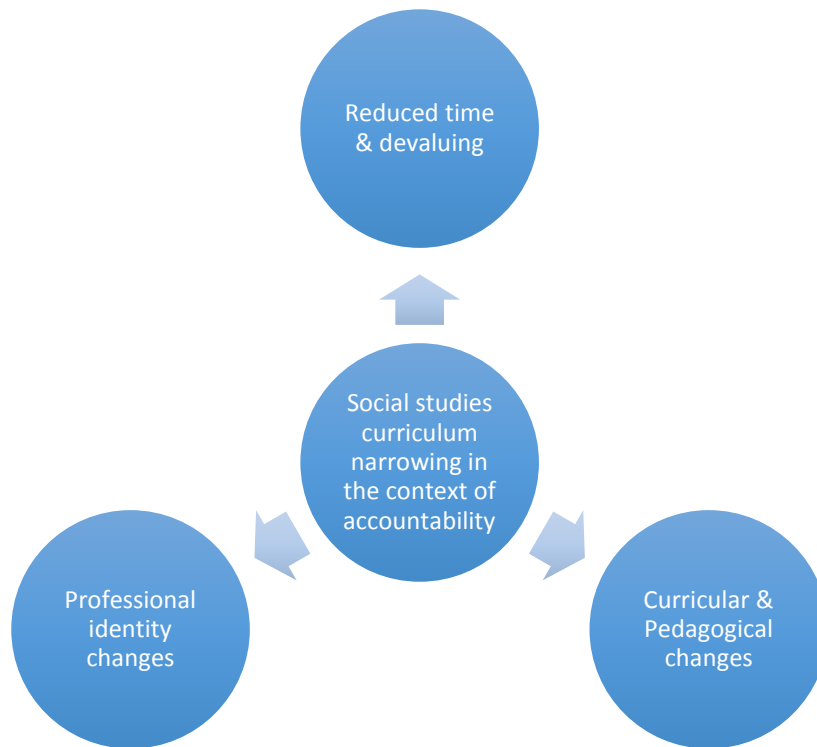
### LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This chapter begins with a brief review of the research on social studies curriculum narrowing. Then the theories of neoliberalism and hidden curriculum are used to understand the contextual accountability pressure in which social studies curriculum narrowing occurs. Next, it looks at previous research using theories of teacher identity that shaped the construction of this study. This chapter argues that there is a gap in the current research literature on how social studies curriculum narrowing and accountability pressure shape the experience and professional identity of Massachusetts' urban high school social studies teachers, which this study addresses.

#### **Relevant Literature**

One way to group the relevant literature on social studies curriculum narrowing is (1) the reduction in time and devaluing of social studies, (2) curricular and pedagogical changes in the classroom, and (3) influences on professional identity (see Figure 2).





*Figure 2.* My map of the literature of social studies curriculum narrowing.

**Reduction in time and devaluing of social studies in schools.** Numerous studies have found a reduction in social studies instruction time and devaluing of social studies in elementary schools due to state accountability and high stakes testing pressure (Wills, 2007; Jennings & Stark Rentner, 2006; Winstead; 2011; Milner Bisland, 2015; Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Vogler, 2003; Burke & Alder, 2013; Good, Heafner, Rock, O'Connor, Passe, Waring, & Bryd, 2010). Heafner and Fitchett (2012), used quantitative data from the National Center for Educational Statistics Schools and Public Schools Teacher Staffing Survey for teachers in grades 3 through 5, and found that between 1993 and 2008, on average, ELA instruction increased by 52 minutes, Math instruction increased 30 minutes, and social studies instruction decreased by 56 minutes per week (p.

69). As Milner Bisland (2015) summarized, “at this time social studies instruction has all but disappeared in the primary grades...the curriculum is disappearing in favor of math, language arts and more recently science instruction which are tested and therefore considered a more valid use of classroom time” (Heafner & Fitchett; Crocco & Costigan; Sunal & Sunal; Zhao & Hoge, as cited in p. 437).

Many teachers who are required to teach all subject areas recognize the importance of social studies and do not want to spend less time on it but they have limited ability to determine the focus of their curriculum because of the state accountability measures. Winstead’s 2011 qualitative work helps one understand how teachers are reluctant to make this shift. Winstead (2011) conducted a study of nine K-8 teachers in California. She found that teachers spent less than 20% of their time teaching social studies despite all teachers believing social studies to be important for students to understand their role in the world and may become active democratic citizens (Winstead, 2011, p. 224, 227). As one teacher stated “students need to have a good understanding of history and society in order to help improve it” (Winstead, 2011, p. 224). It is great that teachers recognize the importance of social studies knowledge and skills for future citizen participation. However, the desire to teach a subject is not enough in the world of accountability. The teachers in the study were particularly concerned about marginalized students and acknowledged “how accountability-based learning placed minority and immigrant children at risk for gaining civic and democratic knowledge” (Winstead, 2011, p. 226).

However, national data shows that states that have elementary state test of social studies have seen an average of 28 minutes increased social studies instruction per week compared to those states without (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014, p. 24). Vogler,

Lintner, Lipscomb, Knopf, Heafner, and Rock (2007) also found in South Carolina that since the inclusion of social studies in the high stakes testing system, there has been an increase in social studies instruction in elementary grades. Burroughs, Groce, and Webeck (2005) similarly found that since the introduction of an 8<sup>th</sup> grade social studies state test in Texas that there has been an increased focus on social studies in middle schools (p. 16). However, this is only true where social studies is included in the state tests. In states where it is not tested, principals have to devalue social studies in favor of tested subjects on which their school is judged (Boyle-Baise et al; Hutton & Burstein; Wills; Van Fossen; Van Fossen & McGrew, as cited in Milner Bisland, 2015, p. 438). Massachusetts is currently an example of a state that does not have a mandated social studies test at any grade, likely leading to a devaluation and deemphasizing of social studies.

While most of the work on social studies curriculum narrowing has been done at elementary level, there is also concern for social studies' place in the secondary curriculum not just in time spent but also value placed upon the subject from the school and NCLB. Burroughs, Groce, and Webeck (2005) found that high school teachers in Mississippi were concerned about social studies not being part of NCLB accountability, "not including social studies sends the message that learning about social studies is not as valued as learning about mathematics, reading, and science" (p. 17). A teacher particularly noted that students recognized that the educational system was not valuing social studies when they did not test it and therefore the students also saw no value in it (Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005, p. 17). De Oliveira (2008) had similar findings in her study of teachers for grades 8 through 11. These teachers reported "the diminished status of history in comparison with other school subjects" (p. 366) and a sense that students are getting the message that "history doesn't

count” (p. 367). Scholars, policy makers, and school leaders need to hear more from high school teachers about the devaluing of history and social studies curriculum narrowing. This is particularly relevant in Massachusetts where the state is currently considering reviving the History and Social Science MCAS and making it a graduation requirement. My study aimed to help contribute to that debate.

**Curriculum and pedagogical changes in classrooms.** High-stakes testing “has become the curriculum: The tests have, with increasing intensity, become the tool for structuring educational environments in ways that also shape both what knowledge is accessed and how that knowledge is accessed through pedagogic discourse” (Au, 2012, p. 45). Since social studies instruction has been reduced so much in many elementary schools due to accountability, when students do receive more social studies instruction in upper grades, they are often underprepared to rigorous instruction, lacking underlying knowledge and skills to make connections between concepts (De Oliveira, 2008, p. 367, 371). It was important to hear from urban high school teachers in Massachusetts if they are also experiencing students coming to high school classes without the expected historical knowledge from the elementary and middle school grades.

Another consequence of curriculum narrowing was when history instruction gets overrun by literacy instruction. This was seen in Virginia where there was no social studies state test and literacy instruction in the drill and kill style in preparation for the English Language Arts state test became the focus of the social studies class (Yeager and van Hover, 2006). The literacy instruction being forced upon the Virginia social studies teacher appeared to be using the cognitive approach of drill and kill on strategies that are suppose to work across all content areas instead of a discipline specific literacy approaches (Fang, 2012).

Social studies teachers have also expressed concern over district interpretations of the Common Core State Standards glorify close reading and the “decontextualization of historical interpretation” (Dover, Henning, & Agarwal-Rangnath, 2016, p. 464).

Massachusetts teachers needed to be heard from on if this shift of focusing on literacy in preparation for the English Language Arts MCAS was influencing their instruction in history class.

Where social studies was tested and therefore taught, the type of social studies instruction students receive was also curtailed by the test. In a 2005 study, Kenneth Vogler found that when teachers spend more time on test preparation, they are more likely to use teacher-centered practices, such as multiple-choice questions, textbooks, lecturing, and textbook-driven work. In another study in 2008, Vogler compared the impact of United States history end of course state examinations in Mississippi and Tennessee. Mississippi had a high stakes exam, where the results are public and tied to student’s graduation, and there 83.2% of teachers spent class time preparing for the exam, with 61.9% reporting spending more than 2 months preparing students. On the other hand, in Tennessee the exam was relatively low-stakes, only being required to count for 15% of the students’ final grade in the course. And in Tennessee, only 54.8% of teachers spent class time preparing students for the test and only 14.1% reported spending more than two months preparing students (Vogler, 2008, p. 24). Teachers in both states who spent more than two months preparing students for the exam, were more likely to use teacher-centered practices (Vogler, 2008, p. 12). This was despite the fact that the majority of the objectives in the Mississippi social studies framework “require students to analyze, demonstrate, describe, explain, and interpret information—all

higher level thinking activities” better taught through student centered approaches (Vogler, 2008, p. 6).

Vogler’s 2008 study also gave insight into what influenced social studies teachers’ instructional decisions and what teachers fear might be lost in their instruction. A majority of Mississippi and Tennessee teachers (94.4% and 74.8%, respectively) said concern for improving their school’s state accountability scores influenced their instruction. Teachers recognized the importance of their instructional decisions and the role of “the test” in them. One Mississippi teacher stated, “my choice of instructional delivery and materials is completely dependent on preparation for this test. Therefore I do not use current events, long-term projects, or creative group/corporate work because this is not tested” (Vogler, 2008, p. 1). This same teacher recognized possible implications of this instructional approach. The teacher stated “I’m afraid that all meaningfulness and relevancy to history is being lost on my students... they have...a worse conceptual understanding of the subject and what it is good for” (Vogler, 2008, p. 1). Thus, just making social studies part of high-stakes testing may not solve all the problems of a narrowed curriculum and teachers perceptions of trade-offs between inclusion and exclusion from state testing was needed to help policy makers make better decisions on this issue.

**Professional identity of social studies teachers.** High stakes accountability has, in many cases, led to “a revolving door of mandated programs and punitive interventions that narrow the curriculum to test preparation and produce an exodus of some of the strongest teachers” (Lipman; Valenzuela; Valli & Buesi, as cited in Lipman, 2011, p. 52). It was possible these teachers are leaving because they have lost their professional identity and sense of purpose in their work. Many scholars have examined this problem of a loss of

professional identity of teachers. I have defined identity as the distinguishing character or personality of an individual (Identity, n.d.). Multiple studies have shown that accountability diminishes teachers' investment in their professional practice by controlling their labor (Au, 2011, p. 25) and limiting their ability to use "their professional expertise to respond to the localized needs of their students" (Dover et al, 2016, p. 456). Erksine (2014), channeling Marx, declared, "NCLB mandates have turned some teachers into drones...high-stakes tests serve to simultaneously standardize the ways these teachers teach and deskill them" (p. 39-40). I asked teachers in my study about how accountability measures are influencing their identity by deskill them or undermining their ability to use their professional expertise as teachers.

Neumann (2016) studied public Texas middle school teachers and found that mandated testing, teachers' knowledge and beliefs, and teachers' milieu or context form a web of influence on their identity and instruction. For example, he found that when the school failed to meet AYP the administration got more active in altering curriculum decisions to ensure the school met AYP in the future (Neumann, 2016, p. 40). When this happened teachers felt their professional expertise and beliefs were challenged because new pacing and testing guidelines forced them to move more quickly than their students needed and limited the amount of meaningful, deep inquiry strategies they could employ (Neumann, 2016, p. 40). Furthermore, he found that "all the teachers expressed worry that they are shortchanging their students. They worry that the emphasis on efficiency and narrow measures of learning reduces students' opportunities for meaningful learning" (Neumann, 2016, p. 41).

Teachers were able to push back on these mandates to varying degrees. The influence state-mandated testing has on teachers and teaching depends on how teachers interpret these mandates and let it guide their practice (Cimbricz; Grant; Segall; as cited in Neumann, 2013, p. 25). Neumann (2013) found that “policymakers create conditions that squeeze teachers’ instructional options” but that while they competed for classroom time, a skilled teacher could work to both meet accountability demands and her own student learning goals (p. 25). Burke and Adler (2013) found that accountability pressure threatened urban fifth grade teacher’s professional identities as they felt marginalized and that they had a lack of autonomy, especially when mandated to use scripted lessons, pacing guides, and common assessments. Teachers said they wanted to feel valued for their expertise and they no longer did. Yet teachers were able to engage in “silent” acts of resistance as they attempted to implement a culturally responsive, student-centered integrated curriculum and instructional strategies. They found that well intention accountability based mandates “can result in an adversarial climate that reduces the creative moments available to teachers, constrains their abilities to respond to emergent needs in the classroom, marginalizes and causes them to respond to district initiatives in resistant ways, while ‘acting’ in compliance” (Burke & Adler, 2013, p. 14). In the face of curriculum narrowing, it is urgent that further research be done on the professional identity of social studies teachers. Scholars need to understand how social studies teachers’ professional identities are being influenced by state accountability measures. My study contributed to this in a small way.

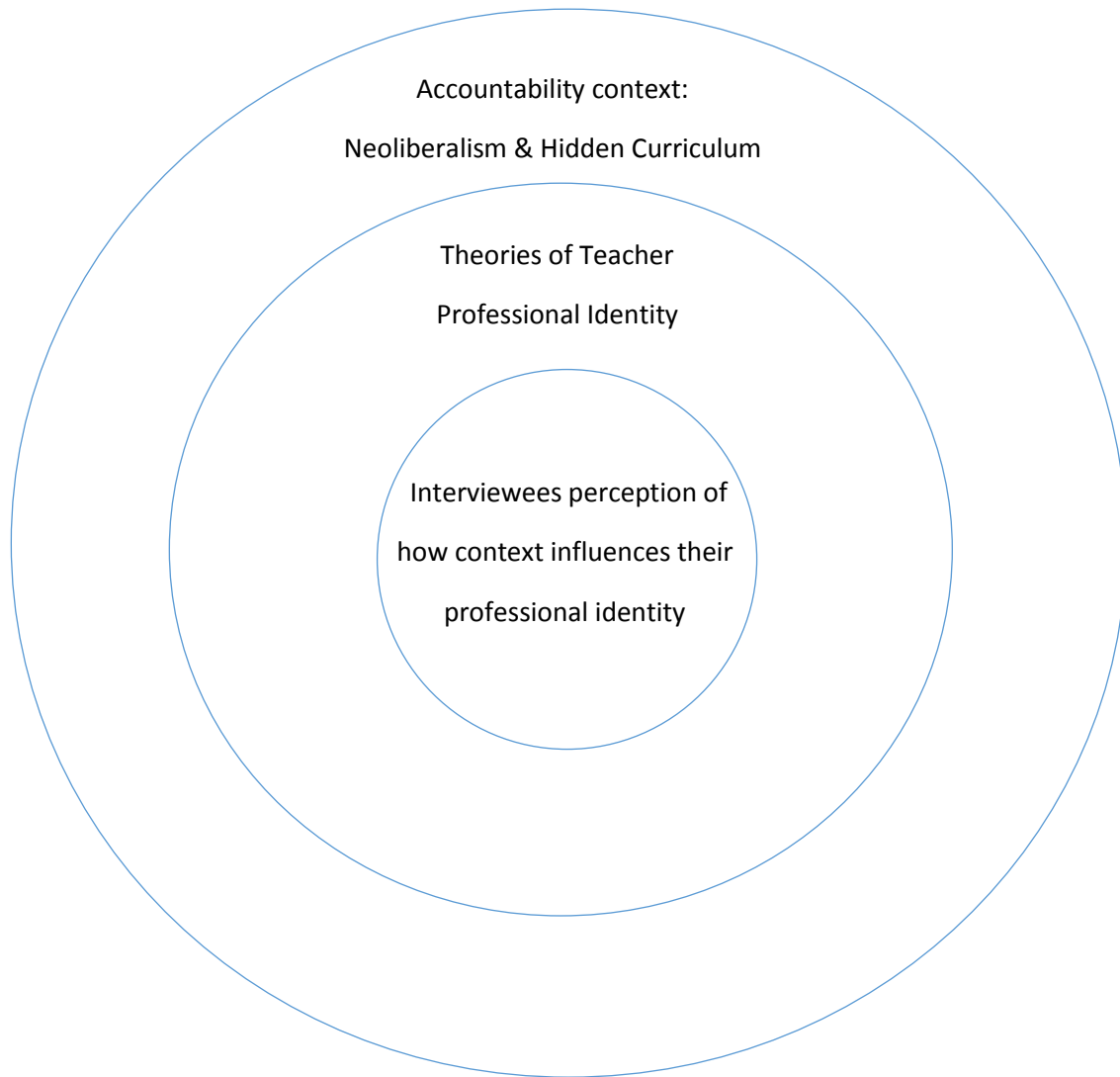
**Gaps in the literature on curriculum narrowing.** Most of the recent research on social studies curriculum narrowing was focused on the elementary classroom. The literature on secondary social studies teachers’ perceptions of the phenomenon of curriculum



narrowing needs further development. The literature on social studies curriculum narrowing would also benefit additional studies in states without mandated social studies testing. For states like Massachusetts that are considering a social studies test, it was important to hear from teachers whose voices are often left out of curriculum decisions. This gap was not altogether surprising. Michael Apple asserted that “not enough thought is given to the realities of teachers’ and administrators’ lives, to the actual power relations and problems they face every day, and to discussions and depictions of...tactics...in the face of these realities” (in Au, 2012, p. xiv). This study aimed to address this by hearing directly from social studies teachers about the context in which they practice.

### **Theoretical Framework**

I used the theories of neoliberalism and hidden curriculum to understand the context of teachers’ practice in an era of high accountability pressure. I then used theories of teacher professional identity to frame my understanding of social studies teachers’ professional identities and how accountability pressure may influence them (see Figure 3).



*Figure 3. My map of the theoretical framework for this study.*

**Theories of context.** To understand how schools and other institutions in American society operate one must understand the belief systems and values that contribute to the running of those institutions, based on the context in which those institutions operate. As Wenger (1998) wrote “we must also remember that our institutions are designs and that our designs are hostage to our understanding, perspective, and theories” (p. 10). This is why it was important to unpack the theories and context that underlie and explain current U.S.

educational accountability systems and schools. The strands of critical theory I used believe society is characterized by historicity. Nolan (2009) explained that “the notion of historicity suggests that present conditions did not come about through universal or natural laws, and although past and present patterns may appear to be intractable, they can in fact be changed through political and social efforts of oppressed groups” (p. 30). Nolan (2009) argued that the relationship between social structure and human agency was dialectical, therefore “individual knowledge of structure and its role in daily life can facilitate change in social conditions” (Agger as cited in Nolan, 2009, p. 30). Understanding how a context had been created has the ability to make real change in social conditions. This highlighted the need to study teachers’ perceptions of how social studies curriculum narrowing and accountability pressure influence teachers’ identities.

***Neoliberalism in education: High stakes education.*** The national and state accountability systems have been created by, and have helped further propel, a collective belief shift. Public schools have moved from serving a public good of preparing citizens, to serving a private good of workforce preparation. This shift has been part of the larger shift in government towards neoliberalism. David Harvey (2005) defined neoliberalism as “a theory of political economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by private property rights, free markets, and free trade” (p. 2).

When neoliberalism takes hold of a society, the government and its actors do not see a society but individual consumers. It changes the culture of people from seeing community problems and community solutions to individualist libertarian approaches (Harvey, 2005, p. 42). Giroux (2004) argued that Neoliberal governments redefine democracy to mean profit-

making and therefore redefine citizenship as consumerism (p. xvii). A citizen works with others to build and rebuild government whereas a consumer is known by what he or she possess, “you are defined by what you buy, not by what you do” (Apple, 2009, p. 186). Neoliberalism works to get rid of government regulation of the market economy and instead “forces, celebrates a ruthless competitive individualism” that leaves society’s institutions being run by powerful corporations (Giroux, 2004, p. xvii). Examples of this school choices and supplemental education services, offered as “solutions” to poor schooling under NCLB. These new neoliberal education markets are not created equal and strongly favor the middle class and wealthy who have the knowledge and ability to move their children into the best schools through these programs (Blakely, 2017). Thus, neoliberal reforms continue to widen achievement gaps in the United States.

The neoliberal control over modern American society further influences schools through accountability systems and the way Americans think about schools. As Lipman (2011) further explained, neoliberalism is not just economic policies, it is “a new social imaginary, a common sense about how we think about society and our place in it” (p. 6). While giving lip service to democratic ideals, Neoliberals are “profoundly suspicious of democracy” and instead support experts and elites running government because they see majority rule as a “potential threat to individual rights and constitutional liberties” (Harvey, 2005, p. 66). Neoliberalism removes the power of government from the hands of the people and instead remakes government to conform to corporate interests. Under neoliberalism, it is hard for people to even recognize the power of collective action and democracy (Giroux, 2004, p. xxi). Therefore it is not surprising that neoliberals do not see preparation of citizens as an important role for schools. Neoliberals, “richly funded, have marshaled the full

apparatus of the corporate media and think tanks to rearticulate education equity and quality as individualistic, competitive, and market-led” (Lipman, 2011, p. 162).

Neoliberalism has strongly prioritized “human capital development,” making education a private good, where parents focus on “adding value” to their own child instead of concern for larger societal good (Lipman, 2011, p. 15). The public and civic mission of schools is being forgotten. Apple and Beane (1995) found that language manipulation is so powerful, “A private consulting firm has recommended that ‘public’ be dropped from ‘public schools’ because its similar use in conjunction with housing, libraries, radio, and assistance programs has come to have negative connotations” (p. 101). Even such basic “social commitments for the common good are now made out to be ‘public nuisances” (Apple & Beane, 1995, p. 101) and some are calling for public education to distance itself from this term and perhaps completely forgo the public and civic mission of schools, to prepare future citizens for democratic participation. Since this denial of citizenship preparation is done unequally, this is one way in which “neoliberalism does not merely produce economic inequality, iniquitous power relations, and a corrupt political system; it also promotes rigid exclusions from a national citizenship and civic participation” (Giroux, 2004, p. xxiv).

Neoliberalism is being contested all over the world by “individuals and groups unwilling to allow democracy to be bought and sold by multinational corporations” (Giroux, 2004, p. xiv). For people to be able to fight neoliberalism they need to have a complex understanding of the system neoliberals have constructed (Lipman, 2011, p. 163) and a plan to improve the language of political agency and civic education (Giroux, 2004, p. xv). The battle against neoliberalism is “also a cry for education that develops our human potential, that prepares us to be subjects of history—to read and write the world” (Freire, as cited in

Lipman, 2011, p. 161). In order to advocate for what the American education system should be like and how to get there, scholars and policy makers must first understand how the current neoliberal based accountability system is influencing social studies teachers' identities. I hope my study will help school and district leaders, policy makers, and scholars understand more about how social studies curriculum narrowing from accountability is influencing social studies teacher identities and therefore the civic education marginalized students are receiving. This knowledge can then help these community leaders fight for and make better policy choices.

***Hidden curriculum.*** Hidden curriculum is what students learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of schools (Giroux and Penna, 1979; Haralambos, 1991; Longstreet & Shane, 1993; Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996; Margolis, 2001; Jay, 2003; Dickerson, 2007; Gibson, 2012). Hidden curriculum theory will help illustrate that social studies is not valued in schools that serve marginalized students. Social studies curriculum narrowing has meant that marginalized students are not being prepared to be business leaders in the global economy or civic leaders in the United States government. In my view, the hidden message of America's school accountability systems is that low-income, minority students are not expected to contribute meaningfully to American society but instead remain on the margins.

The current United States school accountability system is reproducing social and economic inequalities. The way schools are structured and regulated are "integrally related to the ways in which specific people get access to economic and cultural resources and power" (Apple, 2009, p. vii). As Lipman (2004) found in her study of the Chicago Public Schools, the lowest-scoring schools facing the greatest accountability pressures were where the daily

tasks of teaching and learning were most controlled by test preparation and basic skills (p. 43). Au (2012) further explained that state accountability driven “high-stakes, standardized tests literally structure the knowledge embedded in educational environments as well as shape the accessibility of that knowledge in ways that selectively validate and invalidate the identities of students and teachers” (p. 45).

In 1980, Anyon declared the “hidden curriculum” of school was tacit preparation for different kinds of work for different social groups. As Anyon (1980) described “differing curricular, pedagogical, and pupil evaluation practices emphasize different cognitive and behavioral skills...and thus contribute to the development in children of certain potential relationships to physical and symbolic capital, to authority, and to the process of work” (Anyon, 1980, p. 89) Anyon’s hidden curriculum was presented in regards to capitalism of the 1980s, but it is similar to today’s narrowed curriculum for low-income students. The knowledge and skills necessary for social power and reward are provided to the upper class in schools but withheld from poor students who are given a “practical” curriculum (Bernstein; Bourdieu; Apple; as cited in Anyon, 1980). Today’s accountability centered, narrowed curriculum with reduced social studies education means that low-income and marginalized students are not being prepared to be business leaders in the global economy or civic leaders in American democracy. Rather, they are being prepared for low-level work and political disengagement. Social studies is considered necessary knowledge only for some. This is problematic for the future of the United States. It has long been argued that if people are to uphold a democratic way of life, they have to have opportunities to learn what that way of life means and how it might be led (Dewey, 1916). In my view, the U.S. cannot have a

true democracy if certain segments of the population are left out of being taught how to engage in this democracy and therefore continue to be marginalized.

The hidden curriculum includes the messages students are sent by the total instructional environment, organization, and teacher expectations of the school (McLaren, 2003, p. 86). This includes “the bureaucratic and managerial ‘press’ of the school” (McLaren, 2003, p. 86). “The press” at urban high schools facing high accountability pressure is “pass the MCAS, so the school doesn’t get shut down” and since there is no MCAS in social studies, social studies is not viewed as important. While there may be lip service towards this end, “the press” at these schools is not “learn about our government and our world be to be prepared to democratic and global citizens.” My study aimed to understand how that influences teachers and therefore student learning. As McLaren (2003) wrote, “often, the hidden curriculum displaces the professional educational ideals and goals of the classroom teacher or school” (p. 87). This can happen even if individual teachers are trying to go against the agenda of the hidden curriculum.

As Apple (1995) writes “work culture provides important grounds for worker resistance, collective action, informational control of pacing and skill, and reasserting one’s humanity” (p. 76). Urban social studies teachers deserved to be heard from, not only on how accountability influences their work but also how they are able to resist against accountability pressures. As previous discussed, the research shows in schools with more accountability pressure, students often get less social studies education (Wills, 2007; Jennings & Stark Rentner, 2006; Winstead; 2011; Bisland, 2015; Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Vogler, 2003; Burke & Alder, 2013; Good, Heafner, Rock, O’Connor, Passe, Waring, & Bryd, 2010). In my view, by withholding or

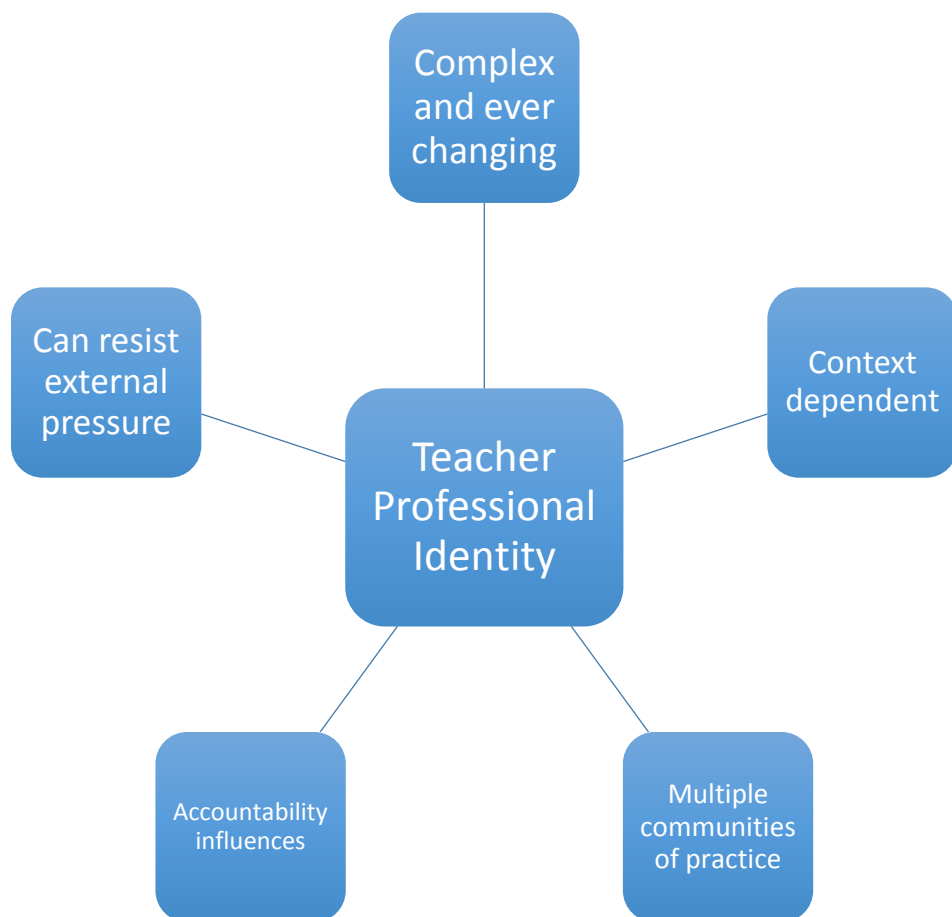


limiting social studies knowledge for marginalized students, the education system was reproducing current societal stratification by preparing marginalized students only for low level work in the economy. The hidden message was that marginalized students are not expected to contribute meaningfully to American democracy. What scholars needed to understand more about was how this hidden curriculum operated. This study investigated how public school social studies teachers facing accountability pressure were having their identity and their practice influenced by social studies curriculum narrowing and this hidden curriculum.

**Teacher professional identity.** Identity is defined as “the distinguishing character or personality of an individual” (Identity, n.d.). Day (2006) pointed out that one’s actions, beliefs, and priorities are linked strongly to one’s identity (p. 603). Dowe Beijaard (1995) explained that identity is the meanings that someone attaches to him or her self as well as the meanings others attribute to him or her (p. 282). Teachers form their professional identities based on the environment around them and how they envision themselves (Wenger, 1998, p.149). MacLure (1993) clarified that identity is not a stable entity people own but instead is constructed within social relations and an interactional resource used by people. Cooper and Olson (1996) pointed out that “identity formation is an ongoing process that involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of our experiences as we live through them” (p. 80). The fact that identity is not fixed but continuously changing and evolving is important for understanding the implications of accountability pressure on established teachers.

Theories of teacher professional identity helped me illustrate how teachers’ understandings of their professional identity and how it influenced their teaching. Teachers’ identity and their practice are strongly tied together “such that one does not determine the

other but, rather, both are constantly being negotiated as we go through our lives and engaged with our communities of practice” (Wenger, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 478). Based on the literature, I conceptualized teacher professional identity as having the following characteristics (1) complex and ever changing, (2) influenced by a teacher’s context, and (3) continuously built out of multiple communities of practice that teachers engage in. Furthermore, (4) in high accountability pressure schools the climate of accountability was so pervasive that it influences teachers’ sense of self and their teaching practice (see Figure 4).



*Figure 4.* My conceptual map of the literature on teacher professional identity.

Urban high school social studies teachers, like all workers, create the practice of their work under the circumstances they find themselves. However, their identity and practice are not entirely determined by their context but also by their (5) willingness and ability to resist external pressures. Wenger's theory of communities of practice and other studies of teacher identity reviewed here supported my assumption that there was a relationship among the climate of accountability, teacher identity, and teacher practice in urban schools in the United

States. It was this relationship that this study investigated by talking directly to urban social studies teachers in urban schools.

***Teacher identity is complex and ever-changing.*** A teacher's professional identity is a complex and dynamic equilibrium between personal self-image and teacher roles one feels obligated to play (Volkmann & Anderson, 1998). Brooke (1994) defined a professional identity as one that has a body of assimilated knowledge and the skills to use it in his or her chosen field. Brooke (1994) also found that the process of becoming a professional was a process of interaction between what was found relevant by others in the field and what teachers value themselves. The research on teacher education also demonstrated that knowing one's self was an important element to the way teachers understand and construct the nature of their work (Kelchtermans & Vandenberghe, 1994). Researchers have also found that personal life events and experiences of teachers are linked to their professional role performance (Ball & Goodson, 1985; Goodson & Hargreaves, 1996; Acker, 1999). Jennifer Nias (1989), who studied primary school teachers in England, found that teachers who had taught for at least ten years were more likely to have merged their professional role into their self-image and identify themselves as "teachers." Many of her respondents also linked "being a teacher" to "being yourself" in the classroom.

Research has recognized that teacher identities are constructed "as the result of an interaction between the personal experiences of teachers and the social, cultural, and institutional environment in which they function on a daily basis" (Slegers & Kelchtermans, as cited in Day et al., 2006). Geert Kelchtermans (1993) further asserted that the professional-self changes over time and was made up of five interrelated parts: self-image, self-esteem, job-motivation, task perception, and future perspective (p. 449-450). In my

study, I was most interested in task perception or how teachers defined their jobs given their context of working in a high accountability pressure school. Day (2004) found that an important part of maintaining self-esteem or self-efficacy and a commitment to and a passion for teaching was a positive sense of identity with the subject, relationships and teaching roles. In a study of Belgian teachers, Kelchtermans (1996) focused on teachers' feelings of vulnerability. He found that vulnerability was caused when professional identity and moral integrity were questioned either by policy changes, parents, inspectors, or colleagues in the light of unrealistic expectations or their failure to help students achieve higher standards. The notion of teacher vulnerability may be important to understanding the influence of Massachusetts accountability systems on social studies teacher identities since these systems may call into question their values and goals for teaching social studies, leaving them feeling vulnerable.

Day *et al.* (2006) also argued that "for all teachers, identity will be affected by external (policy) and internal (organizational) and personal experiences past and present and so it is not always stable" (p. 610). This was why it was important to study teachers' professional identities and how they are influenced by the climate of accountability and how it influences their practice by talking directly to teachers. As Beijaard, Verloop, and Vermunt (2000) found, knowledge of teachers' perceptions of aspects of their professional identity may be useful in helping them to cope with educational changes. Flores and Day's (2006) study looked at the professional identities of new elementary teachers in Portugal and examined how their professional identities were shaped and reshaped through "the interaction between personal, professional and contextual factors" (p. 221). Flores and Day (2006) found that over time these teachers take on an approach of "strategic compliance"

where they comply with some of the norms and values of their school, even though they did not correspond with their own beliefs and values (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 229). In my study, I looked to understand how teachers' feel the need to comply and adjust their own beliefs and values to their current school environments given the context of accountability pressure.

Flores and Day (2006) further found that emotion was a significant and ongoing part of being a teacher and that the emotional climate of a school affects teachers' practices (p. 220). Flores and Day (2006) stated that teaching calls for "daily, intensive and extensive use of both emotional labor...and emotional work which enables teachers to manage the challenges of teaching classes which contain students with a range of diverse motivations, personal histories and learning capacities" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 221). Especially important to their identities were the variety of negative emotions teachers face when teachers' long held values and practices are challenged, teachers lose trust or respect from parents, their students, or the public (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 221). Of particular note for my study was that Flores and Day (2006) found a large amount of teachers who experienced "anxiety because of the complexity of the job; guilt, sadness, blame and shame at not being able to achieve ideals or targets imposed by others" (Flores & Day, 2006, p. 221). This study helped me understand how accountability targets imposed by the state and the corresponding emotions teachers face from this accountability pressure may influence teachers' identity and practice.

***Teacher identity is influenced by a teachers' context.*** Teachers' identities are deeply influenced by their understanding and knowledge of the world around them. Wenger (1998) showed the reason people seek understanding was to make meaning and develop an identity and they do it through active engagement in the world around them (p. 4). He argued that

learning can only be done through social interaction (Wenger, 1998, p. 3). In schools, this could include conversations about the purpose of social studies education among teachers who teach it and conversations with school administrators about the importance of the school doing well on accountability measures, these are considered communities of practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 151).

Wenger (1998) further argued that participating in communities of practice “shapes not only what we do, but also who we are and how we interpret what we do” (p. 4). Teachers’ identities are built through and influence their practice, how they engage and participate in the world (p. 51). Communities of practice are those that have mutual engagement, a joint enterprise, and a shared repertoire. “We all have our own theories and ways of understanding the world, and our communities of practice are places where we develop, negotiate, and share them” (Wenger, 1998, p. 48). Communities of practice are built as teachers work together over time and therefore build a repertoire of shared practice (Wenger, 1998, p. 153). A person’s identity is not fixed but constantly in flux and renegotiated as they experience various communities of practice throughout their lives (Wenger, 1998, p. 154).

Reynolds (1996) also found that what surrounds a person, what others expect from the person, and what the person allows to impact him or her greatly affects his or her identity as a teacher (p. 113). Many researchers have found that identity and institutional contexts are significant for teachers’ sense of job fulfillment, ongoing motivation, commitment and sense of effectiveness (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop; Day et al; Flores and Day; Troman, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 477). MacLure (1993), in her study of 69 teachers in England, also reported that context was a strong influence on teacher identity. Many of her

respondents reported feeling alienated from the values and practices of their institutions and some of them felt that they were no longer able to square their identities with their jobs.

Feiman-Nemser and Floden (1986) found that there was not one teaching culture in a school and that every teacher may to some extent develop his or her own teaching culture, though it will be limited by their context. In my study, I talked directly to teachers to uncover what teaching culture they have developed.

Similarly, Dowe Beijaard (1995) conducted research with secondary school teachers in the Netherlands. He argued that secondary school teachers' professional identity was derived primarily from the subjects that they teach and this has strong and ongoing influence on their image of themselves as professionals. He furthermore recognized the particular significance of teachers' relationships with colleagues who teach the same subject and the statuses of their subjects. Beijaard noted that a negative influence on teacher's perceptions of their professional identities included when one felt that his or her subject taught was not taken seriously by colleagues (p. 288). Therefore, in my study I explored how social studies teachers' perceive how other teaching colleagues view them and how their professional identities were influenced by these perceptions.

Teachers' perceptions of how other teachers view them may be creating a sense of marginality, an inability to engage in full participation (Wenger, 1988, p. 166). Mancini Billson (1988) described marginality as "a social phenomena that can be defined in terms of unsatisfactory, conflicting, inadequate, or unstable definitions of a person's self and of his or her role relationships with others" (p. 188). Marginality often occurred when there was social change that left people in a position of confusion and feeling frustrated with personal or group goals particularly when people are struggling with multiple loyalties (Mancini Billson,



1988, p. 187-188). In my study, I built on this work and particularly looked at the influence of the context of accountability pressure on secondary social studies teachers' perceptions of their role and how it may have marginalized them, especially considering how other teachers viewed them.

***Teacher identity is continuously built out of multiple communities of practice.***

Studies of student teachers and teachers alike showed the formation of professional identity as a struggle where teachers had to figure out who they and what they will confront or adapt too when faced with expectations of others (Samuel & Stephens; Volkmann & Anderson, as cited in Beijaard et al., 2004). Therefore, professional identity may consist of many sub-identities that may conflict or align with each other and continue to be reshaped by contextual influences (Mishler, 1999; Cooper & Olson, 1996; Reynolds, 1996). This plurality can be contradictory and stressful as a teacher decides how to represent him or herself and their practice (Castells, 1997, p. 6-7). Alsup (2008) showed that professional and personal identities are “multiple and ever changing, rather than singular and consistently opposing. Therefore, a teacher’s identity is a weaving together (Gee, 1999) of various subjectivities or understandings of self as expressed through genres of discourse and influenced by multiple life experiences” (p. 41-42).

Wenger (1988) argued that “identity is thus more than just a single trajectory....it should be viewed as a nexus of multimembership” (p. 159). Social studies teachers in high accountability pressure urban high schools are likely engaged in multiple communities of practice. They may participate in and reify themselves as teachers of urban, marginalized students as well as being teachers of social studies. State accountability systems add another community of practice they now may see themselves as part of, and certainly one they

participate in to some extent, that of teachers in a high accountability pressure school. It is only natural that these accountability systems would influence the teachers who serve under them. Other groups of teachers also experience multiple communities of practice.

In Farnsworth and Higham's 2012 study of vocational teachers, found that these teachers had two communities of practice to pull from, one community of practice for their trade or industry and another defined by their teaching community (p. 475). These vocational teachers "trade and industry experience worked within a context where their prior experience and accountability to their work-related industry community was valued and hence allowed, indeed encouraged, to emerge as a mediating factor in their practice as teachers" (Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 475). Many social studies teachers have also tried to bring their identity as civic engaged individual into their classroom and tried to encourage this same identity in their students. Social studies teachers in high accountability schools in particular may not be encouraged to support their identity as social studies teachers because of the prioritization of preparation for state tests.

As Wenger (1998) explained that these are different communities of practice that influence the one identity these teachers have but are not multiple identities, "considering a person as having multiple identities would miss all the subtle ways in which our various forms of participation, no matter how distinct, can interact, influence each other, and require coordination" (p. 159). The social studies teachers I interviewed in this study bring these different parts of themselves into one nexus of identity (Wenger, 1998, p. 160). That can be difficult because parts of one repertoire may not work in another community and may be judged inappropriate or even offensive there (Wenger, 1998, p. 160). Figuring out one's identity is a conflict-ridden process, especially when there are different values and

expectations in different communities of practice one participates in (Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 499).

Alsup (2008) has studied one way teachers cross multiple binaries. Alsup (2008) relied on borderlands discourse theory, built on James Gee's (1999) and Gloria Anzaldua's (1987) work. Alsup found that borderland discourse resulted in "neither the repudiation of one discourse nor the subsuming of one discourse into another; instead, the result was a new discourse with characteristics of both of the earlier ones as well as new characteristics unique" to each teacher (Alsup, 2008, p. 37). Teachers who are undergoing this integration through discourse have identity growth (Alsup, 2008, p. 36). In this study I explored how urban social studies teachers in high accountability pressure high schools are using discourses from the social studies education community, the urban educator community, and the accountability movement to shape their identity.

Urban social studies teachers have to struggle with defining their professional identity as a nexus of multiple memberships between their identities as a social studies teacher, a teacher of marginalized students, and a teacher in a high accountability pressure school. For these teachers, like all humans, are crafting an identity based on negotiating meanings of their experiences across multiple social communities (Wenger, 1998, p. 145). One way people create communities is through alignment or allegiance to a movement that share common commitments (Wenger, 1998, p. 182). The urban social studies in my study may align themselves with a larger community of social studies teachers and also a larger community of urban teachers committed to teaching marginalized students and promoting social justice. These allegiances might be challenged by also being in a school, another community of practice, with significant accountability pressure. Maintaining "an identity

across boundaries requires work and, moreover, that the work of integrating our various forms of participation is not just a secondary process...it is at the core of what it means to be a person” (Wenger, 1998, p. 160-161).

***Accountability influences teacher identities.*** Wenger (1998) pointed out how employees’ identities are impacted by where they work and how they see their place of employment and themselves in it. He wrote of all employees: “in order to do their job, they must align their activities and their interpretations of events with structures, forces, and purposes beyond their community of practice and so find their place in broader business processes” (Wenger, 1998, p. 173). Therefore, how urban social studies teachers see their place in their high accountability pressure schools was worthy of investigation. Similarly, Jeffrey and Woods (1996) conducted research in England found that primary school teachers experienced emotions such as uncertainty, confusion, inadequacy, anxiety, mortification and doubt among teachers in response to this accountability pressure. Building on this work, I researched secondary social studies teachers’ particular responses to high accountability pressure.

Lipman (2004) found “as schooling is reduced to test preparation, the policies have also spawned intense regulation and deskilling of teachers with devastating consequences for their morale, confidence, and commitment” (p. 44). Deskilling of teachers has led to the loss of the best teachers at low-scoring schools because teachers felt pressured to conduct their classes in ways that were against their professional judgment, demoralizing teachers (p. 44). And teachers feel they are being controlled like pawns by experts sent in to improve efficiency and accountability (Kincheloe, 2001, p. 103). The “best practice” for schools under accountability may be to teach to the test to try to bring up the all important test scores

(Ball, Lipman, Sloan, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 474). Lipman (2004) found that Chicago teachers are facing an “existential crisis” because they are being forced to do things in their classroom that are contrary to their rationale for becoming a teacher and beginning to question their own professional competence (p. 44). Teachers’ voices had to be listened to on this issue.

In Farnsworth and Higham’s 2012 work on how school board accountability impacts vocational teacher identity, they used the concept of mediation as “the key to understanding this relationship between context and practice, or policy and curriculum... we argue that teacher identity mediates school board policies and students’ learning experiences” (p. 474). In my study, I investigated how teacher identity mediates accountability policies influence on social studies curriculum in urban, high accountability pressure schools. Like Farnsworth and Higham (2012), this allowed me to better understand “the relationship between context, teacher identity, and curriculum” (Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 477). It is important to understand how curriculum is enacted, but to do this one must recognize that the context where curriculum is enacted influences it greatly (Bloomer, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 478).

***Teachers may resist outside pressure.*** Outside mandates like national, state, or district curriculum plans and accountability programs influenced communities of practice, and therefore the participating teachers’ identities. But as Wenger (1998) noted, “the enterprise is never fully determined by an outside mandate, by a prescription, or by any individual participant...the practice evolves into the community’s own response to that mandate” (p. 80). Coldron and Smith (1999) found that agency was an important element of professional identity. Agency is a person’s ability to pursue his or her own goals (Archer,

2000). Accountability pressure and other “inappropriate and externally constructed surveillance interferes with autonomy as it perpetuates teachers’ subordinate status, restricts their pedagogical choices, and dampens their intellectual freedom” (Bushnell, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 478). Day et al (2006) also asserted that there was some level of agency shown by what extent teachers can operate with the contradictions and tensions within their various identities and roles (Day et al., 2006). In my study, I explored teachers’ sense of agency in their teaching practice as part of their identity given the influence of accountability pressure in their schools.

To what extent teachers are willing to engage in teaching to the test depends on their commitment to the accountability system and the accountability pressure in the school community that they are a part of (Wenger, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 480). Farnsworth & Higham (2012) found that despite the prioritization of accountability and standardization individual teachers are still sometimes able to innovate (p. 474). They found teacher agency was able to occur because the central administration had relatively weak control over teachers’ choices for course and assessment design (Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 476). In this study, I asked teachers about how they are able to maintain their goals and identity as a social studies educator despite the influence of accountability pressure.

Some of the on-going tensions between different communities of practice urban social studies teachers in high accountability pressure schools experience may include tension between how social studies teachers know they want to teach and engage in their practice versus how they are actually teaching and engaged in their practice based on the actual context in which they find themselves teaching in. Day (1999) found that while teachers are subjected to strong socializing forces to conform to their school’s culture they

still try to have their practice align with their personal vision of what it should be (p. 59). Flores and Day (2006) also found that there was a conflict between their ideal beliefs regarding what good teaching should look like and what they were really able to do in their everyday practices (p. 227). The formation of identity takes place as individuals try to resolve the tension between their real self and the ideal self (Adams and Marshall, 1996, p. 435). I explored this conflict of identity more with the social studies teachers I interview in my study.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter outlined earlier research that has contributed to the construction of my conceptual framework for this study. This chapter began with a review of the research on social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability measures including reduced time and emphasis on social studies, shifts in how social studies is taught, and devaluing of social studies teachers' professional identity. This chapter highlights the fact that high school social studies curriculum narrowing in states without a high stakes social studies test is an under studied area of this literature. This chapter then continued by explaining the theoretical framework upon which this study depends. The theories of neoliberalism and hidden curriculum are used to understand the context of accountability pressure in which social studies curriculum narrowing occurs. Theories of teacher professional identity are then analyzed and demonstrate that teachers mediate the accountability context their schools exist in for their students through their teaching and professional identity. This study aimed to address a gap in the literature on how urban high school social studies teachers in high accountability pressures perceive the relationship among accountability measures, social studies curriculum narrowing, and their professional identity. Teachers needed to be heard

from on how accountability pressure shapes their experience. Chapter Three outlines how I conducted my study of this important topic.



## CHAPTER 3

### RESEARCH METHODS

The purpose of this interview-based study was to describe urban secondary social studies teachers' perceptions of accountability pressure, social studies curriculum narrowing, and teacher professional identity in Massachusetts. As Chapter 1 asserted, it was important to talk to high school social studies teachers who practice in these high-pressure contexts because they are in a unique situation to help researchers understand how accountability systems dictate school operations and teaching, the inequality in the U.S. education system, and the importance of social studies education in students' lives. In chapter 2, I examined the existing literature on social studies curriculum narrowing and found high school social studies curriculum narrowing in states like Massachusetts that do not currently have a social studies high stakes test to be under researched. I outlined how the theories neoliberalism and hidden curriculum help me understand the accountability context teachers practice in. I further reviewed the literature on teacher professional identity and conceptualized teacher professional identity. In this chapter, I outline how I conducted a phenomenological study of high school social studies teachers to hear from those in the arena about how accountability pressure was influencing their identity and practice.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to describe how public high school social studies teachers perceive accountability pressure, curriculum narrowing, and their professional identity. Specifically, I studied the following three questions: What were public school teachers' understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school? What were high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing? How did teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure?

## **Phenomenological Methodology**

As a phenomenological study, my research aimed to “reduce individual experiences” with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing into a description of the “universal essence” of the experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). Phenomenology’s goal is to “grasp of the very nature of the thing” (van Manen, 1990, p. 177), which made it an appropriate choice for this study. In phenomenology, getting to the very nature of the thing is accomplished by studying a small number of participants to recognize what their experience have in common and what patterns and relationships of meaning in how a phenomenon was experienced can be seen across the participants. The purpose of phenomenological research is to study the meaning of the “*lived experience* of people” to recognize the fundamental elements of this particular human experience as described by the research participants themselves (Bloomberg, 2012, p. 48). Phenomenology “looks at how people *make sense* of what happens” as well as “what the meaning of that happening is” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 45). Phenomenology focuses on the phenomenon and how it appears to the research participants, as evidenced in phenomenology’s maxim “to the things themselves” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26).

Edmund Husserl was known as a pioneer in phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994, p. 25). Husserl's approach to phenomenology "utilizes only the data available to consciousness—the appearance of objects" (Husserl, 1965, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 45). That is, Husserl was concerned with how people perceive an object or experience because it is all that one can really ever know. Husserl (1927) asked that researchers turn their gaze inward towards our perception of the objects of the world instead of outwards towards the world (as cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 12). Husserl was focused on careful examination of the human experience (as cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 12). Husserl wanted to find a way for people to systematically explore their own experiences with a phenomenon, with a rigor that would allow to find the essential qualities of the experience (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 12). He argued that the essential elements of the experience would then transcend the particular circumstances that the researcher had encountered them and may illuminate the experience for others as well (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 12). Husserl feared that people's penchant for order meant that people are always trying to put 'things' into the schema they already have for world. Husserl instead wanted people to study each particular thing on its own (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 12). Phenomenology does not expect people's experienced reality to be rational or logical but instead recognized that to truly understand a person's experience one has to be "sensitive to moments of thoughtfulness as well as moments of taken-for-grantedness" (van Manen, 2016, p. 68).

Phenomenology focuses on the experience of a phenomenon. The goal of phenomenology is to determine what this experience "means for the persons who have had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (Moustakas, 1994,

p. 13). In phenomenology, meaning is used to describe the significance something holds for someone and how someone has come to understand something (Hopkins, Regehr, & Pratt, 2017, p. 21). The phenomenologist “wants to know in detail what the experience for *this* person is like, what sense *this* particular person is making of what is happening to them” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 3). Universal meanings, such as the essences or structures of the experience, are then derived from the individual participants’ descriptions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). This prioritizing of the human experience separates phenomenology from positivist approaches to research. As Dilthey (1976) wrote “we explain nature, but human life we must understand” (as cited in van Manen, 1990, p. 4).

Phenomenology focuses on fully understanding a phenomenon. It works to look at every perspective and side of an experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). From this exhaustive analysis the researcher can get a clear vision of the key elements of the phenomenon or experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 58). Phenomenology is particularly useful for educational research because all issues that occur in schools are related to people’s individual human nature, their individual understandings and interactions with others (Hopkins, Regehr, & Pratt, 2017, p. 20). Therefore, each person involved in educating a child has a unique take on any educational issue (Hopkins, Regehr, & Pratt, 2017, p. 20). Hopkins, Regehr, and Pratt (2017) further asserted that in phenomenology, researchers do not begin with the premise that one perspective is better than others. Instead, everyone has their own perspective that is “correct” but represents a different vantage point from which they see and experience that part of schooling (p. 20). Hopkins, Regehr, and Pratt (2017) concluded that to make more appropriate decisions around educational issues, policy makers need to understand more of the perspectives of people who are actually involved in the process of schooling (p. 20).

Since educating a child is a complex human endeavor, phenomenology was an appropriate means understand and unpack how many people have experienced a phenomenon such as curriculum narrowing.

A phenomenon is defined as “an observable fact or event” as well as “a rare or significant fact or event” (Phenomenon, n.d.). A phenomenon is further defined as “a fact or event of scientific interest susceptible to scientific description and explanation” (Phenomenon, n.d.). Social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) style state accountability systems is a phenomenon since it is time-bounded event beginning in 2001 with NCLB and is an experience that influences teachers, students, and school leaders’ daily lives. As described in chapter 2, social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability is a phenomenon that has been studied numerous times before from both quantitative and qualitative approaches (Wills, 2007; Jennings & Stark Rentner, 2006; Winstead; 2011; Bisland, 2015; Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Vogler, 2003; Burke & Alder, 2013; Good, Heafner, Rock, O’Connor, Passe, Waring, & Bryd, 2010). The phenomenological approach I took in this study, adds to this knowledge basis by providing personal stories of how social studies teachers in Massachusetts have experienced this phenomenon. I was interested in others individual stories because they are of worth. And in order to answer my research questions, I needed to hear from people who have experienced the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing in a context of accountability and understand their personal perspectives of it.

## **Research Context**

In qualitative research, the researcher has to “purposefully select participants or sites that will best help the researcher understand the problem and the research question” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). In this study, I focused on teachers in Massachusetts’ public high schools. Massachusetts was an important place in which to conduct this research because Massachusetts has long been recognized as a national leader in educational achievement and school reform (Borg, 2016). Massachusetts is also currently considering re-introducing a social science and history MCAS. This made it a particularly important time to hear from Massachusetts’ social studies teachers.

All Massachusetts public schools, including charter schools, are subject to accountability under the Massachusetts Framework for District Accountability and Assistance. This framework classified schools based on their scores on the Progress and Performance Index (PPI) which incorporated student MCAS scores and student growth for all students and numerous high needs sub-groups as well as other indicators such as drop out rates. Annual PPI score was a measure for how each school and subgroup improved relative towards its own targets over a two-year period on up to seven indicators: narrowing proficiency gaps (in English language arts (ELA), mathematics, and science); growth (ELA and mathematics); the annual dropout rate; and the cohort graduation rate. The cumulative PPI was the average of each group’s annual PPIs over four years, with more recent years having the highest weight (1- 2- 3- 4).

Schools and districts were then classified on a five-level scale based on their cumulative PPI, classifying those meeting their gap narrowing goals in level one and those that are the lowest performing in level five. About 80% of schools are classified as level 1

and 2. Schools are classified into levels 3, 4, or 5 if they are among the lowest 20% relative to other schools in the same school type category statewide, if one or more subgroups in the school are among the lowest performing 20% of subgroups relative to all subgroups statewide, if they have persistently low graduation rates (less than 60% for any subgroup over a four-year period), or if they have very low MCAS participation rates for any group, less than 90% (Mass. DESE, 2016).

In 2018, Massachusetts made small changes to this system including changing the descriptors for each level of schools. However, as the interviews for this study were conducted before new ratings of the schools under the new system were made public for all schools, the previous system described above was utilized. Since NCLB in 2001, all states have been required to set up similar accountability systems, therefore readers may be able to make some generalizations to the national level based on the experiences of my participants. I used thick, rich description in my analysis to allow readers to make their own assessments about what conclusions can be generalized to other contexts.

### **Recruiting Participants**

Phenomenology research begins with an “abiding concern” (van Manen, 1990, p. 31). My abiding concern was social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability. This was the phenomenon I sought to study. After receiving University of Massachusetts – Boston Institutional Review Board approval, I looked for research participants who had experience with this phenomenon and interviewed them to try to understand how they have made meaning of this experience. I sought 12 participants for my qualitative phenomenological study. I offered an entry to a raffle for a small gift card of \$25 dollars to Amazon for each participant who volunteer to be interviewed to incentive participation.

Using this minimal incentive may have encouraged participants to volunteer, but since it was only a chance at a small reward it would still ensure that volunteers were people who were truly willing to openly share their ideas

To find research participants for this study, I asked the Massachusetts Council of the Social Studies, the state association of social studies teachers, to include a brief description of my study, what participants I am seeking, and a link to my research study participant volunteer form in their e-mail newsletter. I also contacted local universities with social studies teacher education programs to ask them to send a brief description of my study and a link to my volunteer form to their alumni. I also recruited participants by posting to user groups on social media sites such as Facebook and LinkedIn. I then contacted the volunteers to set up an interview of 45-60 minutes in person or over the phone.

## **Sampling**

In this study, I interviewed high school social studies about curriculum narrowing. I chose 12 teachers to participate. This was a reasonable sample size for a phenomenological study that would use time intensive in-depth interviewing. This sample size allowed me to understand the essence of the experience of social studies curriculum narrowing. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) emphasized that when it comes to sample size, “the issue is quality, not quantity, and given the complexity of most human phenomena [phenomenological] studies usually benefit from a concentrated focus on a small number of cases” (p. 51).

I used purposeful sampling to select these teachers. It was criterion-based selection where persons, settings, or events are deliberately selected to provide important information



for the study (Lecompte & Preissle, 1993, as cited in Maxwell, 2004, p. 70). All of the participants represented “people who have experienced the phenomenon” of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability (Creswell, 2007, p. 128). The participants had to be Massachusetts public school teachers who teach social studies or humanities at least half of their teaching load to students in grades 9-12.

I also used stratified purposeful sampling to illustrate subgroups and facilitate comparisons between them (Creswell, 2007, p. 127). I selected eight participants from urban school as well as four participants from suburban schools as a comparison. I selected six participants from level 3, 4, or 5 schools, that might be considered high accountability pressure schools, as well as six participants from level 1 or 2 schools as an alternate case. This should “provide sufficient cases for the development of meaningful points of similarity and difference between participants” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 51).

In this study, I used being classified as a level 3, 4, or 5 school on the Massachusetts’ accountability system as a proxy for high accountability pressure since these schools are under the most scrutiny from the state and most likely to experience more severe consequences of accountability. These schools are so classified for being the lowest 20% relative to other schools statewide on the Progress and Performance Index (MA DESE, 2016). Since these schools are only 20% of all the schools in Massachusetts, it was harder to recruit participants from these schools than schools in level 1 or 2 schools, which make up the other 80% of schools. I considered schools classified as level 1 and 2 as low accountability pressure schools because those schools are less likely to fall into level 4 or 5 state takeover than level 3 schools that are already in the lowest 20%.

Using these sampling and recruitment strategies allowed me to gather a “highly selective sample of individuals who are willing and able to be outspoken on the topic and share their experiences with the phenomenon” (Barriball & While, 1994, p. 328). It was necessary to get a committed group of research participants who were willing and able to share their experience with a phenomenon under study. This was preferable to randomized selection, which is popular with quantitative studies. In a small qualitative study, such as this, purposeful selection was preferable since “most of the advantages of randomization depend on a reasonable large sample size to make such variations unlikely” (Maxwell, 2004, p. 71). It was better instead in a small qualitative study like this to use “*purposeful selection, rather than relying on the idiosyncrasies of chance*” (Light et al, 1990, as cited in Maxwell, 2004, p. 71). However, one limitation of this selection process was the participants could be unrepresentative of the total population of social studies teachers in Massachusetts (Denzin, 1989, as cited in Barriball & While, 1994, p. 329).

Phenomenological research depends on being able to access “rich and detailed personal accounts” of the phenomenon under study (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 40). I got these accounts from teachers during my interviews. As Burke and Adler (2013) pointed out the reform efforts for high-poverty urban schools cannot just stop at numbers and accountability, but needed to include “the voices and narratives” of the individuals who work in urban classrooms (p. 15). That was why my study engaged directly with teachers who worked in urban classrooms to understand how accountability influenced their work and their professional identity and therefore their teaching. This study sought to understand changes to classroom practice because of accountability pressure, but also how the teachers interviewed “make sense of these, and how their understanding influences their behavior” (Maxwell,

2004, p. 22). These social studies teachers had to make choices about how they taught given the context they were working in. Scholars from many disciplines have long found that how one perceived the world influenced how one acted in it (Apple, 1995, p. 63). It was necessary to talk directly to these social studies teachers because every day they are making decisions in these complex contexts that influence the education the next generation of U.S. citizens are getting.

This “In-depth, small-scale study” about teachers’ perceptions of secondary social studies curriculum narrowing “gives expression and nuance to larger scale qualitative studies” (Milner Bisland, 2015, p. 462). It was not enough to only describe the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing. Also, “one must look exogenously at *non-x*—particularly the context and social forces in which the object of study is embedded” (Anyon, 2009, p. 2). That was why this was a qualitative, interview-based study where I asked teachers about their experience with curriculum narrowing as well as how the experience happened, including their reflections on the setting and context for the curriculum narrowing. This allowed me to build rich textual and structural descriptions (Creswell, 2007, p. 159). It was important to look at how teachers were shaped by and shape their schools and the larger accountability context. Teachers have such rich and deep stories of curriculum narrowing and their own understandings of how this narrowing has happened. Their stories demand to be heard by scholars, school leaders, and policymakers.

### **Data Collection**

My primary research method was phenomenology, which is an interview-based method focused on how the participants experience a phenomenon. In this case, the phenomenon was high school social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of

accountability. Phenomenological interviews are collaborative processes that utilize open-ended questions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). In phenomenological research, the focus of the inquiry comes from the researchers “intense interest” in the topic and the enthusiasm and inquisitiveness the researcher brings to the study that motivates their work (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). The researcher’s own history with the topic “brings the core of the problem into focus” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). I experienced this phenomenon myself and have excitement for studying it.

Husserl argued that the first step of phenomenological research was for the researcher “to bracket” their own taken-for-granted assumptions about the world (as cited in Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 12). Moustakas (1994) referred to this “bracketing” of one’s own experience as the *epoche*—a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment (p. 33). In the *epoche*, the researcher first systematically explored his or her own experience with the phenomenon so that their own past understandings and biases can be set aside and did not influence how they understand the data they collect in their research (Moustakas, 1994, p. 116). While this is not typically perfectly achieved, the process does considerably decrease the influence of preconceptions (Moustakas, 1994, p. 90). Therefore, I worked first to explore my own experience with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing so that it did not then shape how I gathered, analyzed, and interpreted the experiences my participants have had with the phenomenon.

Once I completed my *epoche* analysis by exploring my own experience with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability pressure, I then began my collection of others experiences with the phenomena. I started by emailing each of the identified social studies teachers who volunteered for the interviews through the

google form. In this email I provided a consent form (see appendix B) with an introduction and description of the study, the risks and benefits of the study, information about confidentiality and anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study up until publication of the study.

I then worked with the participants to arrange a time for a one-on-one meeting. I chose to conduct one-on-one interviews over a focus group because it would encourage participants to give “rich, detailed, first-person account of their experiences” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 56). One-on-one interviews would also make sure each participant had the space “to think, speak, and be heard” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 57). While ideally I would be able to conduct each interview in person, to provide flexibility that would allow more teachers to participate I offered multiple ways of interviewing including in person, over skype, and over the telephone. However, I recognized the limits of a telephone interview, where as a researcher I would not be able to see the participant’s informal communication through body language (Creswell, 2007, p. 133).

At the start of the interview I again reviewed with the participants the purpose of the study, their rights as a research participant, and what I would do with the data collected. Furthermore, I let the participants know that I was interested their experiences and perceptions, that there are “no right or wrong answers,” and they should take as much time as they need to think about and express their answers (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 63). I asked for the participants’ permission to use a digital voice recorder during each interview to allow me to capture their words accurately. Following each interview, I transcribed the conversation. In phenomenological research, it is important to get as much of their verbatim words as possible. I also keep a field notebook to record key ideas expressed by the

interviewee as well as my immediate thoughts, connections, and impressions during and directly following each interview (Patton, 1990, p. 274).

I used in-depth interviews with open questions because research indicated that they would best allow participants to explain their perspectives and beliefs in-depth as well as discuss contextual factors to fully answer my research questions. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) stated that in depth interviews provided participants “to speak freely and reflectively, and to develop their ideas and express their concerns at some length” (p. 56). I asked broad questions that yielded “rich, vital, substantive descriptions” of the participants’ experience of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 116). This helped me to achieve the goal of facilitating “an interaction which permits participants to tell their own stories, in their own words” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 57). Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) also highlighted the importance of using open-ended, non-leading questions that allowed participants to guide his or her own responses without constraints or assumptions being placed upon him or her (p. 60). In-depth interviewing with open questions allows researchers to get to the nature of social life and learn about interior experiences and perceptions of a situation (Weiss, 1994).

I used semi-structured interviews to investigate the participants’ experience with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability pressure and how it influenced their professional identity because the research indicated this method would allow me to best answer my research questions. Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2012) argued that phenomenological research was usually conducted with a semi-structured, flexible, interview where the participants have some control over where the interview goes (p. 4). While not looking only at phenomenological studies, Beijaard et al. (2004), found that most studies on teachers’ professional identity used structured or semi-structured interviews

and open-ended interview questions with a small number of teachers (p. 119). Beijaard et al. (2004) concluded that these methods allowed researchers to better understand the influence of context and personal values on the teachers (p. 125). Barriball and White (1994) also found that semi-structured interviews helped with looking at respondents' perceptions and opinions regarding complex and sensitive topics as well as probed for more information and got clarification when needed (p. 330).

As the primary researcher, in advance of the interviews I developed an in-depth interview schedule (see appendix C) that included "a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the person's experience of the phenomenon" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 114). I crafted a "loose agenda" for the meeting, including interview questions and probes based on my review of the literature on the topic and related theories (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 58). Some level of probing was necessary because "most people have learned to give personal information in bite-sized, box-ticketing packages and may need encouragement and guidance in engaging in fuller, deeper disclosure" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 56). I also added spontaneous probes as I listen attentively to the participants, such "Can you tell me more about that?" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 65). This was especially important early on in the interview since it helped the participant understand the "level of depth and detail" I wanted them to go into and encouraged them to answer future questions with this depth so less probes would be needed going forward (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 65).

While I used my interview schedule as a "virtual map" I also used my professional judgment in adjusting the schedule to more naturally follow the conversation and participant's concerns, as long as the discussion was be relevant to my research questions

(Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 58-59). I recognized that during the interview, “the participant is the experiential expert on the topic in hand and therefore they should be given much leeway in taking the interview ‘to the thing itself’ (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 58).

Moustakas (1994) suggested that phenomenological interviews should begin with a social conversation that was “aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere” (p. 114). Creswell (2009) suggested starting with an ice-breaker (p. 183). I did this by asking my participants to describe their teaching experience. Starting with a soft, general question about their teaching experience allowed teachers to feel comfortable in our interview since this was likely something they have spoken about a lot. This also helped participants understand that I was interested in their experiences and preferred an account that was “personal and detailed” rather than “generic and impersonal” (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 69).

What was great about the conversational and open-ended interviews I conducted was I could ask the research participants to clarify anything I was confused by when they said it (Moustakas, 1994, p. 110). If I had additional questions later while I was analyzing the data I asked participants to clarify something in an e-mail. I also engaged in member checking by asking participants to review for accuracy my analysis of their experience later in the data analysis process. I also asked them to pass my research and information on to other social studies teachers who might be interested in participating in the study for my snowball sampling (Creswell, 2007, p. 135).

### **Data Analysis Plan**

To analyze my data I used Moustakas’ (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis. Once the full transcript(s) of a participant’s interview(s)



had been read, I started horizontalizing the data from that participant. This was important because in a phenomenological study the researcher must treat every horizon or statement relevant to the topic and question as having equal value. As Moustakas (1994) wrote “each angle of perception adds something to one’s knowing of the horizons of a phenomenon” (p. 91). This step involved listing every non-repetitive, non-overlapping quote from the transcript relevant to the experience. This was also known as constructing a list of significant statements about how individuals experience the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 153). These are known as “in vivo codes” because they are exact words used by participants (Creswell, 2007, p. 153). I then reduced and eliminated expressions that did not affirmatively answer these two questions: Does it contain a moment of the experience that is necessary and sufficient for understanding it? Is it possible to abstract and label it? I also eliminated expressions that are overlapping, repetitive, or have vague, unclear language. What was left was the “invariant constituents of the experience” or the key parts of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

The next step of data analysis was to cluster the invariant constituents into themes and gave each cluster a thematic label. These were the core themes of the experience. In constructing these themes, the researcher needed to look for what underlying themes or contexts would help explain how the phenomenon came to be (Moustakas, 1994, p. 99). I determined categories and themes as they emerge, ensuring that they reflect the views of the participants, because using “prefigured” codes could limit the analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 152). I then validated these themes by checking to make sure that they either were explicitly expressed in the interview transcripts or were compatible with what was stated by the research participant (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). This step of

validation of going back to the data was very important because qualitative coding should be “grounded in the data” (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Maxwell, 2004, p. 79).

I then used the relevant, validated themes and invariant constituents to develop an individual textual description of the “what” of the experience for this particular participant. I included verbatim examples from the transcribed interview to allow my readers to see the evidence I was using to support my textual description. As Moustakas (1994) wrote “in descriptions one seeks to present in vivid and accurate terms, in complete terms, what appears in consciousness and in direct seeing” (p. 59).

Next, I constructed an individual structural description for each participant based on individual textual description and imaginative variation (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The imaginative variation allowed me as the researcher “to seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspective, different positions, roles, or functions” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 97-98). The goal of the structural descriptions of an experience was to describe “the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced; in other words the ‘how’ that speaks to conditions that illuminate the ‘what’ of experience” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). The structural description was where I considered the accountability context in which social studies curriculum narrowing takes place. The structural description was where I, as the researcher, reflected “on these textual portraits to arrive at their essences, in terms of underlying conditions, precipitating factors, structural determinants” (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). Lastly, I combined the textual and structural descriptions to arrive at the essence of this

individual's experience with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121).

I repeated these data analysis steps for each participant in my study. Then from the individual textual-structural descriptions, I developed a composite description which would show the meanings and essence of the experience for the whole group (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). In this composite description I described the experience in detail and offered "a clear portrait of what it is" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 60). By having both individual and composite descriptions allowed me to address phenomenology's "idiographic aim of providing a detailed analysis of divergence and convergence across cases, capturing the texture and richness of each particular individual examined" (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 200). The goal of the composite description was for the reader of my study to "come away from the phenomenology with the feeling, 'I understand better what it is like for someone to experience that' (Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 46 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 62). I was careful to note when there were discrepant or negative cases that did not fit the most common composite description themes.

To conclude my phenomenological analysis, I summarized my findings, considered the possible limitations of my study, and drew possible interpretations and meanings from my data. I discussed the "outcomes of the investigation in terms of social meanings and implications as well as personal and professional values" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 155). I then returned to the literature review and point out where my study confirmed previous studies work and where it diverged from earlier work (Creswell, 2009, p. 189). This was also when I, as the researcher, pointed out new questions raised by the data and outlined possible future

research projects that would move forward in knowledge of this topic (Moustakas, 1994, p. 155).

### **Ethical Considerations**

Qualitative research methods are “highly personal and interpersonal” and therefore it was important to always keep ethical considerations forefront in my mind as a researcher (Patton, 1990, p. 356). It was important to keep in mind that what was a “research project” for me was to some degree an intrusion into the lives of the participants of my study (Maxwell, 2004). Since interviewing was the primary interaction I had with these teachers, I had no to minimal participation in their daily work inside and outside the classroom. The extent that each participant engaged with my study was limited to the time needed for an interview and possible follow ups and member checks and did not exceed 5 hours. My role as a researcher was overt and transparent, my participants knew that I was a researcher and what I was studying when I meet with them (Patton, 1990).

When I initially reached out to participants via email to ask them to participate in the study I included a consent form for participation (see appendix B) with an introduction and description of the study, the risks and benefits of the study, information about confidentiality and anonymity, and the right to withdraw from the study up until publication of the study. Participants needed to understand that while I protected my participants’ anonymity, my final publication included verbatim extracts of their interviews (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 53). For my study, there was minimal risk to the participants and the only discomfort they might have experience would be if discussing their experience brought up any painful feelings.

There were a number of safeguards to protect participants. Participation in the study

was confidential and their districts or schools would not be informed that they participated. During my data collection and analysis, all data, including written and recorded records, was kept in a secure location and electronic records were stored on a password protected computer. Upon completion of my research, all written and recorded interview data were destroyed. These safeguards were relayed to participants before they are interviewed. Their informed consent for the interview and audio recording of it was received from the participants before the interviews begin. This informed consent included permission to use excerpts of transcriptions of the interviews in presentations and my final write up of this research project.

### **Researcher's Role**

In qualitative research, the researcher was an active participant in data collection and analysis, and it was important to understand their positionality. My own experience as a social studies teacher in an urban high school facing accountability pressure for nine years had raised my sensitivity to the issues and challenges faced by social studies teachers in similar contexts. I held strong views about the purpose of schools and the role of a strong social studies education. I did not ignore my own experiences when conducting my research. “My subjectivity is *the* basis for the story that I am able to tell. It is a strength on which I build. It makes me who I am as a person *and* as a researcher, equipping me with the perspectives and insights that shape all that I do as a researchers” (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 104). This was common for many practitioner-researchers, as Kress (2011) wrote of her graduate students, “what remained the same for most of them was how much their Selves, their work settings, and their desires to improve something were reflected in the research they gravitated toward” (p. vi).

## **Validity**

In qualitative research, validity means that there are certain procedures that researchers utilize to check for accuracy of their data (Creswell, 2009, p. 190). A major validation strategy I employed was using thick, rich description to convey the findings of the study. “This description may transport readers to the setting and give the discussion an element of shared experiences. When qualitative researchers provide detailed descriptions of the setting, for example, or provide many perspectives about a theme, the results become more realistic and richer” adding to the validity of the research findings (Creswell, 2009, p. 190-191). In presenting my analysis by using thick description, I rigorously looked for data that both supported and was discrepant from my themes and composite descriptions. (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). While most of the evidence presented in the coming chapters helped build a case for the themes, it is also important to “present information that contradicts the general perspective of the theme. By presenting this contradictory evidence, the account becomes more realistic and hence valid” (Creswell, 2009, p. 192). Qualitative research is sometimes criticized for not being able to be generalized (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). However, it is possible that some findings from this study could be transferred and applied to other issues in educational research. In my study, I included verbatim quotations from participants and thick description of the participants and their context allowing the readers to make their own decisions about what they can transfer to another setting (Erlandson et al, 1993; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Merriam, 1988, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 209).

Another strategy I employed was highlighting my own biases and role as a researcher. Highlighting my own bias as a researcher was also important so that the reader of my study

can understand any possible biases or assumptions I hold that may have influenced my work (Merriam, 1988, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 207). As Merriam (1988) pointed out it was important that “in this clarification, the researcher comments on past experiences, biases, prejudices, and orientations that have likely shaped the interpretation and approach of the study” (as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 207). I was cognizant of my own values and biases related to this topic (Rossman & Rallis, 2003, p. 51) and engaged in “critical self-reflection” on them throughout my study (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998, p. 161).

A validation strategy I used was member-checking. According to Creswell (2009), “member-checking is a frequently used approach, in which the investigator takes summaries of the findings back to the key participants in the study and asks them whether the findings are an accurate reflection of their experiences” (p. 211). Member checking was considered “the most critical technique for establishing credibility” in qualitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 207). This strategy was often used in phenomenology. For example, Trumbull (1993) gave each research participant a copy of his complete analysis of all data and asked each to respond with how accurate they thought it was as well as any changes they should suggest to make it clearer for his readers or to allow his readers to more fully understand the experience of undergoing coronary artery bypass surgery (as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 109). I took a similar member checking approach to Trumbull by e-mailing each participant a copy of my analysis of their interview data and asking for any needed clarifications or additions.

Finally, it was important to remember that “findings are ‘valid’ if the idea is well grounded and well supported” (Polkinghorne, 1989, as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 215). An important general question to ask about the validity of findings in phenomenological studies

is: “Does the general structural description provide an accurate portrait of the common features and structural connections that are manifest in the examples collected?”

(Polkinghorne, 1989, p. 57 as cited in Creswell, 2007, p. 215). Since I have included multiple measures for validity, I can assert that my study meets the expectations for validity of qualitative studies. Furthermore, I, by interviewing 12 participants, I reached saturation, where I heard many participants tell stories of social studies curriculum narrowing that shared common themes. This helped my study have internal generalizability. My findings should help stakeholders understand public high school social studies teachers’ experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing, even for those teachers not directly interviewed in this case.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter built on the work of chapter 1 where I provided the rationale for my study and chapter 2 which provided a literature review. This chapter outlined why and how I employed phenomenology to hear from high school social studies teachers about their experiences with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing. This was important because high school social studies teachers provide access to important learning for high school students that influences those students’ and America’s success in the future. If accountability pressure was influencing how these social studies teachers perceive their ability to teach students these important lessons it may have significant ramifications for American society. Therefore, it was very important to explore how these teachers are experiencing the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing. My findings are explored in chapter 4.



## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this study was to describe urban public high school social studies teachers' perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing and its influence on their professional identity within the context of Massachusetts' school accountability policies. This chapter presents the results of the study by providing both textual analysis, the "what" of the experience of curriculum narrowing, and structural analysis, the "how" of the experience of curriculum narrowing. Within this chapter, first, the data analysis process is briefly reviewed from chapter three. Second, participant profiles are presented that provide brief descriptions of the participant's background and school settings. Then the data gathered is presented, organized by the study's research questions and then themes pulled from across the participant interviews. Quotations directly from the interview participants are presented to bring to life, illustrate, and provide examples of their experiences with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing.

Table 1

*Themes Derived from Analysis of Collected Data, Organized by Research Question*

<b>Research Question</b>	<b>Themes</b>
1. What were public school teachers' understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accountability level sometimes correlates with testing pressure</li> <li>- Gap between teacher's perception of goal of education &amp; leader</li> <li>- A general devaluing of history education in public schools</li> </ul>
2. What were high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Supplanting of history class with ELA MCAS preparation</li> <li>- A shift towards inquiry based history education</li> <li>- Joy at not having MCAS in their subject</li> <li>- Concerns over possible social studies MCAS</li> </ul>
3. How did teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being a social studies teacher was important part of identity</li> <li>- Felt lack of respect from teachers of MCAS tested subjects</li> <li>- Some felt secure in their position as a social studies teacher</li> </ul>

As shown in Table 1, the first research question this study explored was: What were public school teachers' understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school? This section explores three themes found in the data for this question: that accountability level did not consistently correlate with testing pressure, the existence of a gap between teacher's perception of the goal of public education and their school administrators, and a general devaluing of history education in public schools. The second research question explored was: What were high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing? The themes identified from the interview data on this question were the supplanting of history with English Language Arts (ELA) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) preparation, a shift towards inquiry-based history education, a joy at not having the pressure of MCAS in their subject, and a fear about possible social studies MCAS being implemented. The third research question this study explored was: How

did teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure? Themes that emerged from the interview data on this question are that being a social studies teacher was an important part of many of the participants identity, most participants felt lack of respect from teachers of MCAS subjects, and yet half of the participants felt secure in their jobs as social studies teachers.

### **Data Analysis Process**

To analyze my interview data I used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis, as described in Table 2. I began by listing every non-repetitive, non-overlapping quote or significant statement from the transcript that related to the participant's experience as a social studies teacher. I then eliminated expressions that are overlapping, repetitive, or have vague, unclear language to be left with the "invariant constituents of the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). I then clustered the invariant constituents into themes, that make up the core themes of the experience. And I returned to the data to make sure that the themes were directly expressed or aligned with the data in the interview transcripts to validate the data (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121; Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Maxwell, 2004, p. 79).

Table 2

*Steps of Moustakas' (1994) Phenomenological Data Analysis Method*

Step #	Step Description
1	Listing every non-repetitive, non-overlapping significant statement
2	Eliminated expressions that are repetitive or have vague language
3	Clustered the invariant constituents, expressions, into themes
4	Validated themes against original transcript of data
5	Develop individual textual description of the “what” of the experience
6	Develop individual structural description of the “how” of experience
7	Combined the descriptions to arrive at the essence of this experience
8	Member checking with participants to ensure validity of findings
9	Repeated steps #1-8 for each participant
10	Develop composite description of group to show essence of experience

I then used the validated themes and invariant constituents to develop an individual textual description of the “what” of the experience for each particular participant, including direct quotes from the participants to provide illustration. Next, I constructed an individual structural description for each participant based on interview data and imaginative variation (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The goal of the structural descriptions of an experience is to describe the “how” of the experience. The structural description was where I considered the accountability context in which social studies curriculum narrowing took place. Then I combined the textual and structural descriptions to arrive at the essence of this individual’s experience with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) and shared these findings with my participants for additional validation through member checking (Trumbull, 1993 as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p 109; Creswell, 2007, p. 207).

Portions of these individual descriptions have been used for the participant profiles presented in this chapter.

I repeated these data analysis steps for each participant in my study. Then from the individual textual-structural descriptions, I developed a composite description to show the meanings and essence of the experience for the whole group (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). This composition description is presented in the remainder of this chapter broken up by the research questions explored and themes found across participants' responses. I hope it gives the reader a clearer sense of what it was like to experience this phenomenon. In my analysis and writing, I was careful to note when there are discrepant or negative cases that do not fit the most common composite description themes as another assurance of validity of my findings. In chapter 5, I draw possible interpretations and meanings from this data, return to the literature review and point out where my study confirms previous studies work and where it diverges from earlier work (Creswell, 2009, p. 189), and point out new questions raised by the data (Moustakas, 1994, p. 155).

## **Participant Profiles**

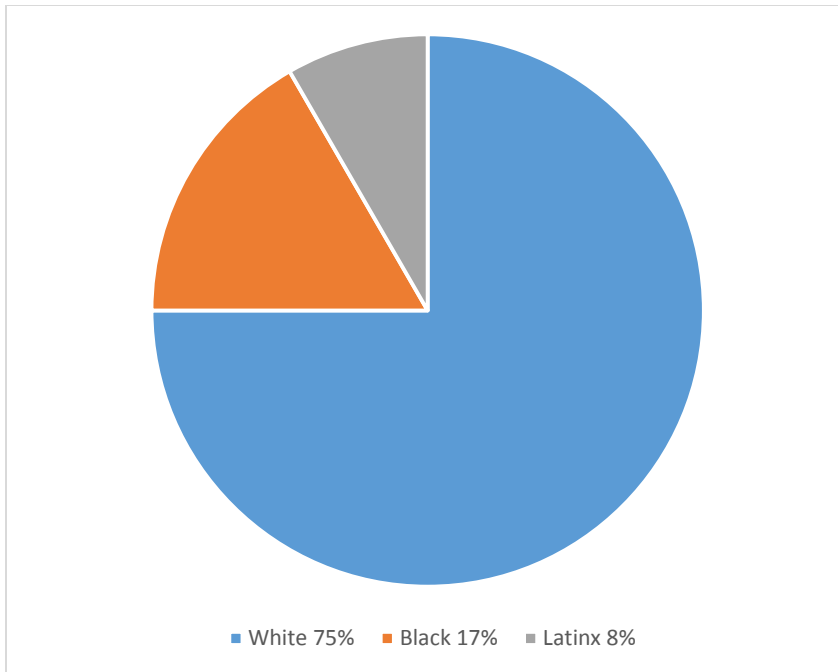
**Demographic information.** As outlined in Table 3 and Figures 5-9 the 12 participants from 12 different schools were selected using stratified purposeful sampling. Pseudonyms are used for participant and school names. The participants years of experience range from less than one full year to 19 years. There were five female teachers and seven male teachers. There were nine white teachers, two Black teachers, and one Latinx teacher, reflecting the overwhelming white teaching force in Massachusetts. The focus of this study was urban schools, as defined by being situated in a community with over a population of over 50,000. The urban schools in this study also all served disproportionate numbers of

low-income, racially and ethnically minoritized, English Language Learners (ELL), and immigrant students. Eight teachers from a variety of urban school were interviewed. These urban high schools included four traditional urban public schools, one urban public school focused on teaching English Learners, one urban public school for which entrance was done by exam, one urban charter public school, and two public urban alternative education programs. As a comparison point, four suburban high school teachers were also included as participants in this study. All participants in the study had a four-year college degree as well as a Master's Degree. All but one (Arthur) held a Massachusetts' educator license in History, a few in other fields as well.

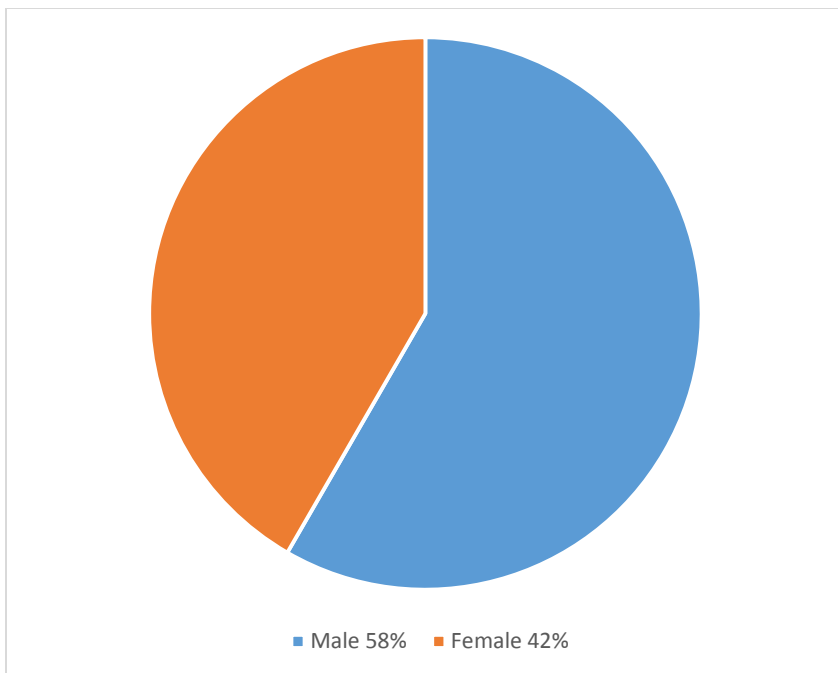
Table 3

*Demographic Information for Study Participants*

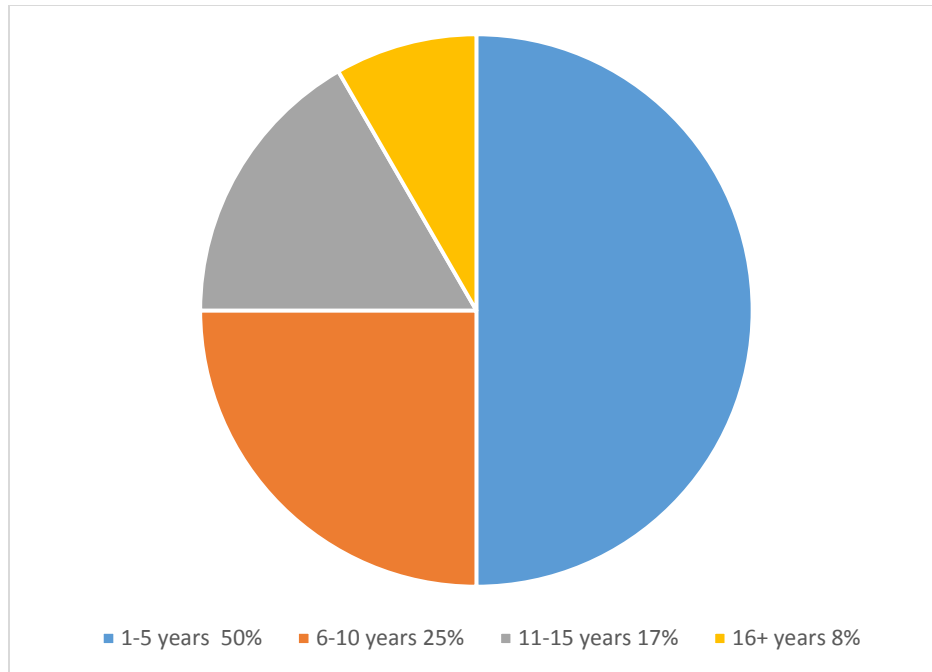
<b>Name</b>	<b>Race</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Years Teaching</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>School Level</b>
Sage Forrest	White	Male	14 <sup>th</sup>	Urban Public	3
Noah Thomas	Black	Male	5 <sup>th</sup>	Urban Public	3
Judy Atherton	White	Female	1 <sup>st</sup>	Urban Public	3
Sarah Ragan	White	Female	15 <sup>th</sup>	Urban Public	3
Taylor Johnson	Black	Male	6 <sup>th</sup>	Urban Exam	2
Arthur Bennet	Latinx	Male	1 <sup>st</sup>	Urban Charter	2
Jim Brown	White	Male	2 <sup>nd</sup>	Urban Alt Ed	5
Jen McDonald	White	Female	3 <sup>rd</sup>	Urban Alt Ed	4
Margaret Kolby	White	Female	4 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban Public	1
John Smith	White	Male	19 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban Public	2
Stephen Webster	White	Male	7 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban Public	2
Jane Allen	White	Female	6 <sup>th</sup>	Suburban Public	1



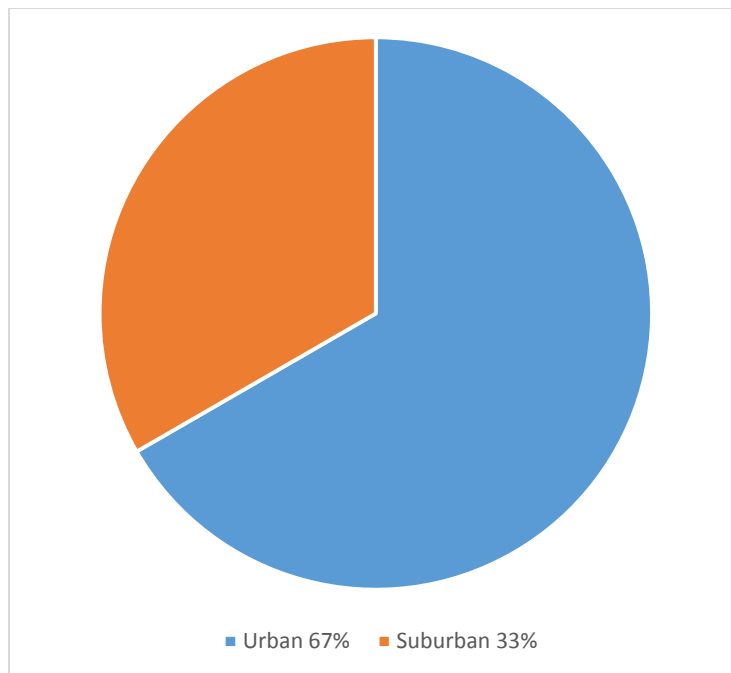
*Figure 5.* Participants' race.



*Figure 6.* Participants' gender.

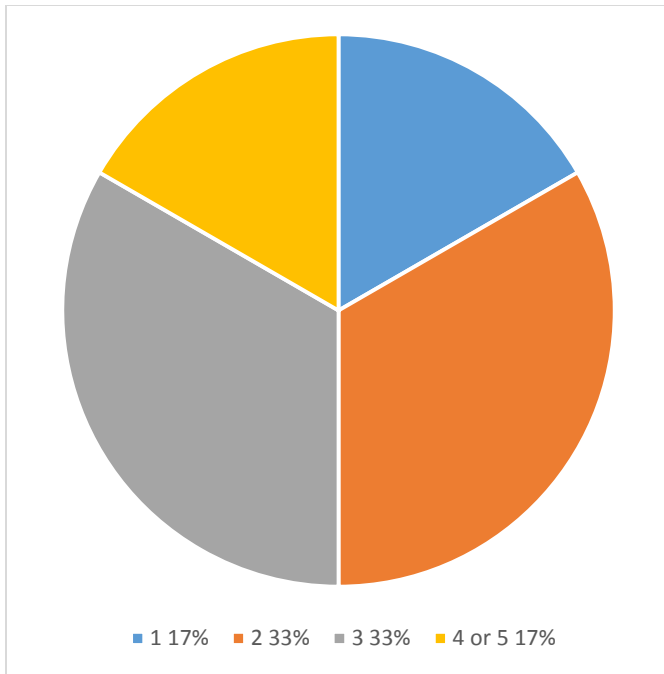


*Figure 7.* Participants' teaching experience.



*Figure 8.* Participants' school location.





*Figure 9.* Participants' school state accountability level.

Noted in Table 3 above was also the school's accountability level on the Massachusetts Performance and Progress Index (PPI) based on closing gaps on MCAS scores across multiple subgroups (further explained in Chapter 1). These levels are important to keep in mind when exploring how the pressure of accountability and MCAS scores influences individual schools and teachers' experiences. Schools with levels of 3, 4, or 5 were so classified for being in the lowest 20% relative to other schools on the PPI (MA DESE, 2016). Schools in level 4 or 5 are undergoing some type of state intervention. Six schools in the study had school levels of 1 or 2, meaning that they were in the top 80% on the PPI and were less likely to need state intervention in the immediate future. The two alternative education program schools in the study were not individually leveled by the state, so the accountability level for the district they reside in was used instead. Since schools

adopted the next generation MCAS at different times, some recent years schools have been held harmless and not classified based on MCAS results. Therefore, I used the school accountability levels from 2016 for Margaret, John, Noah, Taylor, and Arthur and from 2017 for Sage, Jane, Stephen, Sarah, and Judy. What follows is participant profiles that provide more specific background on each teacher and their school setting that help paint the picture of each participant's experience with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of the Massachusetts accountability system.

**Sage Forrest.** Sage Forrest was a white male teacher in his 30s who had been teaching social studies for 14 years. His undergraduate major was history and he had a Master of Arts in Teaching in Social Studies. Sage loved teaching because he felt an adrenaline rush when teaching and learning was happening. "It feels electric," he said. While he recognized that teaching does not feel that way all the time, "when it does feel that way, it makes it all worth it." Sage Forrest had taught 9<sup>th</sup> grade United States History at Woods High School for six years. Before that he taught middle school for eight years in the same district, mostly classes in geography and ancient history, though his first year was teaching middle school science.

Woods High School was in a city with a population of about 50,000. Woods High School student population was 35% white, 55% Latinx, and less than 5% Asian and African American. On the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS 83% of students scored proficient or higher on ELA, 67% scored proficient or higher on Mathematics, and 69% scored proficient or higher on Science. Woods High School did attempt to establish a community of practice for Sage by requiring him to meet twice each week for 45 minutes each with other social studies teachers. He stated, "we do a lot of collaboration, a lot of...discussion of assessments,

curriculum...and working through the changes to the state frameworks.” Forrest High School supported teacher collaboration by setting aside time in the school day, when the students come in late those days, for these professional learning groups to meet. However, Sage reported that he was pretty independent and preferred to “have a lot of those kind of conversations with myself.” Sometimes he liked to “shut my doors...and kind of avoid...the other pressures and all the other things going on within the school can they kind of fade away.”

**Noah Thomas.** Noah Thomas was a black male in his 20s who had been teaching history for five years at Bay High School, an urban school. He held an educator’s license in history and political science and philosophy. His undergraduate major was political science. He also earned a Master of Education through a program specifically to prepare urban teachers. Noah realized he wanted to be a teacher after he spent a year working at an urban school as a City Year corps member and another year, also at an urban school, as a paraprofessional. In his five years at Bay High, he has taught grades 9-12 and a number of required and elective courses including United States History I, United States History II, World History with an emphasis on Latin America, AP U.S. History, AP Government, and a local civics course. Noah was really passionate about history and loved teaching. He found being a history teacher was a great way to combine his passion about history and political science with his interest in working with young people. He believed adolescence was the most interesting age and feels that “teaching high school means that I’ve also never left high school.” He found teaching fun, meaningful, and ethic work.

Noah taught at Bay High School which was approximately 40% African American, 26% Hispanic, and 20% white. Bay High School was one of many high schools in a major

Massachusetts city with a population of over 100,000. Bay High School was a level 3 school and in 2018 had 78% of its 10<sup>th</sup> grade students score proficient or higher on the ELA MCAS, 45% score proficient or higher on Math, and only 23% score proficient or higher on Science. The history department at Bay High School was only four teachers but Noah also maintained a community of practice with people he met in graduate school for teaching as well as through other social studies teachers he met at city wide history professional development opportunities. Noah chaired the department at his school. He noted of his fellow Bay High Social Studies teachers, “all of us are really passionate about history and not making this another ELA.”

**Judy Atherton.** Judy Atherton was a first-year social studies teacher at City High School in the same large city as Bay High School. Judy was a white female in her 20s who teaches 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade World History and American Government. She had a history license and her undergraduate major was in political science and Spanish. She had a master’s degree of Hispanic Language and Literature and a master’s degree in Education. Judy enjoyed teaching because she likes interacting with and talking to other people. She said, “I can’t just sit at a desk all day.” She acknowledged that sometimes teaching makes her feel stressed out and exhausted sometimes, but in a “good way.”

Judy was in her first-year teaching at City High School, an urban level 3 school with 70% black and 25% Latinx students. On the 2018 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS, 88% of students got proficient or higher on the ELA section, 68% got proficient or higher on the Math, and 33% got proficient or higher on the Science. She reported that history, especially in the upper grade where students had already passed the MCAS, was kind of left alone at her school and in the background. And in the lower grades it was the first thing cut when other priorities like

preparing kids for the MCAS got in the way. Judy met once a week with the two other social studies teachers at her and formed a type of community of practice for Judy. Judy had a strong community of practice from her recent completion of graduate school in teaching as well.

**Sarah Ragan.** Sarah Ragan was a white female history teacher in her 40s who taught 9<sup>th</sup> grade US History I exclusively to English Learners (ELs) at English Language Development levels 1-3. She studied art history as an undergraduate and worked in publishing until she decided to change careers to become a teacher. At that time, she got her master's degree in Applied Linguistics and certification in Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). She was passionate about teaching ELs and had been doing so for 15 years. She was licensed as a history teacher and in English as a Second Language teacher. She began her teaching career with K-8 students but always wanted to work with high school students and had been able to do that for the last 12 years at English Learners High School, a school specifically designed for recent immigrants to the U.S.

Sarah had taught at English Learner High School in the same large urban community as Bay High School and City High School. English Learner High School was 38% Black, 54% Latinx, and 6% Asian. English Learner High School was a level 2 school. On the 2018 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS, 69% proficient or higher on ELA, 57% proficient or higher on Math, 46% proficient or higher on Science. Sarah informally met with her students' English Language Arts teacher and thought it would more appropriate for her to have shared prep time with them instead of her school's current configuration where she has common planning time and meets with the other four social studies teachers in the building across grade levels. This

suggested that perhaps Sarah engaged in multiple communities of practice, both with history teachers but also with other teachers of her students.

**Taylor Johnson.** Taylor Johnson had taught for six years at Regional High School. He was a black male in his 20s. He studied government as an undergraduate and has a Master of Education in Secondary Education. He has taught a variety of required courses for almost every grade at his school from seventh through 12<sup>th</sup>. We spoke near the end of his first year of teaching AP US History and his fourth year of teaching a sociology elective course. He stated that teaching makes him feel “overwhelmed” and “drained” as well as “fulfilled, excited, motivated, inspired” and “optimistic.” He was particularly excited when a student would start putting things together in their own mind and make connections to something that is happening in the real world or their own life. He said, “just witnessing the critical thinking and engagement happen, like, in real time is amazing—I really enjoy that moment.”

Taylor taught at a level 2 urban exam-entry school called Regional High School that was fairly evenly divided between Black, Asian, Latinx, and White students. His school consistently did not struggle in getting its students to pass the MCAS and focused instead on improving AP scores. For example, in 2018, Regional High School had 100% of its 10<sup>th</sup> graders score proficient or higher on the ELA MCAS, 99% of its 10<sup>th</sup> graders score proficient or higher on the Math MCAS, and 94% of its 10<sup>th</sup> graders score proficient or higher on the science MCAS. Taylor did not feel that he had a strong community of practice of social studies teachers at his school. He reported that they do have opportunities to work together at the department level but that each of the over a dozen social studies has their own idea of what that time should look like and the department has not had consistent leadership to always provide clear vision and direction during department time. The one thing most of the

social studies department could agree on was resisting one program director's proposal to merge the social studies and English departments into a joint humanities department with a double block English and History class. Taylor thought a lot of resistance to this idea came from social studies teachers who did not have experience or licensure in English and did not want to have to obtain a new license or reapply for their jobs.

**Arthur Bennet.** Arthur was a Latinx male in his twenties who was in his first-year teaching at Star Academy. Arthur was involved in an alternative licensure program and not currently holding a Massachusetts educator license in history. He had some previous experience working in a school as a City Year Corps Member immediately after high school and as a teacher at Breakthrough Collaborative summer program during college. From these experiences he realized he liked working with students and in education. In college, Arthur studied international business and Spanish and has since earned a Master of Public Affairs. He joined his alternative licensure program because he wanted to eventually be involved in education policy development and implementation because he thought this was one of the most important issues currently facing our country. However, he recognized that “we need to understand how the policies impact the teachers and students themselves, before we can really try to offer solutions.” Therefore, Arthur wanted to get “experience actually teaching in the classroom to understand” how policy actually influences education. He does not want to be a teacher for the long term but rather “get my toes into what it is to be a teacher.” He taught tenth grade U.S. history II. Teaching made Arthur feel exhausted but also excited to work with students and help students “feel proud of something that they really worked on, like a really well written piece of work.”

Arthur was in his first-year teaching at Star Academy, an urban charter school with a student population of 60% Black, 27% Latinx, and 9% white. Star Academy was classified as a level 2 school. In 2018, on the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS, 100% of students got proficient or higher in ELA, 78% got proficient or higher in Mathematics, and 69% got proficient or higher in science. Arthur believed he could work closer with the ELA department to understand what the MCAS expects for writing, but he did not currently. Arthur did not regularly get to really collaborate with other social studies teachers in lesson planning. He had joined a U.S. History Facebook group but had not been following what was going on there for a while. He met once a month with the seven other social studies in his school but did not think they were effectively maximizing their opportunity to collaborate. He acknowledged the work they were doing to standardize their rubrics for essays across the history teaching team was important but would have preferred to first focus on standardizing what teachers are teaching and what skills students are expected to learn by each grade level. This desire might come particularly from his difficulties with curriculum planning in his first-year teaching. He said, “I don’t know what I’m doing, I was stumbling around without a light in a dark room.”

**Jim Brown.** Jim Brown was a 2<sup>nd</sup> year white male licensed history teacher in his 20s. Jim studied criminology and public administration and public policy as an undergraduate. He was in his second year of participating an alternative licensure program and was also in his second year of getting his master’s degree in social studies education. In the year he was interviewed, he was teaching a 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> grade Humanities class. In the year before he had taught a blended English and World History class. While Jim acknowledged that there are tough days, he has found teaching overall to an incredible experience. He had found the relationships he has formed with his students, their parents, and other adult supports in the



community especially valuable. He felt like he has learned a lot from his students, especially about their Latinx culture. Jim thought there was a lot of “value in listening and understanding the population of who you are working with before you the teacher and educator are understood.” While his students had faced a number of challenges he is impressed by the loyalty and support they show one and other. He prided himself on the effort he has put in over his last year and half teaching to really get to know the students and how to best serve them academically.

Jim Brown taught at Alternative Ed Academy. Alternative Ed Academy was a charter school not directly affiliated with a district but is located in an urban community of around 70,000 that has a level 5 public school district. Like that urban community, Alternative Ed Academy study body was approximately 70% Latinx. There are approximately 120 students age 15 to 21. Alternative Ed Academy marketed itself as an alternative placement for students who have not succeed at traditional public schools. Given the population they serve, many of the students are Alternative Ed Academy are well below grade level and not generally experienced much academic success previously. Many of their students have been expelled or repeatedly suspended from the city’s public high school or other schools. Many have been involved in the criminal justice system at a young age. Other struggles that Jim’s students often face include irregular attendance, teen pregnancy, learning disabilities, and socio-emotional challenges. Jim recognized that these struggles make teaching at Alternative Ed Academy difficult at times but he still found it very rewarding. Alternative Ed Academy tried to offer a smaller environment that is like a large family. Jim’s largest class was 18 students.

Jim believed that public education is the greatest influence on society, especially social studies education. He saw social studies education as how the next generation of citizens in a democratic society gets prepared for that vital role. He believed his students need to develop an understanding of their civic duty, how to uphold the rights of citizens, and how to maintain our democracy. He pointed to a social studies methods professor in his graduate program as helping inspire him in his belief. This pointed to one of his main communities of practice, his social studies teacher colleagues at his alternative teacher licensure program and his affiliated graduate program as well as the social studies methods professor in the program. His professor had a significant influence on him, including shaping his beliefs about how likely it is that a social studies MCAS will be implemented as a high school graduation requirement in the near future and its possible influence on the social studies teaching job market.

**Jen McDonald.** Jen McDonald was a white female in her 30s who had taught for three years at Special Needs High School. She had studied archeology as an undergraduate and worked in the field for a few years before getting her Masters of Education. She taught three history classes and also taught some other classes as needed including culinary, computers, and transitions—a class preparing students for things like taxes, college, and jobs. Jen had taught U.S. History I, U.S. History II, and was currently teaching World History. Her classes are mixed grades nine through 12. Jen’s goal for teaching social studies was to “stir curiosity” in her students and “give them hope in the world.” She believed most of her students have only seen a small snapshot of the world that was really disparaging and sad and she wanted to expose them to the rest of the world. Jen really wanted to make sure that her students “feel like they’re part of a society and they have a place” in it.

Jen taught for three years at Special Needs High School. Special Needs High School was a small school focused on special needs students and considered an alternative setting. Therefore, Special Needs High School was not leveled and while the students did take MCAS, not enough 10<sup>th</sup> graders took it to be publicly reportable, and many students take MCAS alt. Special Needs High School was located in a level 4 district. Jen was one of two social studies teachers at the high school grades in her school and they do not get any time plan together built into the school day nor are they able to find much time outside of school to do it. On the other hand, Jen very easily worked with her students' ELA teacher and was sometimes able to hang out with them outside of work to coordinate between humanities classes. Jen does not really have a larger community of social studies teachers to work with, she has met a few at various workshops but has not really kept in touch.

**Margaret Kolby.** Margaret Kolby was a 4<sup>th</sup> year white female licensed history teacher in her 20s who taught 9<sup>th</sup> grade World History. Margaret took a very traditional path to becoming a teacher. Her undergraduate major was History and Secondary Social Education and she had since earned a Masters of Education as well. Margaret reported that teaching “makes me feel like I’m doing something important. She pointed out that “even on days when it is really rough,” it helped to know “that the struggle is going to pay off in the long run.” She particularly appreciated that it was a job where she felt like she had a “re-do every day” which allowed her to improve and grow and that experience felt “very powerful” to her.

Margaret Kolby taught at Oak Hill High School, which was a level 2 school on the Massachusetts accountability system. Oak Hill High School was a suburban high school with a student population of approximately 60% white, 30% Asian, and just under 5% of each

black and Latinx students. Oak Hill High School had over 90% of its students score proficient or higher on the ELA, Math, and Science MCAS subjects. Over 70% of its students scored advanced on the ELA and Math MCAS. Margaret was allotted one common planning period per six-day cycle to meet with another social studies teacher who taught each course she teaches, for example the world history teachers meet every six school days. She found this community of practice that her school assigns her “really helpful” and took it seriously. She also had built her own informal community of practice with a good friend who was also a social studies teacher at another high school and with whom she attended undergraduate and graduate school. They spent a lot of time together collaborating on materials for their world history classes even though they do not teach at the same school. Margaret devoted significant time outside the job to meeting and working with her self-created community of practice of social studies teachers.

**John Smith.** John Smith was a white male teacher licensed history teacher in his 40s at Water High School. Like Margaret, John also took a very traditional path to becoming a teacher. His undergraduate major was History and he had since earned a Masters of Arts of Teaching History. He had been teaching at Water High School for 19 years and has taught mostly world history. Despite doing it for 19 years, John still loved teaching. He stated, “I can’t believe... that I actually found a job that I get paid to do something that I really like.” He got excited when students come into class and say things like, “I watched this movie and I can’t believe this happened and we talked about it in class, I can’t believe and oh my god I can’t believe North Korea has an atomic bomb and what are we going to do.” He admitted he was not as passionate as he used to be about teaching, “the first 5, 8, 9 years they are kind of

magical and now I would say it's a job. But a job that I still love and I feel I can really do good things in that job.”

John Smith taught social studies at Water High School. Water High School was a level 2 school, indicating a low accountability level. 92% of their 10<sup>th</sup> grade students score proficient or higher on ELA MCAS and 74% score proficient or higher on the Math and Science tests. A large majority, 72%, of Water High School's students were white, 11% were Latinx, and 9% were African American. John's direct supervisor was a district social studies coordinator who supervised grades 1 through 12 and was in his building two and a half days a week. This showed the district's concern that teachers were evaluated by another expert in their content and not any building administrator. His district coordinator supported his innovative approach to teaching world history through biographies. There was some recent excitement in the social studies department at Water High School, since for the first time since all elective were cut in 2008 financial crisis, the social studies department was offering elective courses. Though they were not getting high student enrollment in those courses, according to John. John and his colleagues in the high school social studies department got along well and had a reputation of being a fun department. Even over the summer, they socialize, for example a number of people go golfing together and some people even drove down to New York City to see a Mets game. They collaborated well together at work and supported each other. For example, John stated, if someone had an emergency dentist appointment, a colleague would cover their class. This showed that John was part of a group of social studies teachers who are friends and see each other as a part of a community of practice.

**Stephen Webster.** Stephen Webster was a white male teacher in his 30s, who has been teaching history for seven years at Gold Hills Regional after spending two years teaching at an out of district placement school. At the time of the interview, Stephen taught U.S. History I college prep, government, and AP U.S. History. He had previously taught replacement level World History course. Stephen loved the day to day aspects of being in the classroom and found interacting with students incredibly rewarding. Stephen had served on a number of committees in his school and district, such as their NEASC accreditation preparation team. However, he had come to realize that the outside of the classroom, administrative tasks he had been involved in was not something he was very interested in. He found the internal politics of his district were not somewhere he wanted to focus his energies in the future.

Stephen Webster had been a history teacher at Gold Hills for seven years and six years before that was a student and graduated from the school. Gold Hills student body was 95% white, 2% Latinx, and 2% African American. Gold Hills was a level 2 school. On the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS, 94% got proficient or advanced on ELA, 89% got proficient or advanced on math, and 83% got proficient or advanced on science. Stephen pointed out that the biggest downside to working at Gold Hills was that he does not get much opportunity to work with other history teachers built into his schedule and therefore has not been really able to participate in a community of practice. They only had department meetings for 50 minutes once, or at most twice, a month and they are focused mostly on administrative stuff. He stated that for years they have been trying to get more common planning time built into the schedule. Stephen reported that his current schedule felt very isolated from one another professionally. He said that if he wanted to work collaboratively with his colleagues he

needed to seek them out on his own and it can be difficult. He did this mostly with the other AP social studies teachers, those who teach AP Psychology and AP European history. He tended to get together with them once in a while to talk about they manage issues like homework, etc. He also made an effort to be friendly with the other teachers who also teach U.S. history I, noting that he has been to their houses multiple times. He stated he has a good relationship with these other history teachers personally but that his opportunities to collaborate professionally were lacking quite a bit. His department and school were very good at promoting and approving teachers' participation in outside social studies professional development such as through North East Regional Council or Massachusetts Council of the Social Studies. Unfortunately, it was only sometimes that he found these professional development opportunities useful. Sometimes these PDs just made him feel better about his own teaching.

**Jane Allen.** Jane Allen was in her 6<sup>th</sup> year teaching. She was a history and political science major in college. She taught American History I and II as well as an elective class. Her students were in the 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grade. She previously taught at an alternative high school. Jane reported that “I really like the age groups I work with, primarily 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup> grader, they are awesome to work with.” The class Jane most enjoyed was an elective class on conspiracies that she got to construct around the students' interests. She was also very passionate about getting to take her students on an annual international trip to Peru, where she also runs an international non-profit.

Jane Allen had taught social studies at Field Town high school for six years. Field Town was a level 1 school. Its student population was approximately 76% white, 14% Latinx, and less than 5% African Americans and Asians. On the 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS, 92% of

students got proficient or higher in ELA, 76% got proficient or higher in Math, and 75% got proficient or higher on science. Jane wished she had a strong community of practice of social studies teachers to collaborate with. She stated that she had common planning time with her department colleagues at her school but she did not find it very productive, even saying it was “kind of useless.” Jane wished for more opportunities to work with other social studies teachers because she loved “hearing other people’s ideas and seeing what they’re doing in their classroom and just hearing about other people’s creativity.” However, she felt she just did not have the opportunity to do that. She mentioned that none of her friends outside of work are history teachers, so she does not have a community of practice outside of school.

### **Teachers’ Understandings of the Influence of Testing Pressure in Their School**

The first research question this study explored was: What were public school teachers’ understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school? This section considers three themes found in the data for this question that accountability level did not always correlate with testing pressure, a gap between teacher’s perception of the goal of public education and their administrators, and that history class was devalued compared to other classes by administrators. Table 4 summarizes the themes and major sub-themes found in answer to this research question. These major sub-themes as well as additional sub-themes and discrepant cases are further discussed in the following sections to provide as full as possible an understanding of the phenomenon of curriculum narrowing and fully explore how teachers understand the influence of testing pressure on their schools.



Table 4

*Themes and Major Sub-Themes of Teachers' Understandings of Influence of Testing Pressure*

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Accountability level did not always correlate with testing pressure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Urban level 3, 4, or 5 schools face significant accountability pressure</li> <li>- Urban specialty and level 1 &amp; 2 schools face low pressure</li> <li>- Suburban level 1 &amp; 2 schools face low accountability pressure</li> </ul>
2. Gap between teacher's perception of goal of education and leader's	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All teachers believed civics preparation was major purpose of schools</li> <li>- School leaders had multiple priorities and civics took a backseat</li> <li>- School leaders are focused on socio-emotional learning over academics</li> </ul>
3. A general devaluing of history education in public schools	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- History classes lose more time than others to non-academic tasks</li> <li>- History classes are pushed aside as districts focus on STEM</li> <li>- There are structural ways in which history classes are devalued</li> </ul>

**“We can’t do that if we aren’t open”:** Accountability level sometimes correlates with testing pressure. As outlined in chapter 1, I noted that Massachusetts urban schools, which are more diverse than suburban Massachusetts districts, were likely to face more significant accountability pressure and are more likely to be deemed in need of improvement (level 3, 4, or 5) than suburban school districts. One might expect that participants in level 3, 4, or 5 schools would experience more accountability pressure as their school’s battle to remain free of state control. This was true in the cases of Noah, Judy, and Jim, who all worked in urban level 3, 4, or 5 schools that could feasibly be closed if they fell to a lower accountability level. While Sarah did not report feeling accountability pressure at her school, she did share many MCAS preparatory activities her school does for her students.

Not all urban schools face significant accountability pressure or find themselves deemed a level 3, 4, or 5 school, in need of intervention. For example, Jen experienced little

accountability pressure at her un-leveled alternative special education focused urban school. Taylor and Arthur also did not feel significant accountability pressure at their level 2 specialized exam and charter schools within a larger urban school district. Since these urban schools were special case schools, with control over their enrollment, higher state accountability grades, and/or lack of need to be graded on state accountability indicators, it makes sense that participants from these schools did not experience significant accountability despite their urban location.

As one would expect, Margaret, John, and Stephen did not experience much accountability pressure in their level 1 or 2 suburban high schools. This may be in part because their schools were less diverse and therefore had less sub-groups on which they had to meet accountability indicators to achieve a high state accountability level, that is they did not face a diversity penalty. However, Jane in her level 1 suburban high school reported experiencing a significant amount of accountability pressure and Sage at a level 3 urban high school did not experience significant accountability pressure. The cases of Jane and Sage run contrary to what one would expect and present interesting questions.

To summarize, of the four participants who taught in traditional urban public schools, all of which were a level 3 on the state accountability indicators, two participants faced significant accountability pressure, or 50%. Of the four participants who taught in urban specialty schools, which were alternate education, charter, or exam schools, only one participant faced significant accountability pressure, or 25%. Of the four participants who taught in suburban public schools, which were all level 1 or 2 on the state accountability system, only one participant faced significant accountability pressure, or 25%. So while traditional urban public schools that rated 3, 4, or 5 on the state's accountability system

where twice as likely to face significant accountability pressure, there is not a consistent correlation between a school's state accountability level and a feeling of accountability pressure. Table 5 summarizes participant's feeling of accountability pressure at their school as compared to their school's state accountability level.

Table 5

*Participants' School State Accountability Level Compared to Reported Feeling of Pressure*

<b>Name</b>	<b>State Accountability Level</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Feeling of Pressure</b>
Jim Brown	5	Urban Alt Ed	Significant
Noah Thomas	3	Urban Public	Significant
Judy Atherton	3	Urban Public	Significant
Sarah Ragan	3	Urban Public	Some
Taylor Johnson	2	Urban Exam	Low
Arthur Bennet	2	Urban Charter	Low
Jen McDonald	4	Urban Alt Ed	Low
Sage Forrest	3	Urban Public	Low
Margaret Kolby	1	Suburban Public	Low
John Smith	2	Suburban Public	Low
Stephen Webster	2	Suburban Public	Low
Jane Allen	1	Suburban Public	Significant

*Significant accountability pressure in urban level 3, 4, or 5 schools.* Noah, also at a level 3 urban school in a city where there were many high schools, also saw a direct connection between accountability pressure imposed by MCAS and the lack of concern about history content learning at his school. Noah saw reviewing MCAS data and discussing how to improve students' MCAS scores as the focus of whole staff professional development and a frequent topic at his school's Instructional Leadership Team (ILT) meetings, which he was

a part of. Noah felt that these data reviews often showed the same thing that was predictable and everyone already knew: “our kids have gaps in reading.” Noah’s administration, especially his director of instruction, definitely pushed the entire staff to focus on improving MCAS scores. Noah recognized that his administration was just reflecting outside accountability pressure put on them. He said, “I think the pressure is really coming from above but I don’t necessarily fault our administration because it’s not unique to our school.” Noah further explained:

Because the reality is, schools are broadly assessed on how they are doing on standardized tests, and while I don’t agree with that pressure I understand that our primary goal has to be at first to be open to provide transformational education students and we can’t do that if we aren’t open.

When asked how her urban level 3 school emphasized improving MCAS scores, Judy answered, “I think that’s like the whole point of our school. The only reason it’s still open is because we had to improve our test scores.” Judy also added “I think sometimes that’s at the expense of some areas that don’t have MCAS attached to them” like history. And while, Sarah reported that she got “no pressure whatsoever” from her urban EL school administration to support students’ growth for the MCAS but her school did a lot to help support its urban students’ success on the MCAS, similar to that which Judy’s school did, that was not traditionally done in the suburbs such as offering Saturday schools and vacation academies in addition to a lot prep work during the school day. Sarah also recognized that her school, like others, was struggling with the switch to MCAS 2.0. She reported “hither to, there’s been a strong sense of what the task is and how to prepare kids so they can” succeed.

She continued “but now the test is entirely changing, everything’s going to have to shift, so we’re bracing for transition here.”

For Jim, MCAS scores and state accountability was only part of why Alternative Ed Academy put so much pressure on its teachers and students. From what Jim saw, Alternative Ed Academy valued students MCAS scores so they can graduate from high school and keep the school’s graduation rate up. Jim thought that Alternative Ed Academy pushed kids towards graduation because the administration wanted to develop Alternative Ed Academy into larger schools with more funding from the state and outside donors. And the state and donors like to fund schools with higher graduation rates and increased enrollment. Jim stated simply “that’s how they get more money, is increasing enrollment. In order to increase enrollment, the students need to achieve....so they can graduate at a steady rate each year.” Jim saw some value in charter schools like his, but got irritated by how the charter school functions as “a business for the sake of developing for its own financial profit, not for the betterment of students.”

***Low accountability pressure in specialty urban schools.*** Jen also worked at an alternative education school but unlike Jim, Jen experienced little accountability pressure from her school administration, perhaps because her school focused on supporting special education students. Since history was not on the MCAS, her administration did not see history teachers as having a role in preparing for MCAS. Jen thought this was odd since Jen used so much reading, writing, and mathematics in her history classes, for example by reading and making timelines. She said that “if I want to include anything that’s in the MCAS like, it’s not required, it’s not even expected, you just do it if you want to be a better teacher,” because Jen was trying to help her students pass and improve her craft as a teacher

she did often include working on academic skills that are tested on the MCAS in her history classes.

Taylor reported that the school administration at his level 2 urban exam school seemed to rely entirely on the math, English, and science departments for delivering MCAS scores with no pressure applied on history teachers to help sustain their high performance. Taylor reported that “MCAS is not necessarily something that's at the forefront, it's there, I think we kind of take it for granted how well we do on the MCAS.” Perhaps because of high MCAS performance, especially on the ELA section, Arthur’s urban charter school administration also did not push Arthur to prep students for the ELA or Math MCAS in social studies class. He reported “they haven’t talked to me much about...for history, they are kind of like do whatever you feel is right” and while it can be overwhelming at times, overall Arthur did “like the liberty of it.”

***Low accountability pressure in suburban schools.*** Margaret, John, and Stephen at suburban level 1 and 2 schools did not feel significant accountability pressure. Margaret stated students at Oak Hill know that they will most likely pass the MCAS. Margaret thought many students who were struggling with a class actually saw it as reassuring when they do well on the associated MCAS. For example, one might say “I’ve been struggling in physics all year, how I am actually doing, it seems like I did well on that.” She reported that students’ value MCAS as an outside measure of their work beyond just teacher-driven feedback. According to John, there did not appear to be much school wide focus improve students’ MCAS scores at Water High School. Yet, he said his school did take the MCAS “seriously” but mostly around getting a few straggler students to school to take it, not in regards school wide preparation. For example, if a student was not there the day of the test, the school would

have people call a student's home and even provide transportation to pick a student up. He even recalled one time his principal personally did a home visit himself for a student who did not show up for the MCAS. And if a student failed the MCAS, his school provided intensive one on one MCAS remediation, but that was not that common at Water High School.

Similarly, there was little MCAS pressure school wide at suburban level 2 Gold Hills. Stephen reported that he knew that the ELA and Mathematics department chairs put a lot of emphasis on it but that he did not hear much about it as a history teacher. There was some extra tutoring in preparation for the MCAS that a small group of students get pulled from academic classes for but that it was approximately 10 students out of over a 1,000 students in the building that are affected and that he has never personally had a student pulled from his class for tutoring. The only other thing that happened special for the MCAS at his school was the Parent Teacher Organization organizes a special free breakfast for the mornings of testing.

***Discrepant cases.*** Unlike the other suburban level 1 schools, Jane reported that her level 1 suburban Field Town High school focused a lot on MCAS, for example, that MCAS and MCAS scores was talked about at nearly every staff meeting. And that as a teacher she was made acutely aware how “the whole school is weighted down by the scores, the whole school is judged by the scores.” This makes me think that how much accountability pressure teachers feel may be influenced by more than just the school's current accountability level but also by factors such as the school principal's or other administrators' personal concerns about accountability level and MCAS results reflecting poorly on them or the school. This may partly explain why Jane, who worked at level 1 suburban school, still felt significant

accountability pressure from her administration and Sage, at an urban level 3 school, did not feel significant accountability pressure at the time of interview.

Sage's Woods High School had a new principal in 2018-2019. However, for the previous seven school years, the school had one principal who was "super data focused." This principal was always talking about data driving instruction and spent a lot of time in staff meetings looking at data, MCAS scores in particular, and discussing ways to improve the school's numbers. This led to a lot of initiatives across Woods High School such as text-based writing and Making Students Thinking Visible (MSTV) that were focused on school wide efforts to improve reading and writing instruction. The new principal had been less explicit that MCAS scores needed to improve and had instead focused on simplifying and making clearer the school's mission. Sage and Jane's experience highlighted that the school's principal had a major role in mediating how much accountability pressure comes down to teachers. Perhaps another reason Sage did not feel as much accountability pressure because Sage worked in a smaller city of just over 50,000 people and he worked at the city's one large traditional high school and there were not competing other high schools like in some larger urban areas.

**"We are ill equipping students": A gap between teachers and school administrators.** All the participants in the study viewed part of the goal of public schools to prepare students to be civically engaged in their democratic society in the future and in addition to preparing students for post-secondary college and career opportunities. Many participants believed that civic education was essential for schools to serve their purpose in providing an avenue for social-economic mobility in society. This is not surprising given the fact that all participants self-selected to become social studies teachers, which includes



teaching students to be prepared to be active citizens. While many participants felt that their school administrators and mission statements nominally supported this goal, at least four participants felt there was a gap between how much the participants valued this civic preparation for students and the level of support and focus their administration gave to that goal (Jim, Noah, Sage, and Jane).

Four other participants felt their administration was not as focused on improving students' academic preparation as they should be and instead are distracted by socio-emotional learning and independent living goals (Stephen, Margaret, John, and Jen). In the area of discrepant cases, Sarah and Arthur expressed opposite concerns about their administration, that their administrations were too focused on college preparation and not as open to supporting students' non-college options as Sarah and Arthur would like. Interestingly, Taylor and Judy also pointed out that they believed their administrators had more power than they knew over shaping the direction of their school community and could do more to live up their vision for the purpose of public schools. Table 6 summarizes these findings.

Table 6

*Participants' Belief in the Purpose of Education Compared to Feelings of School Leaders*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Believed civic education was a purpose of education</b>	<b>Felt school leaders did not equally value civics education</b>	<b>Felt school leaders valued socio-emotion over academics</b>
Jim Brown	X	X	
Noah Thomas	X	X	
Sage Forrest	X	X	
Jane Allen	X	X	
Stephen Webster	X		X
Margaret Kolby	X		X
Jen McDonald	X		X
John Smith	X		X
Arthur Bennett	X		
Sarah Ragan	X		
Taylor Johnson	X		
Judy Atherton	X		

*Civic education is essential for social mobility.* Jim viewed schools as the “most socially empowering and economically empowering institution” in American society. Jim stated that public education

provides the most mobility for anyone, when education is provided in an equitable way, when the resources and funding and opportunities for students are at everyone’s disposal, I think it is the greatest mobilizer that we have at our disposal, especially a public education being available to all.

Jim thought the purpose of education was “equipping all students with...the personal and academic skills necessary to be self-sufficient in the rest of their lives with whatever they choose to do.” He wanted his students to have a foundation of knowledge and a skill set—

both academic and socio-emotional—that they can take to their next opportunity, either academic, for a trade, or a job might have in the future. When public schools are provided with equitable resources, funding, and other opportunities, he believed, they can be an agent of mobility in our society. His beliefs had been shaped by his own experiences as well as those of his mom, who had been teaching for 39 years. She was part of his community of practice as an educator and had been an influence on him long before he became an educator.

Jim thought that Alternative Ed Academy’s administration agreed that education was the path to social mobility. According to Jim, Alternative Ed Academy prided itself on “equipping students with the academic and personal skills to best support them and prepare them for whatever they want to pursue in the future.” The school administration believed all young men and women had the potential to succeed when provided with the right environment. Their mission statement focused on rigorous academics and relentless supports. Jim believed his administration agreed with his general view on the purpose of education. However, Jim believed that his school administration does not at all share his belief about the importance of social studies education.

Jim thought social studies education was important for everyone but was especially important for students like his, many of whom are immigrants, “who need to know their rights, exercise their rights, and in the future be a representative of people who also are a part of their communities instead of having people who are not representative of their communities represent them politically.” Therefore, Jim was particularly upset that his administration did not see the value in social studies. Jim’s statement here was similar to one I made in Chapter 1, that students in marginalized communities will only become more

marginalized if they are not given the social studies knowledge and skills necessary to participate in American democracy. He stated,

I don't think my school is equipping students by any means to be active civic participants in society. I think that is the number one flaw that our school has from a curriculum point. And I actually think we are ill equipping students to be members of their own communities by not teaching social studies, like active participants and members of their own communities because social studies education is critical analysis, discussion, reflection, debate about the past.

For example, Jim pointed to the fact that students often ask him about local labor history but he was not permitted to fulfill their quests for historical knowledge with a true history class. He stated, "those are the conversations we could be having and in more depth, not only domestically but internationally." Jim was pained by the fact his students were denied those opportunities because his school did not offer history classes. Instead, his school was focused only on ELA and mathematics skills not content, especially not social studies content. In Jim's understanding, his administration believed the achievement gap can be closed more quickly by focusing solely on skills and not "teaching content and recognizing the value of content." Jim found this troubling. The school was transitioning to a competency-based model that included academics and social emotional based competencies such as reading critically and developing self-knowledge but did not include any type of historical thinking skills. Jim reported that "the historical standards are not addressed at all at my school, like zero, like may not even touched, not looked at, not considered in consultation on teaching research skills, nothing."

*Education is an equalizer only when civics education is included.* Similarly to Jim, Jane believed the purpose of education was to be a great equalizer in terms of socio-economic status. Education, she argued, should be a stepping stone for both socio-economic status and political participation. She stated, “we have this, so called, democratic society where everyone has the ability to participate, but unfortunately we have a deeply uninformed populace.” Jane believed that the school administration wanted to share her vision for the purpose of education. For example, the school’s mission statement and core values included lofty statements about the value of civic engagement. However, the administration had many pressures on them that distract them from that mission statement and therefore do not always act in accordance with it. Jane knew that they feel pressure for students to perform well on the MCAS and to keep their graduation rate number up. She did not fault them for having to also focus on these issues.

However, Jane was bothered by the lack of focus on civic engagement. For example, the school just recently started doing mock elections and they were entirely student run with little faculty support. The school did not have any sort of multi-cultural events or celebrations. Furthermore, students are not encouraged to join protests or otherwise be civically active. Perhaps this was an example of when administration or other people in power like the idea of civic engagement until it might threaten their monopoly on power. Jane was disappointed with the overall lack of commitment the school had to real community service. For example, Jane reported “you wash a teacher’s board and you get an hour of community service.” But the kids were not actually working in the community and getting engaged with real issues. Jane expressed that she did not think community service was really taken seriously at her school “I think it's kind of a rubber stamp.”

In another example, every year Jane's service trip to Peru got "criticized by school committee and almost shot down and yet they're the ones who approved our mission statement of civic engagement." And yet, according to Jane, this trip exemplified the civic engagement in the school's mission statement because, "it's based on cultural immersion engagement and based on getting students into the mindset of seeing a problem, social or economic or physical environmental problem, and not just ignoring it but drawing attention to it and trying to find solutions." Perhaps, the school committee had a different idea of what civic engagement was or wanted the students to focus more locally instead of globally in their engagement of citizenship, though the lack of concern about the quality of community service done by students would suggest otherwise.

***School leaders have competing priorities, and civics takes a backseat.*** Noah believed that the most important purpose of public schools should be "preparing young people to live in a pluralistic society, in a multi-cultural society" and "preparing young people to be active participants, civically engaged in their society." He felt social studies played an important role in that. Noah's goals for teaching social studies are "civic engagement, having students understand their own cultural backgrounds, and how to operate in a multicultural pluralistic environment." He believed that even students who initially found history boring can leave his class saying, "I didn't know that about myself, my community, my people, I didn't know that this is possible." He believed this was the power of history being taught really well and by someone who is really engaged in history. He also really appreciated when students started asking the "why questions about democracy... regarding fairness and equality and opportunity, the sort of big questions that don't have easy answers." Noah believed his school administration strongly shared his general beliefs about

the purpose of education. He particularly appreciated how his administration shared his commitment to discussing issues of ability, race, income, and class and that they are “fully supportive of my discussing these issues and bringing them into the classroom curriculum.” He concluded, “I do believe I work for a particularly supportive school administration,” even if they were often having to pass on pressure for the school to focus on MCAS based subjects to their teachers.

Sage recognized that, with his liberal arts background, he used to think the purpose of education as learning for its own sake. But as a teacher he instead saw education as preparation for the “so called” real world. He thought schools should prepare students to become civically minded people who are engaged in their community. Therefore, in Sage’s mind, schools need to develop in students’ literacy, reading, writing, thinking, and speaking skills. Sage described these as “Common Core kind of skills” making reference to the national Common Core curriculum standards for English Language Arts and literacy. Sage saw these skills as transferable “no matter what.” So even if they are not retaining a lot of content, if students are getting these transferable skills they could use them beyond the classroom. He believed that schools focusing on these skills prepare students for whatever path they choose, college, career, military service, etc.

Sage believed his school administration was largely on the same page as him about the purpose of education. He reported that they are focused on the 4 R’s – rigor, relevance, relationships, and resilience. Sage liked to think of the relationships as not only developing relationships between teachers and students but also students developing relationships that extend beyond school into the community. Sage stated that civic engagement was part of the school’s mission statement, but his current administration did not focus on connecting

students to the community and preparing for civic participation. Sage perceived a disconnect between how he strongly views civic education and how much the district values it, since the focus of what the central administration office says was always Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) related.

***Socio-emotional learning overtaking academics.*** A concern among some participants was that their school leaders were focused primarily on socio-emotional needs instead of academic needs of the students and that their professional development did not support teacher's need for academic pedagogy learning. For example, Jen viewed the purpose of education to help students become "a whole person, well-rounded, multifaceted, colorful person that's familiar with the world, as best you can be at 18" and to become engaged citizens. She was also focused on preparing her students for independent life, which was critical as she worked with an entirely special education population. She wanted her students to be comfortable with themselves and "know how to get the information... how to access it." Jen believed her urban alternative education school administration mostly shared her views about the purpose of education. However, she found them more focused on helping students develop independent living skills and less focused on the students' academic education than she would like. She found the administration had difficulty getting really strong professional development for their staff tailored to the school's unique needs and was focused on how to help teachers provide academic support to her diverse students. Instead, she felt she often needed to seek out her own professional development which was difficult because it was hard to leave school and burden her colleagues so she could attend professional development. In a single classroom she had students with a second-grade reading level and a 12<sup>th</sup> grade reading level and recognized that she needed professional



development to help her learn to differentiate for all their needs. However, her administration did bring in some professional development she thoughtful was useful, especially around trauma informed education, but it was more focused on socio-emotional needs than academic ones.

Stephen thought that the main goal of education was to educate students to participate in a democracy, pointing to Horace Mann as an example. Stephen was concerned that the study of civics and civic engagement has fallen “by the wayside nationally.” Stephen felt his administration at the school “very much” shared his beliefs about the purpose of education. This was especially true since many of his administrators were former history teachers who he had previously worked closely with as teachers. He thought the bigger struggle was how much attention are they able to devote to those beliefs because they get pulled in many directions. For example, the district’s big focus for the school was socio-emotional learning and therefore all PD, faculty meetings, and many resources were dedicated to that topic. Stephen remembered that before socio-emotional learning became the focus there was more talk of trying to get students out into the community doing things like voter registration drives. He reported “it’s just not what they talk about anymore, we’ve moved onto a different initiative.”

John viewed one of the purposes of education as “inculcating civics and a shared history.” Though he felt this shared history they should know was mostly American history and since he taught largely world history, he did not see teaching this as mostly his responsibility. However, he was able to point to some opportunities he has had to talk about the electoral process, the electoral college, and campaign ads in his class, as well as had students run mock elections. It was interesting that even as a world history teacher, he saw

the shared history students need to know as American history and not a global history. He also saw his job as inspiring interest in the content and encouraging kids who struggle. Perhaps the biggest role he saw for schools was preparing students with the skills be successful in the future.

John reported that Water High School's mantra was "college and career ready." Over the 19 years John had worked at Water High School he felt that the administration had shifted its focus away from academics to socio-emotional support for students, especially when it came to teacher professional development. He described that it was "less content and more touchy feely." For example, the school had spent a lot of time working on their school's mission statement, but he could not recall what it was. And he was asked to sit on a committee tasked with creating a Multi-Tiered System of Support for students but he felt it was just looking at the same pyramid of Tier 1, Tier 2, and Tier 3 students each time without making much progress. He preferred when his school would have History Alive or Teaching Tolerance come in and give professional development to the history teachers. He also appreciated an opportunity his school used to provide to attend professional development opportunities across the region on one particular day, focused on different contents that teachers could choose from. To him, "professional development is really not professional development anymore."

Margaret saw the role of schools as preparing student to become "successful human beings" who can participate in society. In Margaret's opinion, schools should help students acquire citizenship skills, social skills, problem solving skills, and resiliency. Building students' resiliency was a particular priority for her. Like Jane, Margaret expressed a desire for her students "to be able to encounter problems in the world and not shut down in the face

of them.” She pointed specifically to her concern about students who are avid news consumers and become angry and disheartened based on what they see around them. Margaret wanted to help students develop agency and recognize how they can engage with the problems around them. She thought history was particularly valuable in building student agency because it provided examples of others who have created change in their communities that students can look back upon.

Margaret viewed Oak Hill’s administration as haven been focused on helping students build the resume they need to be admitted to a selective college instead ensuring students were actually getting high level skills necessary for college or being worried about if they pass MCAS. The administration, according to Margaret, had also recently started focusing on providing more socio-emotional support for students. For example, many professional development sessions had focused on supporting students through stress and helping students avoid drug use. The administration had also supported teachers taking the lead in some professional development that have focused on racial, gender, and disability inequity.

***English learners particularly need civic preparation.*** Similar to Jim, Sarah believed the purpose of public education was to expose students to a broad area of content and let them practice skills that will serve them in their chosen future opportunities. She was personally committed to ensuring young people were able to have the tools necessary to engage in society as young, informed citizens and productive residents. She was particularly concerned that her students were able to develop “a sense of cultural understanding and the confidence to engage in the United States on the level of equality and have the confidence to

claim [their] own voice.” She further explained that “having a foundation in history and civics helps you with that confidence and the literacy that goes along with it.”

Sarah’s goals for teaching social studies were clearly informed by the student population she taught and the current political atmosphere. She explained, “I want them to have a sense of the operations of the government, the basic function of government, the Constitution, ... the Bill of Rights.” Most importantly she said of her goals with her students, “I want them to feel prepared when their place in the U.S. is challenged.” She also spoke of the need to have historical knowledge not just skills to truly be able to do this well. She continued, “I want them to have the tools to be able to navigate socially what’s going on in the U.S. by having a background in the history of enslavement, the history of immigration.” She also spoke about how particularly important social studies education was for recent immigrants to the U.S. She explained to them “this is a strange new place, and it’s overwhelming and to have sort of a history glasses I think helps kids interpret socially and nationally what’s happening here and if they don’t have that I imagine it could be bewildering because this country is strange.”

Sarah believed her school administration had similar beliefs about the purpose of education as herself. Sarah especially saw her administration as sharing her focus on civic education, she stated “given our population it is sort of the necessity of it right now. And having kids know what’s up.” She pointed to the fact that the administration has always supported the history curriculum she has come up and supported her shift recently towards a more civics-based curriculum. Over the years the administration had also always supported her when she wanted to take students on field trips or engage them in extracurriculars such as debate and model United Nations. Her administration had also been very engaged in bringing

in outside organizations to talk to her students about their rights and the opportunities they have.

*Some school leaders are fixated on college.* Sarah and Arthur thought their administration was too focused on college preparation. Sarah was starting to question her administration's focus on pushing all kids to college without other options. She referenced the on-going cheating and bribery scams and student debt crisis as some examples of how "nation-wide we're at a point we're really starting to look at what does post-secondary education" look like, "what is it worth and how to make it work for more." Sarah explained "I don't think it's right for everyone to take on the debt and time but I don't what other good options are....I don't think there are right now. So a lot of students are kind of stuck with college or nothing and that's not fair."

Similarly, Arthur believed the purpose of K-12 education should be "to enable all students regardless of their background to achieve maximum potential." He felt that schools needed "to create spaces in which students can grow and develop on their own," and have opportunities to develop their own talents and interests. Arthur felt that his urban charter school administration mostly shared his belief about the purpose of education. He thought that ultimately both he and his administration shared the same goal of "trying to break the cycle of poverty." He believed the administration emphasized mostly preparing for college with the students, which he mostly thought was positive with but had some reservations. He said, "I believe that college is helpful for a lot of students but it's not the end all be all. I think students can be successful in other areas." Arthur also expressed that preparing students to be engaged citizens was important to him but not his school administration.

*School leaders have more power than they know.* Taylor believed the purpose of education had changed. He saw it as originally trying to build a literate but not critically thinking population. He saw that schools, in recent decades, are trying to cultivate more critical thinkers. But he still did not think public education currently consistently puts student in the best position to be successful and economically stable, which upset him. He was hopeful that his district had a lot people who are “advocating for students and trying to give them as many opportunities as possible” to be prepared for whatever post graduate options students choose including college, a fulfilling career, and/or being participants in their community on a civic level. Taylor’s goal for teaching social studies was to “cultivate students into critical thinkers who can apply the skills that they learn in social studies class anywhere in their lives.” While he valued the content of history class, he also focused on teaching students’ skills such as articulating a position on an issue and supporting that stance with evidence and analytical reasoning. He also valued “building empathy towards different groups of people that have been marginalized throughout global history” and pushing students to understand how people were put in those positions and what his students can do in the future to make sure to prevent or address similar problems from occurring.

During Taylor’s time teaching at Regional High School, he had three history program directors and only the first shared his concern about explicitly teaching reading and writing skills. Taylor saw a gap there between what he and his immediate boss saw as the purpose of education. He believed his school administration, were not completely aligned about what they want for students, but they all want their students to be successful. He thought that the size of his school and the fact it has over 100 faculty members might be part of why it had been hard for administrators to get all teachers on the same page and sharing a common

vision. While he acknowledged the difficulty of this, especially when many teachers have been at the school for 20 or more years and have their own strong ideas about what is best for their student population, Taylor thought that his school administrators had more influence than they realized and could shift the school in the direction they wanted. For example, he believed that the professional development offered by the school was the bare minimum required by the district and every month it was something different, not connected to what they did the previous month.

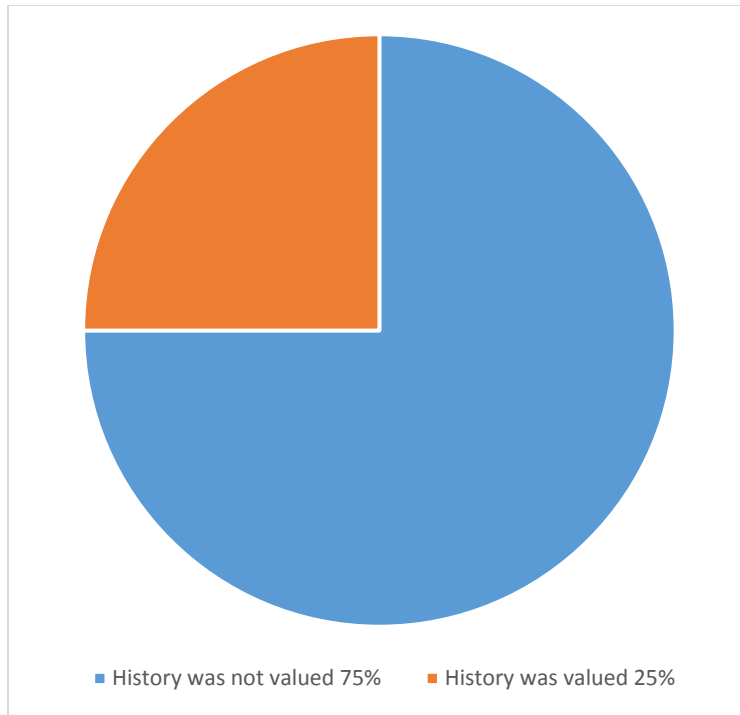
For Judy, the purpose of education varied by grade level. At the lower grades she thought it was to teach kids how to read, write, and do math. But at the secondary grades, she thought the focus should shift to teaching kids critical thinking skills and how to be good citizens, especially in social studies class. Judy said, “I’m really not concerned with them, memorizing a bunch of names and dates and facts, because like, we all have Wikipedia at our fingertips.” Instead she preferred to focus on helping students develop the skills to understand what they see in the news and “parse out, what is fact and what is propaganda or opinion [and] use that to navigate the world to vote, hopefully, in a way that is going to benefit them.” Judy strongly valued preparing students to be civically engaged in the American democracy. She also thought schools should teach students “how to be humans” and “life skills like self-management, coming to school on time, and making sure you’re prepared.” She saw these as skills students would need both to do well in college and have a successful career. Judy recognized that her school administration had “really high aspirations” for students including a Vision of the Graduate and school wide core values. Like Taylor, Judy wanted her school administration to take more active leadership role. But Judy said “I don’t know that...what we’re as individual teachers trying to teach students is

always supported. For example, around behavior, showing up on time, not being on your phone or skipping class.” She continued, “I don't know that we as a school, support students enough in meeting those hard and high expectations.” And therefore, she believed that the school was in “some ways...doing a little bit of a disservice to students who might think when they are in the real world that they can do some of the things that they do here.”

**“History is the class that gets left behind”: The devaluing of social studies.** Nine out of twelve participants in the study expressed the feeling that history class was not valued by their administration and students at the same level other academic classes were (Jen, Noah, Margaret, John, Jim, Sage, Jane, Stephen, and Judy). The feelings that history class was not valued was shared by all participants in level 3, 4 or 5 schools, as well as by some in level 1 or 2 schools. The belief that people at their school did not value history was also shared by all participants who felt significant accountability pressure, as well as some participants who felt only low accountability pressure. The lack of value of history class was also felt across urban and suburban school teachers. Many sub-themes emerged for how and why social studies was not being valued. First, social studies teachers experienced class time being lost for non-academic tasks when other departments did not and also saw less resources being allocated for social studies classes. Second, teachers noted a focus on Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) – especially science and math classes—instead of history. Table seven summarizes these findings. Third, there are structural ways history is undervalued at some schools. And fourth, a participant saw a connection between history being undervalued in school and society’s lack of civic engagement as a whole.

Figure 10 and Table 7 showcase these findings.





*Figure 10.* Feelings on history being valued.

Table 7

*Participants' School State Accountability Level Compared to Reported Feeling of Pressure*

Name	State Accountability Level	School Type	History Not Valued	Feeling of Accountability Pressure
Jim Brown	5	Urban Alt Ed	X	Significant
Noah Thomas	3	Urban Public	X	Significant
Judy Atherton	3	Urban Public	X	Significant
Jane Allen	1	Suburban Public	X	Significant
Jen McDonald	4	Urban Alt Ed	X	Low
Sage Forrest	3	Urban Public	X	Low
Margaret Kolby	1	Suburban Public	X	Low
John Smith	2	Suburban Public	X	Low
Stephen Webster	2	Suburban Public	X	Low
Sarah Ragan	3	Urban Public		Some
Arthur Bennet	2	Urban Charter		Low
Taylor Johnson	2	Urban Exam		Low

***History got cut.*** Judy saw a direct connection between cut backs in history at her school and the lack of history MCAS. She reported that between last year and this year, the school cut freshman history classes so the students could take multiple math classes in preparation for the MCAS and she felt like that was saying “history doesn’t really matter” in a huge way. She furthered reported that during summer school, students who needed to make up a history class had to do so online, unlike math, English, and science, which all had in-person traditional classes. Judy also reported that for professional development the school prioritized Evidence Based Argumentation (EBA), a strategy for improving students written and oral argumentation skills across all contents that was aligned to the new common core based English Languages Arts MCAS 2.0 and that teachers, especially history teachers, were

expected to dedicate a significant amount of their content class to EBA activities. This was a smaller version of the cuts to history seen at Jim's school where history was completely eliminated.

***The focus is on STEM.*** Sage, at a level 3 school, also viewed his district as very STEM oriented and he felt that "history is...on the fringes" instead of a focus for the district. The rhetoric of his district leadership focused on STEM, but Sage reported the district administrators denied that they saw history as less important. However, in the last ten years, Sage saw the high school history department only add one teaching position while the math and science departments added at least five positions. Similarly, the textbooks in Sage's U.S. History I class was last replaced in 2005. He also noted that at data meetings at the beginning of the school year, they talked about English, Math, and Science MCAS scores and celebrated those departments successes, when warranted, in a way that they do not celebrate non-tested subjects. He also observed that social studies was the one class that was cut to address other school matters. For example, when a school wide student survey had to be administered, it was typically done in history class.

John, at a level 2 school, reported "that English Language Arts and Math get much more funding when it comes to equipment, books, real professional development, I definitely think there is that split." For example, the world history textbooks he used are the same ones they had his first-year teaching, 19 years ago, he could open a cover and see a kid's name he taught and think "that girl must be thirty now." John also saw that other departments also got more specific content trainings, sometimes from outside partners like National Math Science Initiative (NMSI), that offers trainings in Math, Science, and English Language Arts. He also saw the devaluing of social studies when his school scheduled non-academic activities. For

example, time had been taken only from social studies for vision and hearing screenings, course selection, and a program called “Signs of Suicide.” He reported that the administration did not “want to take the kids out of math or English or science class” and so they end up being pulled from social studies. He recognized that in the big picture, social studies was viewed as lower.

Margaret also reported that even at her level 2 school, “history is the class that gets left behind.” She thought that “some of that has to do with the fact that we don’t have an MCAS that [students] will be taking.” For example, when students were choosing the classes, they might think to themselves “what are the classes I want to challenge myself in? Well I need to be the most prepared in this.” Margaret did not think MCAS was the only factor leading to devaluing of social studies, but she did think it was part of it. Margaret’s students and administration were more concerned about how student’s high school transcript would look to colleges than their MCAS scores. Getting into college was constantly on their minds, according to Margaret. For example, she would have students who come to her and ask if colleges would see their first quarter freshman year grades if they did not like the grade they received. The community also encouraged students to be more STEM focused. Margaret reported that students “in their senior year will double-up on math and science...they think it will look better on a college transcript and in our community that really is what it comes down to.” This meant there was less enrollment in social studies electives. However, the school was still able to offer a number of elective social studies courses including psychology and sociology, both of which Margaret had taught.

***Structural concerns.*** Stephen, also at a level 2 school, felt that his school’s administration did a good job of including all departments in decisions for the building and

were particularly careful to include history because they themselves were former history teachers. These administrators who were former history teachers were “very cognizant of the fact that they never want to be rolled into a humanities department. That’s their biggest fear.” Stephen recalled that one of the building administrators, who was formerly the social studies department head, was very involved in the Massachusetts Council of Social Studies and other social studies groups and had heard stories of particularly middle schools rolling history departments in English departments to become “humanities.” He was fearful it might also happen at Gold Hills and this fear was part of why this former department head pushed the history department to take on some tasks voluntarily to remain relevant in the future. For example, history was the only department in the building that teaches research methodology and sourcing and has the students complete research papers. Except for one senior AP English class, no English classes take on this task that they did 15 years ago, when Stephen was a student at the school.

Despite the fact that much of the building leadership was invested in social studies education, Gold Hills still had a structural district deficit that favors other academic subjects over history. The English, Science, Math, and Fine and Practical Arts departments each had a department coordinator that was an administrative position where the occupant taught one or two courses at both the high school and middle school and also had some oversight responsibilities over the department’s teachers in both buildings. History and Foreign language, on the other hand, did not have department coordinators and instead at the high school only had a department chair which was a position with a stipend for a teacher who remains under the teacher, not administrative, contract, and who had no official interaction with the middle school teachers. Stephen’s understanding was that the middle school’s

history department meetings were facilitated by the school's principal and that he was not particularly knowledgeable about history education.

Stephen reported that history teachers at his school had “been fighting...for years” for an administrative department coordinator to be on par with other departments and he was hopeful with that the state's recent update to the social studies curriculum that it was going to happen. He thought that because the new standards required content that had previously been the purview of United States History I teachers at the high school to now be part of a new 8<sup>th</sup> grade civics course, the district would see the need to make sure there was consistent language and practice across those courses. He also had heard that the new MCAS for history was going to be focused on 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Also, Gold Hills High School only had ten social studies teachers, the other academic departments had eleven or twelve teachers. So even when some in leadership positions in the school or district valued social studies, societal devaluing of social studies meant social studies departments were undervalued compared to their other academic counterparts, even at low accountability pressure schools.

***Lack of concern for history goes beyond school.*** Jane knew that the administration did not fully value social studies the way she did because “classes like history and social studies are often kind of pushed to the side.” For example, her school did not have a government class. And other departments get more funding and the administration had not bought new history textbooks in a number of years. Jane reported “I have books that still say Bill Clinton is President.” Jane also felt that she was not given many professional development (PD) opportunities as a history teacher, especially compared to math and science teachers, since there are so many outside organizations offering professional development on STEM topics. She reported that limited options for outside PD for history

teachers were not widely promoted at her school, so she had to find them on her own. Jane also felt that it was not just the MCAS test and accountability but the whole society that was not valuing history education. She called school a mini-society, preparing students for their engagement in the larger society and she expressed the concern, perhaps tied to the Presidency of Donald Trump, that “if its history teachers aren’t taken seriously then the society is going [to keep going in] the direction that it's going on, which some people might agree with but other people might be a little worried.”

### **Teachers’ Experiences with Social Studies Curriculum Narrowing**

The second research question explored by this was: What are high school teachers’ experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing? The themes identified from the interview data here was that history class can be overrun with ELA MCAS prep, that most participants have shifted to an inquiry-based approach to teaching social studies, that the majority of teachers appreciated the flexibility and freedom provided to them by teaching a class without an MCAS, and teachers had concerns over a possible social studies MCAS. Table eight below summarizes the themes and major sub -themes found for how participant teachers experienced social studies curriculum narrowing in their classrooms. To help the reader gain as clear an understanding as possible of the experience of curriculum narrowing, additional sub-themes and discrepant cases are also described in the sections that follow.

Table 8

*Themes and Major Sub-Themes of Teachers' Experiences with Social Studies Curriculum Narrowing*

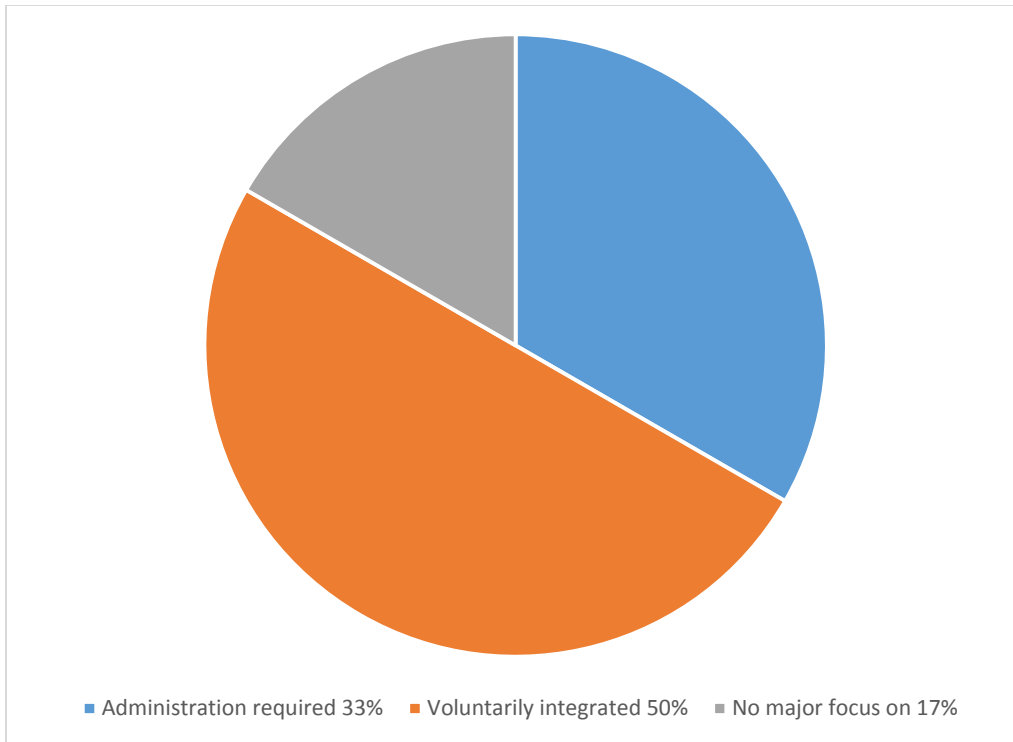
Themes	Sub-Themes
1. History is overrun by ELA MCAS preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- One participant had history completely eliminated from curriculum</li> <li>- Participants with significant accountability pressure are forced to focus on ELA skills in history class by administrative directive</li> <li>- Many additional participants voluntarily focus on reading and writing</li> </ul>
2. Teachers are shifting history class to be more inquiry based	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The majority of participants focused on teaching critical thinking skills</li> <li>- Multiple participants used SHEG, DBQ, &amp; NewsELA resources</li> <li>- Some participants attempted to build connections from history to today</li> </ul>
3. Teachers value the flexibility of not having a history MCAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants appreciate freedom of not having MCAS</li> <li>- History teachers still feel obligation to prepare kids for ELA MCAS</li> <li>- Some teachers structure classes differently based on student level</li> </ul>
4. Teachers had concerns about possible history MCAS	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Teachers recognize a social studies MCAS might bring it attention</li> <li>- Teachers are concerned they would have to focus on facts over skills</li> <li>- Teachers would prefer inquiry based over multiple choice MCAS</li> </ul>

**“History is just sort of seen as an addendum”: History giving way to ELA**

**MCAS prep.** Jim was the only teacher who had experienced the complete elimination of social studies from his school’s curriculum. However, many other teachers expressed that history class was not valued by their administration and students at the same level as other academic classes, in part due to the supplanting of history class time with ELA MCAS preparation. Four participants (Noah, Judy, Jim, and Jane) expressed that they felt the need to focus on ELA MCAS preparation and/or reading and writing skills in history class instead of exclusively history content and skills and that their administration had directed them to this focus. Six additional participants (Arthur, Sarah, John, Sage, Stephen, and Taylor) also expressed their own desire to focus on improving reading and writing skills to support



students' MCAS scores or general academic growth but were not explicitly directed by administration to do this, to their recollection. Margaret and Jen on the other hand, did not feel any pressure or need to do ELA MCAS preparation in her history classes. Figure 11 and Table 9 below summarize these findings below.



*Figure 11.* Participants' integration of ELA skills into history.

Table 9

*Participants' School State Accountability Level Compared to Reported Feeling of Pressure*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Social Studies completely eliminated from curriculum</b>	<b>Administration required ELA MCAS preparation in history class</b>	<b>Focusing on reading and writing skills voluntarily in history</b>
Jim Brown	X	X	
Noah Thomas		X	
Jane Allen		X	
Judy Atherton		X	
Sage Forrest			X
Stephen Webster			X
John Smith			X
Arthur Bennett			X
Sarah Ragan			X
Taylor Johnson			X
Jen McDonald			
Margaret Kolby			

Table 10 compares participants feeling of accountability pressure to their perception of an administrative directive to focus on reading and writing in their history classes. All participants who felt significant accountability pressure also felt an administrative edict to focus on ELA skills in history. It was likely that school leaders were pressuring social studies teachers to include ELA MCAS preparation in their classes because they themselves are feeling, and passing on, significant accountability pressure, in part because of their school's state accountability level and their urban location and population.

Table 10

*Participants Feeling of Pressure Compared to Focus on Reading and Writing in History*

<b>Name</b>	<b>State Accountability Level</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Admin Focus on ELA Skills in History</b>	<b>Feeling of Accountability Pressure</b>
Jim Brown	5	Urban Alt Ed	X	Significant
Noah Thomas	3	Urban Public	X	Significant
Judy Atherton	3	Urban Public	X	Significant
Jane Allen	1	Suburban Public	X	Significant
Sarah Ragan	3	Urban Public		Some
Sage Forrest	3	Urban Public		Low
Jen McDonald	4	Urban Alt Ed		Low
Margaret Kolby	1	Suburban Public		Low
John Smith	2	Suburban Public		Low
Stephen Webster	2	Suburban Public		Low
Arthur Bennet	2	Urban Charter		Low
Taylor Johnson	2	Urban Exam		Low

*Curriculum devoid of history.* Jim stated the administration had “completely taken out social studies education from our curriculum.” In the year he was interviewed, his school had moved away from even calling the course he taught “humanities”, to include history, and instead simply referred to it as a “literature” class. In addition, he did not have as much freedom in crafting his curriculum as he did the previous year. He had been told by administration to make the course even more skills-based and was not allowed to have as heavy a focus on content. He stated that there was “especially no focus whatsoever on history content or Social Studies content for that matter.” While last year the administration had encouraged him to be focused on skill-driven education, especially literacy skills, this year he felt it was even more explicit and restrictive that he had to focus exclusively on “literature,

reading comprehension, basic reading and writing, and foundational reading and writing.”

While the school administration may have in part wanted him to focus on these skills because they are tested on the ELA MCAS, Jim had never seen the students or school’s MCAS performance data or been instructed to focus on MCAS preparation in his classes.

The devaluing of social studies at Alternative Ed Academy may have be partly because their students had a difficult time earning passing MCAS scores and the school focused its resources on ensuring they do. While the administration did not explicitly say they prioritized the MCAS, they did heavily prioritize it given the courses they offered at the school. The school had cut down on the number of classes they teach. Jim reported that they used to teach United States History and World History but do not offer them anymore. While the school had cut other classes, they have added MCAS boot camps and MCAS test prep courses that take the place of another class, like history. Jim compared Alternative Ed Academy to his own experience in high school where he never had MCAS prep classes.

***Focus on claim-evidence-reasoning.*** Noah reported that history teachers at his school knew what they needed to do to help students’ ELA MCAS scores improve and they were trying to figure out how to incorporate that into history class. He felt that this ELA MCAS preparation mostly consisted of finding multiple ways to do Claim-Evidence-Reasoning activities. Noah believed this focus on ELA MCAS preparation in history was “taking away our ability to be creative as history teachers in the classroom.” For example, his administration would prefer he always had students write essays using document-based evidence to conclude units, where as he preferred to use a variety of projects. For example, wrapping up a recent unit on Progressivism, Noah had students make their own muckraking newspapers using both text and visuals. Noah clarified that he did not believe history

teachers “shouldn’t be teaching how to provide evidence and how corroborate a claim with evidence and how to provide reasoning but when it’s the only thing we are focused on we really are doing a disservice.”

Noah reported that he participated in many Instructional Leadership Team meetings where he found himself:

looking at this predictable data, knowing what it's going to say, which is our kids have gaps in reading...but us as teachers and humans that understand the implications which is often that our kids have reading issues that we need to close reading gaps, structural problems that have long existed and rather than closing those gaps and being able to talk about the harder conversations

Instead it often turns into a conversation about “How do we restructure DBQ? How do we restructure Claim Evidence Reasoning lessons? And how do we incorporate that more into the classroom regardless of where this falls in regards to content?”

Noah recognized that, at least recently, history instruction did include teaching reading and literacy but he did not want that to be all it was. Noah felt that he was becoming a kind of secondary ELA teacher, which was upsetting to him since he was passionate about history, not ELA. He explained:

One thing that I do see a lot as a history teacher, a lot of schools are moving towards humanities instead of separately having history and ELA. Sometimes that causes us to be kind of secondary ELA teachers, we know this is what we need to do on our ELA MCAS scores, here is the issues, how do we incorporate that into history. And a lot of history is teaching reading and literacy and ELA but not all of it is and sometimes I think that balance doesn’t really exist. One of the things that is really concerning to

me, is that instead of being a history teacher, which I've always been passionate about, I'm becoming primarily the secondary ELA teacher and history is just sort of seen as an addendum.

Noah explained that the problem was not just inside his school or unique to just his school, but rather a problem in our society at large. As he stated:

I think that is sort of true everywhere. I've heard this phrase 'we test what we value and we value what we test' and I just think that our society doesn't particularly value civic engagement or history as an academic field in high school, the way we do science, math, and ELA.

Judy also felt that she was required to support reading and writing in history class, especially through using Evidence Based Argumentation (EBA) strategies. The school's professional development focused significantly on using EBA strategies. These EBA strategies were similar to what Noah described as a variety of ways to do Claim-Evidence-Reasoning activities. These EBA activities designed to be common core aligned and to prepare students for success on the new ELA MCAS 2.0 which is aligned to common core as well as the new SATs.

***Shaping history assignments into ELA MCAS prep.*** Even though her school was classified as a level 1 school and there was no history MCAS, Jane reported that her history department meetings often focused on supporting the school's growth on the ELA MCAS. Jane stated that the school's pressure on her to prep kids influenced not what she taught but how she taught, delivered, and tested content. She recalled:

History is not an MCAS tested subject yet and yet we still we still feel the kind of effects of testing. For example, it's always well kind of in the back of our minds. So

like when we do writing assignments, we are encouraged to do writing assignments that kind of fit into the MCAS model. When we create tests, when we create mid-terms and finals, we're encouraged to word things in a way or collect documents in a way that kind of mirror the MCAS testing... still somehow feel the pressure of MCAS in the way that we deliver our assignments.

Jane further stated that she had her classes do “a lot of document readings and analysis and essay responses.” Especially for her school’s EL population, she really focused on vocabulary and learning skills to identify words from a context when reading. Jane said, “I do think about MCAS quite a bit. I want to make sure that they're prepared and that they get as much preparation for their English MCAS as possible which is something I can work on in my class.” This focus on ELA MCAS preparation in history detracted from teachers’ ability to focus on historical context and skills in their class and assessments.

***Their own motivations for teaching reading and writing.*** Taylor taught at a level 2 inner city school that did not struggle in getting its students to pass the MCAS and focused instead of AP scores. However, despite the lack of pressure from his school administration, Taylor had his own more personal reason for commitment to preparing his students for standardized testing. Taylor was an African American man himself and had graduated from the school he now teaches at, growing up in similar circumstances to a lot of his students. He recognized how important standardized tests could be for students growing up in lower socio-economic status situations. He reported:

I really do believe that standardized testing is the great equalizer, not that I'm trying to push for more standardized testing, and more high stakes, pressure filled exams.

But I know that a lot of my students are competing with a lot of other students around

the country, and ways where they don't have the same resources, right. And so if they can perform well on these standardized assessments that can really show that they're more than capable. And then when they get to college, and they have certain resources, they're going to use them appropriately.

Therefore, Taylor was very explicit and diligent about using his history class to build students' skills that they would need on the MCAS, SAT, and AP exams. During his time teaching at this school, he had three history program directors and only the first shared his concern about explicitly teaching reading and writing skills in preparation for standardized testing. Likewise, no one at suburban level 2 Gold Hills had ever talked to Stephen about cross curricular writing or reading strategies to incorporate into his class to prepare students for the ELA MCAS. He did however, try to reinforce strong reading and writing skills in his class as much as he could.

Similarly, Sarah reported that she got “no pressure whatsoever” to support students' growth for the ELA MCAS. However, she nevertheless considered:

I consider it part of my own mission to make to expose them to as much vocabulary and literacy and in schema as I can. So they encounter texts from history curriculum, that they have more opportunity for success, because you never know where those excerpts are going to come from, sometimes it's a hit, Whoa, there's something about Thomas Jefferson, you never know. But exposing them to as much as you can helps.

While she focused her time on history content, Sarah recognized that as a teacher of English Learners she was “also tasked with helping them with reading strategies” and therefore she tried to bring in annotation and other reading strategies into her class and get her students to use them consistently throughout the year. Arthur also reported not having



any pressure to get students ready for the ELA MCAS, but feeling a personal responsibility to help his students, especially his many English Learners, improve their reading skills. As a first-year teacher, he struggled with how best to do this. He taught a 10<sup>th</sup> grade class but assigned an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level textbook because he found that, when he assigned grade level reading, the students were not comprehending the material. This way the students better understood the history content but he was worried that he might be “doing a disservice to them by not giving them the harder reading” and helping them improve their reading more.

*No ELA MCAS pressure at all.* The lack of pressure to prepare students to do well on the ELA MCAS was evident in Margaret’s classroom practice. Despite teaching mostly 9<sup>th</sup> graders, students about to take the big high school graduation requirement 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS in the next school year, she did not feel that her job as their social studies teacher involved “directly preparing kids” for the ELA MCAS. And she did not tend to tailor her practice towards it “at all.” In fact, when asked to describe how the MCAS influenced her teaching Margaret talked mainly of small logistical changes. For example, she might be asked to relocate some of her classes for a few days because certain hallways get shut down for MCAS testing. Margaret also reported that her administration requests that teachers are mindful of the stress associated with MCAS testing in their assigning of homework. Margaret felt that MCAS testing disrupted six to seven days of her school year in this way. Margaret thought that Oak Hill’s administration was focused on helping students’ build their resumes so they could get into selective colleges and was not focused on the MCAS, as evidenced by what they talk about and plan professional development on.

**“Memorizing a bunch of facts is useless”: The shift towards inquiry-based history education.** Even though many participants had literacy goals for their social studies

classes, all participants hoped students would historical understandings out their classes as well. Every participant in the study described their goals for teaching social studies as more than just getting their students to recall names and dates. Instead, they spoke about helping build students critical thinking, source analysis, historical thinking, and civic action engagement skills. Judy specifically and empathetically called this an “inquiry” approach. While other participants did not use the same term, their descriptions of their course designs shared these common characteristics. Table 11 summarizes the finding on participants’ goals and curriculum concerns.

Table 11

*Participants’ Goals and Concerns*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Critical Thinking</b>	<b>Coverage Concerns</b>	<b>Connections to Today</b>
Jim Brown	X		
Noah Thomas	X		
Jane Allen	X		
John Smith	X		
Margaret Kolby	X		
Sage Forrest	X		
Stephen Webster	X		
Judy Atherton	X		
Sarah Ragan		X	X
Taylor Johnson		X	
Jen McDonald			X
Arthur Bennett			X

Many participants highlighted the need to focus on critical thinking in social studies class. Perhaps participants were able to shift to towards this more skills driven social studies

course focus because there was not currently a social studies MCAS. The valuing of historical thinking skills over content represents a major shift from traditional history classes that focused on drill and kill of historical facts. Participants also discussed shifts in assessment systems that aligned with this focus on skills. Sarah and Taylor both still expressed a desire to cover all the content of their assigned course and how this did not allow them enough time to go into depth in all the topics they would like. Arthur also brought up an important concern about having trouble finding enough easily accessible resources that highlighted diverse voices in history, a goal that others including Jen had also mentioned.

Four participants particularly noted that one of the curriculum resources they draw on was Stanford History Education Group (SHEG), which was a curricular resource focused on building students source analysis and historical thinking skills (Stephen, Judy, Sarah, and Taylor). Many participants also noted using Document Based Questions (DBQs) either as part of an Advanced Placement (AP) curriculum and/or using the DBQ project (Stephen, Judy, Sarah, Taylor, and Arthur). NewsELA was also a resource brought up by three participants (Jim, Sarah, and Jen). Many other curricular resources (such as Facing History and Ourselves, Readworks, College Board AP, Zinn Education Project, DBQ project, Brown University's Choices, ComLit, and Big History) were also brought up by participants, many of which share common values of focusing on historical thinking skills and larger themes over specific historical facts and detailed content. Table 12 summarizes which participants preferred three of the curriculum resources most commonly mentioned by participants: SHEG, NewsELA, and DBQs.

Table 12

*Participants' Preferred Curriculum Resources*

<b>Name</b>	<b>SHEG</b>	<b>NewsELA</b>	<b>DBQs</b>
Jim Brown		X	
Stephen Webster	X		X
Judy Atherton	X		X
Sarah Ragan	X	X	X
Taylor Johnson	X		X
Jen McDonald		X	
Arthur Bennett			X

***Inquiry projects over multiple-choice tests.*** Judy was very opposed to traditional multiple-choice tests, saying that she “hates them” and “don’t think they are useful at all.” This was partly tied to her aversion to students memorizing facts which she also finds “useless.” Instead in her class she focuses on inquiry-based assignments and assessments, most of which are written essays where students review primary sources and answer an inquiry question. This was in part because of her graduate school program she was recently in that heavily emphasized the importance of taking an inquiry approach to teaching social studies. It is clear from how often she talked about taking this approach to inquiry that her program has had a major influence on how she teaches and likely forms a community of practice for her as social studies teacher. For example, at the time of the interview her American Government class was writing an essay from the DBQ project on “Valley Forge: Would you have quit?” When she assessed student writing from these assignments she would look to see if they used the documents well to support their claim and if they had clear reasoning for why the evidence they choose supported their claim.

Judy also uses teaching materials from SHEG, Facing History and Ourselves, Brown University's Choice Program, and the Zinn Education Project. She noted that it was harder to find inquiry-based materials for World History than for American History, which was why she particularly appreciated the Choices Program, especially the map and graphic handouts. She had started to realize one challenge she had in using inquiry as a driving force behind her instruction was that "the kids need some kind of knowledge of the content before they can like try to answer an inquiry."

In teaching and assessing historical content with students, Margaret likewise preferred projects, Socratic seminars, and written assessments over multiple choice exams. She only gave multiple choice exams because she felt students need to practice tackling such items for standardized assessments outside her class such as the MCAS and SAT. However, Margaret acknowledged that when she gives multiple choice exams, she often asked questions that are not the focus of what she was trying to teach or assess. Instead, Margaret preferred projects and essays. For example, she had students complete a Shark Tank type project where, working in groups, students made an argument for why an assigned city from an Islamic empire will become a hub of trade and then develop a plan to market the city to investors. Later, the students wrote a group essay evaluating what were the most important factors that created the golden age of Islamic empires based on their classmates' presentations.

***Critical thinking.*** As a social studies teacher, Jane saw her job as preparing future voters. She tasked herself with preparing students to participate in society. She hoped her students would be prepared to "think critically about the environment around them" and "make connections between past and present that help them inform their decisions." She

wanted her students to be prepared to travel aboard and “know the weight they carry as an American in both the positive and a negative way.” Jane wanted her students to understand what it “truly means to be an American in the larger world and recognize the connection between American past actions and differently present-day developments” around the world.

Similarly, last year, when Jim was able to focus more on social studies content. His priority was teaching “critical thinking in the sense of like learning from the past, critically analyzing a past event, considering the context in which that event occurred, why it occurred, what affected.” He aimed to be interdisciplinary within the social studies, examining social, economic, and political effects. He enjoyed being able to incorporate that into his curriculum last year. And he would like to be able to be able to teach more social studies like that in the future. He wanted his students to be able to become active participants in society and recognize what they can do within their own sphere of influence from analyzing events of the past for how they affected groups of people or individuals.

Jim called himself a “huge proponent of civics education not just domestically but internationally.” He wanted students to understand the rights that Americans can exercise for the best possible life in the U.S. for themselves and their communities as well as think about the U.S. role globally. He wanted them to be able to think about how to promote a better society at a global level. He thought that in order for students to learn those skills and mindsets they need to be provided with opportunities to “critically analyze the past, question the past, question different perspectives, question different narratives.” That’s why he is not in favor of using textbooks, and instead focused on using NewsELA and ComLit articles, Primary Source documents, and sometimes even research reports to class. He encouraged his students to be critical of the sources they are working with as well as make connections to

their own lives from what they have learned about the past. He wanted them to think about what they have learned from the past and how they can apply to their own lives currently and moving forward in their respective communities.

Noah also wanted students to develop critical thinking skills, including beyond just writing Claim-Evidence-Reasoning paragraphs. In describing his curriculum approach, he said:

One example might be, recently I did an activity where students are doing a progressive era magazine or newspaper and they have to a couple of political cartoons, an editorial as well as a baseline article, a factual article. That may or may not necessarily fall into our CER goals for history...But this is what we're doing, it is engaging students its allowing students to show their abilities across multiple dimensions, that may or may not be what my director of instruction is asking for as far as an assessment that can prepare students to answer ELA MCAS questions.

Noah liked to be creative in his history assignments and projects, like Margaret and Judy.

Stephen's objective when teaching social studies was to foster this civic engagement. He thought the best way to do this is to focus on making students into "critical thinkers and observers of media and politics in the world that they are going to take part in." To do this, he focused on teaching students historical thinking skills and making his class primary source driven. He thought this focus was partly because of who he was as a teacher but also because the AP curriculum "tends to force you to do that." Stephen pulled those primary sources for his class from everywhere he can, including SHEG, but he chose not to use a whole curriculum set from anywhere. Most of his materials he had developed on his own. He often

gotten ideas for class activities from the College Board's AP U.S. history teachers' boards online and then made his own lessons based on that idea or source posted.

***Critical thinking through multiple choice.*** Unlike Judy, who despised multiple choice tests, John sees a lot of value in them. However, he has tried to shift the type of questions on those tests to be more centered on critical thinking. Even in his lower level classes, John has started shifting to use AP style stimulus based multiple choice questions. For example, he gave his students a chart on deaths in the Holocaust and asked questions such as: "What percentage of the Jewish population was that? What nation experienced the greatest population loss? What were these deaths caused by? Or what was a consequence of the Holocaust?" with an answer like the creation of the state of Israel. Most of the questions can be answered just by understanding and analyzing the chart. John liked that most of the content was right there because even if students have not studied, if they can interpret a map or image, they can get it done. He stated that usually only one question for each stimulus requires outside knowledge. He got excited when he had students say, "I can't believe I got a 90%" and he'll say "yeah, you interpreted the stuff you did great...I'm proud of you." He also thought this focus on skills was more valid. While he loved history, he recognized that his lower level classes might not really need to know Wilson's Fourteen Points but they should probably understand the concept of punishing another country after a war.

For these lower level classes, John particularly made some questions very easy to answer, like "what does this image reflect?" He pointed to a professional development he attended years ago where the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education came in and suggested that teachers design assessment with some low hanging fruit such as this, which was easy for students to answer and engages them in the assessment.



John stated his assessments for these classes are now about 50% skills based and about 50% content based. He was proud of the fact he made his own assessments instead of using pre-made assessments from textbook companies, so his assessments closely match what he has taught in class. He had taken questions from the Regents exam in New York and the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills in Texas. This focus on multiple choice assessments was also partly a practical matter, as John learned from 19 years of teaching. He stated “I hate giving projects that I have to grade, if I assess them I’m just going to give them straight multiple choice and I will literally grade it in front of them and punch it in the grade book.” He saw the record keeping part of the job as an area that he feels he has “sold out to some extent.” This seemed like a compromise he had made to keep himself able to be successful and engaged in other areas of teaching over the long haul.

Similarly, Sage also used “kind of standard format and quizzes and tests, which include, multiple choice questions, open response questions, like analyzing primary sources, reading nonfiction texts, things like that” in his traditional 9<sup>th</sup> grade history classes. Though in his upper grade level elective courses he goes a different route. He said, “the electives definitely feel more free to kind of assess in like many different ways. And so like they don’t get like standard quizzes and tests because it is more of a kind of a project based class.”

***Needing to differentiate.*** Jen had almost complete free range to create her own curriculum in her courses and she really appreciated that freedom. One resource Jen really liked to use in her classes was “Big History,” which was an interdisciplinary history of the universe from 13.8 billion years ago to up to us now. It included lots of science and history with differentiated readings across many reading levels and supported with lots of graphics and videos. Jen liked it because it talked about themes and longer-term patterns and helped

her build connections between historical content and today for her students. Likewise, Jen used NewsELA and Readworks since they also have differentiated reading materials that support the lower reading levels of many of her students. Jen also used PBS's Teachers Learning Media. These materials support her student's diverse needs where she had one student who was ready for college and one student had a second-grade reading level in the same class.

Sarah used many similar curriculum materials to Judy, Jim, and Jen to support teaching of U.S. History I content including SHEG, NewsELA, Readworks, the DBQ project, and Zinn Education Project. Sarah expressed similar concerns to Jen about needing differentiated readings for her students. Like Margaret, Sarah was particularly interested in using project-based learning with her students, which for social studies shares many of the same characteristics as an inquiry approach. Sarah did not spend as much time on current events with her English Learners (ELs) because she "feels responsible for moving through the U.S. I content" and ELs often needed to be taught a lot of background information before they can understand a current event, so she did not have enough time. However, she had spent some time on the Black Lives Matter Movement and the context of white supremacy where that was coming from. Similarly, Taylor often felt pressed to move through content quickly in his survey type courses and did not get to spend as much time as he might like on one topic. Some curriculum resources Taylor used to teach his students these skills are from SHEG and Brown University's Choices Program.

***Connections to today.*** Like Sarah, Arthur wanted to build connections between the history students were learning and life today. Arthur wanted his students to be able to recognize patterns in history and make positive change in the future. He did not want his

students to learn a bunch of facts about history but rather come out of his class understanding the world and how to analyze and consider how the decisions people make today impact their future. He always tried to connect a historical event to how it was reflected in today's society. For example, he tied the eugenics movement of the early 1900s to current debates about limiting immigration. Arthur, as a first-year teacher, often felt overwhelmed by putting together his curriculum and lessons and felt like he did not "have time to really get as deep as I should be." One curriculum resource he had recently found and thought was very good was New Visions from New York.

Arthur was also very cognizant of the fact he was limited in what he could teach students in history by his own knowledge, he reported "I'm constantly teaching the history under the lens of a white perspective" but that was how he learnt it himself. He stated, "I feel like whenever I talk about minorities it's always like they are oppressed or they're fighting for justice and there's much more to celebrate them than that but I feel like I'm stuck." He recognized that he should seek other sources to share other perspectives with students but was limited by his available time, energy, and knowledge. Arthur struggled with having no set curriculum provided for him and having to develop his own curriculum as he was teaching during his first year and therefore found it "more difficult to incorporate some of those things that push students to be passionate about their own learning" and really fulfill what he viewed as the purpose of schools. Instead of getting to focus on these larger goals he found that he was still often working on basics of teaching like classroom management. This was perhaps because it was just his first year and as he was completing an alternative teaching pathway he might not have had as much experience in a traditional student teaching environment before having his own classroom.

**“I’m lucky that I don’t have that”: Experience of teaching without an MCAS.**

Seven participants expressed joy at the fact they do not currently have a history MCAS because they have more flexibility in their course and can be more imaginative in their teaching methods (Arthur, Jen, Margaret, John, Sage, Jane, and Judy). However, some still felt an obligation to prepare students for the ELA MCAS or develop their reading and writing skills which sometimes limited, but other times inspired, their creativity (Arthur, Sarah, John, Sage, Stephen, and Taylor). John used the flexibility provided by not having an MCAS and his desire to improve his lower level students’ literacy skills to tailor the goals of his different level classes to the students who are in them. Only Jim would have appreciated more clarity around the history content he should have taught. Table 13 summarizes the finding on participants’ goals and curriculum concerns below.

Table 13

*Participants' Feelings on Currently Not Having History MCAS*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Provides freedom</b>	<b>Still concerned for preparing for ELA MCAS</b>	<b>Would prefer more structure</b>
Jim Brown			X
Noah Thomas			
Jane Allen	X	X	
John Smith	X	X	
Margaret Kolby	X		
Sage Forrest	X	X	
Stephen Webster		X	
Judy Atherton	X		
Sarah Ragan		X	
Taylor Johnson		X	
Jen McDonald	X		
Arthur Bennett	X	X	

***Freedom from MCAS, but concern for it still.*** Jane described it as “a gift” that she can be creative, have a good time, and can really dive into and fully immerse her class in a topic if that’s where a class took her. This was the positive and fun way she spoke of teaching throughout her interview. However, she also acknowledged that supporting student’s growth on the ELA MCAS was also always in the back of her mind. She reported “I do think about MCAS quite a bit. I want to make sure that they're prepared and that they get as much preparation for their English MCAS as possible, which is something I can work on in my class.” Jane further stated: “I already do my best to make sure that all my kids in my classes are prepared for that test when it comes to English” MCAS.

Similarly, Sage's goals for teaching social studies focused on basic literacy skills like reading and writing but also he focused particularly on "civic literacy," which he described as "being able to read and analyze different kinds of texts in different kinds of context" and having the skills necessary "to engage in civic discourse." Sage did not feel pressure to help prepare students for the ELA MCAS, but he knew that teaching kids how to read and write would help them on the MCAS and was necessary for his "civic literacy" and that was always in the back of his mind when he was planning. He did not see preparing students for the ELA MCAS of part of his day to day thinking about his class. Yet, in his 9<sup>th</sup> grade required U.S. history course, that students take the year before they take the big 10<sup>th</sup> grade MCAS they need to pass to graduate high school, Sage used fairly standard formatted quizzes and tests with multiple choice questions, open response questions, and questions that ask students to analyze primary non-fiction texts. This approach may have assisted students in preparing for the MCAS. In his upper-class elective classes, he felt "more free to assess in many different ways" and did not give standard quizzes and tests.

***Two different approaches to two different classes.*** No participant appeared more grateful for the flexibility of not have an MCAS in his content area than John. John knew that his colleagues who teach math and English felt "an enormous amount of pressure to do well and their scores get evaluated." In fact, his wife taught middle school ELA and he knew that her school would literally pull apart their kids' data and that they were held accountable for that. He stated that "I'm lucky that I don't have that" when discussing MCAS not currently including history and social studies. John saw the purpose of education and the goals of his class as varying based the students' skill level. He said the end goal for his class varied "depending upon the student, and what their path or trajectory is." For example, John helped

start his school's AP world history class because he was passionate about world history and he found that excitement pays off when you also get students who are motivated about the subject and generally not behavior problems. In his two or three AP level classes, he felt pressured to help his students perform well on the AP exam at the end of the year. Therefore, he followed the AP world history curriculum frameworks closely, even as they were updated by the College Board. He designed the regular assessments in his AP classes to mirror the AP exam. The assessments focused on stimulus based multiple choice questions where students would get an image, an excerpt, a map, or a chart and then they would have between two and five questions based off of that stimulus. He also tasked them with writing assessments based on the type of writing they would have on the AP exam. For his higher-level students, John also wanted to help students build collaboration skills and have opportunities to practice the work of a historian such as analyzing sources. John reported that he has had a few students come back from college and say that "your AP class was harder than my freshman level classes at college." John appreciated feeling like he has helped prepare these higher skilled students for college.

John particularly felt a lot of freedom in designing his own curriculum for his non-AP classes. Over his 19 years of experience, John had learned to take a different approach with his lower level classes. John said, "in some of my classes I realize that the content is never going to be something that is important to them, but if they can leave with better skills in the sense of looking at sources or looking at documents or collaborating together." He sometimes thought to himself, "If I do content with them – how is that really relevant?" Instead, he taught the Massachusetts world history standards through three biographies: *I am Malala*, *Escape from Camp 14*, and *The Long Walk to Water*. *I am Malala* supported his teaching of

the Middle East and Islam, which he reported was a topic that was controversial with parents to start the year with. He felt parents were less turned off and students are more engaged through teaching this topic through this text instead of other methods. *Escape from Camp 14* was about North Korea and *A Long Walk to Water* was about civil war in Africa and the scarcity of natural resources. He thought supporting lower level students' literacy was particularly important and that these engaging historically based novels were a good way to do that. He reported that some students tell him that "this is the only book I've read this year."

As a testament to his willingness to continue to improve and revise his teaching despite his long tenure, John reported that he was inspired to take this approach to teaching world history to his lower level classes when he saw a kid reading *Escape from Camp 14* for pleasure and he thought to himself, "how often do you see a kid reading a book for pleasure that is about... history?" He found these three books particularly relevant for students. He reported that his students asked questions as they read and got aggravated and emotional in response to the texts. The kids were engaged by the young protagonist in each, who endured significant hardship. John did not see himself as taking this approach to teaching world history specifically to support the students' success on the ELA MCAS, but he did see a connection. He pointed out that the ELA MCAS long composition prompt was "always like identify a character that endures hardship, struggle or transformation. I've had kids tell me that they have written about the books that we've read in class, I feel validated by that." However, he reported that no one in administration other than his direct supervisor seemed to know about the books he read with his low-level world history classes and how that supported those students' success on the MCAS.



***Standards help new teachers.*** While many teachers felt joy in not having to prep students for an MCAS, for new teacher Jim, being encouraged to follow the state curriculum standards would have helped him effectively give shape and structure to his history and ELA class. Jim was given a lot of autonomy last year to determine the curriculum that would best serve his students in his joint English and World History class, titled “Humanities.” He was not instructed or encouraged by school administration to follow the Massachusetts history and social science state standards. He shared that it would have been helpful for him, especially in his first-year teaching to follow the standards for content to focus his curriculum on. Instead, Jim was encouraged to make his curriculum from scratch focusing on literacy skills and what the students were interested in. He sought feedback on what they were interested in from his students through conversation and surveys. He ended up focusing a lot on personal reflection about students’ cultures. One of the units Jim was most proud of was focused on racial bias. In this unit, he was able to incorporate some civics education. Jim was disappointed he was not able to craft the course to be historically driven in the sense that “it wasn’t grounded in chronological understanding of why one event led to another.”

**“Does our class turn into pub trivia?”: Teacher concerns about History MCAS.**

The overwhelming majority of participants in this study expressed both hope that a social studies MCAS may encourage schools to put more emphasis on social studies education as well as concern over how a social studies MCAS might influence their classroom. For example, Sage thought that social studies and civic education might get more focus and the same kind of attention as English, Science, and Math if social studies also had an MCAS. However, he recognized that a test would bring additional pressure on to students and himself as a social studies teacher. He finds himself “unsettled” and “leery” of more testing

requirements. Overall, three themes were found in this area: teachers recognized a social studies MCAS might bring it attention, teachers were concerned they would have to focus on facts over skills, and teachers would prefer inquiry based over multiple choice exam.

*Social Studies MCAS might bring more attention to social studies education.*

Eleven participants shared a belief that having a social studies MCAS be a high school graduation requirement and part of the state accountability system for schools like ELA, Math, and Science would draw more attention back to social studies and highlight its importance to school administrators. Jen believed that the “tests would also help to keep districts accountable and school accountable” that students are consistently getting high quality social studies classes. It would also help students “to make sure that they are learning that stuff and not just getting passed through the system.” Taylor thought the “the pivotal piece of introducing a history MCAS would be trying to maintain history classes in K through 12 education” and that it might be one way to “make sure that history is protected in all schools across the state, or at least reintroduced into schools where it's been phased out.” Taylor thought that a social studies MCAS would make schools invest more in social studies education, but that it might take a while. He predicted “more schools would hold themselves accountable for fear that the state is going to sanction them in some way. But... some schools aren't going to just all of a sudden shift gears simply because this test has come around.”

Noah believed that “our kids are over tested” and therefore he did not “believe in any more standardized testing for our children.” But he recognized that “we value what we test and we test what we value” and that history and civic education has been devalued and if there was a social studies MCAS then “schools could no longer simply devalue history and social studies and civic education.” Noah also highlighted the job security that a social

studies MCAS would provide. He said it would “also mean that my job is protected as a history teacher” because he does not want to become an ELA teacher. Jane was upset about the possibility of a test especially because she had worked hard to bring engaging projects into her class that would be destroyed by a history MCAS. For example, she stated “last year we spent two weeks working on a project that looked at refugees from Syria in my American history class and if I needed to teach to a test, we probably wouldn’t have been able to do that.” She believed the skills and knowledge the kids learned from projects like that are “far more valuable than if I was feeding them information,” the type of teaching she would have to engage in to pace her class for an MCAS test. While she recognized that a history MCAS might bring more attention to the subject, she wished society would value social studies without resorting to one. Jane stated, “I think social studies plays an important role in preserving the humanity of the world and MCAS or not people need to realize the importance of it.”

Jim thought assessments like the MCAS, when done right, hold educators and students accountable and can be powerful in targeting teachers’ instruction and providing valuable data to help students learn. Jim did think a social studies MCAS that was a graduation requirement would force schools to value social studies education more. He thought it would be very hard for his school to have students pass the social studies MCAS and graduate without them reinstating more social studies into their curriculum. Jim argued, “in order to hold people accountable to teaching social studies and it being equally important unfortunately we have to have a state mandated test.” Similarly, Margaret thought she would be able to push the kids further in her class if it was not “the extra class you don’t have to a state test in.” Margaret recognized that, having a social studies MCAS would likely put more

focus and funding into the social studies department. Margaret explained that “I would love to see them do it right, I just can’t imagine how it would work out.” While John was aware of recent talk of the introduction of a history and social studies MCAS and he would be okay with introducing a history and social studies MCAS. However, he did not think it will happen in the next 12 years he plans to continue teaching. “I don’t think it’s considered a strong enough discipline, I’m saddened by that, it’s not valued enough as a discipline to really make the MCAS a graduation requirement for it,” he stated.

*Social studies teachers are concerned their classes would have to focus on memorizing facts over skills.* However, some participants also expressed concerns about what the introduction of a social studies MCAS might mean for their classes. Margaret pointed out that when she grew up in state where she did have to take a social studies exam in order to graduate, it was mostly just memorizing dates and facts. Margaret believed that was “exactly why kids check out from in social studies.” She thought such a focus on memorization “would take away from students’ ability to make a meaningful connection.” And it would also take time away from bigger projects teachers want to work with students. For example, without an MCAS, social studies teachers at Oak Hill were able dedicate adequate time to complete a research paper, which they might not be able to do if there was a state test in history. Also, if there were an MCAS test, she thought that she would have to change her teaching style, do a lot more lecturing and miss out on making a lot of modern connections.

Judy had heard that the state would be coming out with a history MCAS and was saddened by the fact. She thought it would be particularly unfortunate if it was the history Massachusetts Test for Educator Licensure (MTEL) which was “just 100 questions of do you

know this history?” and all factual recall based. She thought that if the history MCAS would be like that “teachers would be pushed back towards let’s just read the textbook and memorize all these things and then do a multiple-choice test, which would be sad.” She did not think students learn history very well like that, especially her urban students. She said, “it’s harder it’s really hard for students to just like memorize a bunch of facts.” And she did not know if her students would be passing an MCAS like that which would make her worried about her job performance. She thought that students, especially urban students like hers, learn better through inquiry. Inquiry and backwards design, and “making history class not about memorizing a timeline,” were major focuses in her recent graduate school program that she agrees with. If there was a history MCAS her students had to take, Judy would try not to change how she teaches and still focus on inquiries. She said, “I might just ignore it until someone actually said to me, your students are doing really horrible, and then I would be like oh, crap, I guess I need to change something.” In this, Judy acknowledges that pressure from school administrators might influence how she taught her class if there was a multiple choice based history MCAS and force her to engage in more test prep activities.

Jane also reported that she was aware of the new history standards and the fact a test may be on the horizon soon. She expressed that this was something she was thinking about and that her fellow history teachers at her school and herself are beginning to adjust their curriculums for the new standards and possible upcoming test. For example, she was trying bring in more economics into her units since that was such a big focus in the new standards. Jane thought a history MCAS would be miserable. Not because she minded having to prepare kids for a test but that “the last thing these kids need is another test.” She reported, “they already spend so much time testing.” She also expressed concern for how testing has already

limited her students to formulaic literacy. She stated, “these kids are already robots when comes to their writing and their reading.” She reported that even without a history MCAS, “I’m already constrained by MCAS” and that she already does her best to make sure that “all my kids in my classes are prepared for the test when it comes to English.” Jane did not think it will be a good thing for history to have an MCAS, instead she thought it will be “extremely restrictive and detrimental.” She was concerned that if there is a history MCAS instituted that she will need to work on pacing a lot. She planned on experimenting more with ways to deliver content, integrating the suggested documents, and generally how she structures things to make sure she can get from the spot the course started to the spot she needs to end if a test is implemented in the future.

Most participants thought a social studies MCAS might bring positive attention to the need for social studies education and yet 11 out of 12 participants expressed some concerns about the possible introduction of a history MCAS. John, the most experienced teacher in the study, was the only participant to express no concerns about the possibility of a social studies MCAS. John said “whatever hoop you want to set that’s cool,” about the possibly the state could introduce a social studies MCAS, and even he felt that a state test would change how he taught. He stated, “I would take it seriously, I would want my students to do well. I would look what they want to focus on and I would teach that.” He compared it to what he already does with his AP classes, focusing on the set curriculum outlined by the college board for that class so he could best prepare his students for the AP exam. John said he already follows the state curriculum frameworks for his non-AP world history classes, with “some leniency,” even without a test. And if they did institute a test, John had confidence he would find a

strategy to “teach to the test but in a way that would give me enough leeway in the classroom that would not make it redundant or boring.”

***Teachers have strong opinions about what content should be on a possible MCAS.***

There are a variety of areas of social studies that participants would like assessed on a social studies MCAS test. Stephen was concerned about the possibility of a social studies MCAS. He believed math and English had more objective skills to assess than history does. Stephen said that a history test especially scared him because of the interpretative nature of history. He was also leery that if the test is more content centered there would be fierce debate over what history is included and tested. He asked “Who gets to determine what’s history? What are the questions that we get to ask?”

Jen “totally” wanted a social studies MCAS that would make sure high school students knew the basics of “what it means to be American” as well as cultural awareness, geography, civics, and bigger historical concepts. For example, she said it would “be really nice for people to know where places are in the world that we’re hearing on the news every week” and to ensure students know “how to carry out duties of a citizen, how to vote, how to register.” Noah was concerned about what history would be included in the test and shared that he thought most social studies teachers would lean towards focusing on United States history but, he said, “we live in a global community” which would be an argument for focusing on world history instead. He also pointed out that there is “so much cultural bias in teaching history” and there are “often points where historians have disagreements, not necessarily on baseline facts, but around interpretations of those facts” and what historical events are most important to focus on. Like Jen and others expressed, Noah thought a good starting point for the social studies MCAS might be American civics. He thought facts like

“how many branches of government there are, what are the role and responsibilities of the President, what is the difference between both houses of congress” would be a “fair starting point...where most Massachusetts history teachers could agree that one should be taught in schools” and “the most free of bias.”

***Teachers would prefer a skill-based MCAS instead of one focused on multiple-choice questions.*** Teachers have strong opinions about what form a social studies MCAS should take. Participants mostly favor a test more focused on historical skills assessed through written responses than a multiple-choice fact-based test. Jim thought an exclusively multiple-choice test that only requires students to regurgitate facts does not serve the purpose of developing students’ historical thinking skills. Instead, he supported a test with a balance of written responses that would “effectively and equitably assessed students based on the totality of their learning in social studies over the course of the four years.” Margaret would prefer if the social studies MCAS “was more geared towards written assessments that gave students a chance to do that kind of application” even though she thinks this is unlikely. She recognized that it would be “tough to really test historical thinking skills on an MCAS style test instead of just memorization and regurgitation.” Judy suggested that having an inquiry-based history MCAS might make other teachers choose to take a more inquiry-based approach, that she favored, because, as she said, “I think that would make more teachers use inquiry which would be good to like move people away from like let's read a chapter and answer questions and then let's do a multiple choice test on it.”

Stephen was concerned that students will have to memorize specific dates, names, and places that he had not emphasized in the past. He asked, “does our class turn into pub trivia?” He hoped the assessment would be skills based but he was not sure what skills they



would be looking for. However, he was concerned that if the skills that are assessed on the social studies test are more writing-based than it might actually “expedite the process of some history departments being rolled into humanities departments.”

Taylor predicted the social studies MCAS would be skill based. He said it would likely be aligned to the AP curriculum and similarly have text dependent multiple-choice questions and open response prompts where students have to provide some clear explicit historical examples. He therefore would not be worried about changing how he taught his courses because that was how he already focused his classes on building those AP skills. He was not concerned about content memorization but rather having students apply the concepts they learn to an analysis of a text or an image or cartoon. Arthur also had similar mixed feelings about a possible history MCAS. Arthur would prefer a social studies test that was more skills based, like the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills, which he experienced when he lived there, and had skills such as understanding a graphic or chart of information on it. Arthur felt like “if it was more skill based, I could teach whatever history I wanted, but incorporating those things like reading graphs, analyzing documents, and so on.”

Sarah was also concerned about the format of a possible social studies MCAS, especially given her population of entirely English Learners. She said “when it comes to history, so much of it is literacy. And I’d be very concerned for my students...having the literacy skills to access the questions” to see if they know the historical content. She recognized that if there was a state social studies test instead of doing project-based learning like she would like to, she “can just see myself ploughing through a bunch of memorization, which would not help my students at all.” Sarah pointed out the gap between what social studies teachers and government officials view as what students need. She stated, “top-down

people have such different ideas about what students need and what they should be required of them.” Sarah thought it would be better if the state focused on providing more examples of strong projects for social studies teachers to use as models than creating another state test.

Stephen and Jane, unlike other participants in the study, recalled specifically discussing about a possible future social studies MCAS with their social studies teacher colleagues at school. Stephen’s understanding was that the most likely grade for the new state history test would be eighth-grade, where the new civics course was outlined in the new standards. He was concerned that if was an eighth-grade test, it would mean students are taught history one way for the first eight years in preparation for the test and it might not be the best preparation for high school or AP history classes. He reported that he already found his high school students lacking in basic historical thinking skills when they arrived to his classroom now.

### **Teachers’ Perception of Their Own Professional Identity in Accountability Context**

The third research question this study explored is: How do teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure? Three themes that emerged from the interview data on this question are that being a social studies teacher was an important part of many of the participants identity, just over half of participants felt that their colleagues who taught MCAS tested subjects look down on their them or their class subject, but most participants felt secure in this jobs as social studies teachers. Table 14 summarizes the themes and major sub-themes found in answering the question, how do teacher perceive their own professional identity when in the context of state accountability? Additional sub-themes and opposing cases were also presented in the sections below to

provide the reader with as much of the experience of being a social studies teacher reflecting on their own professional identity in an accountability context as possible.

Table 14

*Themes and Major Sub-Themes of Teachers' Perceptions of Their Professional Identity*

Themes	Sub-Themes
1. Being a social studies teacher was an important part of participants' identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Majority saw social studies teacher was primary part of identity</li> <li>- Additional participants saw being a teacher was primary identity</li> <li>- Two participants did not see being a teacher as primary identity</li> </ul>
2. Feeling that colleagues who teach MCAS tested subjects look down on their subject	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- MCAS test subject teachers looked down on history classes</li> <li>- Some teachers do not see history as a rigorous and important class</li> <li>- Some did not feel that MCAS subject teachers looked down on them</li> </ul>
3. Participants felt secure in their jobs as social studies teachers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Most participants felt secure in their jobs as social studies teachers</li> <li>- Participants recognized that the history job market was over saturated - Some teachers took on additional PD or responsibilities for security</li> </ul>

**“It’s the core of who I am”: Being a social studies teacher role in their identity.**

The majority of participants in the study reported that being a social studies teacher in particular was an important part, the primary source, of their identity (Arthur, Jen, Sarah, Noah, Margaret, Taylor, and Judy). Other participants thought being a teacher was an important part of their identity, but that being a social studies teacher was only a small part (John, Sage, and Stephen). Jim and Jane spoke about other core parts of their identity that they value more than being a social studies teacher but both connected to their teaching. The value participants placed on being a social studies teacher in particular was not correlated with their perceptions of accountability pressure at their school. Figure 12 and tables 15 and 16 below summarize these findings.

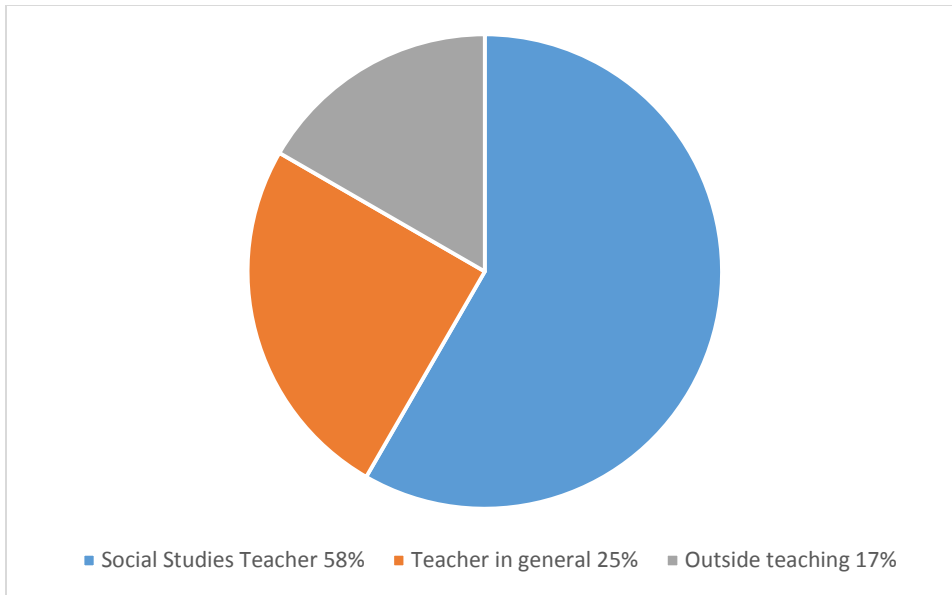


Figure 12. Primary source of identity.

Table 15

*Participants' Perception of the Role of Being A Social Studies Teacher in their Identity*

Name	Social Studies Teacher was Major Part of Identity	Teacher, Not Just Social Studies, was Major Part of Identity	Other Factors Were More Major Part of Identity
Sarah Ragan	X		
Noah Thomas	X		
Judy Atherton	X		
Jen McDonald	X		
Margaret Kolby	X		
Arthur Bennet	X		
Taylor Johnson	X		
Sage Forrest		X	
John Smith		X	
Stephen Webster		X	
Jim Brown			X
Jane Allen			X

Table 16

*Participants' Perception of Role of Being a Teacher in their Identity vs. Accountability Pressure*

<b>Name</b>	<b>State Accountability Level</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Feeling of Accountability Pressure</b>	<b>Perceptions of Role of Being a Social Studies Teacher</b>
Jim Brown	5	Urban Alt Ed	Significant	Not Important
Noah Thomas	3	Urban Public	Significant	Important
Judy Atherton	3	Urban Public	Significant	Important
Jane Allen	1	Suburban Public	Significant	Not Important
Sarah Ragan	3	Urban Public	Some	Important
Sage Forrest	3	Urban Public	Low	Not Important
Jen McDonald	4	Urban Alt Ed	Low	Important
Margaret Kolby	1	Suburban Public	Low	Important
John Smith	2	Suburban Public	Low	Not Important
Stephen Webster	2	Suburban Public	Low	Not Important
Arthur Bennet	2	Urban Charter	Low	Important
Taylor Johnson	2	Urban Exam	Low	Important

***“It’s just who I am.”*** Jen stated, about being a social studies teacher, “it’s like the core of who I am. It’s like I was born this way, just took me a long time to realize it. It’s my persona. It’s just who I am and what I do.” She reported that she would be bringing aspect of being a social studies teacher into any job she would do. She also said that working at her current school, which focuses on providing socio-emotional support to students with significant special needs, had “allowed me to grow tremendously, personally and professionally” and she was “really thankful” for that and how it has allowed her to care “for the person as a person, not just as a student.” Like Jen, many participants noted how they

spend significant time and energy trying to grow and improve as a teacher. This is a major indicator of how significant being a social studies teacher is to their identity.

It was clear that Margaret was also excited about being a social studies teacher and that it was a “very important” part of her identity. She reported that being a social studies teacher was “central to who I am” and that was what made her “feel impactful.” It was clear that this was a large part of her identity because she reported constantly thinking about teaching and consistently worked to get better at it. Margaret’s constant drive to improve her teaching and unwavering belief that her work would make a difference were additional examples of how her role as an educator served as an important part of her identity. Margaret was also excited by new challenges she faces as a social studies teacher. For example, she had the opportunity to teach a humanities class next school year. In this senior-year course, students had an English class and a social studies class back-to-back each day that are themed around a common book and topic. She enthusiastically shared that they would have a core book “Ishmael” and the courses would focus on the question “How do we live right?” Margaret was particularly excited to have conversations with students about what artificial intelligence was and what it meant. Margaret was also eager to join the community of practice of the team of English and History teachers who build and teach this class together each year.

Being a social studies teacher was also “super important” to Judy, a first year white urban school teacher. While she would have been willing to take a teaching job in another subject for her first year if she needed to because of the tough job market, she was very committed to being a social studies teacher. Judy was very politically active in college and had worked on political campaigns and for political non-profits and saw being politically

active as a big part of who she was as a person. She thought this type of work will always be a part of who she is and what she felt like she needs for her existence. She stated, “I need to be doing things are going to help the world...I want to be politically active, like throughout my life.” And she continued that “one way of doing that as being a social studies teacher, because you're literally educating the electorate, and I'm not there to brainwash them. But it's important that I'm teaching social studies because it like really connects with the world” and was particularly important in our current divisive political climate.

Sarah, who taught at a school specifically for recent immigrants to the U.S., also thought being a social studies teacher was very important to her identity. She said that being a social studies teacher informed her personal reading, the professional education courses she took, and her own development. Teaching social studies to the population of recent immigrants who are also learning English was particularly important to her. She considered it “a mission” and said, “I’m not sure what I would do if I weren’t doing this.” She thought social studies education was vitally important to her immigrant students to provide them with the cultural understanding and confidence to “engage in the United States on a level of equality and having the confidence to claim your own voice.” She said that given her school’s population, focusing on civics was out of necessity right now, given the current political context of the United States.

***Social studies teaching was particularly important to participants of color.*** Noah, a black teacher at an urban school, also reported that being a social studies teacher was “critical” to his identity. He said: “When I think about the first aspects of my identity,” I think of, “race, gender, and being a teacher, particularly being a history teacher.” Noah shared: “it forces me to look inward, about my own biases, because we all have them, my

own perceptions of diversity, about my own values, if you are really teaching history effectively, then your teaching should give you pause to consider that.” His teaching history influenced many aspects of his daily life. He reported that it influenced “conflict resolution at school, the way I interact with homeless people, the way I interact with conflict within my own family, the way I think about litter, the way I think about the way I buy things at the store.”

Noah reported “constantly thinking about my own teaching, my own values, the values I expose in front of my students.” Noah was also constantly using his daily life to think of examples that connect what he was teaching students in history to daily life. He argued “no kid gets engaged in history by standing up there and spewing out facts but students do get engaged by saying this is how history relates to our modern life.” Therefore. Noah was “constantly trying to think about examples in my regular everyday life that connect to history that connect to our students understanding of themselves and the world around them.” He concluded that being a history teacher was “a major part of my identity and the way I think about the world.” Noah feared that as he was forced to incorporate more ELA MCAS prep into his history class, he was “losing my craft as history teacher” and since being a history teacher was such a major part of his identity, it felt like he was losing some of himself in the process.

Taylor, also a black male teaching in an urban context, also considered being a social studies teacher was a major part of his identity. Taylor said “history is the one discipline that has really made an impact in my own life. Growing up, this is where I saw myself, even if I couldn’t literally see my ethnic background, or my race, being taught in the content.” Taylor stated that history connected with him because it involved “really thinking about world issues



and how to go about addressing them” and “that's the way I think. So that's where I really saw myself fulfilled and empowered through academia.” More recently, Taylor had felt even more connected to the sociology curriculum he had taught for the last four years. He reported that it had “definitely had an impact where I'm thinking about how I approach certain situations and the people around me differently because I've been so critical about the content that I'm bringing into the class for students.” When he was offered to teach this class in his second year of teaching at his school, he jumped at the chance to learn this new content area and it had become a passion project of his.

Taylor had since pursued a second masters in Gender and Cultural Studies so he could bring as much knowledge and resources as possible into his sociology classroom. This master's degree also allowed him to further explore something he had always been interested in and show others that he had credentials that validated his knowledge in this area. The fact he was willing to pursue additional graduate degrees while teaching full time to build more knowledge and resources for a course he taught demonstrated that being a social studies teacher was such a major part of his identity. He also expressed interest in the future in possibly developing an out of school curriculum for adolescents to further explore issues of gender and sexuality.

Being a social studies teacher was also very important to first year teacher Arthur, who was a Latino male teaching in an urban school. Part of why teaching history mattered so much to Arthur was that he believed AP US History was one of the hardest classes he ever took, even in comparison to his graduate school classes. That class stood out to him because it pushed him “as a learner, as an intellectual, and then also forced [him] to look at the world with a wider lens.” To Arthur those lenses included “not just history, it's the legality, the

culture, the economics, all kinds of scientific innovations, come together to impact and the ways it's creating our society. I just love that kind of thinking" that the social studies bring together. Now being the teacher Arthur grappled with how to best push his own students to the level he was pushed, especially the school's large population of English Learners or Former English Learners when it comes to understanding the history textbook. Arthur found that many of his students need extra support around how to read a textbook and struggled with grade level reading. Arthur said when he assigned grade level reading the students would not understand the historical content because they struggled so much with the reading, which seemed like a disservice. But when he instead assigned them an 8<sup>th</sup> grade reading level textbook they could understand the content of he was doing them a different disservice because he was not exposing them to the higher-level reading. He clearly struggled with this moral question, he explained "when I tried assigning them 10th grade level, they were not getting the materials like certain words or the crazy writing, so that is a huge worry, am I doing a disservice to them by not giving them the harder reading?" Arthur continued, "but at the same time if they are assigned to the hard reading but not comprehending the actual material that there seems to be understanding than I did just as big a disservice." The fact even as a first-year teacher Arthur was contemplating these complex questions and speaking of his choices in such moral language as "disserve" indicated that the importance of being a teacher to his identity, despite the fact he did not intend to stay in the profession long term.

***Teaching was what mattered.*** On the other hand, Sage saw being a teacher as a "fairly substantial part" of how he saw himself, especially since he had been teaching for 14 years. But he did not see being a social studies teacher, in particular, as the most important part, he said "I'd say that the social studies part is a part of that whole, but not, not all of it."

Some other participants also agreed that being a teacher was more important to their identity than particularly the subject they taught. For example, Stephen saw being a teacher, but not necessarily a social studies teacher, as a big part of his identity. He felt the job naturally aligned with his personality and his values. He stated, “in a way, being a teacher is the best extension of who I am as a person.” Yet it was the way he was able to grow the government program at his school, a very social studies focused interest, that Stephen was particularly passionate about and proud of. Stephen stated he would love if he could also offer an AP Government course and a U.S. history through pop culture course. But the social studies department already offered the most elective courses in the school and with the graduation requirement courses it had to offer, the number of elective slots available was limited. This demonstrated that despite teaching for many years, he was passionate about finding new ways engage students in rich social studies content. His passion for teaching social studies was also shown through in the fact he went to the state house to lobby for a new civics-based graduation requirement.

Similarly, John said he was “proud of what I do. I think my job has a deeply intrinsic value to it, and there is something good of it.” However, he was less proud of being a teacher than he used to be. He used to proudly tell everyone he met “I teach at the high school” and would be excited to see kids out and about. But more recently, when he meets people, “I don’t even tell them I’m a teacher, I think the profession itself is, I think that the general perception is that teachers are lazy, that they are hacks, so I don’t even tell people I’m a teacher anymore.” When he was younger being a social studies teacher was a big part of his identity. He was really proud to be a teacher, loved to tell everyone he met, and was very happy to see kids and their parents out around town. That had become less important to him

especially since he had his son. He reported “I will tell the kids, I will say look, my son is number #1, you guys are #2, you get that your parents love you, your second but I will do just about anything for you.”

John stated that “I still love my job, I still take it seriously... I think the struggle as you hit year 20 is not just cash out.” He even believed he was better at the job now because of his experience. At this point in his career, what was important to him was how he had learned to treat his students. “I strive to treat them with respect and dignity, that’s important to me,” he stated. It is also important to him to be a good role model and be approachable and friendly. It meant a lot to him when students tell him “you’re the nicest teacher I have, you’re the only one that I feel I could talk to.” But he recognized his role to play as a classroom teacher was small and he did not have delusions of grandeur. “I don’t consider myself to be Mr. Holland-Opus, I don’t think I’m anybody special, I don’t think I’m going to save the world,” he stated.

***Discrepant cases.*** Interestingly, despite Jim being very concerned over the elimination of social studies from his school or perhaps because of this, Jim saw being a social studies teacher as a small part of his identity. He studied some history in college but majored in other social sciences. He saw public service as a much larger part of his identity. While other participants might find part of the value of being a teacher in its public service aspect, Jim was the only participant to explicitly say that public service and not teaching was the most important part of his identity. Jim aimed to best help his students and their families however he could. He saw his role as a social studies and humanities teacher as important because it provided him an opportunity to work with young men and women and their families to “help them whenever I can...even outside of my role as a teacher.” He thought

the content he taught was important, but he was more concerned with being able to connect with students. He saw helping students see the “inherent potential they have is far more important to me than my role just as a content teacher.” Jim focused a lot of his time and his reflection on how he can help students with their social emotional skills, not just content skills. This was part of how his entire school operates and what they prioritize, not just him, so in this aspect it was a good fit for his personality even if he was concerned that they devalued social studies education.

Jane also did not think being a social studies teacher was a very important part of her identity. Instead, she thought the non-profit she runs in Peru was a much larger part of her identity. What she associated with being a history teacher outside of school was people asking her history questions when they find out what she does for work and expecting her to know every historical fact. This quiz show contestant aspect was not a part of the job that she enjoyed. Jane did have two opportunities at her school to engage in passion projects that she was really excited about as a social studies teacher. One passion project of hers, was an international trip she takes each year to Peru where students work with her non-profit to help the local community. She loved this so much because that is where she saw students have real learning and growth. She reported that she regularly saw “kids just kind of transform before my eyes and they come back to my classes there they're sharing their experience and demonstrating what they learned outside of the classroom and bringing it in,” which was very important to her. She also reported that she had no trouble recruiting students to participate in this foreign trip. Another passion of hers was an elective on conspiracies. She had wanted to take over this class for three years and has finally had the opportunity too. What she loved about this class is that she got to completely build it, since there are no standards. And it was

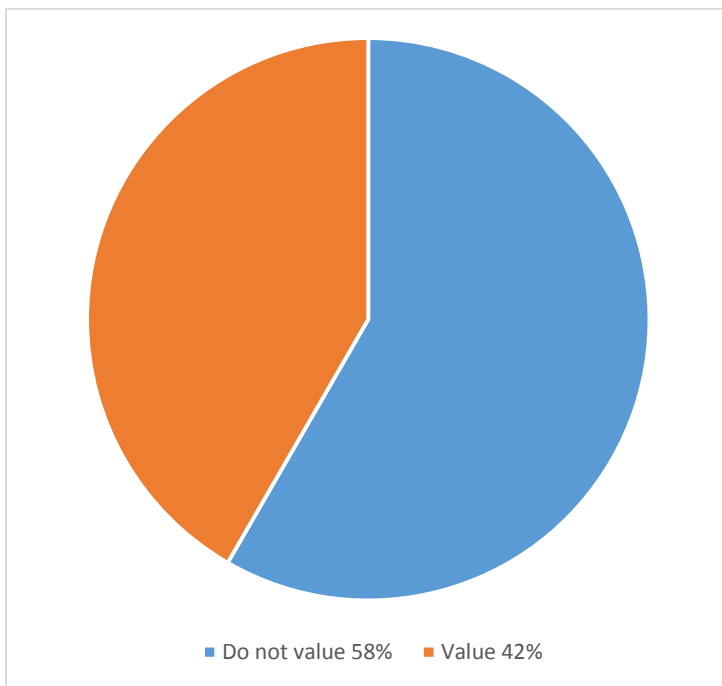
just awesome to build it around what the students wanted to learn about conspiracies in history. She stated, “What I really, really love about the elective is I get to completely build it, there are no standards, it's an awesome to kind of build around with the kids wants to learn and see them feel passionate” about those topics. She enjoyed seeing the students really get into the research they engaged in during the class.

**“Well I have MCAS and you don’t get it”: How their colleagues see them.**

Teachers have mixed opinions about how their colleagues see the importance of social studies education relative to other academic departments. Seven participants perceived their colleagues, especially those who teach MCAS tested subjects such as ELA and Math, as looking down at them because they taught a non-tested subject (Arthur, Jen, Noah, John, Sage, Jane, and Judy). Some participants reported that MCAS tested subject teachers did not see history as important because they did not think it was rigorous. Other participants reported a feeling that history was not considered important by MCAS tested subject teachers even though they could not specifically pinpoint why, though it might have something to do with the focus on STEM throughout society. The other five participants did not (Sarah, Jim, Stephen, Margaret, and Taylor). Figure 13 and Tables 17 display these results.

These experiences do not entirely correlate with the level of accountability pressure they experienced. One would expect that in schools where there was high accountability pressure that pressure placed upon teachers of tested subjects would be more likely to translate into them looking down on non-tested subjects. Three out of four, or 75% of, teachers (Noah, Judy, and Jane) who experienced high accountability pressure felt their colleagues looked down on their class as less important than tested subjects. However, four of the eight, or 50% of, teachers (John, Sage, Jen, and Arthur) in schools with lower

accountability pressure also felt their colleagues in tested subjects looked down on them. Therefore, while it was more likely that a participant in a high accountability pressure school felt looked down upon by colleagues who teach tested subjects, there must also be other factors that lead to social studies teachers feeling like their colleagues did or did not equally respect history class as compared to MCAS tested subjects. Perhaps, this was in part because of a larger societal devaluing of social studies that went beyond accountability pressure. Figure 13 and Tables 17 and 18 display these results.



*Figure 13.* How colleagues see history.

Table 17

*Participants' Perception of How Colleagues Who Teach Tested Subjects See Them*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Perceived their colleagues as looking down at history classes</b>	<b>Did Not Perceive their colleagues as looking down at history classes</b>
Jane Allen	X	
Noah Thomas	X	
Judy Atherton	X	
Jen McDonald	X	
Arthur Bennet	X	
Sage Forrest	X	
John Smith	X	
Jim Brown		X
Stephen Webster		X
Margaret Kolby		X
Sarah Ragan		X
Taylor Johnson		X



Table 18

*Participants' Perceptions Colleagues Views of History Class vs. Accountability Pressure*

<b>Name</b>	<b>State Accountability Level</b>	<b>School Type</b>	<b>Feeling of Accountability Pressure</b>	<b>Colleagues Look Down at History Class</b>
Jim Brown	5	Urban Alt Ed	Significant	
Noah Thomas	3	Urban Public	Significant	X
Judy Atherton	3	Urban Public	Significant	X
Jane Allen	1	Suburban Public	Significant	X
Sarah Ragan	3	Urban Public	Some	
Sage Forrest	3	Urban Public	Low	X
Jen McDonald	4	Urban Alt Ed	Low	X
Margaret Kolby	1	Suburban Public	Low	
John Smith	2	Suburban Public	Low	X
Stephen Webster	2	Suburban Public	Low	
Arthur Bennet	2	Urban Charter	Low	X
Taylor Johnson	2	Urban Exam	Low	

*Colleagues did not think history was rigorous or complex.* Jen reported that that math, English, and science teachers at her school, a school focused on supporting special education students with socio-emotional needs, did not think social studies was as important as their classes. When asked about this, she stated “I’ve heard the words before. They have straight up said it. And granted I don’t know how it was taught before I was there. It may have been just a total knockoff joke class” before she started three years ago. She raised an interesting idea that other teachers lack of value on social studies education may be related to how it was previously taught at her school. She concluded “the emphasis is definitely on the core subjects excluding history.” Jen went on to point out the importance of social studies education, especially for her population of students and stated: “But I find it extremely

important, especially in a behavioral school, of all of the subjects, it would be like one of the most important: how to interact with people, why people make the decisions that they do and the thought patterns of people?”

Jane “definitely” knew that math and English teachers saw her work as a history teacher as less important than theirs. She reported that they would say things like “it’s not an MCAS subject” or “can’t they just Google that” or “you guys just show movies all day.” It might be all joking, but the feeling was definitely there, she reported. Arthur similarly reported that his colleagues who teach Math and English see history as a “blow off class” because it did not have a specific MCAS attached to it. Judy believed that teachers in other contents perceived social studies as easy because it is just a bunch of facts that are set in stone, but in reality, Judy was instead trying to help students understand that not everything happened exactly how the textbook describes it and that history was actually very complex. Judy and Arthur were both always trying to emphasize the many viewpoints that have traditionally been ignored to students.

*A feeling whose origins cannot be specifically pinpointed.* Some expressed a “feeling,” even if it is without much evidence, that they get from their colleagues that they view history as lower. Sage reported that his colleagues who teach Math and English at Woods High School would never explicitly say that history was less important than their classes and social studies teachers were not excluded from school wide cross curricular conversations. He reported that English teachers even frequently talk about collaboration between English Language Arts and Social Studies. However, he did get the feeling that it was “the other main subject.” It was “just kind of a feeling” to Sage and he could not pinpoint the exact origins of it.

For another example, John reported that the school's different departments had different standing within the school. For example, all the other teachers "collectively make fun of the wellness department, because it's a non-traditional department and there is like no assessment for it at all. We're like what's your final? You're going to shoot hoops?" According to John, social studies was also "definitely considered lower on the totem pole because there isn't a formal assessment like" the MCAS in his department. John had internalized this lower position of social studies, to some point, stating: "I'm okay with that lesser perception and lesser role" of history class. However, he saw some signs that he individually had a level of respect. For example, colleagues saw he was a good teacher and other faculty members have specifically requested him as a history teacher for their son or daughter because they view him as doing a good job.

While Noah did not necessarily think his colleagues at Bay High School saw his work as less important than theirs, he recognized that among teachers at large that he has known there does appear to be:

a belief among many, this extends to people I've known, not just in my building, but other teachers I've known, is there an sort of an underhanded, a sub-conscious belief based on something of the things they have said whether or explicitly or implicitly, that history is less important than science or math, yes I do, I absolutely do, and I would include ELA in that as well.

He continued that "I think most ELA teachers do understand the implicit value with history and social studies education. But they also understand that their jobs are more heavily at stake because of the fact they are assessed on MCAS." He further pointed out that it's "abundant and evident in education culture...you see it everywhere STEM, STEM, STEM,

STEM, you see it everywhere, diversity STEM, girls in STEM, make STEM more fun.”

While he wanted to make sure that his students are able to access STEM fields it, he did not want it to mean that “we are deemphasizing humanities, history and ELA.”

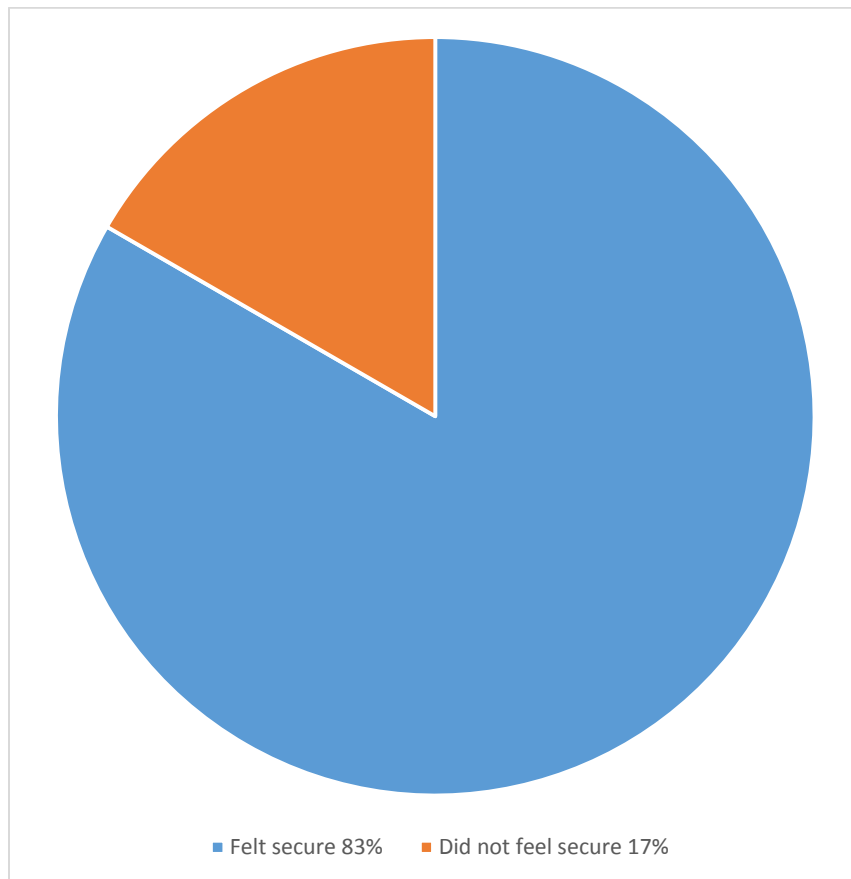
*Some participants did feel equally respected.* Margaret stated that in other buildings she had previously worked at, she had gotten the attitude from individual teachers, “well I have MCAS and you don’t get it.” But Margaret stated she had never felt that at her current building and that other teachers at Oak Hill saw social studies as valuable for students. Margaret reported that even the STEM teachers recognized that students need to be better balanced. For example, science teachers thought science-focused students should take an ethics course in the social studies department. Also, the social studies teaching team was pushing for four-years of social studies to be a graduation requirement, a move that was generating a lot of support from other departments, according to Margaret. Similarly, Jim did not feel that teachers of other subjects saw his work as any less important than theirs. Alternative Ed Academy’s staff was very small, around 10 teachers. He felt that all the teachers at his school were very supportive of each other.

Stephen also felt that social studies teachers were equally valued by other teachers in the building. He even said that “some people feel jealous of us because there isn’t an MCAS” in history. They would say things like “oh it must be great not to have to worry about test scores” and are jealous history teachers do not have to go to a meeting where their scores are broken down and the whole department talks about the data. Likewise, Sarah never felt that history teachers like herself were ever looked down on by other teachers at her school or excluded from participating in decision making or discussions at her school. Perhaps this was in part because of the unique population of Sarah’s school, Sarah felt like at her school “it’s

sort of accepted that history is a big part of developing kids' language skills in another context, so it's very important to our students...it's definitely part of the student experience that is valued and prioritized." Taylor did also happily report that in his estimation his administration and colleagues in other subjects place equitable value on all departments and do not de-value the work history teachers are doing, perhaps this was partly because of the success the school had on the MCAS in the past.

**“I know that they could replace me very easily”:** Most participants felt secure in their jobs as social studies teachers. More than half of the participants felt secure in their jobs as social studies teachers and were not worried they were going to be dismissed from their employment, despite the fact that they were aware that the social studies teacher job market was oversaturated with qualified applicants (Sage, Noah, Sarah, Taylor, Arthur, Judy, and Jen). John and Stephen also felt very secure positions in their low accountability suburban schools because they had gained significant seniority. Jane and Margaret were the least confident in their job security because of they were both the mostly recently hired in their department and therefore had very low seniority, a common way schools dismiss staff if there are job cuts. Many participants also shared that they engaged in many “extra” tasks around the school such as coaching or leading extra-curricular as well as spent “extra” time, outside of contract hours, on professional development. Some engaged in these tasks because of their own passion or commitment, but some also engaged in them to help themselves be more likely to maintain their current employment in the future. Jim was an outlier as the only participant who thought demand was going to outpace supply for social studies teachers in Massachusetts in the near future. Figure 14 and Table 19 summarize these results. Table

20 compares these results to participants feeling of accountability pressure, there does not appear to be a correlation.



*Figure 14.* Feeling of job security as social studies teacher.

Table 19

*Participants' Perception of Their Own Job Security as Social Studies Teachers*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Perceived they had significant job security as a social studies teacher</b>	<b>Did not perceive they had significant social studies teacher job security</b>
Sarah Ragan	X	
Noah Thomas	X	
Judy Atherton	X	
Taylor Johnson	X	
Jen McDonald	X	
Arthur Bennet	X	
Sage Forrest	X	
John Smith	X	
Jim Brown	X	
Stephen Webster	X	
Margaret Kolby		X
Jane Allen		X

Table 20

*Participants' Perception of Their Own Job Security as Social Studies Teachers vs. Accountability Pressure*

Name	State Accountability Level	School Type	Feeling of Accountability Pressure	Felt Significant Job Security as Social Studies Teacher
Jim Brown	5	Urban Alt Ed	Significant	X
Noah Thomas	3	Urban Public	Significant	X
Judy Atherton	3	Urban Public	Significant	X
Jane Allen	1	Suburban Public	Significant	
Sarah Ragan	3	Urban Public	Some	X
Sage Forrest	3	Urban Public	Low	X
Jen McDonald	4	Urban Alt Ed	Low	X
Margaret Kolby	1	Suburban Public	Low	
John Smith	2	Suburban Public	Low	X
Stephen Webster	2	Suburban Public	Low	X
Arthur Bennet	2	Urban Charter	Low	X
Taylor Johnson	2	Urban Exam	Low	X

***Felt secure because he was good, not because he was a history teacher.*** Noah felt secure in his job as a history teacher because of the reputation he has as an effective teacher and his strong relationship with his school administration. But he said, “it has nothing to do with [the fact] I’m a history teacher.” In fact, he said “I think if I was a math teacher, I would feel more secure.” While Noah did not find the required professional development opportunities at his own school that useful, Noah had done a lot to build his knowledge base and strengthen his teaching outside of required professional development at his school. He participated in many voluntary professional development opportunities offered by his district’s history department that helped him learn, what he viewed as, “really strong



instructional strategies for being a history teacher.” He also reached out to his professor from his graduate school social studies teaching methods course, who was a history teacher in a different district, to ask for lesson ideas and even visited his classroom to observe. Noah had also done other classroom visits as well and helped write curriculum for other districts. In this way, it was clear that Noah had looked for and found numerous ways to build a community of practice of history teachers outside his immediate school setting to help him improve his practice and that being a social studies teacher was a valued part of his identity, since he worked so hard to get better at it. Working so hard, outside of his own school, to improve his practice earlier in his career might also indicate part of why he felt so secure in his job now in his fifth year of teaching.

While many participants engaged in additional professional development to improve their craft and many tasks at their schools outside of their contracted job as a social studies teacher, they did not do this necessarily because were worried they would lose their job if they were not seen as valuable outside of their teaching position. Similarly, in addition to doing outside professional development, Noah had also taken on many other responsibilities at his school and did “a lot of extra things with the kids.” He served as history department facilitator, participated in the school’s Instructional Leadership Team (ILT), coached debate, and helped organize the school’s prom and graduation. He also organized an elective at his school called “Strong Men, Strong Leaders” with the goal of combatting negative narratives about men of color and to “facilitate conversations about successes and setbacks in our lives and communities.” Thirty boys participated in this program each of its four year in existence at his school and it had become his school’s largest elective.

Noah admitted to having thought about and discussed with others before a question: “I wonder if I wasn’t a history teacher would I feel the need to” do so much extra at the school? He believed the answer was two part, partly, “yes, of course, because I’m passionate about teaching but the other part of it is always a fear in the back of my mind, that my job could be cut.” What was particularly hard for Noah was that, “my job could be cut not because of me and the work I’m doing but because so many districts are eliminating history or are trying to really reduce it...that is a real fear for me.” Noah acknowledged that that fear “is part of the reason why I’m really involved in my school community... some of that is my own interest and some of it is job security.”

***More social studies teachers out there than jobs available.*** Sage, on his 14<sup>th</sup> year teaching in his district, recognized that there was a long line of humanities teachers looking for jobs and that his district could have replace him very easily. But he did not feel that his job was in any kind of danger. He had done a lot of extra things at the school, but he did not feel like he did them for job security purposes. He had coached tennis and basketball, served as the 504 coordinator for a year, and as an outdoor club advisor. He also served as a new teacher mentor and a mentor for teachers seeking National Board certification. Sage found this was a way that he was “trying to stay relevant and but also academically stimulated.” He did not see it as coming from a place of fear or a need to prove himself from the district.

Jen felt that it was “hard to get social studies positions because they are few and far between” and “competitive” but she felt secure in her current job and that she could stay there as long as she wanted to. She had also been able to combine her interests in the outdoors with her work as a teacher by getting certified to do Youth Upper Opportunity Leadership through the Appalachian Mountains, which will allow her to take her students

outdoors to “roam around in the woods for a few days.” She said she did this in part because of her own interest in the outdoors but also because it “looks really great on paper” when it comes to building her resume for future job searches. Judy had also experienced a difficult social studies job market and felt lucky to have gotten the social studies teaching job she did. She was prepared to possibly teach in another content area if she could not find a social studies position. She noted:

I've seen a lot of schools, even within my [graduate] program, like other teachers who are studying social studies are actually humanities teachers. And I've seen like some schools move away from history and English as two separate subjects and more of like a humanities course where you're like reading literature, and maybe you're kind of learning about history in that process.

In this way, Judy was worried social studies had been seen as a “dying field.”

*Some felt very secure.* Stephen, in his 7<sup>th</sup> year of teaching in his suburban school, said he felt very secure in his position at Gold Hills because of his “seniority, what I bring to a district, and my general performance.” John, in his 19<sup>th</sup> year of teaching in his suburban school, also felt fairly secure in his job. He did not think his suburban school was likely to get rid of the social studies department in favor of combined history and English in a humanities class like some schools around his district have. And he was second in seniority of a large social studies department of 21 teachers. He also knew that his district cares about teaching a large number of AP classes so the fact he teaches multiple sections of AP also made him feel secure. He stated:

And I know in our district, having X number of AP classes is important, so I feel pretty confident I could do the next, I have to figure out, if I'm doing 30 or 35 years.

It's weird, I don't think in our world today there are many jobs where you can say I'm going to teach 30 to 35 years at the same job and going to retire and have a pension.

So I really feel blessed with that. I take my job wicked seriously. I do feel that I have an enormous amount of job security. I don't feel threatened at all.

Sarah also attended numerous voluntary professional development opportunities available to history teachers. For example, she participated in professional development opportunities at Massachusetts Historical Society, Massachusetts Arts Institute, Leventhal Map Center, Paul Revere house, Museum of African American History, and National Institute of Humanities summer grants. Her dedication to engaging in these professional growth opportunities showed how significant being a strong social studies teacher was to her identity and how much she cared about continuously improving at it. Sarah felt secure in her job as a social studies teacher at her school but still got involved in a number of extra jobs at her school, but more because she got bored and wanted to do something beyond teaching. Taylor also felt fairly secure in his job as a social studies teacher at Regional High School. This was partly because of the high number of electives his department offered and that students subscribed to in high numbers. Taylor reported that there are equal numbers of social studies, ELA, science, and math teachers at his school even though there are less required years of social studies courses.

***Some felt insecure.*** Jane was concerned about her job security because she was the least senior member of her department. To help address her job security concerns, Jane took on some extra trainings and responsibilities. For example, she got Sheltered English Instruction (SEI) certified as soon as she could so she could have ELs in her class. She also saw her foreign trip every year as something the school appreciated her doing. And last year,

before she got professional status, she was an advisor for six extra-curriculars just to make sure she was seen as valuable in her school. Jane was sure that if a budget cut hit, the school would cut a social studies position before they cut one from another academic department. Jane stated, “I have professional status here but I'm pretty much one budget cut away to being stuck in the middle school.” This fear was made worse by the fact that she had heard that in surrounding towns “they're cutting their social studies curriculum all together.” These schools apparently felt that social studies was one department one can get rid of spend more time and money on MCAS subjects. She stated that this was “terrifying, absolutely terrifying” to hear. She expressed that this was always in the back of her mind, that her school might not recognize social studies importance.

Margaret felt minor job insecurity as a social studies teacher, largely unrelated to state accountability policies. She and her colleagues in the social studies department have recognized that because they were slowly losing enrollment in social studies courses despite the fact that student enrollment in the school was going up, they have lost some positions in their department over the years. She attributed this to a community focus on STEM (Science Technology Engineering and Mathematics), not the MCAS. Margaret was the last hired in her department and therefore would be the first dismissed if a social studies position was cut. Given the past reduction of social studies positions relative to other departments, Margaret stated that she will not feel secure in her position until someone new is hired. She was concerned about finding a new job if she had to because she sees the social studies teacher job market as “very saturated with excellent teachers right now.” However, she was not currently concerned that her school would eliminate the entire social studies department, like Jane. Margaret was also an advisor to a number of after school clubs. She did this, in part, to

make sure she was seen by her department coordinator and principal as someone valuable who contributed to the school community. Margaret also advised the clubs because it brought her joy to interact with her students on a non-graded basis and because she thought its valuable for the kids to have spaces after school that are not academically focused.

***Discrepant case.*** Perhaps being overly optimistic, Jim had strong faith that there was a “huge demand” for social studies teachers in the job market, especially because of the current political climate around President Trump. He also thought that the importance of social studies education in preparing students to be active civic participants has come to the forefront. Jim correctly reported that “Massachusetts just actually recently just prioritize the teaching of civics in 8<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> grade classes and for future years seniors doing a civics project.” I believed his opinion on this may be clouded by participation in a community of practice with other social studies educators and a social studies methods professor who was a leader in crafting the new state History and Social Science Frameworks and was now helping shape the possible new assessment. Jim believed that once the new social studies MCAS was approved and implemented there was going to even greater demand for social studies teachers. Therefore, he was not worried about finding a social studies teaching position in the future. He stated that while he would be happy to teach literature or another class again in the future, he would ideally like to teach social studies because that is where his interest and passion for civic education lies.

## **Conclusion**

The first research question this study explored was: What are public school teachers’ understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school? This section explores three themes found in the data for this question: that accountability level did not always

correlate with testing pressure, a gap between teacher's perception of the goal of public education and their school administrators, and general devaluing of history. The second research question explored was What are high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing? The themes identified from the interview data on this question were the supplanting of history with English Language Arts (ELA) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) preparation, shift towards inquiry-based history education, a joy at not having the pressure of MCAS in their subject, and seeing both positives and negatives with the potential of a future social studies MCAS. The third research question this study explored is How do teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure? Three themes that emerged from the interview data on this question are that being a social studies teacher was an important part of many of the participants identity, just over half of participants felt lack of respect from teachers of MCAS subjects, and yet half of the participants felt secure in their jobs as social studies teachers. Chapter 5 will consider how these findings support or contradict earlier research findings (discussed in Chapter 2) and will explore implications for these findings going forward.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

The final chapter of this study begins with a brief summary of the study. It then discusses the findings of the study as compared to other studies reviewed in Chapter 2. This discussion is organized by the three research questions that focus this study. Implications and limitations of this study are then presented. Suggestions for future research are also given. The chapter wraps with my personal reflection on this research.

#### **Summary of the Study**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe urban public high school social studies teachers' perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing and its influence on their professional identity within the context of Massachusetts' school accountability policies. This qualitative study used the phenomenological methodology to "reduce individual experiences" with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing into a description of the "universal essence" of the experience (van Manen, 1990, p. 177). Accordingly, I interviewed 12 participants to recognize what their experience had in common and what patterns and relationships of meaning in how the phenomenon was experienced could be seen across the participants. In conducting this research, I was particularly interested in "how people *make sense* of what happens" to them as social studies teachers in an accountability



context and therefore phenomenology was an appropriate methodology for my research aims (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2012, p. 45).

Twelve participants from 12 different schools were selected using stratified purposeful sampling. Eight teachers from a variety of urban school were interviewed. As a comparison point, four suburban high school teachers were also included as participants in this study. Six teachers were from schools or districts labeled as level 3, 4, or 5 on the state accountability system and six teachers' schools were rated as level 1 or 2. The participants average years of experience teaching social studies was seven years. There were five female teachers and seven male teachers and there were nine white teachers interviewed, two Black teachers, and one Latinx teacher.

To analyze my interview data, I used Moustakas' (1994) modification of the Van Kaam method of phenomenological data analysis. I used validated themes and invariant constituents from participant's interview transcripts to develop an individual textual description of the "what" of the experience for each particular participant. Next, I constructed an individual structural description for each participant with the goal of describing the "how" of the experience (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121) and shared these findings with my participants for additional validation through member checking (Trumbull, 1993 as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p 109; Creswell, 2007, p. 207). Then I developed a composite description to show the meanings and essence of the experience for the whole group (van Kaam 1959, 1966, as cited in Moustakas, 1994, p. 121). The table below summarizes the themes found.

Table 21

*Themes by Research Question*

Research Question	Themes
1. What are public school teachers' understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Accountability level did not always correlate with testing pressure</li> <li>- A gap exists between teacher's perception of their school administrators' goals for public education and their own</li> <li>- A general devaluing of history by admin and students</li> </ul>
2. What are high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The supplanting of history with ELA MCAS preparation</li> <li>- A shift towards inquiry-based history education</li> <li>- A joy at not having the pressure of MCAS</li> <li>- Seeing positives and negatives of potential history MCAS</li> </ul>
3. How do teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Being a social studies teacher was important part of identity</li> <li>- A lack of respect from teachers of MCAS subjects</li> <li>- Feeling of security in social studies teaching jobs</li> </ul>

## Findings

In this section, I revisit the research questions that were the basis of this study. I also consider my findings in conjunction with earlier research on similar topics, which were previously discussed at greater length in chapter 2.

**Question 1: What are public school teachers' understandings of the influence of testing pressure in their school?** Three themes that reoccurred through the interview data of this study related to question one was that accountability level did not always correlate with testing pressure, a gap between teacher's perception of the goal of public education and their school administrators, and a general devaluing of history.

***History doesn't count.*** While numerous studies have found a reduction in social studies instruction time and devaluing of social studies in elementary schools due to state accountability and high stakes testing pressure (Wills, 2007; Jennings & Stark Rentner, 2006;

Winstead; 2011; Milner Bisland, 2015; Burroughs, Groce, & Webeck, 2005; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012; Vogler, 2003; Burke & Alder, 2013; Good, Heafner, Rock, O'Connor, Passe, Waring, & Bryd, 2010) there have been fewer studies about a reduction of time for social studies at the high school level. In my study, only one out of twelve high school participants, Jim, reported that history had been completely eliminated from his school's curriculum.

However, in total, nine out of twelve participants, 75%, reported smaller reductions and injury to social studies classes such as cutting of freshmen history classes (Judy), less teaching positions than other departments (Sage), less resources, such as textbooks, than other departments (Sage and John), history class time being taken for non-academic purposes when other classes did not (Sage and John), lack of professional development (Jane), and lack of history department administrators (Stephen). Participants expressed how these slights made them feel that social studies was being devalued in their schools in similar ways other high school social studies teachers have in previous studies. For example, in Burroughs, Groce, and Webeck's 2005 study participants reported "not including social studies [in state testing] sends the message that learning about social studies is not as valued as learning about mathematics, reading, and science" (p. 17). High school teachers also reported a sense that students are getting the message that "history doesn't count" (De Oliveira, 2008, p. 367).

***Accountability pressure serves as a hidden curriculum.*** While my study did not find a direct correlation between a participant's school's state accountability level and the level of accountability pressure felt, it did find that the feelings that history class was not valued was shared by all participants in level 3, 4 or 5 schools, as well as by some in level 1 or 2 schools. In schools where there was more accountability pressure, students may be getting an even clearer message that "history doesn't count" that has many participants concerned, especially

for their already minoritized student populations. As Noah said, “we test what we value and we value what we test.” As discussed in chapter 2, the hidden curriculum is what students learn through the experience of attending school rather than the stated educational objectives of schools (Giroux and Penna, 1979; Haralambos, 1991; Longstreet & Shane, 1993; Leistyna, Woodrum, & Sherblom, 1996; Margolis, 2001; Jay, 2003; Dickerson, 2007; Gibson, 2012). The hidden curriculum includes “the bureaucratic and managerial ‘press’ of the school” (McLaren, 2003, p. 86) including what administrators value and do not value, which is of course determined by what accountability system values because as Noah’s administrators said, “We can’t do that if we aren’t open.” The hidden message of America’s school accountability systems was that low-income, minority students are not expected to contribute meaningfully to American society but instead remain on the margins.

Like Winstead (2011), who expressed concern about “how accountability-based learning placed minority and immigrant children at risk for gaining civic and democratic knowledge” (p. 226), some teachers in my study were particularly concerned about marginalized students and their need for social studies education and how the current education system may be limiting their ability to access it fully. In one example, Jim believed schools were the “most socially empowering and economically empowering institution” but that because his school had cut history classes “we are ill equipping students to be members of their own communities.” Jim thought social studies education was especially important for his immigrant students who particularly need to “know their rights, exercise their rights, and in the future be a representative of people who are part of their communities instead of having people who are not representative of their communities represent them politically.” Similarly, Sarah was particularly concerned that her English Learner students need to be able

to develop “a sense of cultural understanding and the confidence to engage in the United States on the level of equality and have the confidence to claim [their] own voice.”

*School administrators take a neoliberal view of the purpose of education.* As argued in chapter 2, accountability systems have been created by, and have helped further propel, a collective belief shift about public schools. Public schools have moved from serving a public good of preparing citizens, to serving a private good of workforce preparation. This collective belief shift strongly ties to the rise of neoliberalism which prioritizes “human capital development,” making education a private good, where parents focus on “adding value” to their own child instead of concern for larger societal good (Lipman, 2011, p. 15). Yet all participants in my study, likely because they are social studies teachers, still saw public schools as a public good with the goal of preparing citizens. However, many also expressed more neoliberal goals for public schools and the descriptions they provided about how they view their administrators’ beliefs aligned strongly with neoliberalism. For example, Taylor was concerned that public education did not put students in the best position to be successful and economically stable. Similarly, according to Jim, Alternative Ed Academy administrators prided themselves on “equipping students with the academic and personal skills to best support them and prepare them for whatever they want to pursue in the future.” Sage and Margaret both spoke about their administration’s focus on STEM, driven by a belief that students will be more successful financially in the future if they engage more in science or engineering-based fields.

Four participants in my study felt their administration was not as focused on improving students’ academic preparation as they should be and instead are distracted by socio-emotional learning and independent living goals (Stephen, Margaret, John, and Jen). In

some ways this focus by school leaders on socio-emotional learning over academic growth, which the students need to be successful academically in the future, may be similar to Anyon's (1980) argument that through the hidden curriculum, knowledge for social power and reward is only provided to those already in the upper class, while poor students are being taught a different set of cognitive and behavioral skills that make them more compliant in future employment, which today is likely entry level service jobs.

**Question 2: What are high school teachers' experiences with social studies curriculum narrowing?** The themes that emerged from the interview data on this question were the supplanting of history with English Language Arts (ELA) Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) preparation, a shift towards inquiry-based history education, and a joy at not having the pressure of MCAS in their subject.

*High stakes testing has become the curriculum.* Virginia, where there is no social studies state test, saw literacy instruction in the drill and kill style in preparation for the English Language Arts (ELA) state test became the focus of the social studies class (Yeager and van Hover, 2006). The literacy instruction being forced upon the Virginia social studies teacher appears to be using the cognitive approach of drill and kill on strategies that are supposed to work across all content areas instead of a discipline specific literacy approaches (Fang, 2012). Similar results were found in my study. While only Jim had social studies completely eliminated from the curriculum in favor of ELA skill focused material, four additional participants (Noah, Judy, Jim, and Jane) felt that their administration directed them to focus on supporting ELA MCAS preparation and reading and writing skills instead of history content and skills. Six additional participants also expressed their own desire to focus on improving reading and writing skills to support students' ELA MCAS score growth. For

example, Jane said, “I do think about MCAS quite a bit. I want to make sure that they're prepared and that they get as much preparation for their English MCAS as possible.”

One area of social studies curriculum that many scholars of social studies education agree on is the focus of using historical evidence. As Claud & Marriot (2012) wrote “The successful resolution of all historical problems depends upon the appropriate use of evidence” (4). Even in school’s that were prioritizing preparing students for the ELA MCAS in history class, there was a priority of teaching students how to make arguments with evidence. For example, Judy felt her school emphasized using Evidence Based Argumentation (EBA) strategies. The EBA strategies Judy described were similar the Claim-Evidence-Reasoning activities Noah reported being required to do in his history classes. These activities were designed to be common core aligned and to prepare students for success on the new ELA MCAS 2.0 which is aligned to common core as well as the new SATs. While social studies teachers in other studies expressed concern that the Common Core State Standards glorified close reading and the “decontextualization of historical interpretation” (Dover, Henning, & Agarwal-Rangnath, 2016, p. 464), participants in my study did not mention this as a concern.

***“I’m lucky that I don’t have that.”*** Teachers in my study appreciated the flexibility and creativity that not having a high-stakes social studies MCAS allows them to have in teaching their history classes. For example, John was able to focus his lower level world history classes on a set of three memoirs from young people around the globe. In another example, Margaret did a “shark tank project,” where student were assigned to research a different city that was a thriving trading community in the Islamic Empire. Then students needed to “look at what the different geographic, religious, political, social facts, that are

going to make this place a hub of trade” and decide “how would you sell it to somebody, how would you explain that these are factors worth investing in.” Also, Jane was thrilled to teach an elective course on conspiracies. She said, “what I really, really love about the elective is I get to completely build it, there are no standards.” She further explained that “it’s awesome to build around what the kids want to learn and see them feel passionate about different things.” Teachers in my study liked to be able to prioritize topics students were most interested in. For example, Noah said “nobody teaches history just for the content but also for the enduring lessons that our students should leave our classrooms with and the problems our students should leave prepared to solve.”

This flexibility allowed social studies teachers to prioritize what they focused on in their classes. For example, Margaret, John, Taylor, and other teachers in my study valued their students learning to be active global citizens. As discussed in chapter 2, Dower (2003) defines an “active” global citizen as a person who “has the following moral perspective: all human beings have certain fundamental rights and all human beings have duties to respect and promote these rights” (p. 7). For example, Taylor described his goal was to “cultivate students into critical thinkers who can apply the skills that they learn in a social studies class anywhere in their lives” and particularly build global citizens who have “empathy towards different groups of people that have been marginalized throughout global history, really understanding how people have been put in this position, and what can we do in the future to make that’s either being addressed or not happening anymore.”

***A focus on critical thinking.*** Eight participants from my study felt that “critical thinking” should be the focus of their social studies classes. For example, Jim’s priority in his teaching when he had the flexibility to design his own curriculum was “critical thinking in



the sense of like learning from the past, critically analyzing a past event, considering the context in which that event occurred, why it occurred, what affected.” This aligns itself well to Weinburg’s (2001) vision of the importance of historical context, writing: “context, from the Latin *contexere*, means to weave together, to engage in an active process of connecting things in a pattern” (p. 21). As well as to Thornton’s third and critical approach to teaching social studies that was “designed to promote a transformation of some kind in the learner” through developing critical thinking (Thornton, 1994, p. 233). Noah gave an example of using an inquiry or critical thinking approach, “students are doing a progressive era magazine or newspaper and they have to a couple of political cartoons, an editorial as well as a baseline article, a factual article...it is engaging students, it’s allowing students to show their abilities across multiple dimensions.”

The inquiry approach, also described as project based and critical thinking, preferred by many study participants but particularly Judy was also codified in the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Frameworks for Social Studies State Standards: Guidance for Enhancing the Rigor of K-12 Civics, Economics, Geography, and History in 2014. This document was put together through a collaboration of fifteen professional organizations including the National Council for the Social Studies and the American Historical Association. The primary purpose of these frameworks, therein after referred to as the C3 Frameworks, is “to provide guidance to states on the concepts, skills, and disciplinary tools necessary to prepare students for college, career, and civic life...and support for rigorous student learning.” (p. 17). The core of the C3 Frameworks is the inquiry arc, which is well aligned to the work of Weinburg. The four dimensions of the arch include “(1) developing questions and planning inquiries, (2) applying disciplinary concepts and tools, (3) evaluating sources and using evidence, and (4)

communicating conclusions and taking informed action” (p. 17). This inquiry arc can be followed using a variety of history curriculum, but particularly aligns well to many of the curriculum materials favored by many participants in my study such as Stanford History Education Group, Document Based Questions, and Brown University’s Choices curriculum.

**Question 3: How do teachers perceive their own professional identity in the context of accountability pressure?** Reviewing the participants interview data from my study, netted two themes connected to the literature review of chapter 2 that answer this question. First, that being a social studies teacher was an important part of many of the participants identity yet most participants felt lack of respect from teachers of MCAS subjects. Second, participants in my study also displayed some evidence of having multiple memberships in different communities of practice.

*Being a history teacher was an important part of participants’ identities, and lack of respect from colleagues and accountability efforts hurt their identity.* The majority of participants in the study reported that being a social studies teacher in particular was an important part, the primary source, of their identity (Arthur, Jen, Sarah, Noah, Margaret, Taylor, and Judy). For Jen stated, “It’s just who I am and what I do.” This aligns with what Dowe Beijaard (1995) found when he conducted research with secondary school teachers in the Netherlands and found that secondary school teachers’ professional identity was derived primarily from the subjects that they teach and this has strong and ongoing influence on their image of themselves as professionals. Many researchers found that identity and institutional contexts are significant for teachers’ sense of job fulfillment, ongoing motivation, commitment, and sense of effectiveness (Beijaard, Meijer, & Verloop; Day et al; Flores and Day; Troman, as cited in Farnsworth & Higham, 2012, p. 477).

Beijaard also noted that a negative influence on teacher's perceptions of their professional identities included when one feels that his or her subject taught is not taken seriously by colleagues (p. 288). In my study, seven participants perceived their colleagues, especially those who teach MCAS tested subjects such as ELA and Math, as looking down at them because they taught a non-tested subject (Arthur, Jen, Noah, John, Sage, Jane, and Judy). Jen stated "I've heard the words before. They have straight up said" that they do not value history as much as other MCAS tested subjects. Arthur similarly reported that his colleagues who teach Math and English see history as a "blow off class."

Brooke (1994) defined a professional identity as one that has a body of assimilated knowledge and the skills to use it in his or her chosen field. Multiple studies have shown that accountability diminishes teachers' investment in their professional practice by controlling their labor (Au, 2011, p. 25) and limiting their ability to use "their professional expertise to respond to the localized needs of their students" (Dover et al, 2016, p. 456), that is part of being valued as a professional is being able to be creative in their practice. This was also found in my study when teachers felt like their ability to teach their passions were limited. For example, Noah was so upset that his administration had him focusing on ELA preparation instead of his own priorities for teaching history, he said it "is taking away our ability to be creative as history teachers in the classroom...I'm losing my craft as a history teacher." Many other studies have also found that high stakes accountability has, in many cases, led to "a revolving door of mandated programs and punitive interventions that narrow the curriculum to test preparation and produce an exodus of some of the strongest teachers" (Lipman; Valenzuela; Valli & Buesi, as cited in Lipman, 2011, p. 52). Specifically, Burke and Adler (2013) found that accountability pressure threatened urban fifth grade teacher's

professional identities as they felt marginalized and that they had a lack of autonomy, especially when mandated to use scripted lessons, pacing guides, and common assessments.

*Participants had multiple communities of practice.* However, as the research presented in chapter 2 indicated, a way an individual's identity was shaped was by the communities of practice they engage in (Wenger, 1988). Evidence to support that was found in this study, six out of the 12 teachers in the study felt they had strong communities of practice that shaped their professional identity (Jim, Judy, Margaret, Noah, Sarah, and Taylor). Jen, Arthur, and Stephen did feel they the opportunity to form real communities of practice at their schools. Jen only had one other high school social studies teacher she worked with and she reported that they did not have much time or desire to collaborate, though she did often work with an English teacher she taught with. Arthur and Stephen met with other social studies teachers at their school but only once a month and they felt this was not enough time to get into deeper instructional planning and learning opportunities. Jane and Sage did have regular meetings with other social studies teachers at their schools, but did not find it useful for their own professional growth. Sage chalked this up to his own style and personality but Jane noted that she would greatly like to have a community of practice where she could hear "other people's ideas and seeing what they're doing in their classroom and just hearing about other people's creativity." The way Stephen and John described their social studies teacher communities at their school were more friendly and social than places of deep collegial learning. For example, they talked about covering each other classes when needed, going to baseball games together, and visiting each other's homes. The other six participants all felt they had a strong community of practice with other social studies teachers at their school.

Some participants also noted other communities of practice they engaged in addition to meeting with other social studies teachers at their school. This meant these teachers' identities would have been shaped by their "nexus of multimembership" (Wenger, 1988, p. 159). For Noah, Judy, and Margaret their additional communities of practice stemmed from people they met in their recent education graduate programs. Jim, who did not feel he had a community of practice at his school but felt he had a strong community of practice from his graduate program. What these participants all had in common was that they were within their first five years of teaching, Noah had taught for five years, Judy was in her first year, Margaret had taught for four years, and Jim had taught for two years. That might account for why these teachers were still connected to a community of practice they had developed in a graduate program before they began teaching.

I expected to find that urban social studies teachers might have to struggle with defining their professional identity as a nexus of multiple memberships between their identities as a social studies teacher, a teacher of marginalized students, and a teacher in a high accountability pressure school. I only found a few examples of this. Noah and Judy saw themselves as both in communities of practice of social studies teachers and as a teacher in a high accountability schools. For example, Judy said "we had to improve our test scores" and Noah said "I understand that our primary goal has to be at first to be open." Sarah, who taught exclusively English Learners, showed a multiple membership in a history teacher community of practice and a community of practice of other teachers of English Learners, including her students' English teachers. One way this was evident was when discussing her fellow English Learner teachers at her school, Sarah said "it's sort of accepted that history is a big part of developing kids' language skills in another context."

## **Implications**

This study focused on urban high school social studies teachers because they are in a unique position to understand the influence of secondary social studies curriculum narrowing related to accountability systems and inequality in the U.S. education system. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe public high school social studies teachers' perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing and its influence on their professional identity within the context of Massachusetts' school accountability policies. This study has implications for many areas including research, policy, as well as school leaders and teachers. It's implications for research include highlighting the importance of talking to teachers in education research and focusing on urban schools when looking at implications of accountability. Implications for policy include reasons to include social studies in the accountability testing systems as well as concerns about the content and form such a test might take. Implications for school leaders and teachers include the need to recognize and consider how to ameliorate negative influences of accountability on students' civic, historical, and other areas of social studies education.

**Implications for research.** Talking to urban social studies teachers in this study was important to fully understand how accountability influences equitable social studies education. The education research community knows that teachers are “curricular-instructional gatekeepers and in this way largely determine the character of the curriculum and teaching to which their students have access” (Thornton, 1994, p. 236). And yet often education research does not focus on teachers, when teachers mediated state and district curricular mandates for students and are essential to hear from. I hope this qualitative study helps give life and color to quantitative studies on social studies curriculum narrowing. In

doing so, I hope it helps other researchers see the value of hearing from those in the arena who are actually doing the work of educating future generations and argues for more value to be placed on such qualitative work in the future.

This study also focuses on urban schools that are more susceptible to accountability pressure because of the “diversity penalty” built into No Child Left Behind. In doing so, it helped make the case that “curriculum narrowing to improve test scores of poor and minority students may... end up magnifying the achievement gaps between them and their middle-class peers” (Berliner, 2011, p. 299). I also hope that it helps argue for the need for other researchers to consider how accountability and other policies may have differing influences on different schools or populations. This study argues for the need for researchers and policy makers to consider the long-term implications of policies on different school communities and sub-groups. While this study focused on the influence of the Massachusetts accountability system, researchers and policy makers from any state or country should consider the results of this study to help them think about how their policies may influence social studies education or other important areas of schooling.

**Implications for Massachusetts policy.** An obvious question raised by this study is should social studies be included in the MCAS tests required for high school graduation and state school accountability systems in Massachusetts? Or in similar tests in other states? Federal accountability legislation never mandated testing in social studies, yet Massachusetts had intended to include a History and Social Science MCAS in its testing program and high school graduation requirement. Between the Massachusetts Education Reform Act of 1993 and today, the state had made four different history and social studies curriculum frameworks and piloted multiple exams including multiple choice and essay questions (Martell, 2013). At

least three times, the state has delayed implementation of making passing a social studies state test a graduation requirement (Martell, 2013). Yet today there is new hope that a social studies MCAS will soon become a reality. Policy makers in Massachusetts are currently making these important decisions and citizens should be voicing their opinions to these leaders.

In 2018, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts passed new History and Social Science Curricular Frameworks. In discussing this achievement on November 28, 2017, Kerry Dunn, President of the Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies said, “We believe that the passage of the new History and Social Studies frameworks will be closely followed by a state-wide history/social studies assessment” (Dunn, 2017.) She also pointed out something that many participants in this study likewise noted: “The sad fact is that...social studies have not been a priority of the DESE... as a result, schools, particularly those struggling with ELA and math accountability measures, have often limited students’ opportunities to learn about... their...country, and our complicated world.” (Dunn, 2017.)

Similarly, Michael Dukakis, former Massachusetts Governor, and Thomas Birmingham, former President of the Massachusetts Senate, wrote an editorial in the Boston Globe on March 14, 2016, arguing that “Massachusetts should revive the requirement that public school students pass a US history MCAS test to graduate from high school” (Dukakis & Birmingham, 2016). They highlighted the fact that “what isn’t tested isn’t taught” and pointed out that, here in Massachusetts, entire middle-school social studies departments have been eliminated (Dukakis & Birmingham, 2016). Dukakis and Birmingham (2016) further pointed out that while Massachusetts often tops the nation and the world on testing in English, Math, and Science, it has never been in the top 10 states in the national “We the



People: The Citizen and the Constitution” contest. Like Dunn, Dukakis and Birmingham believe a social studies MCAS will start to make social studies a priority in Massachusetts schools.

Eleven of twelve participants in my study shared a belief that having a social studies MCAS be a high school graduation requirement and part of the state accountability system for schools, like ELA, Math, and Science are, would draw more attention back to social studies and highlight its importance to school administrators. However, participants also expressed concerns about the content and form these tests may take and how it could influence their teaching in the future. Both benefits and concerns expressed by my study participants were similar to those teachers in states that already had a high-stake social studies test expressed in other studies. For example, a study using national data showed that states that have elementary state test of social studies have seen an average of 28 minutes more of social studies instruction per week compared to those states without (Fitchett, Heafner, & Lambert, 2014, p. 24). However, in a 2005 study, Kenneth Vogler found that in states where there was a social studies test, teachers are more likely to spend more time on test preparation using teacher-centered practices such as lecturing and textbooks, instead of more student-centered practices such as inquiry-based projects and other teaching approaches and content that were more relevant to their students. In Vogler’s 2008 study of teachers in Mississippi and Tennessee, they recognized the importance of their instructional decisions and the role of “the test” in them. One Mississippi teacher stated, “my choice of instructional delivery and materials is completely dependent on preparation for this test. Therefore, I do not use current events, long-term projects, or creative group/corporate work because this is not tested” (Vogler, 2008, p. 1). Therefore, policy makers should be aware that making social

studies part of high-stakes testing may not solve all the problems of a narrowed curriculum and teachers' perceptions of trade-offs between inclusion and exclusion from state testing ought to be further heard on the issue.

**Implications for national policy.** On the national level, this study helps policy makers understand how excluding social studies from high-stakes testing requirements in No Child Left Behind (2001) has influenced teaching of social studies in high schools and possible ills that may be associated with this. This study may also inspire some policy makers to look at other research studies on how social studies is taught in states without a high stakes social studies test. This study should also encourage national policymakers to examine research literature that looks at how social studies is taught in states with a high-stakes social studies test. My study could also encourage policy makers to consider putting a requirement for social studies testing, and teaching, in future revisions of No Child Left Behind. The participants' words in this study may help national policy makers consider the content and format a social studies test that would be most helpful for students.

It seems that part of why federal policy makers have so far avoided including a requirement for testing history because there are very strong opinions about what history should be taught. Some participants in my study also mentioned this debate. This debate goes back at least to 1994 when Lynne Cheney, at the time, former director of the National Endowment of the Humanities, who had been on the panel appointed to draft a set of national history standards, openly spoke out against those same standards in an editorial in the New York Times (Oct. 20, 1994). Cheney felt the new standards were too concerned with political correctness and negative aspects of U.S. History (Avery and Johnson, 1999). Cheney warned that if the standards were adopted "much that is significant in our past will begin to disappear

from our schools” (Cheney, 1994). Some of Cheney’s compatriots called the standards a “denigration of America’s story” (“What’s News: World-Wide,” 1995). Whereas those from the other side, argued that these standards were “the beginning of a national effort to transform history into the exciting, immensely important school subject it should be.” It seems that because politicians could not agree on what history students should learn, they avoided giving it a required state high-stakes test. I would urge policy makers to think that the fact what history should be taught is such a hot button issue is actually an argument for why history education is so important. History classes should be places where students are learning historical thinking skills and are actively having these debates over how historical facts and events should be interpreted. I hope studies like mine help national policy makers realize the importance of students learning historical thinking skills that are needed for student future success in American democracy as well as students’ success in the global economy.

This study, especially the words of Jim Brown and Sarah Ragan who worked with many English Language Learners (ELLs), should also help policy makers think carefully about how ELLs should be included in national testing and school accountability policies, possibly including social studies tests. Currently, NCLB required ELLs to take the same reading, mathematics, and science content tests as taken by native English speakers. ELLs furthermore represent a subgroup that schools are held accountable for on these content tests. This policy “requires high stakes testing of ELLs in English—a language that these students, by definition, have not yet mastered” (Menken, 2010, p. 121). Therefore, evaluating schools on the results of these tests is fundamentally flawed. The research is conclusive that any content test “administered to an ELL in English is unlikely to render a true portrait of what

the student knows and is able to do, because language impacts the results” (Menken, 2010, p. 123). It is consequently not surprising that ELLs score an average of 20-50% below native English speakers on state content assessments (Menken, 2010, p. 125). This does not mean that ELLs are not learning English or content but “simply affirms that the students are indeed ELLs, and that language is posing a barrier reflected in their test performance” (Menken, 2010, p. 125). This does not necessarily mean that ELLs should not be included in federal testing and accountability policies, but rather policy leaders should carefully consider existing research on ELLs to help craft policies that will ensure ELLs are not left behind by the American education system.

As many participants in my study mentioned, ensuring ELLs have access to high quality social studies education is an especially important issue. Since ELLs “typically do not perform well on standardized tests, they are more likely to receive instruction that focuses on test preparation in the form of rote memorization and drills, at the expense of teaching methods proven effective in meeting the needs of this student population” (Menken, 2008). ELLs are more likely to encounter social studies curriculum narrowing since they get more test preparation and because of their particular learning needs they are more sensitive to the negative influences of this narrowing. For example, ELLs in Massachusetts may get more ELA MCAS preparation at the expense of time for social studies education. ELLs who miss out on social studies education because of curriculum narrowing from accountability pressure may be missing out on opportunities to directly learn about the history and government of the United States, a need that may be particularly pressing for those who have not grown up in the United States and therefore not learned some of this through spending their entire lives immersed in American culture. Like Jim said, social studies education is especially important

for his immigrant students, “who need to know their rights, exercise their rights, and in the future be a representative of people who also are a part of their communities instead of having people who are not representative of their communities represent them politically.”

**Implications for teachers and school leaders.** Another particular stakeholder who would benefit from reviewing the results of this study are school leaders and teachers who need to understand the complex relationship between accountability and social studies curriculum in order to be able to attempt to ameliorate any negative influences on students’ civic, historic, and social studies education. I hope that the results of this study help them think carefully about how social studies education is occurring in their own buildings and how well they are preparing the future citizens sitting in their own classrooms. School administrators and teacher leaders in buildings could use the findings of this study to be reminded to think of the possible implications of decisions that they make in the name of accountability improvements. For example, school leaders who choose to add an additional ELA class to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade to attempt to improve ELA MCAS scores at the expense of students’ taking a history class might seek ways to bring civic or global knowledge education into the remaining courses in the curriculum or might add two social studies courses to seniors schedules instead of a history and ELA class.

Of course, the most important stake holders of this study are the public school students of Massachusetts, and therefore the future citizenry, who deserve to understand how their ability to be active, engaged, successful citizens in the American democracy may be influenced by accountability pressure. They may be able to use the results of this study to advocate on behalf of high school social studies education. However, because they are young and, in some cases, may have had their civic knowledge curtailed by accountability pressure,

as shown in this study, the future citizens of Massachusetts may need others, like teachers and school leaders, to speak up about their need for social studies education on their behalf.

### **Limitations**

This study told the story of 12 high school social studies teachers and their experiences with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing under the particular accountability policy paradigm that existed in the Commonwealth of Massachusetts in the 2018-2019 school year, when the interviews were conducted. As a qualitative, phenomenological study, this study adds depth and complexity to larger quantitative studies, however it is still only 12 people's experiences at a certain point in time. The study explores the relationship among social studies curriculum narrowing, accountability pressure, and inequality but is not designed to draw causal connections between these topics. Also, the 12 participants range in experience from less than a year of teaching to 19, so the study is limited by having no participants with more than 20 years of teaching experience who might be able to add a historical comparison of how teaching social studies was before Massachusetts began its No Child Left Behind style accountability system.

This study focused on the experiences of social studies teachers and their interactions with the phenomenon of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability. It examined this phenomenon through the participant's eyes, using their perceptions and understandings. While this study included how teachers viewed their school's administration's alignment to their own vision for the purpose of public education, it did not speak to school administrators about their perceptions of social studies curriculum narrowing or accountability pressure. This study also did not directly look at how social studies

curriculum narrowing influenced students, as understood by students' own experiences and retellings.

The study only examined high school social studies teachers' experiences. Furthermore, except perhaps Jim, whose humanities class had been forced to become ELA centered, the study did also not include the experience of any people who intended or studied to be social studies teachers but had to choose another subject to teach or career path because they could not find a job in their chosen field, perhaps because of the reduction of focus on social studies in schools. Most importantly, because the study only interviewed social studies teachers, this study did not hear from any representatives of schools that have entirely cut social studies from their curriculum, if they exist, as I suspect they do, in Massachusetts. These are all additional areas that could be explored in future studies.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

This study focused on the experience of 12 high school social studies teachers interviewed in a qualitative nature. A larger more quantitative study could be conducted on the same topic to see what trends hold across a larger swarth of the population in Massachusetts or in other states. A study could also compare high school teachers experiences in a state like Massachusetts that did not have a high stakes accountability exam for social studies to teacher experiences in a state that does have a high stakes social studies accountability exam. This study was conducted in Massachusetts at a time when the commonwealth had high stakes accountability exams for math, science, and English but not social studies. If in the future, as it seems possible, the state adopts a social studies MCAS, then a similar study could be conducted to see how the implementation of such an exam influenced social studies teaching in Massachusetts.

During my recruitment efforts for this study, it became clear to me that there were some people who went to college or graduate school intending to be a social studies teacher but who were not successful in getting a social studies job or otherwise changed their career plans. As some of my participants in this study noted, there can be many applicants for social studies teaching positions in Massachusetts at this time. Another possible avenue for a future study could be to interview people who obtained a history teacher license but are not currently employed as a history teacher to understand their experience of looking for a social studies teaching position. Future studies could also look at how potential social studies teachers who do not currently hold social studies positions may have changed career ambitions and paths and what, if any, similarities they hold.

### **Final Thoughts**

As a passionate teacher and student of history myself, I have always been moved by stories of individual experiences as well as how individuals are shaped by and can shape the contexts in which they find themselves. I am grateful to have had the opportunity to hear from 12 enthusiastic individuals about their experiences of social studies curriculum narrowing in the context of accountability and hope to have faithfully shared a composite of that experience with the reader. I hope putting faces and stories to abstract ideas has made clearer the influence testing and accountability have on schools across the state. I take as an article of faith that no policy makers, in crafting the current accountability regime, were intending to devalue social studies or leave the next generation, especially of the most marginalized populations, unprepared for their role in the American democracy. Yet in doing this work, I have been constantly reminded how policy decisions made at the state and national level have significant influence, both intended and un-intended, over the teaching



and learning that occurs in Massachusetts classrooms. I hope that policy makers from Washington, DC to Malden, MA to each school board and every school house in the Commonwealth are also regularly reminded of the influence of their decisions.

## APPENDIX A

### PARTICIPANT INTEREST FORM

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Massachusetts Boston and I am conducting a study exploring the experience of high school social studies teachers in the context of state standardized testing and accountability systems.

I am looking for participants who are age 18+ and who are teachers in a Massachusetts public school (district or charter) who teach social studies to grades 9-12 at least 50% of their teaching load. This includes teachers who teach “humanities” courses that serve as a replacement for history and/or English language arts courses.

If you are willing to participate in a 45-60 minute interview on this topic in a public place please complete this form. Your name and school name will be kept confidential and not used in the study. By volunteering your name will be entered into a raffle for a \$25 Amazon gift card to be selected at the conclusion of data collection. You may also be asked to answer follow up questions or complete a follow up interview. You can leave the study at any time with no penalty. For more information please contact me, Kristina M. Kelleher-Bianchi, the principal researcher, at [kkelleherbianchi@gmail.com](mailto:kkelleherbianchi@gmail.com).

Name (will not be used in the study):

Personal e-mail address:

Your school’s name (will not be identified in the study):

Your school’s accountability level\*:            1            2            3            4            5

\*If you are unsure of your school’s Massachusetts accountability level please look it up on your school “report card” available here: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/>

Your school’s location would be considered:    urban            suburban            rural    other

Your school is a:            district school            charter school            other

Years of teaching experience:            Gender:            Male    Female    Other

Race:            White            Black            Asian            Latinx            Other

Age:            21-30            31-40            41-50            51-60            61 or older

## APPENDIX B

### CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPATION

University of Massachusetts Boston  
Department of Educational Leadership  
100 Morrissey Boulevard  
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Dear Social Studies teacher:

**Consent form for: *High School Teachers' Perceptions of Social Studies in the Context of Accountability***

**Introduction and Contact Information:**

You are invited to take part in a research project that is exploring the experience of high school social studies teachers in the context of state standardized testing and accountability systems.

My name is Kristina M. Kelleher-Bianchi and I am the principal researcher. I am a doctoral candidate in the Urban Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. Please read this form and feel free to ask questions. If you have any further questions, I can be reached at the above address, via phone at 508-243-0008, or via email at [kkelleherbianchi@gmail.com](mailto:kkelleherbianchi@gmail.com).

As a doctoral candidate, I am required to conduct research as part of the requirements for a Doctorate of Philosophy (PhD). My research is being conducted under the supervision of Wenfan Yan, PhD, Professor and Chair of the Department Leadership in Education, University of Massachusetts, Boston. You may contact Dr. Yan at the above address, via telephone at 617-287-4873, or via email at [wenfan.yan@umb.edu](mailto:wenfan.yan@umb.edu).

**Description of the Project:**

This phenomenological study will explore the experience high school social studies teachers in the context of state standardized testing and accountability systems. Participation in this study will take 1 to 5 hours. If you decide to participate in this study, you will be asked to participate in at least 1 audio-recorded interview of 45-60 minutes. You may be asked to participate in a follow up interview or answer follow up questions via email. You will also be asked to review my analysis of your interview for member checking. By participating, you will be entered into a raffle for a \$25 Amazon gift card. A winner will be randomly selected when the data collection is complete.

**Risks or Discomforts:**

This is considered to be a minimal risk study, which means that is the research risk to you is no greater than that ordinarily encountered in daily life activities. The primary risk that could be associated with this study is appearance of negative or distressful feelings during the

interviews. You may speak with me, Kristina M. Kelleher-Bianchi, to discuss any distress or other issues related to study participation.

**Benefits:**

The potential benefits of your participation in this research include having your voice heard on important issues relevant to your profession. It also may be beneficial to you as a participant by allowing you to reflect on this topic.

**Confidentiality and Anonymity:**

Your participation in this research is confidential. That is, the information gathered for this project will not be published or presented in a way that would allow anyone to identify you. Though verbatim quotes from the interviews may be used, neither your name or any specific information that could be linked to you will be shared. I will omit or alter any details that might identify a specific person, to the best of my ability. You will choose a pseudonym to be used in place of your name and your school name. All research materials and data will be stored in locked file cabinets or password protected computers that only I have access to. When my study is completed and at such time that my dissertation has been accepted, all research materials including audio-tapes, transcriptions, emails, field notes, and reflections will be destroyed.

**Voluntary Participation:**

Your decision whether or not to take part in this research study is voluntary. If you do decide to take part in this study, you may terminate your participation at any time up until publication of the study without consequence. If you wish to withdraw participation in this study, please telephone or e-mail me immediately. Whatever you decide will in no way penalize you.

**Rights:**

You have the right to ask questions about this research before you consent to participate and at any time during the study. You can reach me or my research supervisor, Dr. Wenfan Yan, at the contact information above. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston, which oversees research involving human participants. The IRB may be reached at the following address: IRB, Quinn Administration Building -2-080, University of Massachusetts, 100 Morrissey Boulevard, Boston, MA 02125-3393. You can also contact the Board by telephone or email at 617- 287-5374 or at [human.subjects@umb.edu](mailto:human.subjects@umb.edu).

**Signatures:**

I HAVE READ THE CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY AND TO HAVE MY INTERVIEW AUDIO-RECORDED. I ALSO CERTIFY THAT I AM 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OLDER.

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Signature of Participant

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Date

---

Signature of Researcher

---

Printed Name of Participant

---

Kristina M. Kelleher-Bianchi

Typed/Printed Name of Researcher

## APPENDIX C

### INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

#### **Introduction:**

My name is Kristina M. Kelleher-Bianchi and I am the principal researcher for this study. I am a doctoral candidate in the Urban Education, Leadership, and Policy Studies program at the University of Massachusetts Boston. This dissertation research project explores the experience of high school social studies teachers in the context of state standardized testing and accountability systems.

In this interview, I will ask some questions to guide our discussion but I am interested in you and your experience therefore it may seem like a strange, one sided conversation. You can take your time in thinking and talking about your answers as you need. Be aware that there are no right or wrong answers to these questions. Some of my questions may seem self-evident but that is because I am trying to explore how you experienced and understand things.

Do you have any questions for me before we begin?

#### **Warm-Up:**

1. Tell me about your teaching experience.

Probes: What classes do you teach? What grades do you teach? How long have you taught here? Have you taught at other schools as well? How does teaching make you feel? What do you like about teaching?

#### **Accountability Pressure**

2. What is your personal belief about the purpose of K-12 education?

Probes: Is it to prepare students for college? For the workforce? To be democratic citizens?

3. To what extent does your school administration share your beliefs?

Probes: How do you know? What evidence do you have that they do or do not support your beliefs? What is your school's mission statement or vision of the graduate focus on? What does your principal talk about preparing students for? What is your school's professional development focus on?

4. How, if at all, does your school emphasize improving MCAS scores?

Probes: Are there special classes related to the MCAS? Is MCAS preparation a focus of professional development? Are there special events encouraging kids to try on the MCAS? Are there signs in the hallway about MCAS?

### **Social Studies Curriculum Narrowing**

5. What are your goals for teaching social studies?

Probes: Why do you care about this? How did these become your goals?

6. How does pressure to increase MCAS scores influence your teaching practice?

Probes: How does it influence what you decide to teach? How does it influence how you teach this content? How does it influence your assessment practices?

7. Mississippi requires students to pass a state test on U.S. History since 1877 in order to graduate high school. If Massachusetts required a similar test for high school graduation, what would be your reaction? How would you change your teaching practice?

### **Professional Identity**

8. How important is being a social studies teacher to how you view yourself?

Probes: Do you value your job as a social studies teacher? Why? Do you regularly collaborate or socialize with other social studies teachers? How important is this to you?

9. Do you think your colleagues who teach math or English see your work as less important than theirs?

Probes: How do you know? Has there been a time when people discussed important questions and didn't include you? Has there been a time when an important event happened at your school and social studies was not included? Are teachers of math and English more often getting rewards at your school?

10. Do you feel secure in your job as a social studies teacher?

Probes: Do you look for additional professional trainings or roles at your school to make you feel more secure? Do you take on additional roles at your school to make you feel more secure?

### **Closing:**

Thank you very much for participating in this research project. Please feel free to contact me if you have any questions or concerns about your participation or if you would like to follow up with any additional thoughts on these topics.

Also a reminder that I may be reaching out via email in the future as I analyze this data if I have any clarifying questions or would like to ask you to participate in a follow up interview. Later on, when I have written up my analysis, I'll also check with you to make sure I have correctly summarized your experience.

Also, if you know of any other high school social studies teachers who may be interested in participating in my study, please pass along my contact information.

Thank you again for your time, it is much appreciated.



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