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Geography illiteracy across the K-12 public school system is an issue that the United States is facing, and has been for many years. The majority of schools are not teaching the subject of Geography (on it's own) anymore as part of their curriculum. Currently, most schools combine the subject with Social Studies. Over the years there have been initiatives at the National level to try and make the subject more prevalent in education. Organizations are nationally testing fourth, eight and twelfth grade students using cognitive dimension on specific related content. Particular states across the U.S. have shown progress, and have adapted based on the assessment, others still have work to do. Massachusetts in particular has updated their frameworks for more inclusivity, but Geography still falls short within them.

Research objectives:

- Understand what the Department of Education is doing across the United States to determine and improve geographic literacy
- Locate where in the United States Geography is being taught and/or required
- Look at what Massachusetts specifically is doing to promote geographic literacy
- Look at where Geography courses are offered in Massachusetts schools
- Look at what advocates in the field are doing to improve geographic literacy throughout K-12 education

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—Geography For Life: National Geography Standards, Second Edition (2012)

Data Acquisition:

- The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) released scores for the assessment given to eighth grade students in 2018
- High schools offering AP Human Geography: available through the College Board AP Audit
- State requirements and data collected from reports by The Gilbert M. Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education at Texas State University report (McClure & Zadrozny 2015; Zadrozny)
- Geography or Social Studies exams by state (Brysch 2014)
- Massachusetts frameworks from Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

- Determine the status of Geography Education K-12 across the U.S.
 - Examine which states require Geography courses in Middle school and/or High School, and which require subject exams
 - Determine Geography Standards per state
 - Analyze eighth grade testing statistics with previous years
- Determine the status of Geography Education K-12 in Massachusetts:
 - Examine degree to which Geography is included in the MA Social Studies Frameworks for Geography
 - See how many MA schools offer AP Human Geography in High School
 - Examine High School and Middle School graduation requirements
- Determine efforts made by national and/or state organizations

Cognitive Dimension

Knowledge

- What is it?
- Where is it?

Understanding

- Why is it there?
- How did it get there?
- What is its significance?

Applying

- How can knowledge and understanding solve geographic problems?

Content Dimension

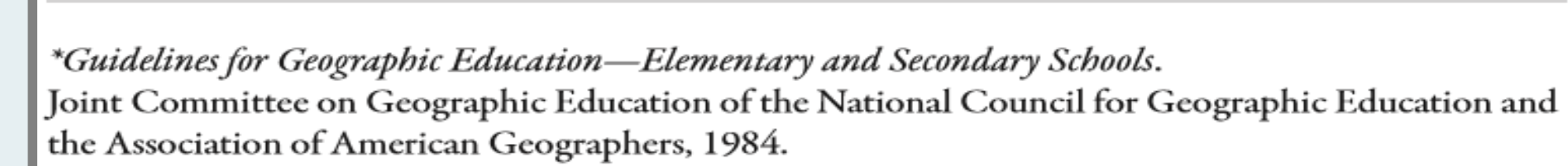
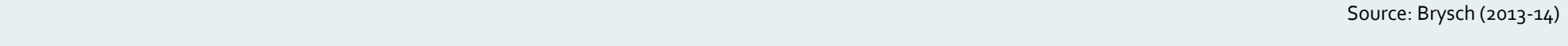
Spatial Dimension

Spatial Dynamics and Connections

Source: NAEP 2025

The National Assessment of Education Progress evaluated eighth grade students on their geographic literacy in 2014 and in 2018, and found a decrease in scores. One reason is that Geography has historically not been taught as a separate subject in most K-12 public schools. Certain states are updating their frameworks to be more inclusive of a diverse array of subjects. In Massachusetts, Geography is addressed under the History and Social Science Frameworks. Unfortunately, the teaching of Geography is given short shrift under these frameworks. The overarching goal of this project is to assess the status of Geographical education in the Massachusetts K-12 system. This study examines the degree to which Geography is being taught in public school districts across the Commonwealth of Massachusetts and offers an assessment of where and how it is being taught; exploring what training state geography educators receive, and what professional development is needed to help support their endeavors. Additionally, why has geographical education lagged in this “liberal” state? Why have efforts to expand geographical education not been successful to date? Therefore, this project studies efforts to expand the requirements for the teaching of Geography in the state’s social studies frameworks; identifying efforts by geographical education advocates (Massachusetts Geographical Alliance, National Geographic, AAG, and Mass. State University Geography Professors) to lobby state political representatives and state public education administrators to pass legislation expanding and mandating geographical education across the state. Finally, this research will determine if geographic literacy among Massachusetts K-12 public school students will significantly increase.

- **Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) - 2015**
 - Replaced No Child Left Behind act (NCLB) 2001
 - States in charge of individual education plans and curriculum intended to improve scores of standardized assessments and increase geographic literacy
- **National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP)**
 - Administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) which under the U.S. Department of Education and the Institute of Education Sciences (IES)
 - Latest one was administered in 2018 to approximately 12,900, eighth grade students
 - Tests students on three content outcomes: “space and place”, “environments and society”, and “spatial dynamics and connections”
- **National Council for Geographic Education**
 - Promotes teacher resources, professional development, and conferences and network opportunities
- **National Geography Standards: *Geography for Life* (1984)**
 - Enforces importance of 5 themes of Geography into K-12 education
- **National Council for the Social Studies**
 - “The mission of the National Council for the Social Studies is to advocate and build capacity for high-quality social studies by providing leadership, services, and support by educators”
 - Different chapters through the United States to focus on state-level initiatives
- **The Gilbert M. Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education**
 - Publishes reports on the status of Geography in K-12 throughout all 50 states



**Guidelines for Geographic Education—Elementary and Secondary Schools.*
Joint Committee on Geographic Education of the National Council for Geographic Education and
the Association of American Geographers, 1984.

- **Massachusetts ESSA Executive Summary (2015)**
 - Recognized the need to review and revise the curriculum frameworks.
 - Summary pledged to increase student access to an “ambitious, engaging, well rounded curriculum”.
- **Massachusetts updated History and Social Science framework for K-12 (2018)**
 - The field of geography is minimally included, with main focuses being on History and “Social Studies” for Middle School and High School curriculum
- **Massachusetts Advocators**
 - Bridgewater State University professors, James Hayes-Bohanan and Vernon Domingo talk on *NightSide with Don Rea* WBZ 1030 News Radio: “Where has Geography Class Gone?” (WBZ 2018)
- **Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies**
 - Legislative Day at MA State House to “advocate, promote, and support social studies education in public, private and charter schools” (Lee 2017)
- **Bill H.573—An Act Relative To Geography Education (2019-2020)**
 - Petition by Smola, D’Emilia, Muratore
 - Section 15RRRRR. The governor shall annually issue a proclamation setting apart the first week of April as Massachusetts Geography Education week.
 - Section 3. (a) Establish commission on geography education (8 members)
 - (b) Commission to investigate status of geography education (I-iii)

2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework	Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018
<p>Adopted by the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education on June 26, 2018, the 2018 History and Social Science Curriculum Framework sets forth the skills, competencies and knowledge in history and social science, including civics, that students should attain at each grade or grade cluster from pre-K–12.</p> <p>Specific features of the framework include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Content Standards from pre-K–12 outlining what students should know and be able to do at the end of each grade or grade cluster in history and social science, including civics. • Standards for History and Social Science Practice, designed to reflect the work of political scientists, economists, geographers, historians, and ordinary citizens • Standards for reading, writing, speaking, and listening in history and social science, drawn from the 2017 English Language Arts and Literacy in History/Social Science Framework • A full-year civics course in grade 8, including coursework in news/media literacy • Content standards for high school courses, including U.S. History I and II, World History I and II, U.S. Government and Politics, Economics, Personal Financial Literacy, and News/Media Literacy (such courses provide opportunities for students to deepen knowledge and application of civic skills, dispositions, and knowledge within a national and global context) 	<p>Signed into law by Governor Baker on November 8, 2018, Chapter 296 of the Acts of 2018 is a law to promote and enhance civic engagement and support implementation of the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework.</p> <p>The law includes these provisions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Each public school serving students in grade 8, and each public high school, shall provide not less than 1 student-led, non-partisan civics project consistent with the History and Social Science Curriculum Framework for each student • A Commonwealth Civics Challenge, subject to appropriation, will be available to grade 8 students to showcase student-led civics projects <p>The law also authorizes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Civics Project Trust Fund to assist with implementing history and social science and civics education, particularly in underserved communities, subject to appropriation • Promotion of youth membership on municipal boards, committees and commissions by the Secretary of State • A non-partisan high school voter challenge to be established by the Secretary of State in consultation with DESE, to encourage eligible students to register or pre-register to vote and participate in municipal and state elections <p>Source: Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education 2018</p>

Source: Zadrozny 2017

- NAEP: eighth grade students tested worse in 2018 than they did in 2014—267 in 2014 to 263 in 2018
- Most states have jurisdiction over curriculum but majority of states and are not meeting national requirements
- Only 4 states (UT, SD, MN, MS) require a stand-alone Geography course to graduate from High School (McClure 2016)
- Massachusetts does not have a Geography requirement to graduate High School and typically does not offer Geography as a stand-alone course either
- 60 schools in Massachusetts offered AP Human Geography in 2019
- Geography is not included in the updated Massachusetts History and Social Science Framework (2018) under “content standards for High School courses”
- In 2016, there were 72,309 teachers in Massachusetts and only 724 were Social Studies teachers (GENIP Project 2016)
- 63 percent of eighth grade students who took NAEP exam in 2018, that said they have a specific geography course, scored lower than students who reported not having a geography course
- Jeffery Sikkegna director of Ashbrook Center calls for “a new approach to teaching history and civics” - some educators argue for “active learning approach” (Jacobson 2020)
- NAGB decides to streamline NAEP to “reduce costs by including fewer subjects, testing fewer students and adding test time” so the Geography Assessment scheduled for 2029 has been eliminated

Massachusetts adopted a Bill in 2019 to make geographic education more apart of K-12 Education, proclaiming the first week of April as “Massachusetts Geography Education Week” and established a committee responsible for investigate the status of Geography in MA and to test students on geography

- Research similar states who have also adopted new acts and if improvement, base off of their initiatives
- Research MA improvement with this new bill
- Examine specific counties in MA and see how requirements and standards differ
- Research which specific MA school districts teach geography
- Compare NAEP test scores between MA school districts
- Compare advocacy efforts to abundance or lack of funding
- Examine literacy compared to socio-economic backgrounds
- Research state and national efforts to keep NAEP Geography exam and continue testing students in 4th, 8th, and 12th grade

Brygh, C. P. 2014. *States' Geography Education in the United States: A Report for the National Geographic Society*. Washington, DC: National Geographic Society.

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Organizations referenced throughout this research:

- National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) <https://www.nationsreportcard.gov/geography/results/scoring/>
- The Gilbert M. Grosvenor Center for Geographic Education <http://www.gso.aos.tstate.edu/grosvenor/>
- The Geography Institute <http://www.geoginstitute.org/>
- Massachusetts Council for the Social Studies http://www.mass-socialstudies.org/?page_id=608
- National Council for Geographic Education (NCGE) <http://netforum.avicita.com/news/47-DominatingPage.aspx?Test&TestID=90>
- Geography Education National Implementation Project (GENIP) <http://www.genip.us/>
- National Center for Research in Geography Education <http://www.ncrge.org/>
- Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education <http://doe.mass.edu/frameworks/current.html>
- National Geographic Society <http://www.nationalgeographic.org/education/>
- National Council for Education Statistics <http://nces.ed.gov/ipeds/datacenter/ipedsdatatools/index.asp>
- National Assessment Governing Board (NAGB) <https://www.assessmentdrive.com/news/naep-to-be-streamlined-in-cost-saving-move-44-44>
- Massachusetts Geographic Alliance <http://massgeo.blogspot.com/>
- WBEZ 102.7 News Radio Nightside with Dan Rose <http://wbeznewsdn14.hearst.com/content/2018/06/16-listen-whereas-geography-class>