

**An Analysis of Middle School Social Studies Program and Test Results
Schroon Lake Central School
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Overview

It is my second year teaching Social Studies. Although 8th graders scored normally on the 2005 Intermediate Social Studies Exam compared to their peers in similar schools, the performance on the 2006 test was very weak. This study arose out of my own dissatisfaction with the test scores in 2006 and a brief conversation with Mr. David Williams about these results.

There are some variables relevant to student performance on the state exams over which the teacher has no control. However, it is important to develop a practice whereby the teacher maximizes a positive force over those variables over which he has control. The purpose of this study is to identify likely areas for improvement and to outline steps I will take toward that end. As a matter of personal taste, I would be more satisfied with above-average performance by my pupils on state tests. In my view, a comparison of the performance of the other schools in my study and the performance of students at SLCS over the past 5 years indicates a “challengingly reasonable” goal to achieve a 70% rate of students scoring 3-4 on the Intermediate Social Studies Test. It is to this end that I will direct my energies in the near future.

I. New York State Intermediate Level Social Studies Test Scores

A. Five Year Review

The following chart summarizes the percentage of students scoring at each level on the New York State Intermediate Social Studies Examination for the past 5 years inclusive.

	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	Average including 2006	Average EXCLUDING 2006
4	13%	5%	8%	12%	4%	8%	9.5%
3	61%	41%	50%	52%	46%	50%	51%
2	26%	55%	42%	36%	38%	39%	40%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%	13%	2%	0%
score 3-4	74%	46%	48%	64%	50%	56%	61%
score 1-2	26%	55%	42%	36%	50%	42%	39%

One can conclude that 2006 was a weak showing, with 13% (3 students) scoring a 1 where none had in the 4 previous years. Prior to 2006, an average of 9% of students scored a 4, compared to only 4% in that year. An average of 58% achieved the Social Studies Standards in 2004-2005 (scoring 3 or 4), compared to only 50% in 2006.

B. Comparison with Johnsburg, Minerva, and Willsboro Schools¹

Statistics are unavailable for 2006 as of this writing for these schools.

Johnsburg Central School

	2002	2003	2004	2005		Average
4	12%	7%	6%	8%		8%
3	69%	67%	41%	76%		63%
2	19%	23%	53%	16%		27%
1	0%	3%	0%	0%		0.70%
score 3-4						71%
score 1-2						28%

¹ Selected for similarity to Schroon lake in number of students, geographic location, and need statistic

Minerva Central School

	2002	2003	2004	2005		Average
4	0%	0%	7%	18%		7%
3	43%	40%	53%	55%		47%
2	57%	60%	40%	27%		46%
1	0%	0%	0%	0%		0%
score 3-4						54%
score 1-2						46%

Willsboro Central School

	2002	2003	2004	2005		Average
4	3%	4%	0%	11%		4%
3	50%	73%	44%	46%		53%
2	47%	23%	50%	39%		39%
1	0%	0%	3%	4%		2.5%
score 3-4						57%
score 1-2						42%

C. Average Number of Students achieving the Standards in Social Studies (i.e., scoring 3 or 4) based on the NYS Intermediate Social Studies Test: Schroon Lake, Johnsborg, Minerva, Willsboro Schools over 4 years (2002-2005)

SLCS	Johnsborg	Minerva	Willsboro	AVG:
61%	71%	54%	57%	61%
<i>2006: only 50%</i>				

While the scores for 2005 were consistent with the average for these schools, the 2006 examination represents a low.

II. Test Item Analysis, 2005 and 2006 Examinations

Curriculum Unit	2005 Average number of students who got questions incorrect on this unit*	2006 Average number of students who got questions incorrect on this unit
1	3	4
2	6	9
3	10	9
4	8	12
5	7	9
6	6	12
7	10	9
8	6	9
9	10	9
10	8	7
11	3	7
12	10	13

**There are 3-4 questions on each unit on each examination*

In 2005, students showed weakest command of units 3 (“A Nation Created”), 7 (“An Industrial Society”), 9 (“Between the Wars”), and 12 (“Cross-Topical”).

In 2006, students showed weakest command of units 4 (“Experiment in Government”), 6 (“Division and Reunion”), and 12 (“Cross Topical”).

Judging from just these two years’ examination results, no one unit of study seems to stand out as particularly weak sufficient to conclude that the unit is particularly inadequately addressed in the program. As to be noted later, there has been a rush to cover material at the end of the year that decreases the effectiveness of instruction.

III. Correlation of Class Grades with State Test Scores

The degree to which the grading system I use reflects student achievement relative to the state examinations is important. Ideally, a student’s grade in my class at any one time should reflect something close to their performance on that topic on a formal state assessment. This would serve two purposes: 1) It would give us all a reliable indication on an ongoing basis of a student’s probable level of achievement on the exam, thus informing decisions about remediation where appropriate, and 2) It could spur the student to action when seeing low grades.

Student	Final Grade in Class	Grade on State Exam	State Test grade minus Class Grade
1	84	57	-27
2	61	65	4
3	93	70	-23
4	75	73	-2
5	89	76	-13
6	75	69	-6
7	77	59	-18
8	66	65	-1
9	87	76	-11
10	72	48	-24
11	76	60	-16
12	67	51	-16
13	90	80	-10
14	98	85	-13
15	84	71	-13
16	79	60	-19
17	84	63	-21
18	80	88	8
19	10	39	28
20	33	39	6
21	94	80	-14
22	71	65	-6
23	80	50	-30
24	65	39	-26

On average, the score on the state test was 10.9 points lower than the grade in the class. The range varies wildly, however, from a test score 4 points higher than the class grade to one 30 points lower. It is painfully obvious that the grade calculation in the class is not aligned with the standards. The wild variation from student to student renders the class grade even more unreliable as an indicator of who needs help nor as predictor of performance on the exam.

IV. Broad Program Assessment

Excepting 2006, the performance of students at Schroon Lake on the Social Studies Intermediate Exam is fairly consistent. I note that the class had a particularly large number of high needs students whose probability of success owing to variables outside my control was limited to start. However, the low turnout for level 4 is a deficiency I regret.

It is easy to conclude that the number of students achieving the Social Studies Standards (scoring 3 or 4) is unsatisfactory and steps will be taken to increase this number. Particularly, I will target moving potential 3's to 4's and 2's

to 3's. I will take no further action toward the lowest performing students because services are already in place to attempt to meet their needs and because it is in those cases that the variables outside of my control are most influential.

V. Program Remedial Steps

A. Steps already taken

1. More swift covering of material and focus on addressing the “meat and potatoes” of content. Projects have been reduced or eliminated, research instruction reduced to bare minimum, and a more lively pace of instruction implemented. The students taking the exam in 2007 are on this faster content track. I do not expect that we will need to rush through the modern era as we approach the exam. Covering all of the material in a timely manner has been a challenge for me I feel I have finally remediated.

2. Some activities resulted in a grade of 100 that were really only participatory, such as appearance of reading during reading time or participation in a question-answer game. Having too many of these inflated the student's grade and may have hidden problems from me. These sorts of grades were reduced starting in the 2005-2006 school year.

3. A system of permitting retakes of failed quizzes on a limited basis was replaced by additional assignments given for failed quizzes starting around February of 2006.

B. Steps to be taken

1. **Mid-year assessment in grade 8** – When I taught French, I customarily gave an old state exam in January each year to see where students stood. Usually, this was just for informational purposes and did not lead to any particular action on my part, but occasionally it led to changes in program to address weak areas. I will resume this practice. Students who show weakness at the mid-year point will be addressed with increased time with me in AIS (schedule permitting) and increased study workload.

2. **More extensive and intensive end-of-year review** – The push at the end of the year to cover the material often led to a truncated review period. Moving more swiftly through the material now, I ought to be able to stop at the end of April and use all of May for review. The review will consist of steady, regular practice on old state exam questions and extra assignments for students showing weakness.

3. **Mid-year review in grade 8** – Before administering the previous years' Intermediate Social Studies test each January, I will break out of the cycle of lessons and guide the class through a 5 day period of review.

4. Aligning grade 8 class grading more with the standards – Most people would be very unhappy if the class grades actually reflected progress toward the state exam. With only 61% meeting the state Social Studies standards in these four schools over a four year period, it would translate into only 61% passing Social Studies on an annual basis. Be that as it may, the variance from the state standards obvious in this study make the classroom grades practically meaningless as predictors of performance on that exam. I intend to align my grading system to more closely reflect progress toward the Social Studies Standards in the following ways. I hope to show a more consistent difference between the state exam and performance in class and I intend that this difference be around 7 points (that is, **that a grade on the state exam will be no more than 7 points lower on average than the grade in my class**). I believe that making some small adjustments making earning high marks just a little harder could put pressure on students to perform.

a. The “extended tasks” that are measured as if an exam (I call them “high order tasks” and they account for 55% of the student’s grade) will be more restricted. Essays will be worth high order credit if done in class without notes instead of as an at-home assignment with notes; skits will be low order tasks; etc..²

b. I will drop only one low grade per quarter in grade 8 instead of two.³

c. I will calculate a grade for practice exercises like the “read time” credit⁴ and participation in question-answer activities only once per 5 weeks instead of once per week.

d. I will assign more short-answer type homework assignments, perhaps once per week, instead of a quiz (it has been customary in my classes to start each day with a short quiz). Writing out more elaborate responses to questions can lend itself to long term retention more than cramming for a quiz (the theory behind which is that temporary cramming in conjunction with class instruction and elaboration would result in long-term retention).

e. I will generally focus more on measures related to the things measured by the exam.

² “Extended Tasks” are extra assignments students contract to do on a voluntary basis. They often count as “high order tasks” in my grading scheme and thus equal to tests. I assume that some students whose grades in class are so much higher than grades on the state exam had done several of these tasks. Although they are challenging tasks that can potentially lower a student’s grade, I suspect that they may have resulted in an inflated grade.

³ I have customarily dropped the two lowest “low order task” grades from student’s grade calculation in a 10 week period. These are on the order of quizzes and extra exercises, not tests or essays.

⁴ Sometimes during silent reading time in class, I observe students using an on-task analysis and calculate a grade.