ABSTRACT

GRAHAM, KRISTOFER. Unveiling the Veil: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Influence on the 2021 North Carolina Social Studies Standards. (Under the direction of Dr. Meghan Manfra)

The intersection of political ideologies and educational policymaking has garnered increased attention, particularly concerning its implications for classroom instruction and inclusivity. This paper presents a critical analysis of the discourse and actions of the North Carolina State Board of Education during the 2021 standards revision process for social studies. The study aims to deepen understanding of how political dynamics within state boards of education influence standards inclusivity and instructional practices, with a focus on diverging perspectives aligned with conservative and liberal ideologies. This research employs Critical Discourse Analysis to examine the discourse of the North Carolina State Board of Education. Drawing from Mullet's (2018) framework, the study analyzes how far-right and liberal political ideologies manifest in the standards revision process, particularly through the lens of Critical Race Theory. The findings of this study underscore the influence and power dynamics of state boards of education, where board members' political beliefs shape standards development. The tension between inclusivity and color-blindness in the discourse of board members about the standards reflects broader ideological divides and challenges in educational policymaking. This critical analysis contributes to understanding how political ideologies within state boards of education impact standards inclusivity and instructional practices. It highlights the need for balanced representation and responsiveness to citizens' input in standards development.

Unveiling the Veil: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Political Influence on the 2021 North Carolina Social Studies Standards

by
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A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty of
North Carolina State University
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

Teacher Education and Learning Science

Raleigh, North Carolina
2024

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DEDICATION

To my foundation, Willie & Selena Graham, Willie Paul & Hilda Young, I love you all dearly! Thank you for being the best grandparents in the whole wide world!

BIOGRAPHY

Kristofer earned his Bachelor of Science from North Carolina A&T State University in 2016. After graduating, he embarked on his teaching journey in Wake County, North Carolina, initially teaching high school social studies. Recognizing his passion for education, Kristofer transitioned to middle school teaching and later served as a coordinator at an elementary school, where he fostered a love for learning in his students. In 2017, fueled by his dedication to enhancing educational practices, Kristofer returned to school to pursue a master's degree in social studies education with the New Literacies and Global Learning program at NC State. Driven by his aspiration to advance the field, Kristofer pursued a Ph.D. in social studies education, aspiring to cultivate deep appreciation for the subject and inspire students to embrace its richness.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To my parents, Rhonda and Monte, I am filled with overwhelming gratitude for your love and support throughout my life. Your unwavering encouragement and dedication have truly shaped the person I am today, and I want to express my heartfelt appreciation for everything you have done. From the earliest days of my childhood, you both recognized the importance of education. You instilled in me a love for learning that continues to burn brightly within me. What truly stands out in my mind is witnessing your own journeys of lifelong learning. Both of you went back to school while I was still young, and your determination to pursue knowledge firsthand made an enduring impression on me. Your sacrifices and dedication to self-improvement served as powerful examples of the importance of continuous growth and learning.

To Dr. Manfra, your mentorship and support have been invaluable to my academic growth since I started at N.C. State in 2017. Throughout this process, your insights and feedback have played a pivotal role in shaping my research and strengthening my writing. Additionally, I greatly appreciate your support and invaluable feedback to my committee members, Drs. Lee, McAvoy, and Walkowiak. Your collective expertise and diverse perspectives have enriched my research and challenged me to think critically about my work. Each of you has contributed in unique ways to the development and refinement of my dissertation. For that, I am genuinely grateful.

To Drs. Hinnant and McCollum, From the beginning of this process, you have been pillars of strength, offering invaluable feedback, listening to my concerns, and providing endless support and encouragement when the road seemed daunting. I am particularly grateful for the countless hours we have spent together at D.H. Hill, poring over research materials, brainstorming ideas, and navigating the complexities of academic writing. Our shared moments

and triumphs and setbacks, laughter and frustration, have strengthened our bond and made the dissertation journey easier. I am honored to have shared this experience with you both.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

Chapter 1: Introduction

State boards of education hold the key to a transformative impact on teaching and learning within their territories, wielding power bestowed upon them by state constitutions and legislators. In North Carolina, the board has broad authority over policy decisions related to what is taught in public schools, such as the standard course of study (see SCOS-012, North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023). Standards provide the foundation of the curriculum that school districts develop and that teachers use in daily instruction. Influencing the standards allows the board to influence what students in North Carolina learn.

Ideally, a board of education should be non-partisan, as its members should be fearless advocates for an educational system that encourages students to be curious about themselves, their community, and their world. When board members become political actors, partisan fighting between the political left and right becomes the focus since members want to be seen as loyal to their party. Thus, critical issues and policies affecting public education are often overlooked, resulting in a lack of attention necessary to drive substantial and meaningful change (Pew Research Center, 2023).

In North Carolina, however, politics is baked into the design of board membership. For example, three members of the North Carolina State Board of Education - the state superintendent of public instruction, treasurer, and lieutenant governor - are elected based on political party affiliation. Other board members are appointed by the governor. This partisan environment can potentially force political actors to take a hardline approach to their party's priorities. Young et al. (2019) observe,

> The voices of the more politically connected or those with greater longevity may make a significant difference on the policy work of the [State Board of Education] and its

> influence on public schools. What these individuals are about and what and whom they pay attention to has ramifications for states' schools, students, and educators. (p. 228)

Thus, research must be conducted on the political dispositions of board members and how their political ideology affects public school instruction.

In this study, as board members act in their official capacity, their actions to support learning about diverse groups or only some groups in social studies instruction was the central focus explored. In a representative exploration of board politics and its direct impact on classroom curriculum, this research delves into the pivotal events of 2020-21, when Democrat and Republican appointed members of the North Carolina State Board of Education wielded their influence to shape the landscape of social studies instruction.

Background

Calls for more inclusive social studies education like those currently playing out in state legislatures across the country, have been persistent in the field of study since its inception. Activists representing a range of underrepresented groups have pushed for the inclusion of their narratives in the mainstream of U.S. public education since the early 20th century (e.g., Bailey, 1991; Brown & Brown, 2015; Chick & Altoona, 2006). One prominent example is the advocacy of Black educators like Carter G. Woodson who advocated for the incorporation of Black studies into public K-12 education. During Woodson's time, social studies curriculums in many places were devoid of Black history and culture; where they were taught, many of the stories advanced White narratives of Black history. King (2017) observes, "Early renditions of history textbooks typically classified Black people as docile, uncivilized, and lazy" (p. 14). Sadly, some of these same concerns have moved to the forefront of educational discussions as the years under the Trump administration, spanning January 2017 to January 2021, created an environment in which

the political right called into question representations of the diverse landscape of America in K-12 classrooms. The concerns have persisted in modern times and intensified under the Trump administration because of his sharp criticism of diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. However, there is a divide in policy between the political left and the political right. For example, Asmelash and Sturla (2020) highlight a policy from the left introduced in Connecticut in 2019. Public Act 19-12, passed by the Connecticut legislature, required school districts to offer courses in ethnic studies that allowed for a better understanding of African American and Latino Americans' experience and contributions to the United States history, society, economy, and culture (Asmelash & Sturla, 2020). This legislative action reflects a commitment to addressing historical omissions and biases in educational curricula, aiming to provide students with a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of American history. However, the tension in educational representation of diverse groups between liberal and conservative became particularly evident with the reception and rejection of initiatives like the 1619 Project.

In 2019, the release of *The 1619 Project* by award-winning *New York Times* journalist Nikole Hannah-Jones sparked a new chapter in the liberal versus conservative struggle on inclusivity in social studies classrooms. Jake Silverstein (2021), a colleague of Hannah-Jones, recalls that she pitched the idea for *The 1619 Project* at a team meeting in January 2019, the year that marked the 400th anniversary of the arrival of enslaved Africans in the land occupied by European settlers. To coincide with the August anniversary, Hannah-Jones and her team worked for several months to produce a project that included a special issue of *The New York Times Magazine*, a special section of *The New York Times* newspaper, and a multi-episode podcast (Silverstein, 2021). Silverstein (2021) reports, "that project made a bold claim . . . that the

moment in August 1619 when the first enslaved Africans arrived in the English colonies that would become the United States could, in a sense, be considered the country's origin."

When the work was published on August 18, 2019, it sold out nationwide. With the fame *The 1619 Project* achieved in the weeks following its release, conservative pushback against the work rapidly followed. Notably, conservative historians Victoria Bynum, James McPherson, James Oakes, Sean Wilentz, and Gordon Wood wrote a letter that was published in the December 29, 2019 issue of *The New York Times* condemning the project (Silverstein, 2021).

The historians wrote that they were "dismayed at some of the factual errors in the project and the closed process behind it" (Silverstein, 2021). One of the major concerns expressed in the letter responded to the claim in the Project's introduction, written by Hannah-Jones, that the American Revolution was centered around African enslavement (Silverstein, 2021). Dr. Leslie M. Harris (2020), Professor of History at Northwestern University, who was asked by a *New York Times* research editor to fact-check *The 1619 Project* prior to publication, acknowledged, "I vigorously disputed the claim. Although slavery was certainly an issue in the American Revolution, the protection of slavery was not one of the main reasons the 13 Colonies went to war."

Harris (2020) noted that some of her recommendations for more accurately conveying specific events of 1619 were not addressed. Nevertheless, as a historian, Harris recognized the importance of the work that was done. In response to conservative pushback, she stated, "It is easy to correct facts; it is much harder to correct a worldview that consistently ignores and distorts the role of African Americans and race in our history" (Harris, 2020).

The conservative backlash to The 1619 Project from a small group of historians was not an isolated event. Rather, it marked another iteration of the movement on the political right to

alter how U.S. society engages with the hard truths of our nation's history, especially in K-12 education. The flame lit in 2019 would be further fanned in 2020 as the world endured a pandemic that infected and killed millions, racial reckonings in the aftermath of police killings of Breonna Taylor and George Floyd, and a high-stakes presidential election. These events also intensified the focus on social studies instruction and how the field addresses issues such as policing, voting rights, and the inclusion of diverse narratives in history classes. At this crossroads, competing ideologies from the political left and right were injected into K-12 educational policymaking.

Although the 1619 Project was not created specifically for K-12 instruction, Senator Tom Cotton from Arkansas proposed one of the first pieces of legislation to limit race-based instruction in classrooms (Silverstein, 2021). In July 2020, during nationwide racial protests against police brutality, Senator Cotton introduced the Saving American History Act. Section 2, Part 1 of the Act proclaims, "The true date of America's founding is July 4th, 1776, the day the Declaration of Independence was adopted by the Second Continental Congress" (Saving American History Act, 2020).

This statement was a direct response to Hannah-Jones' assertion in *The 1619 Project* that the date the first group of enslaved Africans arrived in America should be considered the date of the nation's founding. The Act continues, in Section 2, Part 4, "This distortion of American history is being taught to children in public school classrooms via *The New York Times'* '1619 Project,' which claims that 'nearly everything that has truly made America exceptional' grew 'out of slavery'" (Saving American History Act, 2020).

Had the *Saving American History Act* become law, any school using The 1619 Project in its curriculum would have lost federal funding (Saving American History Act, 2020). The bill

had no chance of becoming law at the time, as it could not secure 60 votes in the Senate to overcome a filibuster and the House of Representatives was under Democratic leadership (Silverstein, 2021). Although it was never adopted, the bill served as a key response for the political right. The political right saw the 1619 project as a way for the political left to continue their ongoing plan to indoctrinate youth (Silverstein, 2021). This back and forth between opposing political forces is a well-documented phenomenon (Evans, 2010), where historically, the political right has consistently formulated policies that push back against their liberal counterparts attempts towards making social studies teaching practices more representative of all Americans.

President Trump issued an executive order in November 2020 establishing the President's Advisory 1776 Commission. The commission's purpose was "to better enable a rising generation to understand the history and principles of the founding of the United States in 1776 and to strive to form a more perfect union" (Exec. Order No. 13958, 2020). The commission, housed in the U.S. Department of Education, had several mandates. These included producing a report for the President on the core principles of America's founding that would be publicly disseminated, facilitating the development and implementation of a "Presidential 1776 Award," and advising executive departments and agencies on their efforts to ensure patriotic education (Exec. Order No. 13958, 2020). The 1776 Commission was not created in good faith, but instead was intended to promote an ideological shift in social studies instruction. This purpose was most evident in the appointment of two commission leaders announced on December 18, 2020. Dr. Larry P. Arnn was appointed to serve as chairman, and Dr. Matthew Spalding was appointed as the commission's executive director (Hillsdale College, 2020). At the time, both men were leaders of a private, conservative Christian school, Hillsdale College in

Hillsdale, Michigan. In addition, Dr. Arnn serves on the board of directors of The Heritage Foundation, a staunchly conservative organization that aims to further far-right political ideology. Under the leadership of Drs. Arnn and Spalding, the 1776 Commission released a report a mere month later detailing its findings. The report had to be rushed and released well ahead of the timetable specified in the executive order, as Trump lost the 2020 election and President-elect Joe Biden vowed to end the commission upon taking office.

New York Times reporter Jennifer Schuessler (2021) noted that the executive director of the American Historical Association described the report not as a work of history but of "cynical politics." Unfortunately, the seed Republicans had planted in the federal government was watered and grew under Republican-controlled legislatures across the country.

Research Problem

The convergence of political forces and educational policymaking presents a compelling research problem around the influence of political ideologies on what students learn in public schools. The 2021 legislative session was an eventful one in many states, as Republicans, reeling from their losses in the 2020 election and guided by former President Trump, sought to inject their politics into K-12 classrooms. Their proposals were full of exclusionary policies aimed at changing how students learn about various aspects of themselves and society. In May 2021, Idaho became the first U.S. state to ban the teaching of critical race theory (O'Kane, 2021).

Several other states soon followed suit and passed bills directed at the humanities by banning the use of The 1619 Project and the teaching of topics such as critical race theory. For example, a bill introduced in Rhode Island would prevent schools from teaching students that their state or the U.S. is "fundamentally racist or sexist." Similarly, a bill in Texas banned any discussion of privilege or White supremacy in schools (O'Kane, 2021).

Journalists Cathryn Stout and Thomas Wilburn (2022) tracked bills nationwide that proposed to either expand or limit the discussion of race or race-based issues in education. They found that at the start of the 2022 legislative session, 36 states introduced bills to limit instruction on race or race-based issues, while only 17 states introduced bills that would expand teaching on these subjects (Stout & Wilburn, 2022). In states where bills limiting race-based discussions failed to become law, this outcome occurred either because one chamber in the state was controlled by Democrats or because the state had a Democratic governor with veto authority (Stout & Wilburn, 2022).

North Carolina was able to avoid the growing influence of conservative ideology of Republican politics during the 2021-2022 legislative session, as Republicans did not have a supermajority in the General Assembly that could sustain a veto override of the state's Democratic governor. However, that situation changed in the current 2023-2024 legislative session, after former Democratic Rep. Tricia Cotham switched her political affiliation to Republican in early 2023. With a newly minted supermajority, the state's Republicans prioritized the culture war issues that represent a national rallying cry for their party.

Paul Specht, Will Doran, and Laura Leslie (2023), journalists from local news station WRAL in Raleigh, NC, reported that several bills became law after the General Assembly overrode vetoes from the governor during the 2023-2024 session. Specific to education, Senate Bill 49, the "Parents' Bill of Rights," is now a law that requires teachers to out transgender youth to their parents and bans books on LGBTQ-related topics from being used in elementary schools (Specht et al., 2023). Another extreme partisan law from the Republican playbook is House Bill 574, the "Fairness in Women's Sports Act," which bans transgender girls and women from

competing in women's sports in K-12 and postsecondary schools across the state (Specht et al., 2023).

This trend is even more alarming in light of other educational bills being considered by the General Assembly. Of particular relevance to this study, a bill working its way through the North Carolina House would transform the composition of the State Board of Education. As WRAL education reporter Emily Walkenhorst (2023) reported,

> House Bill 17, if adopted into law, would ultimately put the question before North Carolina voters in 2024: Would they like to amend the state's constitution to make the board elected and to make the state superintendent the voting chairman of it?

Currently, board members are either appointed by the governor with the approval of the General Assembly or join the board as a duty of their elected position, as with the lieutenant governor, state superintendent of public instruction, and state treasurer. The bill's sponsor, Republican Rep. Hugh Blackwell, observed that education currently is—and should be—a politicized topic (Walkenhorst, 2023). Indeed, education is highly politicized, and changing how the State Board of Education is formed will further exacerbate the issue in the state, as partisan politics would be the undercurrent influencing who is encouraged to run for the board and how they operate once in office.

Under a Republican-controlled State Board of Education, many advances achieved in the approved social studies standards in recent years could be reversed. Conservative Republican leaders have been vocal in their opposition to the current set of standards approved in 2021 (Walkenhorst, 2023). The standards, which are the bedrock of the curriculum taught across the state, were approved largely along political lines, with the Democratic majority, and one Republican appointed board member voting 7-5 for the current standards.

While almost all of the Republican appointed members on the board of education railed against the "divisive" standards, the Democrat appointed members of the board voted as a block to approve the most inclusive social studies education standards ever established in the state (Hui, 2021). If Republican state leaders are eager to thrust North Carolina into the culture war issues of transgender rights and women's rights, what would stop an elected, Republican-led State Board of Education from doing the same with social studies education during the next standard revision process? The Republican stance on social studies instruction clearly seeks a return to a system in which minoritized groups' histories and narratives may be erased from the classroom.

The ongoing political polarization in educational policymaking has become a focal point of concern, particularly evident during the 2021 standards revision process in North Carolina. As conservative ideologies gained momentum nationally, reflected in efforts to restrict discussions on Critical Race Theory and LGBTQ topics in education, similar dynamics played out within the states' legislative and educational spheres. The shift in North Carolina's political landscape, marked by a super majority by Republicans and the subsequent enactment of partisan-driven laws impacting education, underscores the critical need to examine the influence of political ideologies on educational standards. Through rigorous analysis of board discussions, this research aims to contribute valuable insights into the complex interplay between politics and education.

Significance of the Research

The significance of this research is rooted in the complex interplay between political ideologies and educational policymaking. At its core, this study delves into the critical juncture of North Carolina's 2021 standards revision process, a period marked by intense political

polarization and nationwide debates over the content and scope of educational curricula in social studies. Against this backdrop, the research serves as a timely and vital exploration into how political forces shape the educational landscape, influencing what students learn and how they perceive societal issues.

Specific to North Carolina, the significance of this study is amplified by the increased control Republicans can gain from partisan gerrymandering within the state. The current supermajority Republicans enjoy in the North Carolina General Assembly may be the state's new normal. In an opinion issued April 28, 2023, the North Carolina Supreme Court reversed a lower court opinion that invalidated congressional maps drawn by the state legislature in 2016 and 2022 (The American Redistricting Project, 2023).

In a rare politically motivated ruling, the court held that the state maps—which were found by the previous court to violate the state constitution—complied with the state constitution (The American Redistricting Project, 2023). Republicans in the state legislature currently have a court that shares their political views, after the court shifted from liberal to conservative leaning in the last election cycle. This outsized influence of far-right and center-right political ideologies can potentially impact instruction in the state, as the Republican party may now be empowered to shift the state further to the right, as other Republican-controlled state legislatures have done.

These dynamics demand that researchers pay close attention to the Republican political machine in North Carolina and how it may differentiate itself from or emulate its peers. If Republican educational leaders continue down this path, we must offer a robust research-based rebuke of their politics and provide actionable solutions for citizens to engage in resistance. The essence and strength of the U.S. is its citizens' diverse backgrounds, complex histories, and limitless futures. It is non-negotiable that students must learn about the genuine successes and

failures of our nation and the world, instead of studying the distorted version of history Republicans deem worthy of teaching.

In essence, this research not only served as a critical examination of the 2021 standards revision process but also as a catalyst for broader discussions on the role of political ideologies in shaping educational practices and outcomes. By engaging with these complex issues, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of the challenges and opportunities inherent in the intersection of politics and education, ultimately advocating for informed, evidence-based approaches to educational policymaking and implementation.

Research Questions

My analysis of the discourse produced during the 2021 State Board of Education social studies standards revision process was guided by three questions:

RQ1: How did the ideologies of the board members appear in the latent discourse of the state standards?

RQ2: How did these political actors embed their political beliefs in the state standards?

RQ3: To what extent do the North Carolina Essential Standards for social studies incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups, and how are these perspectives represented?

Theoretical Framework

In educational spaces, understanding and addressing the complexity of race and its impact on systems and policies is essential to this study. Critical Race Theory (CRT) emerges as an influential framework that explains the dynamics of racial inequality, highlighting its pervasive power within societal structures. CRT scholars Delgado et al. (2017) note, “The critical race theory (CRT) movement is a collection of activists and scholars engaged in studying

and transforming the relationship among race, racism, and power" (pg. 3). As the state social studies standards play a vital role in shaping the curriculum teachers will use, it is necessary to analyze the standards for implicit and explicit biases that mirror broader societal inequalities, particularly around race. This study achieves that by employing Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) as a companion to CRT to unveil the underlying power structures and ideologies of the North Carolina State Board of Education, which yields power over the formation and approval of the state standards. This interdisciplinary approach allows the researcher to deconstruct the language board members use to analyze how minority groups are silenced within the state standards (Delgado et al., 2017). These themes will be discussed further in subsequent chapters.

Structural Outline

Chapter 1 provides a high-level overview of the study, including relevant background information and the current status of social studies state standards in North Carolina. This chapter also describes the purpose of the study and identifies the research questions. Chapter 2 conducts a comprehensive review of the relevant literature, specifically focusing on the rise of standards-based reform and its ramifications for teaching and learning in public schools. Drawing upon scholarly insights, the chapter explores the multifaceted dimensions of standards-based reform, interrogating its implementation challenges and pedagogical implications. The discussion underscores the seminal role of political dynamics in shaping educational policy, particularly within the context of standards development and revision. While existing studies have analyzed the outcomes of prominent policies such as No Child Left Behind and Race to the Top, there remains a notable gap in scholarship regarding the influence of political ideologies on the standards-making princess. In this vein, the chapter foregrounds the need for research that explains how divergent ideological perspectives, ranging from liberal to progressive to far-right,

may impact the inclusivity and diversity of classroom instruction. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology employed in the study, emphasizing the suitability of qualitative inquiry for unpacking the complex interplay of political forces within the standards revision process. With a primary focus on the North Carolina State Board of Education, the chapter situates the research within the framework of Critical Discourse Analysis. This methodological approach enables a nuanced examination of discursive practices and power dynamics (Gee, 2014). The building tasks set forth by Gee (2014) are central to this endeavor, which provides a structured framework for unearthing the Significance, Connections, and Sign Systems embedded within the standards revision process. Chapter 4 offers a detailed discussion of the 18 questions used for analysis in the study and addresses how the inquiry answers the three main research questions. Lastly, Chapter 5 discusses the findings from the data and implications of social studies policy in North Carolina and identifies areas for future research.

Chapter Summary

North Carolina and the U.S. have become increasingly diverse in recent decades (Zeichner, 2021). This rich diversity brings cultures together to share their food, clothing, stories, traditions, and histories. No two experiences are the same, but all should be celebrated.

One of the best places to celebrate the diversity of our nation and share its full spectrum of narratives of success, failure, and hard truths is the classroom. Schools can have a profound impact on youth when we provide space for their creative minds to critically assess the world in which they live. It should be of the utmost importance for our elected and appointed leaders to foster healthy educational environments that seek to understand, from a variety of viewpoints, how our nation came into being.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

As Americans continue to be divided on the role education should play in our country, conservatives, liberals, and independents find common ground in the notion that the current system is failing our youth. As researchers Deborah Meier and Susan Harman (2008) observed, "too many Americans have bought into the idea that most of our nation's problems can be blamed on our school system, and that the only way to solve them is through 'school reform'" (p. 79). This chapter will provide a comprehensive overview of the research literature related to the standards review process in North Carolina, with particular attention to standards-based reform efforts the federal and state governments have implemented over the past 40 years and how these reforms have impacted social studies education. Additionally, this chapter will discuss briefly political influence on public education. This focus will illuminate areas in which existing research is inadequate and questions that warrant further investigation.

The Modern Education System

By the 1970s, the education community at large began noticing improvements in the achievement gaps between racialized groups in the nation. In the U.S., the *National Assessment of Educational Progress* (*NAEP*), published by the U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, began reporting data on the achievement of White and Black students at the ages of 9, 13, and 17 in 1969 (McClure, 2005). This data showed a narrowing in learning gaps, with Black students' achievement on the rise (McClure, 2005).

However, many of those who celebrated the success of narrowing the gap became concerned about Black student achievement by the late 1980s and early 1990s as the gap began to widen again. McClure (2005) notes, "This reversal was thought to have several causes. Social conditions deteriorated, rates of child poverty increased, and an increasing differentiation in

teaching and learning prevailed in schools serving disadvantaged versus those educating advantaged students" (p. 6). Within a broader context, the racial gap in student achievement represented one of many issues the educational community and society became concerned with following the publication of the National Commission on Excellence in Education's (NCEE) 1983 report, *A Nation at Risk*.

According to NCEE member Gerald Holton (1984), "The National Commission on Excellence in Education was set up in August 1981, by the secretary of education, Terrel H. Bell, acting at President Reagan's request" (p. 2). The commission's purpose was to diagnose the problems in the public education system and initiate reform on a grand scale (Holton, 1984). At the conclusion of its work, the NCEE released its final report titled *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*. The report identified five areas for reform the commission believed would improve the educational system: content, standards and expectations, time, teaching, and leadership and fiscal support (National Commission on Excellence in Education (NCEE), 1983). The commission offered a recommendation for each of these areas and actions to guide school systems in implementing the recommendations.

The report received significant media attention and triggered concern about public education for many across the country. Unfortunately, the influential report had more negative than positive effects on the public school system (Albrecht, 1984; Bell, 1993; Borek, 2008; Bracey, 2002; Holton, 1984; Tanner, 1993). In "Reflections One Decade After 'A Nation at Risk,'" Secretary Bell (1993) observed, "The intent of *A Nation at Risk* was to call the attention of the American people to rally around their schools. No one intended for teachers to receive the blame that was heaped upon them" (p. 593).

The irony of Bell's reflection is the lack of discussion at the time the report was issued around President Reagan's antipathy toward the Department of Education (Holton, 1984). How could the nation rally around public education when its leader did not support the system? Nonetheless, *A Nation at Risk* remains the bedrock of our current educational system. For example, one section of the report, Recommendation B: Standards and Expectations, states, "We recommend that schools, colleges, and universities adopt more rigorous and measurable standards, and higher expectations for academic performance and student conduct" (NCEE, 1983, p. 121). Implementing this recommendation included establishing standardized tests and more rigorous content for students.

Missing from the research on the widening student achievement gap at this time was an exploration of the context in which school systems operated and, in some cases, issues within the school systems themselves. McClure (2005) mentions briefly that educational leaders believed several factors contributed to the decline in Black student achievement, such as an increase in child poverty rates. However, researchers during that period needed to investigate the true impact of those issues as McClure was one of the few researchers who acknowledged that factors external to schools could influence student achievement.

As national leaders began to champion standards-based reform, there was little accompanying effort to identify or address social factors that harmed African American communities and thereby undermined Black student achievement. Examples include Nixon's War on Drugs, the FBI operation COINTELPRO, and the loss of Black school professionals during integration.

The Standards-Based Reform Solution

Although the decline in overall student academic growth and the widening achievement gap between White and Black students in the late 1980s and early 1990s had multiple causes, state and federal leaders turned to standards-based reform as the solution to remedy these problems. There are many definitions of standards-based reform and many perspectives on the best approach to implementing reform efforts. Hamilton et al. (2008) note that although there is no universally accepted definition of standards-based reform, many discussions of reform efforts include some or all of the following features: academic expectations for students, alignment of the key elements of the educational system to promote attainment of these expectations, assessment of student achievement, decentralization to give schools more influence over curriculum and instruction, support and technical assistance to foster improvement of educational services, and accountability.

Educational reform in the post-*A Nation at Risk* era began at the state level, with state governors across the country making education a top priority as President Ronald Reagan was not a champion of creating systemic change in public education, even though it was his administration that put the nation on alert (Clabaugh, 2004). As President, Reagan's goal was to eliminate the U.S. Department of Education; while he was not in doing that, he did find success in cutting the federal dollars spent on education (Clabaugh, 2004). At the 1986 meeting of the National Governors Association (NGA), education as public policy dominated the agenda in response to a public mandate to correct the perceived wrongs afflicting the nation's schools (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000).

As a result, states began developing policy for guiding curriculum content and learning outcomes and raising graduation rates (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). It was not until the 1989

NGA meeting, however, that the federal government started to support reform efforts through official policy (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000). President George H. W. Bush, the self-proclaimed "education president," joined the governors for their annual meeting to discuss reforms to the educational system. The outcome of that meeting was a bipartisan set of goals aimed at increasing student achievement (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000).

National Educational Strategy

That meeting became the springboard for the President's ambitious legislation. The centerpiece of President Bush's educational agenda was his proposal entitled "America 2000: A National Educational Strategy." President Bush presented his vision to Congress in the spring of 1991, formalizing the goals that were co-created with the NGA years prior (Staton & Peeples, 2000). Aspects of the legislation included voluntary national testing at certain grade levels, merit pay for teachers, and federally supported school choice vouchers (Staton & Peeples, 2000). America 2000 ultimately failed to become law, as Congress did not have enough votes to pass the legislation. However, the Bush administration was able to use executive branch funds to help "jump-start the work of professional associations in developing national standards" (Schwartz & Robinson, 2000, p. 178).

The first president to be successful in implementing standards-based reform was President Bill Clinton. Clinton, who was deeply invested in public education, served as governor of Arkansas during the Bush administration and was instrumental in pushing educational reform among his colleagues (Heise, 1994). Subsequently, under the leadership of his administration, Congress passed the "Goals 2000: Educate America Act" in 1993, directing millions of federal grants to states to develop state curriculum standards (McClure, 2005).

The Clinton administration continued to double down on its efforts to implement standards-based reform by working to further codify the practice. Turning again to Congress during the reauthorization of Title I of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, it changed the language of the law to mandate that for Title I schools to continue receiving federal funds, states must develop standards, assessments, and accountability systems (Superfine, 2005). This marked a significant step toward cementing the standards-based reform effort, as schools that receive Title I funds are often located in poor neighborhoods that rely heavily on federal support.

State Level Education Reform: The Virginia Example

Under the Clinton administration, states continued to take the lead in the reform movement. Education professors van Hover et al. (2010) note that "Virginia was at the forefront of this movement through the efforts of Republican Governor George Allen, who took office in 1993 and initiated a controversial standards-based reform effort" (p. 1). Central themes of the Virginia standards-based reform included creating rigorous standards and measuring those standards through aligned high-stakes assessments; rating schools and reporting school and district performances; and revising the standards of accreditation for schools and imposing consequences on schools that failed to perform adequately (van Hover et al., 2010).

Notably, van Hover et al. (2010) discuss Virginia Tech professor emeritus Dan Fleming's characterization of the Virginia standards as "weak, ethnocentric and suffering from content overload/inappropriate content at the elementary grade levels" (p. 3). Fleming's response in the 1990s aligns with the National Council for Social Studies' response to the current standards revision process occurring in Virginia. Virginia and many other states are currently creating

ethnocentric social studies standards that deemphasize or omit the experiences of minoritized groups (Cline, 2023).

Post-*Goals 2000* Reform

The five-year reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 in 2001 allowed another president to place his stamp on public education. As states implemented various reforms following *Goals 2000*, President George W. Bush's administration began to insert its politics into the American landscape. In education, this took the form of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001, signed into law in January 2002. Provisions of the law included affirming the commitment to testing and accountability in schools and developing content standards in reading and mathematics with tests linked in grades 3-8 (Linn et al., 2002).

Prior to the passage of NCLB, Linn et al. (2002) analyzed data from *Education Week*, which found that only nine states had standards-based testing in grades 3-8. NCLB provided more federal oversight to hold states responsible for implementing standards-based reform. A major aspect of the law that was intended to facilitate the reform effort was the requirement for states to ensure that students meet adequate yearly progress (AYP) (Linn et al., 2002).

Linn et al. (2002) detail some of the AYP standards set by the law as follows:

1. States must develop AYP statewide measurable objectives for improved achievement by all students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.
2. AYP must be based primarily on state assessments, but must also include one additional academic indicator.
3. The AYP objectives must be assessed at the school level. Schools that have failed to meet their AYP objective for 2 consecutive years will be identified for improvement.

AYP was anchored by content standards that states were instructed to create as a part of NCLB. The process of learning would proceed as follows: 1) states developed content standards, 2) instruction was based on those standards, 3) students completed assessments (some loosely tied to the standards), and 4) states reported data on students' progress and held school professionals accountable for those results (Linn et al., 2002).

Educators were concerned about many issues in this latest iteration of reform. One major concern involved testing and its effects on teaching. Education professor Theoni Smyth (2008) protested, "High-stakes testing is forcing instruction to change from exploratory, lifelong learning to teaching to the test through drill and kill" (p. 134). Failing to meet AYP and being labeled an "underperforming" school was not the goal of any district leader or school-based professional, yet teaching to achieve AYP can limit teacher autonomy in the classroom.

Meeting AYP was the new standard for schools with local educational leaders prioritizing student achievement on tests in the NCLB era. Deal (1985), as cited in Fusarelli (2004), observes, "Teachers and administrators often use achievement sources, for better or worse, as education's bottom line scores are [often the] prime indicator of instructional success" (p. 79). In this environment, the standards become the vehicle that guides instruction. Even if the tests do not always align closely with the standards, it is the expectation from the top—the U.S. Department of Education itself—that systems will be uniform, and instruction will be based on these standards.

Even More Reform? The Common Core

The 2008 election cycle ushered in a shift from the policies established during the Bush administration as a new president with opposing political views was inaugurated. When President Obama took office, he inherited many of his predecessor's issues, as the country faced

the worst economic outlook in decades. In response, the Obama administration, working with Congress, passed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) of 2009 (McGuinn, 2012).

Researcher Ulrich Boser (2012) highlights, "the law had a very simple mission: kick-start an economic recovery through strategic investment" (p. 7). For education, that meant a $4.35 billion dollar investment known as Race to the Top (RTTT) (McGuinn, 2012). The RTTT grant program was intentionally developed to be different from the mandates and forced compliance used in previous education solutions employed by the federal government, as it was incentive based (McGuinn, 2012). Although RTTT was voluntary, many aspects of the plan required following policies aligned with the Obama administration's view of educational reform.

The administration evaluated states' grant applications in the following priority areas: developing common standards and assessment; improving teacher training, evaluation, and retention policies; creating better data systems; and adopting preferred school turnaround strategies (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.-b, as cited in McGuinn, 2012). As in previous reform efforts, standards were a key component. The new focus, however, was on college and career-ready standards designed to prepare students for college without the need for remediation and to provide them with the skills needed for post-secondary employment (Miller & Hanna, 2014).

One of the most recent nationwide efforts in the standards-based movement at this time was the creation of the Common Core State Standards. In the report, *Year Two of Implementing the Common Core State Standards: States' Progress and Challenges,* Researchers Kober and Rentner (2012) note

> As of January 2012, 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics developed through the leadership of the National Governors Association and the Council of Chief State School Officers. (p. 1)

This information is significant because of the impact common core standards have on the teaching profession by reinforcing standards as the holy grail of systemic reform in this country. The report found that states had aligned the academic content of teacher preparation programs with the common core standards, created statewide professional development initiatives to support common core instruction, and modified or created teacher evaluation systems that hold educators accountable for student mastery of the common core standards (Kober & Rentner, 2012).

When teachers' evaluations are linked to students' performance on tests based on the standards they teach, teachers often focus on the standards as they are written (Hornbeck, 2018). If teachers feel forced to focus on the standards, what happens when the standards are not inclusive of everyone's story? What happens to the sense of self among children from historically marginalized groups if they are (intentionally or unintentionally) excluded from the standards?

The election of former President Trump led to a shift in many of the norms of Washington, D.C., as he ran a campaign touting how his administration would be a stark contrast to those before him. Within the U.S. Department of Education, long-held traditions around school reform from past Republican and Democratic presidents and policy initiatives introduced by the Obama administration were reversed to take a different direction. The Trump campaign's

ideas were put into action when the Senate confirmed Betsy DeVos to lead the U.S. Department of Education in February 2017 (Kaplan & Owings, 2018).

Kaplan and Owings (2018) describe DeVos as a "billionaire philanthropist, businesswoman, Republican mega donor, and long-time school choice advocate" (p. 58). Bifulco et al. (2009) defines school choice as "programs that separate a family's choice of school from its choice of residence" (p. 74). Historically, school attendance has been based primarily on a student's home address. However, with school choice options, parents can send their children to the school of their choice based on personal preference.

The vast majority of the literature on education under this administration focuses on DeVos' inexperience in public schools and the push for less government regulation of education (Barkan, 2017; Jimenez & Flores, 2019; Kaplan & Owings, 2018; Powell, 2017). For instance, Jimenez and Flores (2019) discuss how the U.S. Department of Education, under the leadership of DeVos, proposed policies that would delay, weaken, or eliminate protections for various groups of students. Such protections, like school discipline guidelines, were introduced by the Obama administration to address concerns that African American students were being expelled at higher rates than those of their peers. However, in 2019, the guidelines were rescinded (Jimenez & Flores, 2019).

Social Studies Education in the National Context

The field of social studies was not immune to the effects *A Nation at Risk* had on education in the decades following its publication. Like other professional organizations, several social sciences-aligned organizations began creating national standards during the standards-based reform movement. As Mathison et al. (2001) note, "With the relative success of the 1989 National Council for Teachers of Mathematics (NCTM) curriculum and evaluation standards,

other associations, including a number in the social studies, have joined the movement with high hopes" (p. 87).

Throughout the history of the field, the social studies have continually faced an identity crisis. Ross et al. (2014) posed the question, "What is the purpose of social studies?" According to their research, its five main purposes are: (1) social studies as citizenship (or cultural) transmission, (2) social studies as social science, (3) social studies as reflective inquiry, (4) social studies as informed social criticism, and (5) social studies as personal development (Ross et al., 2014).

Jorgensen (2014) offered another perspective on the purpose of social studies in schools. Jorgensen (2014) argues that social studies classrooms should be spaces that encourage reflective thinking about society. This way of teaching pushes students beyond traditional memorization and toward issues-centered education. Teachers who utilize this perspective create social studies classrooms that engage in social justice learning (Jorgensen, 2014). There is no one "right" way to teach the subject, which is part of the beauty of the field of study. The ability of students and teachers to engage with the social sciences from the perspective of their own lived experiences and unique interests allows everyone to find where they fit.

During the rise of the standards-based reform era, many national organizations began producing their own standards. Some organizations used money appropriated by Congress through Goals 2000 for this purpose; for example, the National Center for History used such funds to create standards that supported their discipline (Lobes, 1998). Other organizations that created standards during this time included the Center for Civic Education, which established its National Standards for Civics and Government in 1994; the Geography Education National Implementation Project, which developed the Geography for Life: National Geography

Standards in 1994; and the National Council for Economic Education, which created the Voluntary National Content Standards in Economics in 1997 (Kenna & Russell, 2018).

With so many ways to structure social studies standards at the state level, there was no uniform approach across the country. Lobes' (1998) review of social studies standards implemented during the 1996-1997 academic year identified three main categories for the standards. Thirty-one states established standards that were interdisciplinary and followed a social studies approach to teaching and learning created by the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS; Lobes, 1998). Eight states created history-social science standards in which "history integrates geography, economics, and civics as well as the other social sciences" (Lobes, 1998, p. 230). Finally, six states established social science-based standards, which Lobes (1998) defines as follows: "Social science standards share the goals of citizenship education with the NCSS standards and include the four general categories of history, geography, economics, and civics" (p. 228).

No Child Left Behind

In the years following the establishment of NCLB in 2002, numerous debates occurred within the social studies profession about the impact of standards-based reform on social studies instruction. A major concern for social studies educators and researchers was the lack of time given to social studies in schools, particularly elementary schools (Fry, 2009; Misco, 2005; Pace, 2007). Ross et al. (2014) suggest, "NCLB has not been kind to social studies as a school subject. The NCLB emphasis on testing to meet 'adequate yearly progress' goals in literacy and mathematics severely limited the curriculum and instructional time in other subjects" (p. 36). There is a correlation between the amount of time a subject is given within the school day and the perceived importance of the subject. Though NCLB did not exclude social studies—its core

subjects included history, geography, civics and government, and economics—the law did not require testing in the subject matter (Burroughs et al., 2005).

What is implied, and at times explicitly stated, in the debate around time is how testing began to drive decisions in school systems. Tested subjects were prioritized in the scheduling of academic time at the expense of subjects like social studies and the arts. Burroughs et al. (2005) studied several states that implemented standardized testing for social studies and others that did not. In North Carolina, a state that did not test for social studies at the elementary level, the state's elementary school teachers were asked to respond to survey questions regarding their social studies instructional time. The survey found that on average 30 minutes a week was spent on social studies, while teachers used more of their time to focus on language arts and math, subjects the state weighs heavily in school growth metrics (Burroughs et al., 2005).

When the researchers analyzed Texas, a state that did test for social studies, the results differed. Texas began testing social studies in middle schools using the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) to monitor student progress (Burroughs et al., 2005). The difference in the outcome of the Texas survey was that teachers reported tying their instruction closely to the TAKS objectives. This was especially true at lower-performing schools, where teachers reported that their school-based administration pressured them to teach to the objectives (Burroughs et al., 2005).

Social studies educators and other professionals faced a dilemma during the NCLB era. On the one hand, testing allowed a subject to be prioritized rather than left on the periphery of core subjects. On the other hand, when a subject is tested, it can cause teachers to lose autonomy over the way in which that subject is taught.

Common Core and Social Studies

Implementing the Common Core standards raised concerns among social studies professionals who feared that the discipline might be marginalized compared to English Language Arts and Math (Lee & Swan, 2013). Fortunately, visionary social studies scholars collaborated to address this issue by crafting the College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. Introduced as an inquiry-based approach, the C3 Framework prioritizes the development of skills and knowledge essential for students' college, career, and civic endeavors (Griffin, 2016). In response to the Common Core's emphasis on literacy, Lee and Swan (2013) note, "the C3 Framework defines the proper role of literacy in social studies, that is, literacy for a social studies purpose" (pg. 327).

The C3 Framework's foundation lies in inquiry and disciplinary literacies, providing structure for teaching and learning. Organized into four dimensions (Swan et al., 2013), each inquiry encompasses:

1. Developing questions and planning inquiries,
2. Applying disciplinary concepts,
3. Evaluating sources and using evidence, and
4. Communicating conclusions and taking informed action

To operationalize the C3 Framework, social studies professionals introduced the Inquiry Design Model (IDM), guiding students through the inquiry process with supporting questions that collectively contribute to answering the overarching compelling question (Swan et al., 2015). As students engage with the inquiry process, there are performance tasks that "provide students with opportunities for learning and teachers opportunities to evaluate what students know and are able to do" (Swan et al., 2015, p. 318). These tasks culminate into a summative

product in which students take informed action that demonstrates their mastery of curricula concepts and allows students to engage with their community.

The 2021 approved social studies standards for North Carolina are deeply rooted in inquiry as a pedagogical approach throughout students' academic journey. This intentional incorporation of inquiry-based learning is designed to foster critical thinking skills and active civic engagement from the early years of education. Beginning in kindergarten, the seeds of inquiry are sown as students are introduced to the concept, guided and modeled by their teachers. The K-2 inquiry standards lay the foundation, providing a supportive environment for young learners to develop an understanding of the inquiry process. As students progress to upper elementary schools, the 3-5 inquiry standards evolve, delving deeper into the methodology. Here, students are introduced to the crucial skills of Developing Claims and Using Evidence, marking a significant advancement in their ability to analyze information critically. During these years, the inquiry process becomes more immersive, with students actively engaged in the process, supported by their teachers and peers. Transitioning to middle school, the 6-8 inquiry standards continue to emphasize inquiry but reflect a shift in approach. While peer support remains integral, there is a noticeable shift towards fostering student independence and confidence in their inquiry skills. The intention is clear, to prepare students for the high school standards, where students are expected to navigate a complete inquiry process with a level of autonomy and mastery built upon the skills they have cultivated since kindergarten. The high school standards represent the culmination of the inquiry-based learning journey. Students are fully immersed in the inquiry process at this level, drawing upon the cumulative skills honed over the years. As with the previous levels, emphasis is placed on using inquiry as a mode of learning for course

content standards to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and to nurture the critical thinking skills necessary for active and informed civic engagement.

Politics & Education

Education has long been intertwined with the currents of politics, shaping and influencing the knowledge transmitted to generations. U.S. educational scholar Joel Spring (2011) emphasizes the strong links between politics and education by illustrating instances where the federal government attributes national challenges to perceived shortcomings in the educational system. Spring (2011) mentions, "After the launch of the Soviet satellite, President Dwight Eisenhower blamed the American schools for not preparing students as well as Soviet schools to excel in math and science" (pg. 16). Without evidence, Eisenhower and successive presidents shaped public opinion on education with crises they rooted in "failing" American schools. However, their rhetoric turned into congressional action, as modern presidents turned to policy changes at the federal level that impacted state and local policies. An example that Spring (2011) uses is President George W. Bush as he describes, "Federal aid linked school policies to national policy objectives. For instance, No Child Left Behind strengthened the power of state education authorities over local schools" (pg.3). With state education authorities being elected by affiliation with a political party or appointed by political figures, the state governor or legislature, they are operating under a particular political identity that guides their work. This point is underscored by the high-stakes environment ushered in by No Child Left Behind. Educational theorist Wayne Au (2007) mentions, "... educational accountability built on high-stakes standardized tests are in fact intended to increase external control over what happens in schools and classrooms" (pg. 236). The control over schools can differ based on the political party at the helm of decision-making. The U.S. Department has operated differently under the various administrations, as

Education Secretaries from President Bush to President Biden follow the lead of the president who is elected based on their political agendas.

The connection between politics and educational policy, such as No Child Left Behind or Race To The Top, has been successful because of political actors' intentional crafting of policy to shape public education in their image. For instance, educational scholar Michal W. Apple's work delves into the influence of the political Rights efforts to reshape education to align with their values. In his discussion, Apple (2001, 2012), offers the "New Right", Neo-conservative intellectuals and Authoritarian populist religious conservatives, have been able to convince middle class families that policy initiatives at the state and local level are essential to correct the wayward way of modern schools. Their aim isn't to increase the representation of marginalized groups, such as women or people of color, in educational spaces but to center teaching and learning on ideals such as "traditional values" and international competitiveness (Apple, 2012). This movement has deployed several tactics to achieve its goal of shifting policies, including messaging to middle-class families about school curriculums. Apple (2012) offers", the increasingly effective attacks on school curriculum for its anti-family and anti-free enterprise "bias," its secular humanism, its lack of patriotism, and it's supposed neglect of the knowledge and values of "western tradition" and of "real knowledge…" " (pg. 199). These actions on the political right are more than op-eds on fringe social media sites; they are the platforms that politicians have campaigned on.

Given the contemporary reemergence of concerns voiced in the standards revision efforts of the 1990s, the absence of research exploring the motivations of policymakers is a particularly timely and urgent issue. Researchers must move beyond descriptive analysis of how standards-based reform has impacted instruction and student outcomes to uncover the beliefs, values, and

motives embedded in the standard creation or revision processes. There is a void in the literature that captures the motivations of the state board of education members as political actors (Young et al., 2019; VanGronigen et al., 2022). Young et al. (2019) note, "Moreover, scholars seldom critically examine the people who populate state boards or interrogate their background or selection for the board, or make the public aware of the work in which these boards are engaged" (pg. 21). Only through such investigation can we uncover potential biases that may result in the undesirable outcomes of the past being replicated anew.

What is missing from the literature is a discussion of how state standards initiatives fared during this transitional time within the U.S. Department of Education. Since 1983, the federal government has had a vested interest in state educational standards, and research has been abundant on the effects of standards-based reform. However, there was a steep drop in available research during the Trump years.

Conclusion

When *A Nation at Risk* was published in 1983, it raised concerns among educational leaders and the public about student achievement in the U.S. and the widening achievement gap between White students and their Black peers. Many plans to address these concerns were presented in the years following the report's release. However, by the early 1990s, leaders across the political spectrum coalesced around ideas from the standards-based reform movement.

This era ushered in an environment that prized accountability and testing in the field of education. Teachers were mandated to teach to standards that were tested at the end of the year, and test results were seen as score cards indicating how much students had learned and how effectively teachers were teaching. Over the years, the approaches taken by the standards-based reform movement varied based on the political party in control at the various levels of

government, but the premise of increasing student achievement remained. The Trump administration took a decidedly different approach to education from its predecessors as Trump's secretary of education, Betsy DeVos, promoted educational deregulation and returning the power of educational decision-making to the states (Jimenez & Flores, 2019).

Current literature has examined the effectiveness of standards-based reform and explored how various presidential administrations have made their mark on the movement. However, more research is needed to examine the impact of political influence on the standards-making process. Most existing studies discuss the outcomes of policies such as NCLB or RTTT but lack a clear analysis of the politics that influence policy decision-making. This is especially clear at the state level, where research is needed on how state actors use politics to influence what is taught in schools through the creation or revision of standards. Specifically, research is needed to illuminate how center-right and far-right ideologies, which tend to be less inclusive of diverse perspectives of their political peers on the left (Parker, 2019), can have a chilling effect on inclusive classroom instruction.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This study examined the discourse of the North Carolina State Board of Education during the 2021 standards revision process for social studies, focusing on exploring the diverging perspectives of board members aligned with conservative and liberal political ideologies. Through a comprehensive analysis of this discourse, insights were gained about the Board's impact on social studies education statewide.

Conservative political perspectives are increasingly shaping public school curricula nationwide, while liberal political actors continue to advocate for inclusive classroom practices. Thus, understanding the viewpoints of Republican and Democratic board members offers valuable insights into their vision for social studies in North Carolina. This research is particularly pertinent given ongoing debates within the Republican-controlled North Carolina General Assembly concerning various bills to reform instruction in the state. For example, one such bill under consideration during the 2023-2024 legislative session is House Bill 17, which proposes significant changes to the composition of the State Board of Education.

If enacted and ratified by North Carolinians through a ballot initiative, House Bill 17 would fundamentally alter the process of appointing Board members. Currently, Board members are appointed by the governor and approved by the general assembly; however, the proposed legislation would introduce a system whereby citizens elect Board members regionally. This potential shift in the appointment process could amplify political influence over the Board, consequently impacting the direction of social studies education in North Carolina's schools.

Research Questions

My analysis of the discourse produced during the 2021 State Board of Education social studies standards revision process will be guided by three research questions:

RQ1: How did the ideologies of the board members appear in the latent discourse of the state standards?

RQ2: How do these political actors embed their political beliefs into the state standards?

RQ3: To what extent do North Carolina Essential Standards for social studies incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups, and how are these perspectives represented?

Qualitative Discourse Analysis

Understanding how people and institutions exert power over learning is best achieved through qualitative research methods. Citing Hoinville and Jowell (1978) and Pope and Mays (1995), Meadows (2003) asserts,

> The aim of qualitative research is to help in the understanding of social phenomena in a natural rather than experimental setting with an emphasis on the meanings, experiences, attitudes and views of the participants rather than providing quantified answers to research questions. (p. 519)

Bureaucratic systems can often shield their intentions through internal processes and language that are not widely understood by the public. This study peeled back the layers of what board members said to make the invisible beliefs about and ideals of social studies education in North Carolina visible. Qualitative research is also appropriate for this study because the method allows for a complex, detailed understanding of these systems by going directly to the source (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The source this study primarily analyzed is the North Carolina State Board of Education.

Often, elected officials and political appointees with center-right and far-right affiliations employ buzzwords and phrases when discussing public education. These terms may include

woke, parent's rights, indoctrination, school choice, liberal agenda, Socialist, and Marxist. Such vocabulary evokes strong emotions in the public sphere and enables policymakers to advance potentially harmful practices within educational environments. Conversely, liberal-leaning elected officials and political appointees often emphasize diversity, equity, and inclusion within educational spaces, employing language reflective of these priorities. Analyzing the language used by both center-right and far-right as well as liberal and center-left politically affiliated individuals shed light on the potential consequences for teachers and students depending on which political party controls the North Carolina State Board of Education.

Theoretical Framework

This study seeks to make meaning from the expressed beliefs of members of the State Board who identify as center-right, far-right, and liberal politically. To guide this work, I employed the theoretical framework of critical race theory (CRT). Critical discourse analyst and theorist James Paul Gee (2014) supports the use of a theoretical framework. He observes, "First of all, any method always goes with a theory. Method and theory cannot be separated, despite the fact that methods are often taught as if they could stand alone" (p. 11). CRT operates as the lens through which I assess the discourse of the social studies standards revisions process.

CRT can be operationalized in education by using the theory as an analytical tool to address school inequalities, such as the privileging of some students' histories over others in social studies classrooms (Kumasi, 2011). Laws passed by Congress and state legislatures are the foundation of policies crafted by the U.S. Department of Education, state departments of education, and local school boards. These policies can have far-reaching consequences that either support inclusive learning environments or exclude various groups of students from the educational space. Legislative policy SCOS-012 requires the North Carolina Standard Course of

Study (NCSCOS) for subjects taught in North Carolina schools to be reviewed, revised, and implemented every five to seven years, as supported by state law (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2023). Through this process, the standards, which act as a springboard for curricula that are adopted at the local level, guide what most students learn in the state.

Educational gaps between White and Black students are not simply the result of bad actors but develop from a system of policies that work together to sustain inequitable practices (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). Educators and researchers can use CRT as a lens to review policies and to interrogate and challenge the policies' intended outcomes (Dixson & Anderson, 2018). Using CRT in the present study requires examining the standards review process critically to ensure that all students can see themselves within the social studies curriculum, and when diverse narratives are missing, to explore why.

Critical race theory is also key to this research because it encourages the exploration of themes in the social studies standards from multiple intersections. This is achieved through *intersectionality*, a term coined by scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in the early 1990s (Delgado et al., 2017). Intersectionality can best be defined as the belief that individuals and classes often have shared or overlapping interests or traits (Delgado et al., 2017). Students must be able to see their entire identities represented in the social studies standards. This representation is more than including stories of African Americans and other minority groups for inclusion; it intentionally creates standards representing students' collective identities. For example, when discussing the suffragist movement, it does students a disservice to only discuss the movement from the national lens but to include narratives from Black women as their experience differed from that of White women. Employing intersectionality and other CRT themes enables educators and researchers to call out intended or unintended bias present in policies—and ultimately, in the

standards that emerge from them—and work with policymakers to ensure equitable outcomes for all students.

As states pass new legislation around educational practices, critical race theorists can employ the theory to push back against race-neutral policies (Kumasi, 2011). With increasing frequency policymakers create policies using the phrase "parental rights" (Dixson & Anderson, 2018) to embed their harmful practices. What is unstated in this coded language is the damage that is done by excluding particular groups' histories from courses and creating policies that prohibit people from showing up as their true selves in educational spaces.

Research Procedures

Critical discourse analysis (CDA) is a relatively new research field. Huckin et al.'s 2012 article "Critical Discourse Analysis and Rhetoric and Composition" highlights the field's roots in Norman Fairclough's 1989 publication *Language and Power*. Fairclough's work was built on the field of critical linguistics, which was established by scholars in the United Kingdom (Huckin et al., 2012). While critical linguistics is primarily a research tool for text analysis, CDA evolved by incorporating more social, cognitive, and rhetorical theories to broaden the scope of analysis (Huckin et al., 2012).

CDA as a research field grew throughout the 1990s, following the creation of the journal *Discourse and Society* in 1990 and a symposium of the field's founders in 1991 (Huckin et al., 2012). Teun van Dijk (2015), one of CDA's founders, defines this approach as "discourse analytical research that primarily studies the way social-power abuse and inequality are enacted, reproduced, legitimated, and resisted by text and talk in the social and political context" (p. 466). Over the years, CDA has been used to explain various societal dynamics including gender inequality (Ahmad & Shah, 2019; Vogt, 2022), ethnocentrism (Lan & Navera, 2022; Payet &

Deshayes, 2019), racism (Trochmann et al., 2022; van Dijk, 2023), political discourse (Méndez Alvarado, 2023; Zhu & Wang, 2020), and institutional power (Dawood & Hameed, 2021).

Discourse analysis using CDA as a methodology can take many approaches. However, despite the variety of avenues available, all analysts focus on the role of discourse in the (re)production and challenging of dominance (van Dijk, 1993). To that end, I found Dianna Mullet's (2018) "A General Critical Discourse Analysis Framework for Educational Research" helpful in guiding my study.

Mullet draws on the perspectives of CDA scholars Kress (1990), van Dijk (1993), Fairclough (2001), and Wodak (2001) to create a general framework that allows analysts from varying disciplines to conduct research. Mullet (2018) explains, "The framework outlines a set of objectives in broad terms, giving the analyst space to select methods that best fit the scope and goals of the research problem" (p. 123). The adaptability of Mullet's framework allows me to analyze the State Board of Education's discourse on social studies standards through the lens of critical race theory. The discourse focuses on the North Carolina State Board of Education standards revision process for social studies. Special attention will be given to far-right and liberal political ideology during the revision process. Table 3.1 provides the framework Mullet created to allow researchers to adapt CDA to their particular research focus.

Table 3.1

Mullet's (2018) General Analytical Framework for CDA

Stage 1: Select the discourse	Select a discourse related to injustice or inequality in society.
Stage 2: Locate and prepare data sources	Select data sources (texts) and prepare the data for analysis.
Stage 3: Explore the background of each text	Examine the social and historical context and producers of the texts.
Stage 4: Code texts and identify overarching themes	Identify the major themes and subthemes using choice of qualitative coding methods.
Stage 5: Analyze the external relations in the texts (interdiscursivity)	Examine social relations that control the production of the text; in addition, examine the reciprocal relations (how the texts affect social practices and structures). How do social practices inform the arguments in the text? How does the text in turn influence social practices?
Stage 6: Analyze the internal relations in the texts	Examine the language for indications of the aims of the texts (what the texts set out to accomplish), representations (e.g., representations of social context, events, and actors), and the speaker's positionality.
Stage 7: Interpret the data	Interpret the meanings of the major themes, external relations, and internal relations identified in stages 4, 5, and 6.

To analyze this discourse, various forms of data were compiled to create the corpus. The textual corpus can be used to comb through the discourse (text, talk, images) to find patterns that create, circulate, reinforce, and reflect dominant norms and ideology (Huckin et al., 2012). Mullet (2018) cites Luke's (1997) explanation that "The unit analysis is usually a whole text, but CDA sometimes focuses on smaller units such as sections of paragraphs" (p. 123). This flexibility is particularly important because the social studies revision process took place over a five-year time span and was not the sole focus of the meetings that occurred during this time.

I used the following data sources to build my corpus: State Board of Education meeting minutes and video recordings, drafts of the social studies standards, final social studies standards documents, and public comments collected by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI). All the data can be accessed publicly online using NCDPI databases and YouTube. NCDPI uses the software Simbli to warehouse its meeting minutes and I used this resource to assess meetings from June 2020 to June 2021, the approximate time frame for these discussions.

I accessed the audiovisual recordings of the corresponding meetings during that period using YouTube. The videos have closed captions, which were used to create transcripts of the meetings. Both data sets were trimmed to sections that focus solely on social studies standards, teaching, and learning. In total, 259 minutes of dialogue was analyzed between June 2020 and June 2021.Drafts of the social studies standards created during this period, including the final draft and the accompanying documents, are on NCDPI-created sites and the main NCDPI website. Lastly, public comments presented by board members during the February 2021 State Board of Education monthly meeting will be a part of the data set. Table 3.2 provides an overview of the meetings that were analyzed for the data set along with relevant information that was taken into account. Table 3.3 provides the name and political affiliation of board members who were on the State Board of Education during the 2020 meeting and who were on the board during the 2021 meetings.

Table 3.2

State Board of Education Meetings Relevant to Study

Meeting Date	Minutes of social studies discourse analyzed	Discourse Overview
June 4, 2020	60 Minutes	Delayed adoption of social studies standards for the standards writing team to rewrite standards with increased diversity and representation.
January 6, 2021	73 Minutes	Draft four of the standards was presented for adoption. Superintendent Truitt and Lt. Gov Robinson new to the Board and adoption again delayed allowing them to review standards. Additionally, conservative push back to select terms included in the draft.
February 3, 2021	87 Minutes	Social studies standards adopted after debate. Three terms changed in the standards at the request of conservative board members. Superintendent Truitt offers a preamble to the standards as a compromise.
June 2, 2021	39 Minutes	Supplemental documents to the standards adopted by the board.

Table 3.3

Board Members on State Board of Education

Board Members at 2020 Meeting	Board Members at 2021 Meeting
GOP Appointed/Elected Board Members	
Eric Davis, Chairman, Member at Large	Eric Davis, Chairman, Member at Large
Dan Forest, Lieutenant Governor	Mark Robinson, Lt. Governor
Dale Folwell, State Treasurer	Dale Folwell, State Treasurer
Dr. Olivia Oxendine, Sandhills Education Region	Dr. Olivia Oxendine, Sandhills Education Region
Todd Chasteen, Northwest Education Region	Todd Chasteen, Northwest Education Region
Amy White, North Central Education Region	Amy White, North Central Education Region
DEM Appointed/Elected Board Members	
Reginald Kenan, Southeast Education Region	Reginald Kenan, Southeast Education Region
Alan Duncan, Vice Chairman, Piedmont-Triad Education Region	Alan Duncan, Vice Chairman, Piedmont-Triad Education Region
JB Buxton, Member at Large	Jill Camnitz, Northeast Education Region
Jill Camnitz, Northeast Education Region	James Ford, Member At-Large
James Ford, Southwest Education Region	J Hall, Member At-Large
J Hall, Member At-Large	Dr. Donna Tipton-Rogers, Western Education Region
Dr. Donna Tipton-Rogers, Western Education Region	
Non-Voting Members	
Mark Johnson, State Superintendent of Public Instruction, Chief Administrative Officer, and Secretary to the Board	Catherine Truitt, Secretary to the State Board & Superintendent, Department of Public Instruction
Mariah Morris, 2019 Burroughs Wellcome Fund NC Teacher of the Year Advisor	Dr. Tony Jackson, 2020 Superintendent of the Year Advisor
Matthew Bristow-Smith, 2019 Wells Fargo North Carolina Principal of the Year	Mariah Morris, 2019 Burroughs Wellcome Fund NC Teacher of the Year Advisor
Tabari Wallace, NC Wells Fargo Principal of the Year Advisor	Maureen Stover, 2020 Burroughs Wellcome Fund North Carolina Teacher of the Year
	Matthew Bristow-Smith, 2019 Wells Fargo North Carolina Principal of the Year
	Kisha Clemons, 2020 Wells Fargo NC Principal of the Year
	Brenda Stephens, Local Board Advisor
	Nate Kolk-Tomberlin, High School Senior Advisor
	Bryce Womble, High School Junior Student Advisor

Note: Mr. Buxton's term had expired when the state board convened for their first meeting in 2021.

Discourse Background

The focus of this discourse analysis are the social studies standards that guide instruction for public schools in North Carolina. Thus, familiarity with the State of North Carolina's educational landscape and the North Carolina State Board of Education is necessary to understand the context of the discourse. Public Schools First NC, a nonpartisan nonprofit focused on public education, commissioned a report during the 2021-22 academic year that provides an overview of public education in North Carolina.

At the conclusion of the 2021-22 academic year, 1,429,275 students attended public schools in NC, representing 77% of the state's student population (Public Schools First NC, 2022). The other 23% of students is shared between charter, private, and home schools across the state. There is currently a trend towards non-traditional schooling options in the state, as about 10 years ago the student population in public schools was approximately 87% (Public Schools First NC, 2022). Although this report did not identify the racial composition of the student population, NCDPI's (2019) *Changes in North Carolina K-12 Population* data showed that about 47% of the student population is White, 25% Black, 18% Hispanic, 4% Asian, and 6% Other. This data shows increased diversity in racial makeup and school type within the state in comparison to previous years.

The Public School First NC report reflected the mix of positive and negative trends the state is currently experiencing. Some highlights of the report include data that North Carolina has the highest number of National Board-Certified in the U.S., the gold standard in teaching, and that 73.3% of state's schools met or exceeded academic growth as measured by end-of-grade/course tests (Public Schools First NC, 2022). As the state recovers from pandemic learning loss, it is the goal of educational leaders at the local and state levels to see these trends increase.

An area of improvement for public education in the state centers around budget expenditures from the NCGA. Unfortunately, the Republican-led legislature has continued to divest from public schools. According to the report, the Education Law Center, a non-profit based in New Jersey that fights for justice and equity in education, gave North Carolina a grade of "F" on school funding and school funding growth (Public Schools First NC, 2022). In 2021-22, per pupil spending was the fifth lowest in the nation, teacher pay was 34th, and child poverty levels were the 10th highest (Public Schools First NC, 2022). If these trends continue, social studies instruction in the state could suffer, as districts cannot invest in professional development for teachers to provide standards-based, quality instruction. Also, if childhood poverty is not taken seriously, it can profoundly affect how students engage with instruction.

The State Board of Education leads public education within the Department of Public Instruction. Article XI, Section 4 of the state constitution lays out the formation of the board to oversee public education in the state (Granados, 2021). State law determines the makeup of the board, as NCDPI (2023) reports:

> The State Board of Education consists of the Lieutenant Governor, the Treasurer, and eleven members appointed by the Governor for eight-year, overlapping terms, subject to confirmation by the General Assembly. Eight of the appointed members of the board represent the eight education districts of the state. These districts are drawn by the General Assembly. Two high school students also are appointed as advisors to the State Board of Education. A high school junior is appointed each year for a two-year term. The current and prior year's North Carolina Teachers and Principals of the Year serve as advisors. Other advisors include a local superintendent and a local school board member.

The board is responsible for many managerial tasks, including approving state standards created by departments within NCDPI. NCDPI created the North Carolina Standard Course of Study (NCSCOS) Manual (NCDPI, 2023) as an internal policy document that discusses how standards are reviewed, revised, and implemented in the state. According to the document, Legislative Policy SCOS-012 mandates that subjects taught in North Carolina schools are guided by the North Carolina Standard Course of Study and that every five to seven years, standards must be reviewed for each content area by grade level (NCDPI, 2023).

The social studies standards currently being implemented across the state follow the guidelines in the document. The process starts with an internal review of the standards by program consultants within the Social Studies and Arts section of the Standards, Accountability, and Research Division. This review process, a perpetual cycle of five to seven years, elicits feedback from various stakeholders across the state through surveys, focus groups, and interviews (NCDPI, 2023). The process also includes researching relevant state and federal laws to ensure compliance with other educational organizations and alignment with peer states that have recently revised their standards (NCDPI, 2023). According to the NCSCOS manual (NCDPI, 2023), this review process "is designed to ensure clear, rigorous, and measurable standards that are easily understood by teachers, parents, and students" (p. 3).

If the data review committee determines that the standards in place at that time need to be revised, the process goes to the revision stage. The revision stage typically takes about 12 months, as a standards writing team is created and begins crafting new state standards for a given subject (NCDPI, 2023). NCDPI has explicit guidelines for how the team is formed, how they must complete the work, and how the mandated drafts are revised over time. For example, the

manual instructs teams that standards must be written in a "subject-verb-object" format (NCDPI, 2023).

Once the State Board of Education approves the final draft of the standards, implementation follows. The manual notes that implementation can take five to seven years, so some stages of the process overlap (NCDPI, 2023). The State Board of Education approved the current social studies standards in February 2021 on a 7-5 vote, primarily split along politically ideological lines.

Although this process is supposed to be apolitical, in the hyperpartisan educational crisis the nation faces it is possible for political influence to alter this process. Since the North Carolina Supreme Court made the rare move of reversing its opinion on the consequential *Moore v. Harper* decision this year, the NCGA can draw a supermajority within the state legislature that can further extend Republicans' political influence over and control of the State Board of Education and social studies instruction in the state.

Discourse Operationalized

Mullet's (2018) framework offers a general guide for conducting a critical discourse analysis. The work of Mullet (2018) and Gee (2014) makes clear that understanding language in use is not always a linear process. Coding the text and analyzing the internal and external relations in the texts happen concurrently in this study. Gee (2014) states, "Essentially a discourse analysis involves asking questions about how language, at a given time and place, is used to engage in the seven building tasks" (p. 121). Three of Gee's (2014) seven building tasks, and the questions an analyst can ask, that were used for this study are presented in Table 3.4.

Table 3.4

Gee's (2014) Seven Building Tasks of Language

Building Task	Example Discourse Analysis Question
Building Task 1: Significance	Question: How is this piece of language being used to make certain things significant or not and in what ways?
Building Task 6: Connections	Question: How does this piece of language connect or disconnect things; how does it make one thing relevant or irrelevant to another?
Building Task 7: Sign Systems and Knowledge	Question: How does this piece of language privilege or disprivilege specific sign systems (e.g., Spanish vs. English, technical language vs. everyday language, words vs. images, words vs. equations, etc.), or different ways of knowing and believing or claims to knowledge and belief (e.g., science vs. humanities, science vs. "common sense," biology vs. creation science)?

When conducting a study, these building tasks are anchored by various tools of inquiry developed by Gee (2014). The tools of inquiry include situated meanings, social language, figured worlds, intertextuality, discourse, and conversations. This method of inquiry blends the building tasks with the tools of inquiry to ask questions about a particular discourse. In doing so, the researcher is asking six targeted questions per building task being assessed. In total, Gee (2014) provides 42 questions an analyst can explore. For this study, 18 of the 42 questions guided the inquiry.

Although the various building tasks would provide a detailed description of the standards revision process, it is practical to focus on the building tasks that will most effectively guide the study to answer the three research questions. Thus, the relevance of building tasks 1 (Significance), 6 (Connections), and 7 (Sign Systems and Knowledge) make them the best

options to explore the discourse. Each building task will be used to answer one research question specifically, but the data collected from multiple tasks may overlap to provide analysis for the overall study.

Q1: How did the ideologies of the board members appear in the latent discourse of the state standards? will be explored by building task 6 (Connections). Gee (2014) explains, "We use language to render certain things connected or relevant (or not) to other things, that is, to build connections or relevance" (p. 19). As the National Republican Party began its crusade against inclusive social studies content by first attacking The 1619 Project, Republican leadership at the state level began joining the center-right and far-right push to change inclusive classroom instruction. Simultaneously, Democratic lawmakers in state legislatures introduced bills that sought to extend or protect social studies instruction, such as discussions on race. This building task showed how Democrat and Republican educational leaders in North Carolina sought to emulate their peers nationwide during the standards revision process for social studies. This building task will also explore how center-right, far-right, and liberal political ideologies sought to connect perceived issues of inclusive classroom instruction to their political opposition.

RQ2: How do these political actors embed their political beliefs into the state standards? was explored by building task 1 (Significance). Gee (2014) states, "for many things, we need to use language to render them significant or to lessen their significance, to signal to others how we view their significance" (p. 17). This building task allowed the research to explore how the process of creating the social studies standards in the current hyperpolitical environment, in which no Republican wants to be seen as a RINO (Republican In Name Only), could inspire center-right and far-right board members to call out specific topics they think are diverse. This building task will also explore how Democratic board members try to expand inclusive social

studies practices, following policies aligned with their peers in states across the country. Through the connections explored in the previous building task, this question identified the topics Republican and Democratic board members sought to keep in or out of the state social studies standards that fit the vision of their national party.

Lastly, RQ3: To what extent do North Carolina Essential Standards for social studies incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups, and how are these perspectives represented? will be explored through building task 7 (Sign Systems and Knowledge). Gee (2014) describes this task by stating, "We can use language to make certain sign systems and certain forms of knowledge and belief relevant or privileged or not in given situations, that is, to build privilege or prestige for one system or way of knowing over another" (p. 20). This building task was used to explore the inclusion of diverse narratives in the final version of the standards. By examining the standards revision process and the compromises made between the political right and left, the influence of center-right and far-right ideologies in creating the current standards will be illuminated.

The questions for analysis are:

1. Building Task 1: Significance: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, discourses, and conversations being used to build relevance or significance for things and people in context?
2. Building Task 6: Connections: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, discourses, and conversations being used to make things and people connected and relevant to each other or disconnected from and irrelevant to each other?

3. Building Task 7: Sign Systems and Knowledge: How are situated meanings, social languages, figured worlds, intertextuality, discourses, and conversations being used to privilege or disprivilege different sign systems (language, social language, other sorts of symbol systems) and ways of knowing?

Each compound question will be divided into individual questions for thorough discourse analysis. For example, Building Task 1 contains six specific questions, including: How are situated meanings being used to build relevance or significance for things and people in context? Breaking down the compound questions allows themes to emerge during the coding process, which can then be used to answer the guiding research questions.

The first tool of inquiry, situated meanings, arise when language takes on a specific meaning in a particular context (Gee, 2014). Gee (2014) uses the example of coffee to illustrate this point. When a person says, "the coffee spilled," the other person uses the context in which the words were uttered to determine whether a mop or a broom is needed. What the State Board of Education members say while discussing social studies instruction and standards was important in this inquiry to describe their stated and hidden beliefs on inclusive teaching practices in the discipline.

The next tool of inquiry, social language, is concerned with "who's doing what" in a discourse. At any given time within a discourse, who a person is trying to be and what they are trying to convey is the tool's primary focus. This practice does not happen haphazardly, as people often want to be recognized as a particular type of person doing a specific thing. As board members discuss social studies standards, they want to be publicly recognized as a specific type of person. For example, a Republican board member may want to be seen as a staunch

conservative, or a Democratic board member may want to be seen as a progressive advocate for education.

The third tool of inquiry is figured worlds. Gee (2014) notes, "The term 'figured world' has the advantage of stressing that what we are talking about here is ways in which people picture or construe aspects of the world in their heads, the ways they have of looking at aspects of the world" (p. 76). The board members' worldviews, and how those worldviews inform their perspectives on the social studies standards, came into focus during this inquiry.

Intertextuality, another tool of inquiry used in this discourse analysis, examines how spoken or written text borrows from other texts to make meaning (Gee, 2014). In the context of this study, intertextuality manifests through the utilization of public comments by board members to articulate and advocate for their respective stances on social studies education. Furthermore, intertextuality is evident in how board members strategically incorporate terminology, and narratives from individuals sharing similar political ideologies. By aligning themselves with these external textual resources, board members reinforce their ideological positions.

The last two forms of inquiry, discourse and conversations, can be assessed separately or together. Conversations are macro discussions the public holds that have clear sides (Gee, 2014). Conversations turn into a discourse when people combine language, actions, and interactions; ways of thinking, believing, and valuing; and the use of various symbols, tools, and objects to enact a particular sort of socially recognizable identity (Gee, 2014). For example, there are several national conversations about social studies instruction in schools. When a person not only takes a side while engaging in the conversation, but also wants to be recognized for their beliefs through their language and actions, the conversation becomes a discourse. As the board members

discuss the social studies standards, they engage in a conversation about state standards. However, when individual board members discuss the standards through the perspective of their own political lens and want others to recognize them as conservative or liberal, the conversation turns into a discourse.

The findings that result from analyzing materials in the corpus were used to build themes to understand board members' discourse around inclusive social studies standards. The primary platform this study used for analysis is Atlas Ti. Atlas Ti is a qualitative data analysis tool that allows for safe, password-protected data storage and analysis for researchers.

Conducting the Research

To begin the analysis, I started by identifying which State Board of Education meetings between January 2020 to June 2021 discussed the social studies revision process. Once those meetings were identified, I located the audio recording of the selected meetings on YouTube. YouTube also had transcriptions of the selected meetings. In total there were four meetings identified where the board discussed the social studies revision process (see table 3.2). The next step in the analysis process included time marking when the social studies revision was discussed at the board meetings and trimming the transcripts to match the audio. That information was then stored in a digital file with the agendas from the corresponding board meetings. Additionally, draft three of the standards, Draft four of the standards, the final approved standards, the PowerPoint the social studies team presented during the February 2021 meeting, and two emails that were read during the February 2021 meeting were stored in the digital file. After compiling the data, I first listened to the specific parts of the board meetings making general notes about what was discussed and by whom. To begin the next round of data analysis, I uploaded the transcripts to Atlas.Ti. Once the transcripts were uploaded, the meetings were labeled by the date

they occurred. Next, each speaker was noted on the documents by their name and political appointment, or elected affiliation, based on the initial review of the audio recordings per meeting. Subsequently, the transcripts were revisited multiple times, with each pass focusing on Building Task 6: Connections, but through a different tool of inquiry. Ultimately, looking at the transcripts six different times from a new angle. With each pass, I took notes on the documents about how the language a specific board member made about topics related to the social studies revision process significant or tried to lessen the significance of a social studies related topic through each tool of inquiry. I then went through the notes on each transcript grouping the topics by the tool of inquiry from each meeting and making one document per tool. After analyzing the transcripts, I then uploaded the public comments presented during the February 2021 meeting. I specifically used the intertextuality tool of inquiry to analyze the documents. From the analysis of their language, I was able to uncover themes, presented in chapter 4, that uncovered board members latent discourse about the 2021 social studies standards.

During the next round of analysis, I uploaded draft three, draft four, and the final approved 2021 standards, and the PowerPoint the social studies team presented during the February 2021 meeting. I first went through the document to note any high-level changes I could see between draft three and the final document. I then went through the documents six more times, each time using a different tool of inquiry focusing on Building Task 1: Significance. Notes that related to the tools of inquiry were made on draft four of the standards that highlighted changes made from draft three. Additional notes were made on the final version of the standards and the PowerPoint from the social studies team to show the last changes that were made to the standards before they were adopted. The data was compiled on another document, grouping the data by tool of inquiry. That data was used to build themes, presented in chapter

four, that related to question two. The same data was used again to answer research question three as the findings from research question two were descriptive enough to draw multiple meanings from. I used a different building task, Building Task 7: Sign Systems and Knowledge, to analyze the data a second time to answer question three.

Validity

Creswell and Poth (2018) describe the validation of qualitative research as the process of assessing the accuracy of the findings as best described by the researcher, as validation is specific to a researcher's goals, objectives, and methodology. They offer several strategies to obtain validation, including incorporating extensive field time, providing thick descriptions, and decreasing the distance between the researcher and participants (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Gee's (2014) work aligns with the view of Creswell and Poth in positing that providing thick descriptions of the discourse is key to having other researchers accept one's work.

Gee (2014) describes this issue as the frame problem (pg. 206). Essentially, the understanding of a piece of language can only be considered valid when a researcher widens the context enough to demonstrate that the interpretation of the language does not change. This is achieved in the study by collecting data from multiple meetings across multiple years to ensure that an utterance is not taken out of context, forcing a particular interpretation of what board members said.

Limitations

One limitation of this study is that it focuses solely on the standards revision process for social studies. Each subject within the state that has a standard course of study is subject to the same standards revision process. However, the sociopolitical climate at the time a subject undergoes the process and the degree to which that subject is politically fraught could determine

how political actors engage with any given subject's standards revision process. This study can best be generalized to other studies that analyze the creation or revision of social studies standards during times of political division.

Another limitation of this study is its scope. When students enter social studies classrooms, the many layers between the standards and their daily classroom instruction can ultimately affect what they learn. Although standards form the bedrock of classroom instruction, local school districts have the autonomy to select curriculums that facilitate the learning process for subjects. This step has the potential to allow additional political actors at the local level to control what is taught or not taught in social studies classrooms in their school district. Additionally, depending on the local school district, teachers have some control over what students learn in their classrooms. Again, teachers' politics are not taken into consideration in this study, although they can have significant implications for what students learn.

Positionality

The role of the researcher is essential in any study, as the researcher's perspective affects the study's design (Bourke, 2014; Dean et al., 2018; Soedirgo & Glas, 2020). In qualitative research, researchers practice *reflexivity* (Creswell & Poth, 2018), positioning themselves in their research by describing their background and how it informs their interpretation of information. This is significant as the researcher is a data collection instrument (Bourke, 2014).

Furthermore, critical discourse analysts are not neutral in their research aims. In fact, critical discourse analysts should explicitly state their sociopolitical stance (Taylor, 2001; van Dijk, 1993, 2015). This requires more than a simple statement of who I am as a person, incorporating a declaration of my belief system that guides my research. Using this methodology

demands that the researcher spell out their point of view and principles within their discipline and society (van Dijk, 1993).

The College Board revised the AP African American Studies framework after conservatives like Florida Governor Ron DeSantis came out against the framework that was being piloted across the country. The outcome, as journalists Anemona Hartocollis and Eliza Fawcett (2023) of *The New York Times* reported, was that

> the study of contemporary topics—including Black Lives Matter, incarceration, queer life and the debate over reparations—is downgraded. The subjects are no longer part of the exam and are simply offered on a list of options for a required research project.

The conservative critique of the course was one of many leveled against social studies instruction by the political right since former President Trump opposed The 1619 Project in 2020.

As someone who identifies as a progressive Democrat, the political opposite of those who espouse a conservative ideology, I reject the premise of the Republican stance on social studies education. On the contrary, I believe that teaching diverse perspectives in social studies classrooms should be mandatory. As a Black, queer man who is the descendant of enslaved Africans, from a professional lens, my pedagogy is also at odds with Republican thinking about social studies.

I believe in academic freedom—freedom to explore the full spectrum of narratives in our complex, interconnected world and to celebrate the contributions of diverse peoples in forming the world we know today, even while facing the hard truths of the past. History does not always shine a positive light on all players in society, but instead of covering up those stories, social science educators should feel empowered to confront them. Confronting stories of the past is not

intended to elicit White guilt in youth, as the political right has alleged, but to grow as a society from our collective past.

Chapter Summary

This study aims to analyze the values and beliefs held by center-right, far-right, and liberal politically aligned members of the NC State Board of Education, assessing the impact of those perspectives on the current social studies standards and examining how they may affect social studies instruction in the future. Qualitative research is most appropriate for this inquiry because it allows for a thick description of the spoken and written text produced during the standards revision process. Additionally, discourse analysis was used as an analytical tool to speak to the impact center-right, far-right, and liberal politically aligned members of the State Board of Education may cause in social studies classrooms across North Carolina (Gee, 2014).

Chapter 4: Findings

In educational policy making, decision-makers' language carries immense weight. It serves as a lens through which the essence of curricula and the underlying principles of learning environments are defined. This discourse communicates explicit directives and conveys implicit messages, signaling more profound ideologies and potentially influencing the dynamics of teaching and learning. This chapter delves into the discourse surrounding the development of the 2021 state social studies standards using Gee's (2014) seven building tasks of language as a method of inquiry. Taking into account the backdrop of political polarization, this chapter analyzes the active participation of various stakeholders in the standards development process through public comments and op-eds. The aim is to uncover and highlight the ideological undercurrents that permeated the standards development process. This analysis explores the complex interplay of political beliefs and sociocultural dynamics with educational policymaking by dissecting the language choices and rhetorical strategies employed by board members.

Research Questions

My analysis of the discourse produced during the 2021 State Board of Education social studies standards revision process will be guided by three research questions:

RQ 1: How did the ideologies of the board members appear in the latent discourse of the state standards?

RQ2: How did these political actors embed their political beliefs in the state standards?

RQ3: To what extent do the North Carolina Essential Standards for social studies incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups, and how are these perspectives represented?

Below, I discuss findings relevant to each research question. Throughout the analysis I referenced Gee's seven building tasks and identified relevant themes.

Ideologies of Board Members and the Latent Discourse of the State Standards

Through research question one, I sought to illuminate the board members' beliefs across the political spectrum, how those beliefs impacted the standards development, and how the board members voted for the finalized standards. For this question, I honed in on Gee's (2014) building task 6, ("connections"). The building task of connections served as a framework for analyzing how board members employed language to emphasize their beliefs and diminish the significance of others within their discourse throughout the 2021 state social studies standards development process. Table 4.1 outlines the tools of inquiry and the key assertions that each tool uncovered for the first research question.

Table 4.1

Findings for Research Question 1

Tool of Inquiry	Assertions
Situated Meanings & Social Language	• Board members across the political spectrum sought to establish validity for their positions by signaling their previous experiences as sources of expertise.
Figured Worlds	• Board members' advocacy for what to include and exclude were related to personal experiences. • Board members positioned their own or their students' racial identities in their arguments. • Board members from the political right push back on increased diversity in the state standards as it my
Intertextuality	• Public comments are presented during the February 2021 board meeting that are aligned conservative and liberal ideologies. Board members used these comments to further their stance on the pending social studies standards.
Discourse & Conversations	• The role of social studies education in public schools is a national conversation that governing bodies across the country are engaging in. • As board members engage in the conversation about the social studies standards it becomes a discourse as board members try to show their personal/political beliefs through their discussion.

Board Members Establish Themselves as "Experts"

From the perspective of discourse analysis, we can infer meaning from the language used within a specific context. According to Gee (2014), individuals utilize specific language within a given context—"their social language"—to signify group membership and a perspective relevant to the group. Gee (2014) states, "Social languages are different varieties of language that allow us to express different socially significant identities (e.g., talking and writing as a mathematician, doctor, or gang member) and enact different socially meaningful practices or activities (e.g., offering a proof in mathematics, writing a prescription in medicine, demonstrating solidarity with

a fellow gang member)" (pg. 44). In this perspective, the words used by State Board of Education members have situated meanings (Gee, 2014). Gee (2014) explains, "Situated meanings arise because particular language forms take on specific or situated meanings in specific different contexts of use" (pg. 65). In essence, words uttered by State Board of Education members are shaped by the specific context of the conversation at that time. Table

The analysis of the documentary evidence from the 2021 state standards development process revealed a notable pattern: board members across the political spectrum sought to establish validity for their positions by signaling their previous experiences as sources of expertise (e.g., social studies teacher, student of history). Board members used similar language to establish themselves as trustworthy sources of knowledge about social studies by highlighting areas of their identity that demonstrated expertise in this area. Examples of this discourse are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2

Examples of State Board of Education Members' Social Language

Board Meeting Date	Member Speaking/ Political Appointment	Statement
June 4, 2020	Mr. Ford, Democratic Appointee	"by trade I am a social studies teacher, still hold my license with the state . . . Whenever I do, in my professional work, and training or discussion, particularly around culturally responsive teaching"
January 6, 2021	Ms. White, Republican Appointee	"my um primary objectives as a former social studies teacher, I agree with you Bristow-Smith, it is important that we offer our students today a full and complete picture of the development of our nation"
January 6, 2021	Lieutenant Governor Robinson, Republican	"as a student of history, I truly believe that you do not need to include this type of language in the standards"
January 6, 2021	Dr. Oxendine, Republican Appointee	"I have designed curricula, I teach a graduate-level course at Pembroke"
February 3, 2021	Dr. Tipton-Rogers, Democratic Appointee	"history should be the study of change, the study of growth and the study of knowledge. With the undergraduate degree and graduate degree both in History, I can say . . ."

It is evident from the analysis that the State Board of Education members strategically employed language to assert their authority and credibility in discussions surrounding the development of state standards. By emphasizing their past experiences as social studies teachers or students of history, they aimed to position themselves as knowledge and trustworthy sources within the discourse. This pattern of signaling expertise not only served to validate their positions but also underscored their proximity to the subject matter, thereby reinforcing their capacity to make informed judgments. Through this deliberate linguistic strategy, board

members sought to assert their legitimacy and influence the development of the social studies standards.

Board Members Personal Experience Guide Their Beliefs on Social Studies Standards

When we engage in conversations and discourse, our informed opinions are often shaped by our personal experiences in life. While our individual encounters play a significant role in our opinions, we also rely upon reading, research, and the experiences of others to broaden the foundation of our perspectives. The ways we see and discuss our feelings about the world comprise our "figured world" (Gee, 2014). Gee (2014) defines "figured worlds" as the "ways in which people picture or construe aspects of the world in their heads, the ways they have of looking at aspects of the world" (pg. 76).

While board members engaged in discussions around the social studies standards, their figured worlds seemed to guide their ideology. There is clear evidence that what they chose to advocate for or against being included in the standards was related to their personal experiences. This included previous work as a social studies as a teacher or student, the literature they read regarding social studies and standards development, and/or their personal views on democratic citizenship.

As board members grappled with what should and should not be included in the 2021 social studies standards, we can get a sense of their public identity. For example, the topic of race was a central part of the argument in developing the standards. Thus, board members strategically positioned their own or their students' racial identities within their arguments. Evidence pointed to the figured world the board members referred to as they discussed the standards (see Table 4.3).

Table 4.3

Examples of State Board of Education Members' Figured World

Board Meeting Date	Member Speaking/ Political Appointment	Statement
June 4, 2020	Mr. Ford, Democratic Appointee	"this week was, uh, [the] 99th anniversary of the bombing of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma and I think that's relevant because it wasn't until the HBO series the *Watchmen* came out last year that a lot of Americans even learned about that, uh, a prosperous Black community that was destroyed, right? And for me, I look at that and what that shows to me is that we are not properly covering American history, we are not bringing in stories, anecdotes, lived experiences beyond the traditional outlook"
January 6, 2021	Dr. Oxendine, Republican Appointee	"thank you again for involving the state advisory council on Indian education, the very valid voice of American Indian students in North Carolina"
January 6, 2021	Dr. Oxendine, Republican Appointee	"help that first-year fourth grade teacher understand the difference between marginalized groups, maybe indigenous groups, racial groups, so is there any overlap, is there, are we talking about distinct groups, just to help that teacher understand and be clear so that he or she can design good lesson plans"
January 6, 2021	Ms. White, Republican Appointee	"I'm very supportive of the inclusive language about giving a very robust and inclusionary picture of the development of our nation including the egregious and aggravated practices of slavery and many of the systemic issues that have impacted our nation as a result of slavery. However, I express with no control over curriculum, which is absolutely determined by the local district, I do worry that individual input may um use the new language to bring um to bring as Ms. Camnitz stated in her opening statement on guilt into the classroom as opposed to a very proactive pro-unity approach"
January 6, 2021	Lieutenant Governor Robinson, Republican	"we are Americans uh and I think that's what we should be teaching our children. Um I certainly have a lot of questions about these standards . . . one of my biggest questions is this: as a student of public schools I don't ever remember a time when so-called marginalized groups weren't mentioned. Uh, I can remember all throughout my school and I was taught about the American Indians, I was taught about slavery"

Table 4.3 (continued)

February 3, 2021	Ms. Camnitz, Democratic Appointee	"we benefit from the vision of the Founding Fathers, we also owe to them and to our fellow citizens to continue their efforts toward a more perfect union. I believe we need to talk about racism, including systemic racism"
February 3, 2021	Mr. Davis, Republican Appointee	"well, I must admit that I do get angry when I feel that I'm being blamed for what happened before my lifetime, but one thing that makes me even angrier is when I'm told I can't handle the truth of my family's or my nation's history, as if somehow I'll be less proud to be a Davis or an American."
February 3, 2021	Mr. Ford, Democratic Appointee	"as we open up the potential to explore diverse perspectives, experiences, and outlooks [that] do not conform to the dominant traditions, there is a legitimate and palpable fear that we will lose the country as we know it"
February 3, 2021	Dr. Oxendine, Republican Appointee	"I'm pleased that the American Indian perspective is certainly in the standards"
February 3, 2021	Mr. Chasteen, Republican Appointee	"describing multiple destructive behaviors such as xenophobia or ethnocentrism are a dominant common thread, admittedly the standards ask for competing narratives but seem to place weighty focus on one dominant narrative. I believe it's best to teach students reality, the warts, the flaws, the failures, the evil, but also include perspectives of history over centuries and compared to about 197 other countries which I, in my job, get to visit a lot of those. Discrimination and oppression must be covered and it will be, yet the last thing I want to do is mislead students to think the U.S. is hopelessly bigoted, irredeemable, and much worse than most nations unless that were true, but I don't believe it is"

Racialized Identity

Key actors emerged as race became the focus of the discourse. Board members Mr. Ford and Lieutenant Governor Robinson, both of whom are African American, and Dr. Oxendine, who is Native American, repeatedly referenced their racial identities to further their claims during the standards development process. Mr. Ford and Dr. Oxendine utilized their racial identities to argue for a heightened emphasis on race within the standards. Conversely,

Lieutenant Governor Robinson employed his racial identity to advocate against such intense focus. This nuanced dynamic underscores the nature of discussions surrounding race in standards development, revealing how individuals with similar racial backgrounds may adopt divergent perspectives and strategies to shape policy outcomes.

In several meetings, Mr. Ford, a Democratic appointee, discussed the need to include multiple perspectives in the social studies standards by anchoring his comments with quotes and narratives involving African American scholarship. Mr. Ford noted in the June 2020 meeting that the draft three standards presented that day perpetuated past practices that excluded non-dominant narratives within the state standards, leaving the curricula from which local school districts could select less than representative of the North Carolina student population.

In addition to Mr. Ford's discussion of the 99th anniversary of the bombing of Black Wall Street in Tulsa, Oklahoma, he provided a metaphor for social studies comparing the field of study to a group picture. In the metaphor, he asserted, "people want to know two things: where am I after the picture is developed and how do I look?" In his comparison, Ford seems to be highlighting that from his worldview, social studies standards and curricula often center hegemonic (white, straight, male, Christian, etc.) narratives while relegating the narratives of minorities (Black, LGBTQIA, women, etc.) to the periphery (Camicia & Zhu, 2019; Crocco, 2001; King et al., 2012; King & Chandler, 2016; Martell & Stevens, 2017). Mr. Ford advocated for greater inclusion of diverse perspectives in the standards. He argued that students must learn about the history of African Americans and other minority groups not on HBO, but as part of their K-12 educational journey.

Dr. Oxendine, a Republican appointee, used much of her allotted time for comments to advocate for her Native American identity to be better represented in the state social studies

standards (see Table 4.3). At the June 2020 meeting, she noted that she speaks "as one state board member, as a citizen of North Carolina, a citizen of this county, a native citizen of this country." While Dr. Oxendine consistently advocated for better representation of Native American identity within the state social studies standards, her discussions were largely absent in the presentation of other racialized groups. Throughout various board meetings, she emphasized the importance of including Native American perspectives and experiences in the standards. For instance, during the February 2021 board meeting referenced in Table 4.3, she stated, "I hope that the American Indian voice, perspective, and the plight, as well as the progress of Indian people will remain as with other groups." Highlighting her exclusive focus on Native American representation, the most Dr. Oxendine mentioned about other minority groups was her statement "as with other groups." This singular focus distinguishes her approach from other board members like Mr. Ford, who advocated for the broader inclusion of racial identities within the standards. In her figured world, the plight of indigenous people seems to deserve representation in the state standards distinct from the stories of other underrepresented groups.

Unlike Mr. Ford and Dr. Oxendine, who used their racial identities to advocate for more inclusive standards, Lieutenant Governor Robinson argued in the January 2021 meeting that in his worldview, explicitly incorporating the language of non-dominant groups is not only unnecessary, but also divisive. In the meeting the Lieutenant Governor states, "…I do not like the divisive language in these standards, uh, as a student of history I truly believe that you do not need to include this type of language in the standards in order to be able to teach history…". The Lieutenant Governor, who joined the board in January 2021 following his election in November 2020, situated himself throughout the hearings/meetings as a staunch critic of the state social studies standards in development. The Lieutenant Governor's stance was perhaps most

significantly reflected in his comments at the January 2021 meeting, in which he challenged the very existence of "so-called" marginalized groups. It appears that to him no single group was on the periphery of social studies. He discussed his own schooling experience, in which he described learning about the topics Mr. Ford and Dr. Oxendine tried to advance in the standards.

The perspectives of Mr. Ford and the Lieutenant Governor create an interesting juxtaposition between two Black male board members with vastly different politics and opposing views on how explicit the state standards should be in presenting a diversity of perspectives. Despite initial appearances, an outsider might assume that Mr. Ford and the Lieutenant Governor share common ground in their advocacy for inclusivity and equity within state standards. However, upon closer examination of their discourse, their vastly different political ideologies and approaches become apparent. This dichotomy serves as a compelling illustration of the complexity inherent in addressing diversity and representation in educational policymaking. The contrast offers valuable insights into the interplay between personal backgrounds, political affiliations, and advocacy strategies in shaping educational discourse.

White Guilt

The racialized discourse surrounding the state standards also seemed to hint at "white guilt" as described by scholar Shelby Steele (1990). As the standards were updated between drafts three and four and the political conversations around social studies became increasingly polarized, some Republican-appointed board members began to echo talking points used by other Republicans across the country into their discussion about the 2021 state social studies standards. Gee (2014) referred to this as "intertextuality," in which spoken or written text is borrowed from another source to make meaning. Here, it seemed that board members validated their talking points by adopting language from those outside the board meeting to emphasize that

their perspectives were not isolated but instead representative of the collective consciousness of center-right and far-right politicians against the exploration of racialized groups in state standards and classroom instruction who fear it could ostracize white students.

During the January 2021 meeting, Ms. White, a Republican appointee, used intertextuality to support her argument against certain aspects of the state standards. Initially commending the inclusivity of the standards, she later shifted to what seemed like party-aligned rhetoric. Ms. White referenced Ms. Camnitz's opening statement about avoiding invoking blame or guilt in students, suggesting that such an approach contradicted a proactive, pro-unity stance she envisions for social studies education in the state. However, it is crucial to note that Ms. White misquoted Ms. Camnitz's intent. Ms. Camnitz emphasized that standards did not instill blame or guilt in any students, but Ms. White's presentation of her comments alluded to the concept of guilt in white students. Ms. Whites's stance epitomized the broader political climate during the 2021 standards revision process. While proponents of inclusive standards intended to represent the diversity of North Carolina accurately, the opposition to the new standards raised concerns that such inclusivity might inadvertently induce feelings of shame, blame, or guilt among white students.

"Public Opinion"

To further situate their positions within the larger socio-political context of the time, the Board Members selectively highlighted written comments from the public that supported their positions on the standards. This was uncovered using the intertextuality tool of inquiry in that the members signal their latent beliefs through a proxy. The theme of public opinion was also evident during the State Board of Education's 2021 standards development process in two

emails, that were submitted during the public comment period, presented during the February 2021 meeting by Superintendent Truitt and Chair Davis.

In Superintendent Truitt's email, the author provides a narrative of personal experiences as an immigrant in the United States, emphasizing resilience in the face of discrimination. The email criticizes the influence of Nikol Hanna-Jones' "The 1619 Project" body of work, arguing against what the author perceives as a negative portrayal of American history. Instead, the author advocates for a narrative that highlights the nation's progress and achievements, while acknowledging its historical challenges that fit her worldview. This email reflects a perspective aligned with board members who voted against the standards, emphasizing a positive, patriotic interpretation of American history and resisting what they perceive as a narrative of blame or guilt, particularly concerning issues like systemic racism and slavery.

Conversely, Chair Davis presents a contrasting email that advocates for a more critical examination of systemic racism and marginalized voices within American History. The author, aa school library media specialist, underscores the importance of addressing systemic inequality and empowering students to critically engage with historical narratives. This email aligns with the views of board members who voted to approve the standards, emphasizing the role of education in fostering understanding, empathy, and positive societal change.

By selecting and presenting these specific emails, the board members strategically highlighted public support for their contrasting viewpoints on the standards. Superintendent Truitt's email reflects resistance to perceived negative portrayals of American history, while Chair Davis's email advocates for a more critical and inclusive approach. This use of intertextuality underscores the competing ideologies with the standards development process and

demonstrates how public feedback was strategically employed to reinforce board members' positions.

Sociopolitical Environment

The 2021 standards revision process in North Carolina happened within the context of escalating tensions and divisions surrounding social studies instruction. Particularly, political polarization and ideological differences to teaching social studies underscored the process. By the end of 2020 and the start of the 2021 legislative session in many states, divisions over social studies instruction had grown. The heightened political climate, exacerbated by events like the summer 2020 protest following the deaths of George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, brough issues of race-based instruction to the forefront. This period was marked by significant state-level actions aimed at regulating discussions on race and gender in K-12 education. Contributing to a polarized environment where Republican-led efforts tended to focus on limiting these discussions, while Democratic-led initiatives tended to prioritize preserving educators' rights and broadening curricular narratives.

Within North Carolina, while the 2020 presidential election did not shift the political make up the state board, it did bring new members to the board, creating greater tension around the standards development process. In the February 2021 meeting, Vice Chair Duncan, a Democratic appointee, noted,

> regrettably, ... some of these comments in ongoing discussions have taken a more aggressive tone and approach, an inappropriate tone and one which is not focused on the issues at all, but rather can be viewed as personally demeaning in its personal attacks.

While the discussions in the state board of education meetings were professional, there was a noticeable shift in the tone some board members took as they engaged with the discourse

after the 2020 election. I observed an environment that seemed more personal while listening to the board members speak about the social studies related action items. There was an air of personal animosities, at times, overshading the educational policy that should have been the priority. One notable moment between the January 2021 and February 2021 state board of education meetings was a political cartoon published online on WRAL, a Raleigh, North Carolina based news organization, in February 2021. The cartoon depicted Republican board members as Klan members. Discussions within the board after the cartoon was published reflected deep-rooting ideological differences around social studies instruction, with conservative voices feeling marginalized and silenced in the face of inclusive language including in draft four. As Dr. Oxendine notes (see Appendix D). "So what does that say about inclusion? What does that say about having a chance to voice one's concerns? It says, ship up. It says, be quiet. It says if not, you may find yourself in a political cartoon." Ironically, Dr. Oxendine co-opts language typically associated with the left to emphasize her point as she questions the implications of the political cartoon. Although none of the board members stated that the cartoon was a reason they voted for or against the standards, it certainly did not help ease the relations around the social studies standards.

The State Standards as a Reflection of Political Beliefs

In order to answer research question 2 (How did political actors embed their political beliefs in the state standards?) the analysis for this question was guided by building task 1 ("significance") from Gee's (2014) seven building tasks of language. Gee (2014) states, "for many things, we need to use language to render them significant or to lessen their significance, to signal to others how we view their significance" (p. 17). While the first research question examined the language of board members to determine their ideological underpinnings, this

research question explores how their beliefs influenced the written version of the social studies standards. In comparing draft four to the pervious draft (draft three) of the standards, I examined which topics were deemed significant for inclusion in the K-12 standards by the board, particularly noting the increased focus on minority groups and the introduction of terms like xenophobia that were absent in earlier drafts. This analysis was contextualized within the sociopolitical environment of 2020-2021, shedding light on potential compromises and the reasons behind the changes made between drafts. Table 4.4 outlines the tools of inquiry and the key assertions that each tool uncovered for research question two.

Table 4.4

Findings for Research Question 2

Tool of Inquiry	Assertions
Situated Meanings	The deliberate use of language within the standards reflected a conscious effort to guide curriculum choices towards diversity and inclusivity.
Figured Worlds & Social Language	Dr. Oxendine's advocacy for enhanced Native representation in the standards resonated with her personal experiences as a Native woman, underscoring the significance of including diverse voices in educational narratives.
Conversations, discourse, & Intertextuality	The national discourse and conversation surrounding social studies instruction, particularly pertaining to issues about race and gender, influenced the discussions with the North Carolina State Board of Education.

Shifts From Draft Three to Draft Four

The first significant finding pertains to the discernible changes observed between Drafts three and four. Gee's (2014) tool of inquiry situated meanings, allowed the research to delve into how specific language forms take on contextual meanings within the state standards. Draft three of the social studies standards were initially presented to the board by Dr. Carlin, the Section

Chief for Social Studies and Arts Education at the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, following the approval granted in April 2019 for her team to move to the revision stage in the standards development process. Like previous drafts, this draft underwent extensive preparation, including data collection through stakeholder surveys, focus groups, and research of other state social studies standards. Through that data collection, the standards writing and review team, representing the eight districts the state board is divided into, crafted standards to serve as the foundation for social studies teaching and learning in the state. Thus, Dr. Carlin and her team sought the adoption of the latest draft at that time, draft three, by the board during their June 2020 monthly meeting.

During the meeting, however, the draft encountered resistance from the board spanning the political spectrum. Concerns were raised about the specificity of historical representation within the standards, with board members highlighting the absence of terms like redlining, immigration, and Civil Rights. Despite some positive feedback on elements like the inquiry strand and community support, the standards were not adopted at that meeting. Instead, the board opted to delay adoption to allow the standards writing team to create another draft and gather additional stakeholder feedback, reflecting a collaborative effort to address the diverse concerns raised by board members and ensure a more comprehensive representation of historical topics within the standards.

One key theme in the resistance was the lack of specificity. For example, Mr. Bristow-Smith, the 2019 Wells Fargo North Carolina Principal of the Year, who served as an advisor to the board, encapsulated that debate when he stated,

> …these standards could serve as a better framework for educators if they were more specific in certain areas instead of general. Um, just as examples, in American history

standards the words Slavery, or Women's suffrage, Great Depression, Industrial revolution, WWI, Civil Rights movement, and immigration don't appear anywhere in the standards or sub standards.

Mr. Bristow-Smith noted during the June 2020 meeting that courses could be taught in 115 different ways, as each local school district would fill in the gaps in various ways.

After several months of updating the standards based on the board's recommendations and a public feedback period, Dr. Carlin's team returned to the board to present draft four of the social studies standards during their January 2021 monthly meeting. It became evident through the comparison of drafts three and four that the feedback from various board members for including more historical terms and explicit language representing the state's diversity had been heeded. Notably, the language in specific objectives was updated to include various groups, perspectives, and historical narratives that were not present in draft three. Furthermore, additional objectives were introduced in draft four, expanding the scope and depth of the standards. While draft three faced resistances from board members due to a perceived lack of specificity, draft four reflected improvements in addressing the concerns. However, they raised new concerns as all, but one board member appointed by a Republican governor expressed reservations or opposition to specific aspects of draft four. Conversely, all board members appointed by a Democratic governor embraced the changes made in the updated draft.

Although changes were made in each course, the data was pulled from a sample of the courses, including American History, World History, Founding Principles of the United States of America and North Carolina: Civic Literacy, and Third grade social studies. Tables 4.5-4.8 provide examples of the significant shifts from draft three to draft four. The analysis of the data uncovered key trends across the course standards including Increased Emphasis on Diversity,

Intersectionality and Interconnectedness, Critique and Evaluation of Systems and Institutions, and Comparative and Analytical Approaches.

Table 4.5

Increased Emphasis on Diversity

Draft Three	Draft Four
Standard: AH.B.1 Evaluate American identity in terms of perspective, change, and continuity.	
Not included in draft three	*Draft Four Objective AH.B.1.6:* Explain how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed to American identity over time in terms of the struggle against bias, racism, oppression, and discrimination.
Not included in draft three	*Draft Four Objective AH.B.1.7:* Explain how slavery, xenophobia, disenfranchisement, and intolerance have affected individual and group perspectives of themselves as Americans.

In the evolution from draft three to draft four the social studies standards, there was a notable and intentional shift towards emphasizing diversity and the representation of marginalized voices. This shift is evident in the introduction of new objectives and the modification of existing ones across the courses, all aimed at providing a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of identity and history. For example, in the American History course, draft four introduces Objective AH.B.6, which requires students to delve into how the experiences and achievements of minorities and marginalized peoples have contributed significantly to the formation and evolution of American identity over time. This objective encourages students to explore and critically analyze the roles played by diverse communities in shaping the nation's identity, particularly focusing on their struggles against bias, racism,

oppression, and discrimination. By highlighting these narratives, the standards aim to broaden students' perspectives and foster empathy and understanding of the challenges faced by marginalized groups throughout history. Another critical addition in draft four in the American History course that is representative of the expanded view of all the course is Objective AH.B.1.7, which prompts students to examine how critical historical realities such as slavery, xenophobia, disenfranchisement, and intolerance have profoundly impacted individual and group perspectives of themselves as American. This objective encourages students to critically reflect on the complexities of American history, including its darker chapters and the enduring legacies of systemic injustices. By addressing these sensitive topics head-on, the standards promote a more honest and comprehensive understanding of American society's diverse experiences and struggles. Including these objectives in draft four signifies a broader recognition within educational policymaking, typically championed by the political left, of the importance of inclusion and representation. By explicitly acknowledging the contributions and struggles of minorities and marginalized communities, the standards seek to validate and honor their experiences, which have often been marginalized or omitted in traditional historical narratives. This deliberate emphasis on diversity enriches studies' historical knowledge and fosters empathy, critical thinking and a deeper appreciation for the complexities of identity. The emphasis on representing marginalized voices in the standards has significant educational implications. It empowers students from all backgrounds to see themes reflected in the curriculum, validating their identities and experiences. Moreover, it equips students with critical thinking skills to engage with diverse perspectives, challenge stereotypes, and contribute positively to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Table 4.6

Intersectionality and Interconnectedness

Draft Three	Draft Four
Standard: AH.H.1 Understand the reasons for American involvement in conflicts and the domestic and foreign impacts.	
Draft Three Objective AH.H.1.1: Explain the causes and effects of various domestic conflicts in terms of political, economic, and societal factors.	*Draft Four Objective AH.H.1.1:* Explain the causes and effects of various domestic conflicts in terms of race, gender, and political, economic, and social factors.
Standard: AH.E.1 Analyze the American economic system in terms of affluence, poverty, and mobility.	
Not included in draft three	*Draft Four Objective AH.E.1.5:* Distinguish the role women and racial minorities have played in contributing to the economic prosperity of American society in terms of equity, equality, and mobility.
Standard: AH.E.1 Analyze the American economic system in terms of affluence, poverty, and mobility.	

Draft four of the American History standards emphasizes understanding the interconnectedness of various factors such as race, gender, and socioeconomic status in shaping historical and contemporary events. This intersectional approach acknowledges the complex layers of identity and societal structures that influence outcomes for different groups of people. Thus, encouraging students to explore historical narratives with an understanding of how different aspects of people's identities interact and interact. One example of this change from draft three to draft four is seen in the American History course, specifically in objective AH.H.1.1, which now includes considerations of race and gender when analyzing domestic conflicts. Draft three's objective focused primarily on political, economic, and societal factors. However, draft four expands this analysis to encompass the intersectional dynamics at play. This

change reflects a deeper understanding of how race and gender intersect with political and economic factors to shape the causes and effects of domestic conflicts. By incorporating these intersecting identities, the standards encourage students to critically examine historical events from multiple perspectives, fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities involved. Another example found in the American history course in draft four is Objective AH.E.1.5, which distinguishes the role women and racial minorities have played in contributing to the economic prosperity of American society. This objective goes beyond traditional analysis of economic systems regarding affluence, poverty, and mobility and highlights the contributions of underrepresented groups. By examining economic prosperity through the lens of equity, equality, and mobility, the standards prompt students to recognize and appreciate the diverse contributions that have shaped America's economic landscape. This intersectional perspective challenges students to consider how systems of privilege and oppression intersect with economic structures, leading to varying opportunities and outcomes for different groups. The emphasis on intersectionality and interconnectedness in draft four has significant educational implications. It encourages students to move beyond simplistic analysis and consider the complex interactions between identity factors and societal structures. By acknowledging and exploring intersectionality, the standards empower students to navigate complexities, challenge stereotypes, engage in informed discussions about social justice, and contribute meaningfully to a more inclusive and equitable society.

Table 4.7

Critique and Evaluation of Systems and Institutions

Draft Three	Draft Four
Standard: CL.C&G.4 Analyze how the judicial, legal, and political systems of the United States and North Carolina embody the founding principles of government.	
Not included in draft three	*Draft Four Objective CL.C&G.4.4:* Assess how effective the American system of government has been in ensuring freedom, equality, and justice for all.
Not included in draft three	*Draft Four Objective CL.C&G.4.6:* Critique the extent to which women, indigenous, religious, racial, ability, and identity groups have had access to justice as established in the founding principles of government.
Standard: AH.E.1 Analyze the American economic system in terms of affluence, poverty, and mobility.	
Draft Three Objective AH.E.1.4: Explain how monetary, fiscal, and regulatory policies of the federal government have impacted affluence, poverty, and mobility.	*Draft Four Objective AH.E.1.4:* Compare how some groups in American society have benefited from economic policies while other groups have been systemically denied the same benefits.
Standard: WH.E.1 Understand the economic relationships between groups and nations in terms of power and interdependence.	
Draft Three Objective WH.E.1.4: Explain how past economic decisions have contributed to the current dependence and interdependence of global economic systems.	*Draft Four Objective WH.E. 1.4:* Explain how economic policies have challenged international interdependence and national and tribal sovereignty in various regions around the world.

Draft four of the standards introduces a vital dimension of critical analysis and evaluation of systems and institutions, aiming to deepen students' understanding of societal structures and governance mechanisms. This emphasis on critique and evaluation encourages students to engage critically with complex issues, assess the effectiveness of systems, and consider the

impacts on diverse identity groups. An excellent example of this shift from draft three to draft four of the standards is evident in the Civic Literacy course with Objective CL.C&G.4.4. This objective prompts student to assess how effective the American system of government has been in ensuring fundamental principles such as freedom, equality, and justice for all. This objective invites student to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the American governance model, examining its ability to uphold democratic ideals and protect the rights of all citizens. By engaging in this assessment, students develop a nuanced understanding of the complexities inherent in governing a diverse society and the challenges of achieving equitable outcomes. Similarly, Objective CL.C&G.4.6 challenges students to critique the extent to which women, indigenous peoples, religious communities, racial minorities, individuals with disabilities and other identity groups have had access to justice within the framework of the founding principles of government. This objective encourages students to examine historical and contemporary barriers to justice, including systemic inequalities and discriminatory practices. By analyzing access to justice through an intersectional lens, students gain insights into the complexities of ensuring equitable treatment and rights protection for all members of society. Introducing objectives focusing on critique and evaluating systems and institutions empowers students to engage critically with societal issues, question established norms, and advocate for positive change. The standards foster civic engagement, ethical reasoning, and a commitment to social justice principles by encouraging students to assess the effectiveness of governance structures and evaluate access to justice. Students develop the analytical skills and perspectives necessary to navigate complex societal challenges and contribute meaningfully to democratic processes. In addition to the civic literacy standards, similar themes of critique and evaluation are evident in other domains, for instance, in American History, Objective AH.E.1.4 challenges students to

compare how different groups in American society have been impacted by economic policies, highlighting systemic disparities and inequities.

In World History, Objective WH.E.1.4 prompts students to explore how economic policies have shaped global interdependence and sovereignty, encouraging critical analysis of power dynamics and economic relationships between groups and nations. Draft four includes objectives that promote critique and evaluation of systems and institutions, reflecting a shift toward fostering critical thinking, ethical reasoning, and civic engagement among students. Students develop a deeper understanding of societal complexities by examining the effectiveness of governance structures, evaluating access to justice, and analyzing economic policies.

Table 4.8

Comparative and Analytical Approaches

Draft Three	Draft Four
Standard: WH.B.2 Understand the concept of identity in historic and contemporary societies in terms of its development and impacts.	
Draft Three Objective WH.B.2.2: Explain how competing groups and individual identities have impacted society, now and in the past.	*Draft Four Objective WH.B.2.2:* Explain how competing religious, secular, racial, ethnic, and tribal group identities have impacted societies, now and in the past.
Standard: 3.B.1 Understand how values and beliefs of individuals and groups influence communities.	
Draft Three Objective 3.B.1.2: Explain how belief systems influence shared cultural characteristics within communities.	*Draft Four Objective 3.B.1.2:* Compare values, beliefs, cultural practices, and traditions of various groups living in local and regional communities.

Draft four of the standards emphasize the importance of engaging students in comparative and analytical approaches to deepen their understanding of cultural diversity, societal dynamics,

and historical interconnectedness. Examples of this approach are evident in the World History and third-grade social studies courses. Through objectives like WH.B.2.2 and 3.B.1.2, students are encouraged to explore similarities, differences, and the impact of cultural interactions, fostering an appreciation for diverse identities and the complexities of global societies. Objective WH.B.2.2 prompts students to explain how competing religious, secular, racial, ethnic, and tribal group identities have impacted societies, both in the past and present. This objective encourages students to engage in comparative analysis, examining how different groups' identities have historical and contemporary societal dynamics. By comparing and contrasting these identities, students develop a deeper understanding of cultural diversity, identity formation, and the complex interactions that influence societal development.

Objective 3.B.1.2 in Third Grade social studies challenges students to compare the values, beliefs, cultural practices, and traditions of various groups living in local and regional communities. This objective invites student to explore cultural diversity within their immediate environments, encouraging them to analyze how different groups' values and beliefs contribute to shared cultural characteristics and community dynamics. Through this comparative study, students gain insights into the richness of cultural heritage and the interconnectedness of communities. Including comparative and analytical approaches in draft four cultivates critical thinking skills as students learn to analyze and evaluate information from multiple perspectives. Students develop cultural empathy, cross-cultural communication skills, and a broader worldview by engaging in comparative studies. These skills are essential for navigating diverse societies, understanding global interconnectedness, and fostering mutual respect and understanding among individuals and communities. In World History, students can explore how different religious, racial, ethnic identities and shaped historical events and societal structures, fostering a deeper

appreciation for cultural diversity and historical complexity. In Social Studies, the comparative study of cultural practices enables students to recognize the unique contributions of various cultural groups to community life and societal development. The emphasis on comparative and analytical approaches in draft four enriches students' learning experiences by encouraging them to explore them to explore diverse perspectives, analyze cultural interactions, and develop a nuanced understanding of complex societal dynamics.

Native Representation in the State Standards

Perhaps the clearest example of the manner with which personal influence impacted the 2021 standards development process was related to the inclusion/call out of indigenous groups by Dr Oxendine. During the February 2021 board meeting, she stated,

> I'm so pleased that the American Indian perspective is certainly in the standards and Stacy played a role in making sure that that happened. So, I cannot um end this conversation without saying I'm very pleased that that's happened, and I hope that the American Indian voice will always, their perspective, and the plight, as well as the progress of Indian people will remain as with the other groups.

Dr. Oxendine consistently advocated for indigenous representation, and there was a notable shift in this area between drafts three and four of the standards. Table 4.9 includes changes made to the state standards that show the explicit inclusion of indigenous representation.

Table 4.9

Examples of Indigenous Inclusion Between Drafts Three and Four

Draft Three	Draft Four
Standard: AH.C&G.1 Evaluate the relationship between the American people and the government in terms of freedom, equality, and power.	
Not included in draft three	*Draft Four Objective AH.C&G.1.4:* Explain how racism, oppression, and discrimination of indigenous peoples, racial minorities, and other marginalized groups have impacted equality and power in America.
Standard: WH.B.2 Understand the concept of identity in historic and contemporary societies in terms of its development and impacts.	
Draft Three Objective WH.B.2.1: Explain how shared values and beliefs of a culture impact national and group identity, now and in the past.	*Draft Four Objective WH.B.2.1:* Explain how shared values and beliefs of a culture impact national, tribal, and group identity, now and in the past.
Draft Three Objective WH.B.2.2: Explain how competing groups and individual identities have impacted society, now and in the past.	*Draft Four Objective WH.B.2.2:* Explain how competing religious, secular, racial, ethnic, and tribal group identities have impacted societies, now and in the past.
Standard: CL.H.1 Understand how individual rights and the American system of government have evolved over time.	
Draft Three Objective CL.H.1.3: Interpret historical and current perspectives on the evolution of individual rights in America over time.	*Draft Four Objective CL.H.1.3:* Interpret historical and current perspectives on the evolution of individual rights in America over time, including women, tribal, racial, religious, identity, and ability.
Standard: 3.B.1 Understand how values and beliefs of individuals and groups influence communities.	
Draft Three Objective 3.B.1.1: Explain how the values and beliefs of diverse cultures contribute to the development of local communities and the state.	*Draft Four Objective 3.B.1.1:* Explain how the values, beliefs, and cultures of various indigenous, religious, racial and other groups contribute to the development of local communities and the state.

Dr. Oxendine's significant impact on the representation of indigenous perspectives within the state standards can be viewed through her Figured World, where the plight of indigenous people is distinct from other underrepresented groups. Her unique position as the only indigenous representative on the State Board of Education during the 2021 social studies standards development process allowed her to advocate effectively for this representation. For example, in draft three of the World History course standards, the absence of terms like "indigenous" or tribal" underscored a significant oversight in acknowledging and incorporating native perspectives, reflecting a broader trend of neglect in educational frameworks. However, with Dr. Oxendine's advocacy and input, draft four of the standards notable included these terms in several objectives, marking a substantial improvement in acknowledging and representing indigenous communities.

If Dr. Oxendine had not been on the board, there might not have been specific representation for Native Americans. Instead, they may have been included within the representation categorized under generic terms like "ethnic and racial groups". This potential outcome underscores the risk of overlooking indigenous communities' unique perspectives and experiences when diverse voices are not adequately represented in decision-making processes.

Changes to Draft Four

Draft four of the state standards faced a tumultuous journey towards adoption by the Board of Education, culminating in a vote during the February 2021 meeting after facing stiff resistance from the political right. The initial discussions in January 2021 were marked by tension, primarily due to the inclusion of terms such as systemic racism, gender identity, and systemic discrimination. These terms sparked controversy and prompted a request to postpone the adoption of the draft for further modifications. This episode highlights a recurring theme in

educational policy discussions: the delicate balance between addressing sensitive societal issues and navigating political ideologies within standards development.

The subsequent presentation of the updated draft in February 2021 revealed deep-seated divisions among board members, particularly along party lines. Republican-appointed or elected members, expect for Board Chair Davis, remained staunchly opposed to the standards despite revisions that toned down the contentious terms to “racism”, “identity”, and “discrimination”. This resistance underscores the ongoing struggle to reconcile differing perspectives on historical narratives and social issues within educational policymaking between the political right and left.

Mr. Chasteen's, a Republican-appointed board member, remarks during the February 2021 meeting, presented in Appendix C, echoed some board members' concerns regarding the portrayal of traditional narratives, such as foreign policy, in the state standards. His concern with representations of privilege and marginalization reflects a broader tension of inclusivity and representation with educational materials that has entangled debates between conservatives and liberals throughout history.

On the other hand, Mr. Ford, a Democratically appointed board member, emphasized the importance of embracing diverse perspectives and experiences within the standards. His remarks highlighted a theme of confronting discomfort and fear associated with teaching history from non-dominate viewpoints. This theme speaks to broader discussions about the role of education in challenging traditional narratives and fostering critical thing skills among students.

The contrasting viewpoints among board members, coupled with Chair Davis decisive vote in favor of the standards, reveal the complex dynamics at play educational policymaking. Themes of political polarization, representation, inclusivity, and the role of education in shaping societal perceptions emerge prominently from these discussions. Ultimately, the journey towards

adopting state standards reflects a complicated complex process influenced by historical, political, and social considerations.

This analysis delves into the development and revisions of the 2021 social studies standards, focusing particularly on the influence of political beliefs on the content standards. The research explores how board members embedded their ideologies into the state standards, with a specific examination of what board members identified as significant between draft three and draft four. Draft three faced resistance from board members due to its perceived lack of specificity in representing historical topics and people. Concerns were raised about the absence of certain crucial terms like "slavery" and "women's suffrage" from board members across the political spectrum.

Deliberate Adjustments and Amplification of Marginalized Voices

In order to answer research question 3 (To what extent do North Carolina Essential Standards for social studies incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups, and how are these perspectives represented?) the analysis for this question utilizes Gee's (2014) building task 7 (Sign Systems and Knowledge). The Sign Systems and Knowledge building task is concerned with how language is used to establish superiority for one system or mode of understanding over others (Gee, 2014). This building task allows the research to assess which narratives were ultimately included in the final version of the standards that was approved at the February 2021 State Board of Education meeting and how the standards can be used to build curriculums that are diverse—or not—for social studies instruction. Data from research question two was used to answer research question three as the findings from question two illuminated how diverse the standards were. Table 4.10 outlines the tools of inquiry and the key assertions that each tool uncovered for research question three.

Table 4.10

Findings for Research Question 3

Tools of Inquiry	Assertion
Situated Meanings, Social Languages, Figured Worlds, Intertextuality, Discourse, & Conversations	The approved version of the standards exhibited a noticeable shift towards diverse conceptual framework that were more representative of the student demographic, demonstrating an enhanced level of inclusivity and relevance within the academic sphere.

The standards, as approved, reflect a concerted effort to incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups. The standards development process was marked by deliberate language adjustments and nuanced revisions aimed at amplifying voices that have often been relegated to the margins of history. The social studies standards demonstrate a sensitivity towards the experiences of marginalized groups across various themes, including economics, civics, and history. Terms like "oppression" and "stereotypes" were introduced, signaling a departure from a cautious approach to social studies towards a more candid exploration of societal realities. Additionally, the standards exhibit a deliberate effort to acknowledge the contributions and struggles of women, racial minorities, and indigenous peoples, challenging traditional narratives often found in social studies classrooms and fostering a more inclusive learning environment.

A noteworthy aspect of the social studies standards is their emphasis on confronting uncomfortable truths and interrogating power dynamics. The inclusion of terms like "forced migration," "slavery," and "discrimination" underscores a commitment to confronting historical injustices and engaging critically with dominant narratives. The shifts from draft three to the approved standards empower students to grapple with complex social realities and interrogate the structures of power that shape our world, as shown in tables 4.5 to 4.8.

The analysis of the state standards revision process through Gee's building task 7 (Sign Systems and Knowledge) illuminates the deliberate efforts to establish a more inclusive and diverse framework within the approved standards. Through my meticulous examination of language choices and thematic shifts from draft three to the final version, it becomes evident that the standards serve as sign systems that challenge prevailing narratives and prioritize voices of historically marginalized communities. By interrogating power structures and confronting uncomfortable truths, the standards encourage students to engage critically with historical injustices and challenge dominate narratives. Ultimately, the standards signal a paradigm shift towards a more inclusive and equitable educational landscape.

Chapter Summary

The journey towards crafting inclusive and equitable standards in educational policymaking is complex and filled with challenges. This chapter comprehensively analyzes the State Board of Education's language strategies and power dynamics during the development of 2021 state social studies standards. Board members strategically used language to assert their authority and credibility, emphasizing their expertise and proximity to the subject matter. This linguistic strategy aimed to validate their positions and influence the standards' development.

Draft three of the standards were revised to address concerns about inclusivity and diversity of the topics covered by the social studies standards. Draft four of the standards offered a more comprehensive understanding of the subject matter but faced pushback from Republican-appointed members regarding terms like "systemic racism" and "gender identity." The pushback from the political right underscored the sociopolitical environment marked by heightened tensions, with debates around race-based instruction and political polarization leading to divisions within the board.

Draft four was ultimately approved despite challenges, showcasing the ongoing struggle to balance diverse perspectives and navigate political pressures in educational policymaking. This chapter highlights the complexities of crafting inclusive standards and offers insights into the interplay of ideology, language, and power in educational discourse. It acknowledges incremental progress in challenging traditional narratives and incorporating diverse perspectives in social studies teaching and learning.

The results of this study are discussed in Chapter 5. The Chapter also includes reflections of the literature, interpretations of the data, and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 5: Conclusions and Recommendations

In educational policymaking, the ideologies held by decision-makers, such as members of the State Board of Education, wield considerable influence, shaping the content, direction, and inclusivity of the standard course of study. The discourse generated between January 2020 to June 2021 during the North Carolina social studies standards revision process reflects the complexities of educational policy change and the underlying political ideologies that permeate these discussions. Expanding on the findings outlined in chapter 4, in this chapter I delve deeper into the major data themes within the context of existing literature. Furthermore, this chapter critically examines the implications of ideological biases on educational policy, emphasizing the impact of systems and classroom instruction. In addition to discussing the implications for policy and practice, this chapter also outlines recommendations for future research by identifying unanswered questions and areas for further exploration to inspire continued scholarship and inquiry into the complex exchange between political ideologies, educational policymaking, and standards development.

Purpose of the Study

This study critically examined the expressed ideologies of board members of the North Carolina State Board of Education and their impact on the state's social studies standards revision process. The study was motivated by the recognition that educational policymaking is profoundly influenced by the political beliefs and perspectives of decision-makers, shaping the content and direction of the standards development process.

Against the backdrop of the 2021 standards revision process, which happened to play out during a period of heightened political polarization and the influence of national culture war issues, this research sought to analyze the discourse produced during this critical period

thoroughly. By exploring the diverging perspectives of board members aligned with conservative and liberal political ideologies, the study aimed to uncover how these ideologies influenced the state standards. Ultimately, the findings of this study are intended to draw attention to the standards development process in North Carolina and the role of ideological diversity in shaping educational practices and outcomes.

Research Questions

My analysis of the discourse produced during the 2021 State Board of Education social studies standards revision process was guided by three questions:

RQ1: How did the ideologies of the board members appear in the latent discourse of the state standards?

RQ2: How did these political actors embed their political beliefs in the state standards?

RQ3: To what extent do the North Carolina Essential Standards for social studies incorporate diverse perspectives and experiences, including those of historically marginalized groups, and how are these perspectives represented?

Interpretation of Findings

Research Question 1: Latent Discourse

The first notable finding revolved around the perception of board members as experts. They exerted significant influence on the educational landscape within the state. This finding underscores the centrality of board members' power and their strategic utilization of it in shaping teaching and learning in the state.

A second discovery revolved around the discourse on race by board members during discussions of the standards. While some advocated for increased representation of racialized groups within the standards, others embraced viewpoints such as *white guilt* or downplayed the

significance of race, suggesting a post-racial worldview. This ongoing and multifaceted discourse reflected the nuanced and sometimes contentious nature of discussions surrounding race within educational policymaking.

Lastly, the analysis uncovered a tense social-political environment surrounding social studies education, particularly in North Carolina. This finding underscored the broader national trend, where states grappled with revising standards amidst politically charged landscapes post-2020, resulting in a divided public discourse.

Research Question 2: Political Beliefs and State Standards

The data underscored an attempt towards greater representation of racial and gender themes within the standards, emphasizing the need for students to see themselves reflected in their learning experiences. This inclusive approach, encompassing racial, ethnic, sexual, gender, and other dimensions, reflects a conscious effort to create a more diverse and equitable educational framework. However, a pivotal discovery centered on how members of the State Board of Education, who are supposed to be non-partisan, actually act as partisan individuals. This reveals the political dynamics within the standards revision process, showing how board members use their political beliefs to shape standards. Most significantly, the evolution of draft four of the standards, marked by changes in specific terms and concepts, served as a testament to the direct impact of political ideologies on educational content.

Research Question 2 and 3: Diverse Perspective

A major thrust of the research was to examine how the standards incorporated diverse perspectives and experiences, particularly those of historically marginalized groups, and how these perspectives were represented. Through a comprehensive analysis, the findings revealed a

landscape wherein efforts towards inclusivity and diversity were evident, yet opportunities for deeper representation still needed to be explored.

These standards encourage students to engage with a broader range of perspectives and challenge them to critically examine their personal world and the broader societal context from multifaceted viewpoints. However, amidst these strides towards inclusivity, a critical observation emerged regarding the impact of political influence on the standards. The involvement of the political right in altering specific terms within the standards led to a shift in their scope. For instance, the distinction between "racism" and "systemic racism" carried significant pedagogical implications, as the latter provides a framework for educators to delve into systemic inequities and structures that perpetuate marginalization. While it is essential to note that standards are not prescriptive curricula and allow for educator autonomy, the changes influenced by political actors' underscore missed opportunities for more robust and inclusive standards.

Together, these findings offer an understanding of how ideologies manifest within the discourse of state standards. Specifically, around the topics of influence and power dynamics of the State Board of Education, sociopolitical environment and educational policy, complexities of representation within the North Carolina Social Studies Standards

Influence and Power Dynamics of the State Board of Education

From the data, many state Board of Education members positioned themselves as experts on social studies instruction during their discourse on the social studies standards. The data analysis within scholarly literature reveals a significant theme concerning the influence of State Boards of Education, particularly in the context of their power and how it is wielded. Black (2017) highlights the shift in power from federal to state levels with the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* passed in 2015, emphasizing the broad authority granted to states in overseeing

education within their borders. However, this autonomy can lead to challenges, especially with state boards that are not sufficiently responsive to the needs of their citizens. In states like North Carolina, where board members are appointed and may be influenced by political agendas, there is the potential for bias and limited opportunities for citizen input. This can raise questions about the policy outcomes of the State Board of Education as board members have the choice to be impartial policymakers prioritizing student welfare or political actors swayed by political affiliations that may not always align with educational best practices (Young et al., 2019).

Understanding board members' choices is especially noteworthy as the composition of most State Boards of Education, as highlighted by VanGronigen et al. (2022), reveals a marked pattern, with most members having affiliations with private businesses rather than educational backgrounds. While a few members of the North Carolina State Board of Education were former K-12 teachers, they did not make up a plurality of board members. Additionally, there was a lack of experience with the contemporary context of public schools from the board, with members having not taught in the technological age. This imbalance can skew decision-making towards business or political-oriented objectives, potentially overlooking the core educational needs of students (VanGronigen et al., 2022). Without a substantial representation of members with contemporary educational backgrounds, State Boards of Education may lack crucial insights into pedagogical methods, standards development, and the unique needs of diverse learners. This absence of expertise can hinder the development of effective educational policies and practices tailored to meet the varied needs of students (VanGronigen et al., 2022). In my study, as board members began their discourse on the social studies standards, they established themselves as experts yet made decisions for social studies instruction without subject matter expertise. This was evident when the board members omitted any mention or discussion of the benefits of an

inquiry-based instructional approach, as promoted by the inquiry strand within the standards. This failure to address inquiry-based instruction disregards a proven method for fostering critical thinking and engagement among students (Croddy & Levine, 2014; Grant et al., 2015). Moreover, the board members neglected to acknowledge and engage with literature discussing the merits or drawbacks of greater representation of diverse groups being represented within the standards. Both sides of the political spectrum of the board missed an opportunity to enrich their stances to discuss the implications of their perspectives. For example, as board members from the political right advocated for additional changes to draft four of the standards before the entire board voted on approving them, such as changing "systemic racism" to "racism," members did not establish if that was based on educational theory and practice or politics.

Furthermore, the disconnect between the State Board of Education and the broader educational community, as noted by Young et al. (2021), underscores the challenge of representing citizen voices effectively. Political appointments and the average citizens not having direct access to their board members, can further exacerbate this gap, leading to decisions that prioritize political agendas over educational excellence (Young et al., 2021). Even as 85% of those who responded to the public comment period for draft four of the standards responded favorably**,** state board members from the political right were able to use their influence in the standards development process to make changes to the standards. When citizen voices feel marginalized or unheard within the State Board of Education, it can diminish public engagement, trust, and participation in the educational governance process (Young et al., 2021). Ultimately, the State Board of Education has power and influence over the direction of public-school policies in North Carolina, which can determine the direction of teaching and learning. However, board

members must remember to be responsive to the needs of students before their political affiliation.

Sociopolitical Environment and Educational Policy

Drawing from Niesz et al. (2018), the context of social movements, such as the Civil Rights Movement, is crucial in understanding the dynamics of educational standards revision. Some of the same findings from Niesz et al. (2018) are parallel to the 2021 standards revision process in North Carolina. The backdrop of societal unrest in 2020, including protests against police brutality, underscored the impact of social movements on educational discourse during the process. The responses of board members to these societal currents highlighted their role as formal educational actors who are both influenced by and influential in social movements (Niesz et al., 2018). This dynamic contributes to shaping inclusivity and representation within state standards. It is important to note that these influences are not uniform across all members; rather, both conservative and liberal members can be affected by or have an impact on these movements. While their approaches and agendas may differ, it is rare for either side of the political spectrum to remain passive in these discussions. The societal unrest in 2020 also served as a catalyst for heighted awareness and discussions around racial justice and equity. These societal currents reverberated within educational circles, prompting reflections for some board members, as evidenced by Mr. Ford, on inclusivity and representation within state standards.

Board members, as formal educational actors (Niesz et al., 2018), had to contend with crafting educational policy in the midst of these events. Their response to these movements reflected a spectrum of perspectives and approaches. Some board members, seemingly influenced by the urgency of social movements and the calls for grater inclusivity, advocated for explicit representation of diverse racial and ethnic experiences within the standards. For instance,

Mr. Ford's support for more inclusive standards was indicative of board members actively responding to the societal demand for more comprehensive and equitable educational narratives. Their actions demonstrated a recognition that larger social movements can influence educational discourse and policy. Conversely, other board members may have exhibited more caution or resistance to these societal currents, either due to ideological differences or concerns about the scope and content of the standards. This diversity of responses to the standards as written in early drafts highlighted the complex interplay between societal pressures, ideological stances, and the practical considerations involved in the standards revision process.

Ultimately, board members' engagement with social movements underscored their dual role as both influenced by and influential actors within the educational landscape (Niesz et al., 2018). Their decisions and advocacy efforts contributed significantly to the relative level of inclusivity and representation within state standards, reflecting broader societal dialogues and evolving understandings of equity in education. In essence, the discourse surrounding the state standards reflects deep-rooted ideological tensions.

Complexities of Representation within the North Carolina Social Studies Standards

Uncovering board members' hidden beliefs around the standards underscored their disposition towards increasing representation within the state standards. While there were discussions about representation of various marginalized groups, race was a significant aspect of the conversation between board members. While some of the board members advocated for more representation of racialized groups in the state curriculum standards, other board members pushed back, signaling ideas such as white guilt or post-racial society. This aligned with Hornbeck's (2018) argument that state standards often maintain a pretense of racial neutrality. This neutral stance has often been challenged by critical race theorists who point to pervasive

dominant narratives. This tension that Hornbeck (2018) described was evident in the discourse surrounding the 2021 social studies standards in North Carolina as Dr. Oxendine and Mr. Ford, vocally challenged the notion of color-blind standards, advocating for explicit inclusion of ethnic and racial groups. Their stance resonated with Hornbeck's (2018) critique of color blindness as a myth that undermines the complexity of historical and societal narratives. Dr. Oxendine's focus on native representation and Mr. Ford's broader inclusivity advocacy disputed the assumption that local school districts will naturally fill in the gaps left by vague or color-blind standards. Instead, they emphasized the necessity of explicit inclusion at the state level to ensure a more comprehensive and equitable educational experience for all students.

Debates about the role of race in education reflects the ideological divide where the political left often advocates for more explicit and inclusive standards, contrasting with the political right's preference for a color-blind narrative (Williams & Maloyed, 2013). However, Dr. Oxendine's advocacy for native representation introduces a nuanced contradiction. As a Republican board member, her stance challenged the notion that the political right uniformly prefers a color-blind narrative. Although Dr. Oxendine only advocated for Native representation with the standards, her advocacy underscored the complexity of perspectives within political ideologies and the importance of considering diverse voices in shaping educational policies.

The tension between inclusivity and color-blindness in standards is not unique to North Carolina. Hornbeck (2018) also points to Texas where partisan divisions led to standards that leaned towards conservative viewpoints, as the conservative State board of Education there pushed back on inclusive social studies standards that represented many perspectives. This historical context emphasizes the ongoing struggle between conservative and liberal ideologies in shaping social studies education.

Implications

Misinformation's Influence on Policy

The case of misinformation influencing policy decisions as seen in the manipulation of Critical Race Theory (CRT) discussions by conservative figures (Wallace-Wells, 2021), and the subsequent executive actions under the Trump administration (Haberman, 2020), underscores the critical need for fact-based policy-making. For instance, misinformation propagated on media outlets like Fox News distorted complex academic concepts such as Critical Race Theory, often by figures like Christohper Rufo (Baker, 2020). This misinformation campaign influenced the creation of executive orders that limited diversity training in federal agencies, showcasing the significant impact and potential dangers of unverified information.

By relying on media reports and misrepresentations rather than evidence-based research, policies can be crafted based on flawed premises. This highlights the importance of fact-checking mechanisms and consulting experts directly involved in the field, as demonstrated by the discussions around diversity training and CRT in federal agencies. After watching Christoper Rufo on Fox News, President Trump deployed Mark Meadows, his Chief of Staff, to speak with Mr. Rufo about his work exposing what he thought were "ugly concepts that should have been left behind a century ago" (Wallace-Wells, 2021). Specifically, Mr. Rufo began discussing diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) workshops conducted nationwide, including within the federal government. He called these DEI workshops out for their teachings, which he felt were un-American (Wallace-Wells, 2021, p. 3). The involvement of scholars and practitioners familiar with CRT and diversity training could have provided valuable insights into the nature of these topics to the President, following his concern from the Fox News reporting. Consulting credible experts can help policymakers avoid misinterpretations and ensure that policy decisions are

grounded in rigorous analysis and empirical evidence rather than sectionized narratives propagated by individuals like Mr. Rufo.

Policymakers and public figures bear a significant responsibility to uphold ethical communication practices and refrain from endorsing or amplifying misinformation. The example of Mr. Rufo's influence on policy decisions underscores the risks of ideological agendas driving policy rather than evidence-based reasoning.

The role of misinformation in policymaking is concerning because of the control President Trump has over the Republican Party extending from the national level down to state and local governments (Galvin, 2020). This control has significantly impacted policymaking, especially in areas such as education. President Trump has utilized platforms like Twitter to enforce party loyalty, often publicly criticizing targeting dissenters. This tactic of public shaming or "bullying dissenter," as Galvin (2020) noted, was a method to ensure adherence to his agenda. In return for loyalty, Trump offered rewards such as endorsements and fundraising support, creating a system where allegiance to him is paramount for political survival (Galvin, 2020).

The alignment of Republican polices with Trump's rhetoric, particularly regarding concepts like CRT, further underscored his control over the party's direction. Legislation, such as the bill debated in Iowa, aimed to restrict certain "divisive concepts" from diversity and sensitivity training, mirrored Trump's stance on issues he deemed controversial or objectionable (Richardson, 2021). This ideological alignment demonstrated a direct link between Trump's rhetoric, policy proposals, and subsequent legislative actions at various governmental levels. Notably, in North Carolina, some State Board of Education members borrowed language for conservative talking points to justify voting against the social studies standards. For example, during the February 20021 monthly board meeting, a Republican appointed board member

mentioned that the terms such as “systemic racism” came from a radical theory, making an inference towards CRT.

Moving forward, policymakers must urgently implement robust fact-checking mechanisms and consult experts directly involved in relevant fields to prevent the proliferation of distorted narratives. Policies should be based on evidence, not sensationalized misinformation, especially when addressing sensitive and complex issues like racial equity. Moreover, fostering a culture of critical thinking and media literacy is not just important, but essential to empower the public in distinguishing between reliable information and misleading narratives, thus safeguarding the integrity of policy discussions and decisions.

North Carolina General Assembly and Public Educational Policy

The reaction of the North Carolina General Assembly, particularly given its Republican-led composition with a veto-proof majority, holds significant implications for educational standards in the state. This legislative power allows for enacting laws that may not align with the majority sentiment of North Carolinians, potentially leading to detrimental consequences. One example of this dynamic is the establishment of the Standard Course of Study Advisory Commission (Childress, 2023). Under the proposed legislation, a majority of its members would be appointed by the General Assembly, potentially leading to policy changes influenced by partisan interests rather than educational expertise (Childress, 2023). This shift in decision-making power raises concerns about the potential revision of state social studies standards, which were recently updated but could face altercations under a politically appointed commission. Such changes could have far-reaching consequences for educational quality and inclusivity in North Carolina.

The controversy surrounding the Parents' Bill of Rights legislation (Senate Bill 49) further highlights the tensions in education policy. While supporters argue that it strengthens parental involvement and rights in their children's education, critics, including state Democrats and advocacy groups, view it as discriminatory and potentially harmful, particularly for LGBTQ+ students and their families (Coffey, 2024). Despite Governor Roy Cooper's veto, the bill's passage notes the Republican-led legislature's influence in shaping educational policies that have divisive impacts on the state's educational landscape. These developments highlight the importance of ongoing dialogue, collaboration, and advocacy to ensure that educational policies in North Carolina prioritize the best interests of students, promote inclusivity, and uphold educational standards based on evidence and expertise rather than political ideologies.

Recommendations for Future Studies

Political Influence during the next Standards Revision Process

An imperative area for future research involves delving into the role of political dynamics during the next social studies standards revision process within North Carolina. This research initiative proposes a multifaceted investigation, employing a comparative analysis framework to discern the impact of political variables under contrasting scenarios. The first scenario entails a situation where the board's composition is similar to the current configuration, allowing for an examination of ongoing political influences and dynamics under a liberal leaning board. The second scenario is a potential shift toward a more conservative board makeup, prompting an exploration into how ideological shifts may manifest in the standards revision process.

This study proposes a mixed methods approach to achieve a comprehensive understanding. Qualitative methodologies could be employed to conduct in-depth interviews with key stakeholders, including board members, and educators. These interviews will aim to

explain the underlying ideologies, political alignments, and decision-making processes that shape the standards revision landscape. Furthermore, quantitative analysis could be leveraged to scrutinize voting patterns, policy proposals, and the alignment of revised standards with political stances.

Integrity, Transparency, and Inclusivity in the Standards Revision Process

Another recommendation for future research is to investigate ways to enhance educational policymaking's integrity, transparency, and inclusivity. To mitigate undue political influence, the new research could propose ways to implement structural safeguards and procedural mechanisms that insulate the standards revision process from partisan agendas or undue eternal pressures. This may include a case study of establishing an independent oversight committee composed of diverse stakeholders, including educators, subject matter experts, community representatives, and policymakers from various political backgrounds. If the NCGA establishes the Standards Corse of Study Advisory Commission, the future research could explore its effectives or offer recommendations for enhanced integrity, transparency, and inclusivity. By exploring these recommendations, North Carolina can fortify its standards revision process, ensuring that it remains driven by educational excellence, inclusivity, and responsiveness to diverse community needs rather than being unduly influenced by partisan agendas or external pressures.

Conclusion

This study explored the interplay between political ideologies, educational policymaking, and standards development, as evidenced by the data gathered from the social studies standards revision process in 2021. The purpose of this study was to unravel the ideologies held by board members of the North Carolina State Board of Education and their consequential impact on the

state's social studies standards revision process. Against the backdrop of heighted political polarization and societal movements, the inquiry sought to dissect how political ideologies manifested within educational policy documents. In interpreting the findings, a multifaceted narrative unfolded, revealing the influence and power dynamics of the State Board of Education, the current sociopolitical environment's impact on educational policy, and the complexities of representation within the North Carolina Social Studies Standards. Board member's ideologies, often intertwined with societal currents and political affiliations, significantly shape the discourse and content of educational standards. These findings highlight the intricate dance between political ideologies and educational practices.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: State Board of Education's Use of Intertextuality: Superintendent Truitt

Dear Members of the NC State Board of Education,

I recently moved my family from California to North Carolina. I am an immigrant who came to the U.S. when I was five years old with my family and my mom and dad wanted to come here because this was and still is the greatest, freest country on earth. They didn't bring me to a racist, evil country; only here could an immigrant family with nothing but a fistful of dollars and a desire to work hard achieve the American dream.

I wanted to write to you because I've heard about your new history curriculum that you are trying to implement. The accusation is that the curriculum follows the tenets of Nikole Hannah-Jones' fictional work, *The 1619 Project.* I understand she won a prize for that, but with the objection of so many of the leading Pulitzer Prize-winning post-racial American historians who actually teach and know real history. These powerful objections and dismantling of *The 1619 Project* are available to all who wish to read them, so that's not the point of the letter I'm writing. Instead, I'm going to make an appeal as someone who grew up in quote "post-racial America" and still went through hellacious discrimination.

You see, I was the only East Indian in my classes in the 80s, pretty much all the way through high school. At that time, terrorism—Arafat, the PLO, Gaddafi etc.—were the front pages of all the news. Whether people were Black, White, or Mexican, I had a lot of people who looked at me through that lens. I was beaten up, called names like monkey, camel jockey, and the rest. I've experienced more racism physically and emotionally than the vast majority of people my age or younger in this country.

But here is the point. I could have been bitter about coming to America and seeing everybody here and the country as racist and hateful. But I didn't and I don't. For every one person who was mean to me, there were a dozen of all races who were my friends.

We don't whitewash history but we don't rewrite it either. The American founding was not based on slavery; it was based on the desire of the colonists to be free from the boot of England. And yes, for the next 100 years we went through a terrible struggle internally, culminating in a Civil War where 500,000 men died and hundreds of thousands were injured, all to finally exterminate slavery. Then for the next 100 years we went through [the] Jim Crow era, where Democrats sought to achieve through unjust civil laws what they couldn't achieve in war. But even that internal struggle we overcame, thanks to people like Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Martin Luther King, Elijah Cummings, and countless other freedom fighters.

America's history is like every other country marred by tremendous good and tremendous evils, but we did what few other countries have done: overcome that evil to create a just and fair society where all who embrace the principles of our rights in the Constitution and our culture of

freedom and self-determination can not only live free, but succeed and thrive in a way that no other country can provide. America is the greatest country in the world and we have a bright future if our kids learn its real history, but more importantly the principles of freedom, God, and patriotism that made it the greatest country in the world. This is the country whose unique capitalist system made the modern age, lifted billions out of poverty, and created the greatest technological, healthcare, housing, in human history. We defeated the greatest single evil the world has ever seen: socialism in the form of the Communist Soviet Union and the fascism of Hitler.

American children need to learn all of history accurately. But they also need to understand that the bloody history and inequality that has been in every country in the entire world, civilization after civilization, since humanity started. Recorded history from the Assyrians to the Babylonians, from Rome to Charlemagne, from the Holy Roman Empire to the Mughals to the Great Khans to the Spanish and British colonial empires, all of human history is a long bloody wash of injustice and death and human slavery. Sure we did great things, but not until America and the American system was there a country that allowed people to unleash their human potential and built on the foundation that government was not the ultimate power in people's lives, but there to serve the people and be limited and controlled by the people.

Children cannot love and defend a country if they are taught to hate it, if they are taught false history and that their entire country is a slave state, and that unless you are quote "white" and quote "privileged" that you can't get ahead no matter what you do or how hard you work. They will grow up to be defeatist in their thinking, cynical about their futures and the country, and hate every principle and opportunity that gives them the chance to succeed.

Note: This is an email read by Superintendent Truitt from the public

Appendix B: State Board of Education's Use of Intertextuality: Chair Davis

I live in Asheville, North Carolina and I've worked as a school library media specialist in both our Asheville city and Buncombe County School System for many years. I'm deeply encouraged by the possibility of how public schools offered to help us integrate our society and decrease inequity by offering all students opportunities to learn, grow, and succeed. I'm so excited and hopeful about the new proposed social studies standards.

Our American society, while offering the promise of freedom and justice for all, has also been built upon systemic inequality from slavery to Jim Crow to school segregation to unequal access to education, housing, and generational wealth. Educators see it clearly in our school populations: achievement gaps, unequal access to resources, racially charged insults. It saddens me to see the missed opportunities to support our students in examining and working to solve these problems in our K-12 schools. But our schools are places that help us to solve problems, to make positive changes that ripple out to our communities and build a healthier culture. New standards that invite students and teachers to critically examine the impact of systemic racism and consider the voices of marginalized populations offer important opportunities to help White students, Black students, and other students of Color work together to solve these issues that are not going away, [and] to be successful learners and members of society.

It's critical that young people understand history and how to work together to build healthier futures. I know you've all gotten pushback on these issues; however, I hope you'll see that encouraging nuanced, diverse perspectives on and critical thinking about our American history does not diminish our country's well-being or merit. Rather, it shows that we're a nation that's willing to grow, of all , mature based on truthful and comprehensive analysis and accountability, and I'm excited for the growth opportunity that these standards present. I hope you will vote to approve them and do your part to use education as a tool to make positive changes in our society this week.

Note: This is an email read by Board Chair Davis from the public

Appendix C: Examples of Republican Pushback to Draft Four of the State Standards

January 6, 2021, meeting North Carolina Superintendent of Public Instruction Truitt, Republican
"I appreciate the request from a previous board meeting, perhaps in June or July, that was presented by Dr. Mullennix, asking for more explicit language to be used. If we had what I believe to be adequate guiding principles to inform our standards that are grounded in the discipline of history, there would not be a need for explicit language to be used, because one of those guiding principles would be all perspectives or multiple perspective are expected."
January 6, 2021, meeting Ms. White, Republican Appointee
"unfortunately, um, out of the 85% who support the standards as they appear, right now I'm going to have to fall into 15. Um, the inclusion of the word 'gender identity' in um, in multiple places" . . . "human beings are born either male or female."
February 3, 2021, meeting Ms. White, Republican Appointee
"so when we talk about three words in context that have been lifted from a very radical theory, a very radical ideology"
February 3, 2021, meeting Mr. Chasteen, Republican Appointee
"when Lieutenant Governor Robinson talked about tone, coded language, or ideology and I spoke at a great weight, emphasis, and repetition of our nation's obvious failures. Consider one example. In foreign policy, it talks about the extent to which American foreign policy has advanced the interest of historically privileged groups over the interest of historically marginalized groups. Well, that question, that obviously is a question drawing out failures. Do we include a standard about foreign policy that informs of all the generosity and sacrifice? Why not for foundational educational purposes start with a litany of noble foreign policy achievements, before covering our discriminatory or questionable misuses of foreign policy? A wording such as, 'discuss the use of foreign policy to assist nations around the globe to achieve economic stability, security, equality, freedom, and assist marginalized peoples.' Students should know that we redistribute billions of dollars to 190 countries and foreign assistance such as humanitarian aid, military support, security, healthcare, advancing freedom every year. Shouldn't we at least start with incredible generosity and realistic understanding before we acknowledge shortcomings and misuse of foreign policy? Covering foreign policy blunders is fine, not trying to hide them. We have it under every President, but do the standards specifically draw out anything about foreign policy to balance the example of our nation placing the privileged over the marginalized? Why is it that certain narratives appear to be given more weight and emphasis than others? We can review a host of standards and see this pattern; this lends support to Lieutenant Governor Robinson's legitimate concerns."

Appendix D: State Board of Education Response to Political Cartoon

February 2021 meeting- Lt. Gov. Robinson, Republican
"Let's talk about the 27,000 signatures that I have on the petition that are patently against these standards. The only responsible course of action right now, when you have television stations depicting a Black man as a clan member, depicting a Native American woman as a Klan member—these standards are divisive and they have become divisive and there are still serious questions around it, and would be irresponsible for this board to pass them at this time . . ."
February 2021 meeting- Dr. Oxendine, Republican Appointee
"my comments over time around the issue of these social studies standards have led to a very disturbing cartoon that paints me as a Klanswoman. Actually, I mean Olivia's face isn't in the cartoon, but there's enough there to identify and associate me with the Klan. Now how does that affect me? I'm a professor, I teach students who are going to be principals, I interact with students who are undergraduates, I mentor students, I advise students. So I'm going to have to face my students real soon and explain this political hardship. So what does that say about inclusion? What does that say about having a chance to voice one's concerns? It says, shut up. It says, be quiet. It says if not, you may find yourself in a political cartoon that is, uh, disseminated and shared across the state."
February 2021 meeting- Ms. White, Republican Appointee
"I have colleagues that I have worked with for more than five years at the State Board of Education, and this was nothing short of a bullying attempt. As Dr. Oxendine said, to be quiet, silenced. And I didn't have not one adult reach out and say, this is bullying and this is wrong. For that we should be ashamed, because I can speak not for myself, but I can speak for Mark Robinson, I can speak for Todd Chasteen, I can speak for Olivia Oxendine, for Dale Falwell, for others that wear the GOP vest. When we come to this table we're about children and we're about students, and what happened yesterday was offensive, nothing short of bullying, and it should not be tolerated."