The New Jersey Council for the Social Studies and the New Jersey Social Studies Supervisors Association are membership organizations of New Jersey social studies teachers and supervisors respectively. They work together to provide an annual fall conference, a spring conference, professional development workshops throughout the year, a monthly enewsletter, and a scholarly biannual journal. They also collaborate with the National Council for the Social Studies, the New Jersey Center for Civic Education, the New Jersey Council for History Education, the New Jersey Geographical Alliance, and the New Jersey Council for Economic Education. Members of these organizations have helped the New Jersey State Department of Education to develop state social studies standards and model curricula. The organizations promote educational polices at the local, state and national level that enhance the teaching and learning of social studies.

Starting even before the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law was enacted in 2001 but exacerbated by the frequent high stakes testing required, liberal and conservative individuals and groups (e.g., the NEA and the Fordham Foundation) have been complaining that the emphasis on reading and STEM, as well as high stakes testing, was narrowing the school curriculum and reducing the amount of time devoted to social studies. In response to the overemphasis by NCLB, common core and high stakes testing on reading and STEM (which has not resulted in improved learning or test scores), the recently enacted Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) seeks a “well-rounded education” for all students, which includes all of the components of social studies: civics, government, economics, history and geography.

As the New Jersey State Department of Education puts together its plan for funding under ESSA, we ask that the Department do the following:

1. Communicate with New Jersey county and school district superintendents to explain that ESSA now asks school districts to provide a well-rounded education that includes civics, government, economics, history and geography and that adequate time should be provided for these critical subjects.
2. Remind New Jersey county and school district superintendents that high quality Social Studies
(civics, economics, geography, government and history) courses develop reading, writing,
speaking and, most importantly, critical thinking skills.

3. Suggest to New Jersey county and school district superintendents that encouraging
English/Language Arts teachers and Social Studies teachers to work together to help enhance
student reading, writing, speaking and critical thinking skills may improve scores on student
assessments.

4. Support the establishment of a state required civics and economics course for all middle school
students (See the attached memo, “Why New Jersey needs a required Civics course in middle
school”).

5. Provide funding for the New Jersey Center for Civic Education to work with the New Jersey Council
for the Social Studies, the New Jersey Social Studies Supervisors Association and the New Jersey
Council for Economic Education to develop a civics and economics course for middle school
students that includes a sequence of subjects and skills that are age-appropriate; links to
resources from high quality sources such as iCivics, and suggested assessments.

6. Provide funding for the New Jersey Center for Civic Education to work with the New Jersey Council
for the Social Studies, the New Jersey Social Studies Supervisors Association and the New Jersey
Council for Economic Education to offer a series of professional development workshops to help
New Jersey middle school social studies teachers to implement the middle school civics and
economics course.

7. Provide funding for the New Jersey Center for Civic Education, the New Jersey Council for the
Social Studies, and the New Jersey Social Studies Supervisors Association to develop a platform
for an annual New Jersey Mock Student Election for New Jersey students in grades 5-12.

8. Provide funding for professional development opportunities to help English/language arts and
Social Studies teachers to collaborate to enhance the quality of education of all New Jersey
students.

9. Provide funding for professional development to help elementary teachers implement effective
social studies instruction as part of a well-rounded elementary curriculum.
The NJCSS is a professional organization of over 400 social studies teachers (K-College) committed to the professional development of educators and students, the development and implementation of effective social studies instruction and curriculum programs, and an advocate for the study and teaching of social studies in every school throughout New Jersey. The NJCSS is the parent organization of the NJ Social Studies Supervisors Association representing more than 100 supervisors in NJ school districts.

Our current programs include two annual conferences for teachers, the publication of an educational journal twice a year, a popular website of best practices lesson plans and classroom resources, and a Board of Directors of 15 educators representative of all geographic areas of NJ. We are located at Rutgers University and our current Board of Directors include professors from Rutgers, Montclair, Rider, and TCNJ.

The NJCSS is committed to history and civic education and has been an engaged partner with the NJ Department of Education for many years in the development of the Curriculum Standards and Model Curriculum. We support interdisciplinary learning, the use of primary documents, the teaching of traditional American History, active citizenship by students, and rigorous assessments.

The NJCSS is involved with supporting social studies teachers with high need students through experiential learning activities, the teaching of historical literacy, support for partnerships with local historical museums and programs throughout NJ, and workshops for supervisors and teachers.

The NJCSS is interested as an organization in proposing Student Support and Academic Enrichment academies using ESSA funds from Title IV Part A, with specific interest in blending learning projects for teaching history and civics that use traditional and web-based instruction.

We are interested in your comments about the requirements for applying for the proposed $10,000 in ESSA grants, the timetable for implementation, and our responsibilities for accountability and reporting.

Additional Information:

A model for $10,000 might be used for a five day professional development program for 21-25 teachers (one from each county) regarding the teaching of history, civics, assessments, and two days of field trips to local historical sites in NJ. ($6,000 or $7,000)

The model for student programs might include one-day programs at three difference state colleges with students from high-need districts. We might reach 25 students from each geographical region from NJ (north, central, south) A day program might include a motivational speaker, simulation, activity on the constitution.