

The Culture and History of Standards-Based Educational Reform and Social Studies in America¹

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Abstract

There is no surprise that the culture of America's public education system is continually changing. More than a decade ago the federal initiative No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was signed into law; a law that many consider the pinnacle of the standards-based educational reform (SBER). Today, the SBER is common and widespread across the educational landscape of America and other parts of the world; however, the historical roots of the SBER within the U.S. predate NCLB by some 30 years originating in state and federal initiatives from the 1980s and 1990s and in activities conducted by professional organizations.

Keywords: Standards-based Educational Reform, Educational Policies, Social Studies Education

Each initiative was established as a response to a real-world scenario, such as a lack of competitiveness in a global marketplace, a decline in SAT scores, or a decrease in the high school graduation rates (Wong, Guthrie, & Harris, 2004).

The SBER has become so common and widespread across the public educational landscape of America that a whole generation knows nothing but a culture of standards and accountability. However, despite the long and persistent presence of standards in schools there is no universal definition of the SBER. According to Hamilton, Stecher, and Yaun (2009) most discussions about the SBER consist of some or all six of the following elements: 1) transference of responsibility, 2) academic expectations, 3) alignment, 4) support and technical assistance, 5) assessment, and 6) accountability.

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To explain it further, first the SBER involves some official or governing educational agency that creates content and curriculum standards, which promote academic excellence and indicates what students should know and be able to do. Next, the standards are aligned with key elements of the educational system (i.e. textbooks) to support the attainment of the expectations. Subsequently, teachers are expected to uphold the standards through their precise teaching. Meanwhile, support (financial, technical, training, etc..) is often given by federal, state, and/or local officials to foster the improvement of the educational services schools and teachers provide to students. Finally, students are expected to reveal their acquisition or attainment of the standards through some form of high-stakes assessment. Consequently, students, teachers, schools, and districts are held accountable (either rewarded or punished) based on the assessment scores of students, which indicate whether the standards had been met or not.

In Florida, for example, students must pass the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA) in reading, writing, and mathematics, or an End-of-Course (EOC) exam, in order to be promoted or be eligible to graduate (Florida Statute 1008.22, 2018). The accountability for teachers is built into their annual evaluation, as 50 percent of it is based on the average FSA/EOC scores of their students (Florida Statute 1012.34, 2018). Schools, on the other hand, receive letter grades (i.e. A, B, C, D, or F) and the FSA/EOC scores of their students is a key component; furthermore, schools stand in line to receive a financial incentive based on the grade they receive; the higher the grade the higher the incentive (Florida Statute 1008.34, 2018).

The SBER mirrors a joining of political trends in education, at both the federal and state levels, and there is a growing emphasis on using high-stakes tests to monitor development and hold students, teachers, and schools accountable. Over the decades, the SBER has received its fair share of criticism and research initiatives (Tanner, 2010). In fact, there is a budding realization that “standards-based educational reform” has largely given way to the “test-based reform” and it is the test-based reform that changes teaching practices (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009, p. 4).

What is noticeably missing; however, in the SBER, is an emphasis on social studies education (Vogler & Virtue, 2007). In Florida, students are only withheld from grade promotions if they do not meet the determined criteria in reading, writing, science, or mathematics, which implies a lack of relevancy for social studies education (Florida Statute 1008.25, 2018). While social studies standards exist in Florida and in each of the other 49 states, without a high-stakes test associated with the standards little may change in regards to teaching practices and culture. Social studies though is not entirely forgotten, as 11 states test it at the elementary level, 14 at the middle school level, and 17 at the high school level (Education Commission of the States, 2018); although few make it a requirement for graduation or promotion. Vogler and Virtue (2007) said it well when they wrote, “Social studies teachers may not like testing, but, in many respects, it is more advantageous to be on the field than on the sidelines” (p. 57). While standards are not bad the question is how did America’s public educational system get to a point where for social studies to matter it must be tested? While there are several

commentaries on this topic, there are none that trace the historical steps of both federal and state initiatives, particularly with an emphasis on how those actions influenced the culture and nature of social studies instruction.

Theoretical Framework

Although this paper simply sought to trace the historical steps of both federal and state initiatives, it became clear that at the heart of the SBER is a “theory of change” (Massell & Perrault, 2014, p. 196). That is, due to the U.S.’s educational structure—state based rather than federally based—disjointed collections of practices were produced among states, which primarily shared a focus on low-level knowledge and skills. Yet, those achievements affected the nation. Thus, with a theory of change it is believed that “...the power of a large collective with the same high aspirations can harness the institutional forces that have consistently undermined reformist goals” (Massell & Perrault, 2014, p. 197). Furthermore, the theory of change relies heavily on a system of alignment. First of which are a set of standards.

Methodology

The purpose of this study was to define the nature, culture, and meaning of the contemporary SBER movement, and to trace the historical roots of the SBER via federal and state educational policies, as well as the work of various professional organizations. This study examined the mirrored actions and responses taken by social studies education organizations within the larger picture of the SBER, placing the focal point largely upon actions taken by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS). As such, a historical research methodology was utilized as described in Cohen, Manion, and Morrison (2007). Historical research is the systematic approach to locating, evaluating, and synthesizing evidence in order to ascertain facts and make assertive conclusions concerning past events. Adhering to the historical research guidelines, historical evidence dealing with the SBER movement was analyzed and evaluated. Pertinent academic journals were searched for pieces on the SBER movement, and federal and state records concerning SBER initiatives, act, and strategies were examined. The analysis included cross-checking dates, statements and other facts with other sources to ensure accuracy and a clear understanding of the past events surrounding the many SBER movements. As expected, the origins of the SBER can be traced back to the actions of both the federal government and several state governments, which are chronicled below beginning with federal and then state initiatives.

Federal Initiatives

The Soviet satellite, Sputnik, was launched in 1957, which confirmed the fears and criticism of the American educational system and there by “unleashed funds for educational reform” (Evans, 2004, p. 115). America would spend hundreds of millions of dollars for the improvement of mathematics, science, and foreign-language instruction (Evans, 2004). Social studies

education too would receive funding as it was heralded as the “New Social Studies” (Byford & Russell, 2007). Despite the grand curriculum reforms little changed in America’s classrooms; in fact, Evans (2004) contends that, “Analysts of the NSF [National Science Foundation] case studies reported that fewer than 20% of teachers had heard of or used the [New Social Studies curriculum] materials” (pp. 145-146). Meanwhile, in 1975, the College Board pointed out the decline of the nations average SAT scores. In 1983, the SBER would officially begin with the National Commission on Excellence in Education’s (NCEE) landmark report *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform!* Finally, after various federal initiatives, the SBER would blossom with President George W. Bush’s signing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001. Currently at the federal level, the SBER continues with the Obama Administration’s “Race to the Top” (RTTT) and the Ever Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015. Additionally, states have voluntarily adopted the Common Core State Standards; although, due to public outcry many states have chosen to repeal those standards, but more on that later.

A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform!

On August 26, 1981, Ronald Reagan’s Secretary of Education, Honorable T. H. Bell, formed the NCEE; an 18-member commission made up of college and university presidents, scientists, school administrators, and business representatives whose goal was to “...present a report on the quality of education to [him] and the American people by April of 1983” (NCEE, 1983 p. 1). It took the NCEE eighteen months to compile dozens of research papers, hold eight meetings, perform six public hearings, two panel discussions, a symposium, and a series of regional meetings before their report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform!* was complete by the required deadline (here after simply referred to as *A Nation at Risk*) (NCEE, 1983).

David Gardner, President Elect of the University of California and chairman of the NCEE, explained in the introduction of *A Nation at Risk* that the committee’s purpose was to “...define the problems afflicting American education and to provide solutions, not search for scapegoats” (NCEE, 1983, p.1) Additionally, Gardner explained that the report is candid of both the strengths and weaknesses of America’s educational system. Furthermore, he expressed the committee’s optimism in righting America’s educational ship citing the committee’s unity despite their diversity, an obvious reference to what the committee believed should be America’s actions. In the opening paragraph of *A Nation at Risk* (NCEE, 1983) the committee stated that:
...the educational foundations of our society are presently being eroded by a rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people. What was unimaginable a generation ago has begun to occur—others are matching and surpassing our educational attainments (p. 9).

The NCEE would later indicate three weaknesses of the American educational system. The first woe dealt with the state of the economy, as Asian and European nations were quickly overtaking America’s manufacturing and high-tech industries. As the report stated:

The risk is not only that the Japanese make automobiles more efficiently than Americans and have government subsidies for development and export. It is not just the South Koreans recently built the world's most efficient steel mill, or that American machine tools, once the pride of the world, are being displaced by German products. It is also that these developments signify a redistribution of trained capability throughout the globe (NCEE, 1983, p. 10).

The committee believed that the last generation of educational graduates was ill prepared to compete with other nations in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics. America's evident lack of technological competitiveness also carried over to the military arena and America's relations with the Soviet Union. Not only did America's workforce appear to create low-quality domestic vehicles, but they also created low-quality weapons, tanks, and aircraft. The report indicated this with its military language, citing that in the days after the "Sputnik challenge," America was engaging in a "unilateral educational disarmament" (p. 10).

Finally (and most fervently) the NCEE revealed America's high illiteracy rates, low average test scores, and drastic increase in the remedial courses at colleges and universities, as compared to other industrialized nations. The committee's concern of an uneducated society went farther than industry and commerce though; they believed that: A high level of shared education is essential to a free, democratic society and to the fostering of a common culture, especially in a country that prides itself on pluralism and individual freedom. For our country to function, citizens must be able to reach some common understandings on complex issues, often on short notice and on the basis of conflicting or incomplete evidence. Education helps form these common understandings... (NCEE, 1983, p. 10).

It is clear that the NCEE believed that America's ills were a direct result of its failing schools and that citizens must use their intuition and common sense to right the ship. The NCEE made recommendations that fell into five categories: 1) "standards and expectations", 2) "academic content", 3) "time", 4) "teacher quality", and 5) "school leadership and fiscal support". One of the greatest legacies of *A Nation at Risk* according to Wong, Guthrie, and Harris's (2004) twenty year reappraisal was the, "subsequent implementation of its recommendations about raising standards" (p. 3). Excellence in education was not just a portion of the committee's title but it was an urgent message that the report expressed, one in which would stir responses and start the SBER that is so common place today.

America 2000: An Education Strategy

As the 1980s were coming to a close, President George H. W. Bush and the National Governors Association responded to the concerns raised in *A Nation at Risk*, and articulated a national strategy at the "Education Summit" at Charlottesville, Virginia. These articulations would help create six National Education Goals that would be implemented later in *America 2000* (Department of Education, 1991).

1. All children in America will start school ready to learn;
2. The high school graduation rate will increase to at least 90 percent;

3. American students will leave grades four, eight, and twelve having demonstrated competency in challenging subject matter including English, mathematics, science, history, and geography; and every school in America will ensure that all students learn to use their minds well, so they may be prepared for responsible citizenship, further learning, and productive employment in our modern economy;
4. U.S. students will be first in the world in science and mathematics achievement;
5. Every adult American will be literate and will possess the knowledge and skills necessary to compete in a global economy and exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; [and]
6. Every school in America will be free of drugs and violence and will offer a disciplined environment conducive to learning. (p. 61-65).

Despite President George H. W. Bush's involvement with the creation and delivery of *America 2000* it is important to remember that it was not a federal policy but a national strategy, a federal-state partnership if you will, formed by the President and the National Governors Association, as well as other state policymakers, and professional organizations. In fact, in July 1990, President George H. W. Bush and the National Governors Association created a group to monitor America's progress towards its achievement of the National Education Goals. The National Educational Goals Panel (NEGP), as the group would be titled, was made up of governors, administrative officials, and members of Congress.

In 1991, President Bush said this to the NEGP, "There are only a few moments in our lives when we are called upon to join a crusade, and I honestly believe this is one of them. We have a crisis in American education, and we've simply got to do something about it..." (Bush, 1991). Unfortunately, President Bush ran into some political trouble (Miller, 1992) as conservative policymakers were interested in school choice measures while liberal policymakers were interested in enhancing student achievement by getting more money to schools (Brown, 2009). President Bush tried to implement *America 2000* by circumventing the legislation and working with the business community, who were asked to invest up to \$200 million in a "New American Schools Development Corporation" but his actions lead to a turf war between the legislative and executive branches (Brown, 2009, p. 5). After further debates and compromises, the Education Council Act was passed in 1991, creating the National Council on Education Standards and Testing (NCEST), an advisory group similar to NEGP but with a higher proportion of Democratic representation and whose job was to examine, "the desirability and feasibility of establishing national standards and testing in education" (United States Congress, 1991, p. 2-3).

Tensions continued to mount in 1991 as the interested parties debated who should develop and evaluate the national standards. That same year, the NEGP would release its first report, which strongly advocated for national standards but failed to urge Congress to take action (Stedman & Riddle, 1992). Meanwhile, in January of 1992, the NCEST utilized terminology and definitions that would begin to shape the SBER (e.g. "leaving no one behind"), when it published

its first report titled, *Raising Standards for American Education*, which, among other things, proposed the establishment of content, performance, and delivery standards (Brown, 2009; Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009). The NCEST (1992) stated that with the, “absence of well-defined and demanding standards, education in the United States has gravitated toward de facto national minimum expectations” (p. 8). Therefore, the committee concluded that: ...national standards and a system of assessments are desirable and feasible mechanisms for raising expectations, revitalizing instruction, and rejuvenating educational reform efforts for all American schools and students. Thus, the National Council on Education Standards and Testing endorses the adoption of high national standards and the development of a system of assessments to measure attainment of those standards (p. 14).

One of the glaring topics of debate that ensued from the beginning of the SBER was the idea that national standards would enhance the federal control of education and thereby reduce the control of state and local policymakers. The NCEST (1992) report curtailed that fear by suggesting that the national standards would be voluntary and that another advisory panel should be created to assist states with the development and creation of standards and assessment. One of the most controversial suggestions the NCEST proposed was the idea of a national assessment; in fact, “50 prominent educators and testing experts” issued a statement the same day the report was released (Chira, 1992)

The NCEST report, *Raising Standards for American Education*, did little to help the *America 2000* bill become law. President Bush, though, would not go down without a fight, even in the midst of a presidential election; he began awarding grants through the U.S. Department of Education for the development of, “voluntary national standards in seven school subjects (science, history, geography, the arts, civics, foreign languages, and English)... that could be used by teacher educators, textbook publishers, and test developers” (Ravitch, 2000, p. 432). Despite the failed attempt of *America 2000* much of what it tried to implement would be included in 1994 legislation the *Goals 2000: Educate America Act* (Kosar, 2005).

Goals 2000: Educate America Act

Upon Bill Clinton’s election, the new president and former chair of the National Governors Association, when it had a significant role in conceiving the National Educational Goals, tried to rejuvenate the SBER with three new initiatives: *Goals 2000: Educate America Act*, *Improving America’s Schools Act*, and *Voluntary National Tests (VNT)* (Brown, 2009). The Clinton administration faced two major hurdles during his tenure. One dealt with the “school delivery standards”, which emphasized how schools delivered the necessary instruction to ensure that students acquired the appropriate information as depicted in future content and performance standards. While the other continued to deal with the perceived federal takeover of education, via assessments and accountability, despite the strong tradition for local control.

As the *Goals 2000* bill was working its way through legislation it, like the *America 2000* bill, emphasized a voluntary standards program but unlike its predecessor, *Goals 2000* wished to

fund states to create their own standards, which would then in turn be certified by a new federal council titled the “Opportunity to Learn Commission”. In the *Goals 2000* legislation, the school delivery standards were re-titled “opportunity-to-learn” standards. Unfortunately, the law did not provide for clear incentives for states to attend to the opportunity-to-learn standards (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009). Therefore, of the 47 states who applied for funding, in the summer of 1995, none were refused, even though, according to Kosar (2005), “few developed adequate standards and assessments” (p. 133).

Meanwhile, the NEGP was given considerable authority over the National Education Standards and Improvement Council as a means to appease those who feared that the *Goals 2000* legislation would lead to an increase in the federal government’s control over education. The NEGP would nominate numerous state members (12 of the 16) to the council who had little motivation to make certification standards so difficult that they might be setting up their states to fail and in this way, the standards were further diluted (Kosar, 2005). Additionally, the law prohibited the use of high-stakes testing as a component for graduation, grade promotion, or retention of students until four years after the initiation of the Act (Brown, 2009).

The Clinton administration also reauthorized the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, called *Improving America’s Schools Act* on October of 1994. The law “required each state to develop state content and performance standards for mathematics and reading by the 1997–1998 school year and assessments by the 2000–2001 school year appropriate for all students, including the disadvantaged” (Watt, 2000, p. 13). States would then have to test students between grades 3 through 8. The demands of the *Improving America’s Schools Act* were a precursor to the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) signed by President George W. Bush.

Another assessment initiative that began in the mid-1990s was President Clinton’s proposed “Voluntary National Tests” (VNT) for both mathematics and reading. The VNT would utilize the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) frameworks but provide school-level scores as well as individual scores (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009). Naturally, this proposal proved to be problematic, especially to conservatives who feared the excessive involvement of the federal government (Armour-Garb, 2007). Congress would ultimately reject President Clinton’s VNT idea and therefore, the states continued to have the primary responsibility for developing high-stakes assessments and measuring students’ performance.

The creation of the SBER was not always led by the federal government as work had already been undertaken by some states and by various professional organizations, such as the curriculum standards developed by the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM). The U.S. Department of Education viewed both the mathematics content frameworks created in California during the 1980s and the 1989 NCTM *Curriculum and Evaluation Standards for School Mathematics* report as models of how to develop standards that reflect widespread consensus (Wixson, Dutro, & Athan, 2003).

The national standards created as a result of the grants provided by the U.S. Department of Education, however, did not receive the widespread consensus as had hoped. In fact, there was

more discrepancy about the mathematics standards than was ostensible at the time, and other subject areas experienced even greater disagreement. The history standards that had been released in 1994 by the National Center for History in the Schools at the University of California at Los Angeles for example, received significant media attention thanks in large part to Lynne Cheney's "The End of History" article, published in the *Wall Street Journal*. She suggested that the standards had too much of a multicultural focus and an "obsession with such topics as McCarthyism (19 references), racism (the Ku Klux Klan is mentioned 17 times), and mistreatment of indigenous peoples, but gave little attention to some of the core developments and figures of American history (Evans, 2004, p. 166). In the science standards a disagreement erupted over the inclusion of evolution. While in the mathematics standards parents began to chafe over the perceived over-reliance on calculators. Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, (2009) state that: These disagreements became more pronounced as the standards development process expanded to include a variety of stakeholder groups, such as business leaders and parents, and ultimately led to a decision by the governors at the 1996 National Education Summit to continue the state-level standards-development activities that had been launched in response to earlier federal legislation rather than pursue the national efforts (p. 23-24).

The national standards discussion would be tabled for now but would be revived with the inception of Common Core State Standards in 2009. In 1995, the National Governors Association met and invited various American business leaders particularly IBM's chief executive officer, Louis V. Gerstner Jr., who told the governors not to wait for Democrats and Republicans to agree on national standards but, as a state, to take charge (Horn & Raymond, 2004). In 1996, the second National Education Summit convened in Palisades, New York but this time the President was not the host but rather a guest of Gerstner's. Various CEOs from blue chip American companies were also in attendance and they came with a preference and agenda for the creation of state generated standards that had a consideration of workforce development (Brown, 2009).

Soon after the second National Education Summit, a group of CEOs and governors established Achieve Inc., a nonprofit, bipartisan organization geared for supervising the process of setting and implementing standards at the state level. In addition, three other business interest groups (The Business Roundtable, the National Alliance of Business, and the U.S. Chamber of Commerce) announced a common agenda to help educators and policymakers (Achieve Inc., n.d.).

No Child Left Behind Act

The third National Education Summit assembled in 1999, again at the request of Gerstner but no longer was standards the sole focus; rather many attendees discussed holding schools accountable for students' achievement through measures, such as testing and issuing school report cards to the public. By the time Clinton's second presidential term ended in 2001 every state had drafted standards, except for Iowa, where local school districts still decided what to teach (Brown, 2009). In January of 2002, President George W. Bush signed into law a landmark

educational reform named after his presidential campaign mantra, “No Child Left Behind” (Frontline, 2002). Technically, NCLB was just a reauthorization of the 1965 *Elementary and Secondary Education Act* signed by President Johnson. Throughout history, educational standards were often divided between political parties; yet, President Bush’s NCLB had bipartisan support, indicating a significant shift on Capitol Hill.

Despite the bipartisan support NCLB was not free from dangers. The first was underfunding, and as with any political reform funding is a vital component. Democrats, though, were familiar with the issue. Plus the U.S. Department of Education had lax enforcement policies, while at the same time granting lots of waivers to states. The greatest danger dealt with a comparability loophole in the bill, which could not prevent states from using unreasonably easy tests or changing tests year after year. Supporters of the bill wanted a national benchmark with which to measure states against and the logical choice was to utilize the NAEP, a national achievement test given every other year to a statistical sample of students in every state. Conservatives were against it; however, the administration held fast on the principle of NAEP comparability despite the fact that no consequences were associated with it. Administrators of the bill believed that having the NAEP comparability would self-regulate states. The NAEP comparability would force states to compare its scores to NAEP, and publish the results. If a state’s scores keep falling behind the NAEP scores year after year they will be forced to account for the disparity and face an embarrassment factor from the media.

The landmark education reform managed to considerably and noticeably expand the role of the federal government in education while at the same time continuing to respect state control over standards. In fact, much of the current SBER movement can be directly tied to NCLB. Like previous legislation, NCLB, requires each state to institute a system of standards-based accountability that includes standards, assessments, and annual targets for performance. Yet, much of the requirements for testing are more stringent, like requiring that all students in grades 3 through 8 be tested annually (No Child Left Behind Act, 2002). Additionally, NCLB required that states create performance standards based on proficiency cut scores. Despite the additional requirements associated with NCLB, today’s state systems maintain similar features from previous SBER movements; although, the glaring difference is the increase in testing. Perhaps most importantly, the increase in accountability under NCLB prompted many to contend that, “standards-based educational reform” has transformed into a “test-based reform,” which alters educators’ schema, where tests communicate expectations and inform practice more than standards (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009).

One of the toughest components to NCLB’s accountability is the increased emphasis on minority students. Schools and districts were given a “report card” based on the test scores of their students; however, to help ensure that all groups of students were progressing at an adequate rate, the test results were broken down and reported according to various sub-groups such as: poverty, race, ethnicity, disability, and limited English proficiency. This disaggregation of data was intended to prevent schools from lumping test results together to

garner an overall average for the school that would effectively hide the achievement gaps between groups of students. This in large part is where NCLB namesake originated.

States had until the 2005-06 school year to develop and implement their standards and tests; although many states already had them in place. In fact, according to Vinson, Ross, and Wilson (2011) NCLB has "...put a federal stamp of approval on what was going on already in most states--predetermined subject-by-subject content standards to be measured by frequent high-stakes testing" (p. 158). Schools and districts were given 12 years to use these frequent high-stakes testing to prove that all students had reached the 100 percent proficiency level in reading and mathematics. Each year leading up to 2014-15 would become progressively more rigorous as states would monitor their "adequate yearly progress" (AYP). Interestingly, states themselves decided what was proficient and what an adequate rate of progress for each group was. Schools who failed to meet AYP were subject to various school improvement measures imposed by the state. Many states offered a "safe harbor" for underperforming schools, if they could demonstrate a ten percent reduction in the number of students that were not meeting the annual proficiency goals.

Race to the Top

In 2007, NCLB was up for reauthorization by Congress, who failed to rewrite it. This lack of reauthorization; however, did not exempt states from meeting the goal of having all students at a 100 percent proficiency level in reading and mathematics by 2014 (what many critics deemed the toughest part of NCLB). In the 2008 presidential campaign, Barack Obama promised to release states from the 2002 law. On February 17, 2009, shortly after Obama became president, he signed into law the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). The ARRA would lead to what is referred to as Obama's Race to the Top (RTTT) initiative (US Department of Education, 2009a), and according to the Executive Summary, ARRA is a, "...historic legislation designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education" (p. 2). Race to the Top sought to provide \$4.35 billion to states but the funds would be awarded through a competitive grant program. States then competed with each other to showcase their acceptance of and ability to meet certain educational reforms, such as adopting new college and career standards and utilizing student test data within the teacher evaluation process.

States that wished to receive funds from the RTTT grant had two phases with which to apply. During the first phase only Delaware and Tennessee were awarded funds (US Department of Education, 2009b). During phase two, nine states (Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Maryland, Massachusetts, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, and Rhode Island) and the District of Columbia were awarded funds (US Department of Education, 2009a). A third phase was introduced in 2011, and seven states (Arizona, Colorado, Illinois, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Jersey, and Pennsylvania) were rewarded funds, bringing the total states to receive funds from RTTT to 18 (US Department of Education, 2009d).

Finally, in 2011, President Obama announced that states could apply for waivers from NCLB's 2014 deadline. In exchange for the waiver states adopted parts of President Obama's education agenda, such as: adopt college and career readiness standards, create an accountability system that reports the lowest performing five percent of schools and the ten percent with the largest achievement gaps, and develop teacher and principal evaluations that include student performance (White House Press, 2011). Under the President Obama's education agenda, only about 15 percent of each state's lowest-performing schools would be penalized.

Common Core State Standards Initiative

In 2009, a state-led effort coordinated and funded by the National Governors Association (NGA) and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) began in order to develop college and career standards. Common Core State Standards initiative also received additional support from various business leaders including the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and the Charles Stewart Mott Foundation among others (Anderson, 2010). Common Core State Standards were created with the collaboration of teachers, school administrators, and educational experts with the hopes of providing a clear and consistent framework for preparing America's children for a future college and/or career (Common Core State Standards [CCSS], 2012).

Common Core State Standards went through various drafts, including a public draft that received nearly 10,000 comments (CCSS, 2012). Furthermore, the Common Core State Standards website states that "the standards were informed by the highest, most effective models from states across the country and countries around the world, and provide teachers and parents with a common understanding of what students are expected to learn (n.p.). In essence, Common Core State Standards gathered and refined some of the best performance standards states had to offer; however, they refrained from creating content standards.

On June 2, 2010 Common Core State Standards were officially released for mathematics and English language arts with a majority of the states adopting the standards in the subsequent months. In fact, approximately a year after the standards were published 45 states, four territories, and the District of Columbia had fully adopted the standards. The American Samoa Islands were the last to adopt Common Core State Standards on October 3, 2012 (CCSS, 2012). States were expected to implement the standards by 2015, although, some did so earlier (Walsh, 2010).

Although, CCSS was a state-led initiative the federal grant program RTTT had an integral role in its adoption, as states that wished to receive a NCLB waiver were required to adopt college and career readiness standards, such as those found in the CCSS. Not every state who applied to receive an Executive waiver from the federal mandates of NCLB adopted the CCSS; such as Texas, Alaska, and Virginia. However, the majority of the states, 45 to be exact, did. One cannot say with certainty if states adopted them for the sake of receiving the NCLB waiver (CCSS, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Some conservative groups, such as The Heritage Foundation, contend that the wide adoption and acceptance of CCSS, especially for the sake of receiving an Executive waiver from NCLB, "...will end up further centralizing education policy"

(Burke, 2012, n.p.). Others have also criticized the quick adoption of CCSS by states before they examined the “underlying assumptions of the initiative” (Tienken, 2010, p. 14).

Every Student Succeeds Act

The most current federal initiative, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), is a reauthorization of NCLB, and was signed into law by President Obama in December of 2015. The bill, like NCLB, had bipartisan support and still requires students to complete assessments in grades 3 through 8 and once in high school. It, however, shifted more control back to the states, and this became even more apparent with the Trump administration.

State Initiatives

Many people attribute the SBER movements as being led by the central government; however, states have long been pushing for increased accountability and standards in education. In fact, states such as: California, Kentucky, Maryland, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Florida, and Texas all began their own SBER initiatives in the 1980s while using their own funds. According to Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun (2009), “states played an important role in the evolution of [federal education] reforms” (p. 24). Once states received federal funding from the *Goals 2000* legislation nearly all the states began to develop their own standards (Armour-Garb, 2007). The next few paragraphs will describe four states (California, Kentucky, Texas, and Florida) and their SBER initiatives. Although, the actions taken by these four states are not intended to be representative of all states it will provide an illustration of some of the steps states took and some of the challenges they faced in their attempt to increase accountability in education.

California

California was a vanguard in the SBER movement, as it was developing challenging and ambitious standards in the mid-1980s while under the guidance of Superintendent Bill Honig; well before the central government enacted the *Goals 2000* legislation (O’Day, 1995). California utilized a three-pronged approach to achieve its educational reform. The first prong sought to establish “rich and rigorous” core curriculum for all students. The second prong aligned the state policy components to support the content in the new rich and rigorous curriculum. The third prong focused on the development of strategies for supporting schools.

In order to establish the rich and rigorous core curriculum California released its first mathematics framework in 1985. Then in 1992, California updated the framework and called for greater attention to mathematical problem solving and multiple representations of relationships. In fact, the 1992 framework served as a model for the national standards development efforts later promoted by NCEST. In addition to the mathematics framework California also released an English language arts framework in 1987. O’Day (1995) states though that the “...framework was intended as a manifesto and guide for curriculum developers, not for teachers and the general public (p. 20).

The second prong focused primarily on the alignment of two factors, textbooks and assessments. In the years following 1985 few textbooks were aligned with California's new mathematics framework; although, the state responded by developing replacement chapters. Later California would rely on textbook publishers to provide better textbooks, which better aligned with the frameworks. California also invested heavily in the development of new and more challenging assessments that would replace the old California Assessment Program (CAP). The California Learning Assessment System (CLAS) not only reflected the contents of the new frameworks; it pushed the boundaries for large scale assessment by including many extended-response and performance tasks. California also linked several professional development efforts to the SBER initiatives and reevaluated its teacher credentialing.

The last prong was achieved through site interventions and subject-specific initiatives. In mathematics, California created the Math Renaissance thanks in part to a grant from the National Science Foundation. In English language arts, California established a pilot program titled REACH, which sought to get every third grade student at or above grade level proficiency in reading. Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, (2009) state that, "California was also a leader in terms of controversy, and many of the efforts undertaken in the early 1990s were modified or eliminated over the next few years" (p. 25).

Kentucky

The SBER began in Kentucky in 1990 with the passage of the landmark Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA), which was in response to a 1989 Kentucky Supreme Court ruling (Knoeppel & Brewer, 2011). In 1985, 66 property-poor school districts filed suit against the Commonwealth of Kentucky contending that the method of financing public schools was unjust and insufficient. Therefore, the learning outcomes were significantly limited for those poor-property districts causing a sizeable schism between them and the wealthier districts. *Rose v. Council for Better Education*, as the suit is known, was finally settled in 1989 when the Kentucky Supreme Court ruled in favor of the poor-property districts. The Kentucky Supreme Court, in addition to favoring the Council for Better Education's position, ruled that the entire K-12 public school system was unconstitutional due to inadequacies in the educational opportunities and lack of efficiency in student achievement levels across the state (Knoeppel & Brewer, 2011) In fact, in the *Rose v. Council for Better Education* case the court defined "efficient" as adequate. Lawmakers and practitioners were then tasked with providing "substantial uniformity, substantial equality of financial resources and substantial equal educational opportunity for all students" (*Rose v. Council for Better Education*, 1989, p. 4).

With the adoption of KERA the Kentucky legislature addressed several issues of adequacy that were stipulated by the court including significant changes in curriculum, governance, and finance. The Kentucky Education Reform Act also launched a comprehensive system of student learning and school accountability that would proficiently predate the national priority depicted in the federal law NCLB (Kannapel, Aagaard, Coe, & Reeves, 2001).

In total, KERA established broad learning goals in several areas including but not limited to mathematics, reading, and social studies. Student and school accountability was determined by a new assessment system called the Kentucky Instructional Results Information System (KIRIS) that included multiple-choice testing, constructed-response questions, and portfolios in the subjects of writing and mathematics (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009).

An unfortunate byproduct of Kentucky's innovative assessment and accountability system KIRIS, required a large demand for time—both proctoring and scoring. Attempts were made to improve KIRIS but the legislature abandoned it in 1998 in favor of a more traditional assessment, which they titled the Commonwealth Accountability Testing System (CATS) (Catterall et al., 1998). Kentucky would continue to utilize CATS until Governor Steve Beshear signed Senate Bill 1, which suspended CATS for three academic years (2008-2011) and called for the development of a new accountability system by the 2011-2012 academic years (Knoepfel & Brewer, 2011). The new accountability system tests students in reading, language arts, math, science, and social studies.

Texas

Texas began its SBER in the early 1980s. Texas utilized two minimum competency tests during that time, the Texas Assessment of Basic Skills (TABs) and the Texas Educational Assessment of Minimal Skills (TEAMS). Meanwhile, in 1981, House Bill (HB) 264 required that schools implement a new curriculum of "essential elements" starting in the 1984-1985 academic year for every subject in the state curriculum (Causey-Bush, 2005). Then in 1983, Governor Mark White appointed a commission of business leaders (chaired by Dallas billionaire businessman H. Ross Perot) to recommend educational reforms. The commission's recommendations led to the passage of HB 72 in 1984, which included several new education mandates including increased learning standards for student achievement, assessments for teachers, and a new funding formula for schools. For example, HB 72 required that 11th grade students take the TEAMS exit examination as a graduation requirement starting in 1985 (Causey-Bush, 2005). In the early 1990s, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) replaced the minimum competency tests in order to emphasize academic, higher-order thinking skills, and problem-solving ability (Texas Education Agency, 2002). However, according to Causey-Bush, (2005) the TAAS was simply a rebranding of the minimal skills tests that it replaced. In 1996, under the leadership of Governor George W. Bush, new standards, called Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills (TEKS), were being developed. In September of 1997, the Texas School Board of Education officially adopted TEKS. Schools had to fully implement the standards into the school curriculum by the 1998-1999 school year, and the TAAS had to be entirely TEKS-based by the spring of 2000 (Texas Education Agency, 2002). Meanwhile, Texas created a student information system that tracked several important elements related to education including student attendance and performance. Texas also began using test scores as the basis for rewards and sanctions, including the Texas Successful Schools Award System (Hamilton, Stecher, & Yaun, 2009).

In 2003, Texas adopted a more difficult testing system known as the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS), which was used to assess students in grades 3 through 11 (Texas Education Agency, 2010). However, in the spring of 2007 Senate Bill 1031 would repeal TAKS in favor of End-of-Course (EOC) exams for the high school grades. In 2010, the state adopted its newest and most rigorous assessment system, State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR), which has been used for grades 3 through 8, and for the 12 end-of-course assessments for grades 9 through 11.

Florida

The Florida Statewide Assessment Program (FSAP) began in 1971 and has been an important part of the state's SBER. The FSAP was created to evaluate students' academic strengths and weaknesses, particularly in communication and mathematics (Florida Department of Education [FLDOE], n.d.). Florida's SBER would at first focus primarily on students in high schools before later incorporating those in middle and elementary schools. In 1978, Florida would become the first state to have made graduation contingent on passing an exit exam known as the High School Competency Test (HSCT) (FLDOE, n.d.). The HSCT was developed in response to the Educational Accountability Act of 1976, which outlined a system for defining and measuring the attainment of basic educational objectives in communications and mathematics. Shortly after the Educational Accountability Act of 1976 was passed Florida utilized a long list of interested parties to develop the new minimum objectives including: the Division of Public Schools, Florida Department of Education; faculty of the state universities and community colleges; school district teachers, curriculum and testing supervisors, administrators; and laypersons (FLDOE, n.d.). In 1998, Florida would introduce the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and the HSCT would be phased out by the year 2000.

In 1991, Florida created *Blueprint 2000*, which sought to return responsibility for schools to those closest to the students. *Blueprint 2000* was created in response to federal initiative *America 2000*. As a continuation of *Blueprint 2000* the Florida Commission on Education Reform and Accountability began to conceptualize the FCAT in 1995, as a means to measure new, more rigorous educational standards for students that would help them compete for jobs in a global economy. The State Board of Education adopted the Commission's recommendations that same year and titled it the Comprehensive Assessment Design (FLDOE, n.d.). The new, more rigorous standards were titled the Sunshine State Standards (SSS). Initially the FCAT was designed to evaluate reading, writing, and mathematics for students in grades 4, 5, 8, and 10 but Governor Jeb Bush expanded it to include grades 3 through 10. Additionally, the graduation class of 2003 would be the first class that needed to pass the FCAT before obtaining their high school diplomas.

Beginning in 2007, Florida would revise the Sunshine State Standards and rebrand them as the Next Generation Sunshine State Standards. Consequently, Florida would also update FCAT turning it into FCAT 2.0. Currently, Florida is phasing out FCAT 2.0 and has adopted a new assessment, titled Florida Standards Assessment, and several EOCs.

SBER and Social Studies Education

Throughout the standards movement, both at the federal and state levels, social studies education had often been an afterthought (Evans, 2004; Vinson, Ross, & Wilson, 2011). Post *A Nation at Risk* the majority of the standards created focused on mathematics, reading and writing. Social studies education was not immune from the actions taken by the policy makers though; in fact, policy makers called for the revival of “history, geography, and civics”, while ignoring the term “social studies” all together (Evans, 2004). Although, as Evans (2004) points out, “In the early 1990s, leaders of NCSS attempted to persuade policy makers that the term *social studies* (emphasis in original) [was] a useful umbrella term, and that history, geography, and the other social sciences could coexist within the social studies curriculum...” (p. 164).

The truth was there was little room for any social science discipline in the standards movement, and professional organizations had to take it upon themselves to organize and develop standards in order to remain relevant during the movement (Vinson, Ross, & Wilson, 2011). Some of the discipline specific standards that were created in response to the standards movement were: the Center for Civic Education’s (1994) *National Standards for Civics and Government*, the Geography Education National Implementation Project’s (1994) *Geography for Life: National Geography Standards*, the National Council for Economic Education (1997) *Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics*, and the National Center for History in the Schools (1994) *The National History Standards*.

Today, all 50 states have developed or adopted standards for social studies, which include history, geography, economics, and civics/government. Yet, as mentioned earlier in the paper, without high-stakes tests associated with the standards little can be expected to change in regards to teaching practices and culture, as nearly no incentives exist to change the status quo (Russell, 2010). Only 21 of the 50 states require statewide social studies testing (Walker, 2012) and 12 states (Alabama, Florida, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, New Mexico, New York, Ohio, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia) require students to pass a social studies test in order to graduate from high school (Gewertz, 2018). For those few states that do test, researchers are seeing a greater disconnect between what the standards expect—analysis, evaluation, and synthesis—and what tests value—rote memorization of names, dates, and loosely connected facts (Fogo, 2010). While no high-stakes social studies tests exist for students in the elementary or middle grades, because of the mathematics and English language arts test, little time is left for social studies instruction (Bisland, 2011; Heafner & Fitchett, 2012). Thus proponents of social studies education have had to work harder in order to ensure that social studies remain relevant. In 2006, 24 states required statewide social studies tests while, again, today only 21 states are on that list, it is just another unfortunate statistic that reveals the deteriorated perception that policy makers have on the importance of social studies education. Though some have argued that social studies education is getting the short end of the stick (Singer, 2012) professional organizations are continuing to rally for support and demonstrate to policy makers the error of marginalizing social studies instruction. In fact, no professional organization has worked harder for the cause than the NCSS (Vinson, Ross, & Wilson, 2011).

The NCSS has published various works such as, *Social Studies Curriculum Guidelines* in 1971 (NCSS Task Force on Curriculum Guidelines, 1971), *Statements on the Essentials of the Social Studies* in 1981 (NCSS, 1981), “In Search of Scope and Sequence for the Social Studies” in 1989, and (NCSS Task Force on Scope and Sequence, 1989) *Charting a Course: Social Studies for the 21st Century* also in 1989 (National Commission on Social Studies in the Schools, 1989). Vinson, Ross, & Wilson (2011) contend that these “early” works by the NCSS, as they put it, indicates four things:

1. the growing strength of the SBER movement;
2. the “necessity” for social studies professionals and their representative organizations to participate in it;
3. the desire on the part of the NCSS that *social studies* [emphasis in original] be considered a distinct “field”- that is, it [is] supported as “social studies” rather than history, geography, economics, and civics (etc.) standards as distinctive of separate disciplines; and
4. social studies’ defensiveness with respect to the burgeoning centrality of reading, writing, and mathematics; the perception that US students were historically, culturally, and socially (etc.) “illiterate”; and the notoriety and controversy surrounding national standards in “constituent” disciplines such as history over, for instance, the extent to which proposed history standards were “patriotic enough,” “multicultural enough,” and so on (p. 160).

Conclusion

When one wishes to trace the lineage of the modern SBER movement all roads seem to begin with the 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*, which proclaimed that America’s economic woes were in large part due to the failing public educational system. During the end of the 1980s, President George H. W. Bush would announce *America 2000*, a voluntary education plan that wished to establish rigorous standards; although, it would never truly materialized due to political turf wars. In 1994, President Clinton would sign into law, *Goals 2000*, a piece of legislature that was similar to *America 2000*; however, it gave greater control to states. Finally, in 2001, President George W. Bush would sign into law NCLB, which is considered the pinnacle of the SBER movement. Today, the SBER movement is led by the RTTT, ESSA, and Common Core State Standards initiatives. However, prior to *A Nation at Risk* several states were funding their own accountability initiatives; yet, many of their standards lacked the rigor sought by the federal initiatives. Many would sum up the SBER movement with the words “rigor and accountability” but in accordance to the “theory of change” it must also contain alignment within and between all parts and parties (Massell & Perrault, 2014, p. 196). Unfortunately, a tracing of the history suggests that the SBER utilized a top-down initiative, led by elite businessmen and politicians as a means to correct America’s lack of competitiveness in the global economic market with little alignment (Fogo, 2010). Each new step, however, has sought to fix the alignment.

Social studies, conversely, has not always had a prominent role in the SBER movement. Many do not see social studies as a viable skill or resource for the global marketplace. Yet, the NCSS

and several other professional organizations continue to campaign in favor of a strong social studies curriculum. The true importance of social studies education does not lie in federal mandates but rather in the people. Scholars, researchers, and policy makers all have important roles to ensure the existence of social studies but the most important key lies with teachers and their perspective students. Rigorous standards should not be something that is forced on teachers but something that teachers naturally require of their students.

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