

WYOMING TEACHERS’ RESPONSES TO THE WGA “FACE TO FACE” SURVEY

**CONDUCTED BY
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From 2009 through 2010, Judy Kallal visited 12 Wyoming School Districts and personally interviewed teachers about the status of geography education in their district and what their geographic needs were in their classrooms and personally. The goal was to ascertain the role that the Wyoming Geographic Alliance and National Geographic could play in order to meet Wyoming teachers’ geographic needs. Please find attached a summary of the teachers’ responses to the survey questions.

SURVEY QUESTIONS -- RESPONSES

1. What types of professional development opportunities would you find helpful in teaching geography and social studies in general? Would you be willing and able to attend these opportunities?

There was agreement that there is a lack of content understanding and a need in those areas.

Historical mapping tools, i.e. Revolutionary War battlefields, European countries prior to colonization, Civil war period.

Need more knowledge of websites with maps. (In one district, no wall maps are allowed and must use online resources or special mapping programs with the provided “smart boards”.)

There is a need for sources about different map projections.

Help in developing relevant learning in order for the content to make sense in the students’ lives.

Help to get students engaged in learning...i.e. problem solving.

Need to have resources in order to invite people to share about their world experiences. (This request was from a speech teacher.)

Would like to learn more about landforms and their relationships to human environment interaction.

Opportunities for current events and US foreign policy information.

Need more US geography for American History.

Greater Yellowstone History project knowledge.

Need first-hand travel experiences.

More sources for non-fiction geography literature.

Increase knowledge of websites for geography information.

Biggest factor in attending workshops is the distance traveled...became an issue the farther north I traveled in the state.

Desire to have lesson plans that take minimal preparation time—one day projects, not week-long lesson plans.

Useful video clips that could be used in the classroom.

Would like to learn how to help students have more spatial awareness.

List of guest speakers who are available in different areas of the state.

Desire for more software and then workshops to enable the teachers to use the software.

Overall, most teachers commented that they would be willing to attend workshops and institutes if the subject was relevant to what they were teaching.

2. What type of support do you have in your school for professional development?

In one school district, there have significant budget cuts and that has affected professional development.

Some schools stated that it is just in a developing stage.

In Casper, the Cowboy Coalition has been extremely supportive.

It was said often that if there were professional development opportunities that they concentrated on curricular specifics, differentiated curriculum and comprehensive areas.

Professional development is geared to curriculum design, not in content area.

Never in content area or technology—it's about school improvement in order to make the district look better, but no help for the teacher.

Directive from principal is to "to pick battles."

In the last four years, there has been nothing, just building improvement.

Focused on quantum learning and nothing is targeted for the social studies.

One district uses every Friday afternoon for professional development, but nothing to strengthen the social studies or content areas.

3. What resources would be useful to help you to engage students in the study of geography/social studies?

Good online sites with maps.

Atlases are not available.

Half day workshops to learn how to engage students.

Integration of information in the core areas with appropriate reading levels.

There is a need for knowledge of more online resources to use in the classroom.

Would like to include students in the teacher workshops, so students could go back to the classroom to teacher other students.

Knowledge of failing nations.

More economic social studies materials.

New ways to use technology.

Geographic specific materials.

Interactive mapping, especially historical mapping on a higher level.

Be able to show changes on maps..sequence of change, i.e. political geography.

Looking for a talking globe.

Maps of WW II battles.

4. What types of social studies curriculum materials do you use most often? Do you need increased quantities of these materials?

There is a need for atlases.

Crisp historical maps online.

Discovery Education has been helpful in at least one school district.

Need short informative texts in both elementary and high school with multiple reading levels.

National Geographic for kids is helpful...but, need more.

Would like to find more simulations.

Need more economic information.

Would like more materials relevant to students about landforms.

Need more access to primary sources.

Would like someone to teach us how to use our resources that we have and how to find additional resources.

Need short readings to go into more depth with students—descriptive historical narratives such as Readers Theater.

Factual stories in story form.

Would like materials that focus on only one class period..not weeks.

Am not interested in lesson plans that require research...the time is not available to do the research. If it says “research” I say no thanks.

Am looking for a primary level Wyoming map.

Have a text, but need more computer resources such as simulations.

One school district said lack of computers is holding them back in social studies.

5. Are you interested in attending institutes/workshops that offer creative ways to integrate geography into other content areas? If so, describe the offerings you would like.

Interest is there in attending institutes/workshops, but would be more attracted to attending, if graduate credits were paid for by the institute.

Several teachers said that they had reached the maximum on the salary schedule and they do not need the credits, but a stipend for attending the institute would encourage them to come.

Wind energy was a topic of interest, especially in Cheyenne and Casper.

Early June and early August were the most attractive times for teachers.

Relating geography to careers and technology

Paying the expenses at the institute

Casper uses Adams State because of low cost of credits.

The types of materials given to teachers makes an institute more attractive.

Would like institutes that deal with the bigger picture, not a narrow focus.

Learning to use multi layered maps on the computer.

Cause and effect learning.

The location of the workshop/institute would affect attendance.

Integrate geography with history.

Work with the science teachers.

Yellowstone, wolves and bears.

Need to be practical—pull something out and show how it works—definitely hands on material.

6. Do you encounter problems that inhibit you from teaching geography or that prevent students from learning or developing positive attitudes toward geography? If so, what resources would be of help?

Memorization burns out the students and is a negative.

Place/name turns off students.

Teachers run out of time to teach geography.

Teachers need to feel excited and have MORE knowledge of geography.

Not part of testing, so it is put on the back burner.

For example, on the MAP (a test given students) the more questions that are answered correctly, the more questions they get...therefore, they don't try.

Transference of spatial concepts is difficult.

Need to have more field trips.

Need student enrichment piece.

Would like a weekend workshop for teachers who could attend with a couple of students.

Need to balance class with more hands on and group collaboration.

Lack of teacher knowledge—need to have more than just one or two courses in geography.

Need to show the glue that holds everything together.

General lack of world knowledge by students and teachers.

Not realizing where one is located and how one relates to the rest of the world.

Building blocks are needed.

Bombarded by textbook.

Need more hands on.

Looking for help with online material—geo cache, Google earth, GPS

Check on more video conferencing for virtual field trips to go to different geographical locations.

7. In your opinion, does geography/social studies instruction help students to become productive citizens? If so, how? If not, can geography/social studies instruction be altered to be more relevant to the personal lives of your students?

Without a doubt, social studies/geography instruction helps students to become responsible, productive citizens.

Trick is to work with the vocational teachers.

A major obstacle has been the “No Child Left Behind” is leaving children behind in geography and social studies.

Peer teaching is helpful.

Need more global education.

Need to reach out to the students.

Yes, but it hard to explain why.

Older people have a mind set of lifelong learning.

We have hand fed the students.
Standards have killed us—students are not allowed to fail
Students need to be more aware of other places.
Students are afraid of thing they don't know.
Do something similar to real time math...if you have only 10 minutes.
It should!!
Need human emotion—true stories behind concepts.
More Project Citizen training.

**8. What social geography/social studies skills or content is the most difficult for students to learn?
What training and/or resources would help you teach difficult concepts?**

Latitude and longitude
Vocabulary—north, south, east, west etc
Aerial view is confusing
Structure of government
Federalism
Geographical issues in the Civil War.
Why early settlement was where it was.
It would help to have resources that offer real life experiences—websites.
Battleship is a good game to help teach concepts.
Spatial relationships are difficult.
“The outside world”
Computer training would help.
One district has numerous programs available, but lack sufficient training to use the resources.
Cultural understanding
Economic diversity
Geo politics
Three Cups of Teas is helpful—impact of a school in a developing nation.
Time zones.
Complex human interaction with the environment.
Abstract of state-country-spatial concept.
World is round.
Seasons and climate.
Need a made for classroom use model of sun-earth relationships.

Different map projections.

Economic concepts (difficult to get certification to teach.)

The composite and highly qualified mix inhibits teachers.

Hate to say it, but too many social studies teachers are coaches and need more emphasis on content.

9. What do you do to meet the requirements for recertification?

Use the PTSB and have five years to meet it. (most common answer)

One district stated that their recertification is met in three areas: student improvement (testing), core subject areas, and technology. Nothing really in the area that is taught by the teacher.

One teacher attends every summer math institute.

Principals offer credit, so easily met in five years.

Also may do a book study and write it up as a class.

Top down problems.

One district has professional development every Friday afternoon—just sign in and receive credit.

Lack of motivation in some districts' pay scale.

10. What can the Wyoming Geographic Alliance do to serve your needs?

Classroom sets of materials.

Giant map was great. Continue it.

National Geographic maps are the best.

Institutes

Focus on energy

Focus on cross curricular literature with geography and science.

Update website and have a blog on the website where ideas can be exchanged among teachers.

Come to the Big Horn Basin

Grad credits, stipends, lodging

Opportunities for international travel or to other parts of the US.

Adopt a school program

Past and present history

Connections between state alliances

Historical culture

Technology

