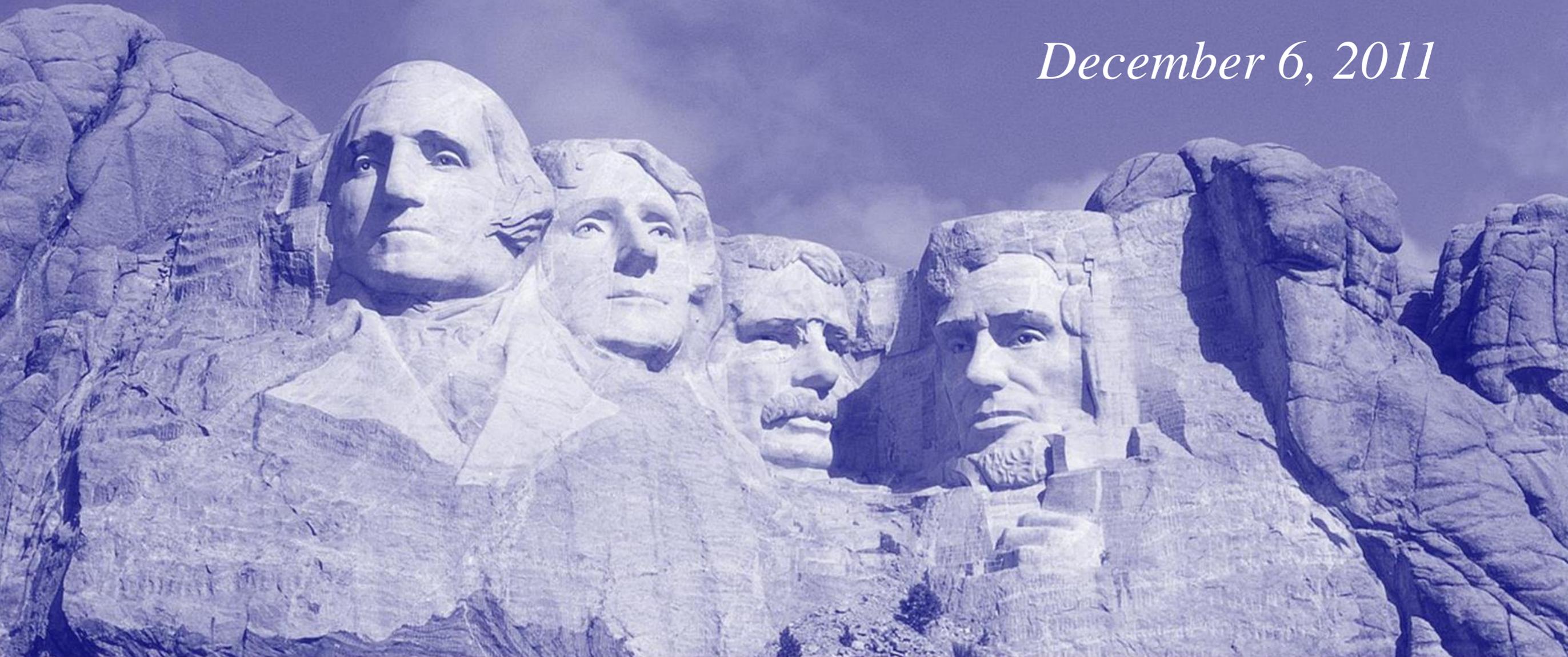


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Evaluation of the Teaching American History Grants



Berkeley Policy Associates



SRI International

The Teaching American History Grant Program

- Established by Congress in 2001, funds competitive grants to school districts or consortia of districts.
- Goal is to provide teacher professional development that raises student achievement by improving teachers' knowledge, understanding, and appreciation of American history.
- LEAs are required to partner with institutions of higher education, nonprofit history or humanities organizations, libraries, or museums to design and deliver high-quality professional development.
- Over 1,000 TAH grants have been awarded, worth more than \$900 million, to school districts in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico.



Prior evaluations

- Implementation study conducted in 2003 by SRI
- Study of grantee evaluations by BPA in 2005
- Initiatives by the program to improve grantee evaluations
- No national outcomes evaluations had been conducted



Study Questions

- What are the analysis options for measuring TAH effects on student achievement and teacher knowledge?
- What are strengths of TAH grantees' program designs and implementation?
- What are major challenges that impede effective program implementation?
- What is the quality of TAH grantee evaluations?
- What are major challenges that impede implementation of rigorous grantee evaluations?
- What are promising practices in grantee evaluation and student assessment in American history?

Study Components

- Feasibility analysis of using state history assessment data to analyze program outcomes.
- Review of grantee evaluations.
- Case studies of sixteen grantees.
- Evaluation encompassed the 2004, 2005, 2006 grantee cohorts (375 grantees)



Feasibility study: review of state-administered U.S. history assessments

- The purpose of this review was to identify states with History or Social Studies assessments that could be used for the student outcomes study
- Initial data gathering for Statewide U.S. History Assessment review based on:
 - Recommendations by the U.S. Department of Education and project's Technical Working Group
 - Literature Review
 - Interviews with state assessment officials and content experts
 - Web research



Criteria for Inclusion in Outcomes Study

- Developed a set of criteria for a statewide history or social studies assessment to be included in the study:
 - A significant portion of the assessment must have covered U.S. History
 - A separate and identifiable U.S. History sub-score was measured
 - Assessment must have been administered to students for at least three years prior (to the year of the study)
 - Assessment must have been administered statewide to students in the target grade (s)

Findings of the Feasibility Study: State Assessments (mid-2008)

- 20 states administered statewide assessments in at least one grade-level in American history
- 6 other states administered social studies/history tests in some grades but with no separate U.S. history score.
- Of the 20 states, many had not administered the test in all the years needed for the analysis; some were newly piloting or revising their assessments
- 9 states were identified as having comparable multi-year statewide U.S. history assessment data potentially useful for analysis.



Feasibility Study: Designs for an Outcomes Analysis

Considered two possible quasi-experimental designs for the outcomes study: Regression Discontinuity Design (RDD) and Interrupted Time Series Design (ITS)

Regression discontinuity design: A rigorous design but feasible only under limited circumstances.

- Requires a large sample of TAH applicants.
- Requires the ability to model a relationship between the assignment variable (application score) and outcomes.

Interrupted time series design: A less rigorous design but a more flexible design to implement.

Feasibility Study: Data Available for an Outcomes Analysis

- Received sufficient multi-year student outcomes data from five (California, Georgia, New York, Texas and Virginia) states
- These data represented fewer than one third of grantees from the three cohorts under study.



Feasibility Study Findings (Design)

- Conclusions:
 - A student outcomes study was not feasible using either design.
 - Problem #1: Lack of generalizability of the study since only about 30% of the TAH grantees would be represented in the study.
 - Problem #2: In the RDD, scarcity of data made it difficult to correctly model the relationship between TAH outcomes and receipt of a TAH grant.

Grantee evaluation review

Evaluations from 2004 Cohort

- Examined 94 grantee evaluations for possible inclusion in a meta-analysis.
- TAH evaluations were not sufficiently rigorous to determine the impact of the TAH program on achievement.
- Only 12 grantees used well documented quasi-experimental designs to measure student achievement outcomes.
- Most of these quasi-experimental designs compared TAH vs. Non-TAH classrooms at post-test only.
- The evaluations did not control for the quality of participating teachers.
- The evaluations did not control for the prior achievement of students.



Case studies

- 16 grantees were chosen from among the 2006 cohort of grantees
- Grantees were selected in pairs representing 8 states (one pair included grantees from 2 different states)
- Initial goal was to identify practices associated with most positive teacher and student outcomes
- Since outcomes data were insufficient, case studies documented whether/how projects aligned with principles of high-quality professional development (research-based)

Case Studies

- Case study grantees served a variety of grade levels with the majority focused on eighth- and eleventh-grade teachers.
- Included 4 single-district grantees and 12 multi-district grantees, up to 68 districts included
- All but 2 offered a Summer Institute.
- All had university or college partners; other partners were historical societies and museums
- Professional development activities also included after-school workshops, full-day symposia, book clubs, collaborative lesson planning, and participation in master's degree programs



Alignment with high quality professional development

Key areas in which TAH program practices aligned with principles of quality professional development:

- Balanced efforts to build teachers' content knowledge and strengthen their pedagogical skills
- Strong project directors who were effective at both project management and blending history content and pedagogy
- Partnerships with organizations rich in historical resources and responsive to teachers
- Creation of teacher learning communities, including outreach and dissemination to teachers who did not participate in TAH events
- At some sites-- clear goals and high expectations, combined with ongoing feedback.



Examples of strategies for combining content and pedagogy

- Historians modeling historical thinking and analysis
- Access to primary sources—online and in the community
- Local action research projects as basis for lesson plans
- Technology tools for integrating audio, visual, and document-based primary and secondary sources into teaching
- Teacher resource file
- Mentor teachers aiding participants in applying what they learned in historians' lectures to the classroom



Challenges

- Most TAH case study sites were not implemented school-wide or district-wide, and most received uneven support from district and school leaders.
- Most grantees struggled to recruit teachers most in need of improvement.
- Challenges in conducting outcomes-focused evaluation

Evaluation challenges

- Obstacles encountered by case study grantees in conducting evaluations:
 - Difficulty of identifying comparison/control groups
 - Difficulty of identifying appropriate, valid, and reliable outcome measures for the measurement of teacher content knowledge.
 - Limitations of student outcome measures

Project-based assessments

- Some grantee evaluators were in the process of developing project-based assessments
 - Tests of historical thinking skills, document-based questions (questions based on analysis of primary source documents),
 - Assessments of lesson plans and student assignments, structured classroom observations.

Conclusions

- TAH is one of few teacher professional development opportunities in history/social science
- Teachers reported that TAH led to increased use of primary sources in the classroom and improved lesson plans that engaged students in historical inquiry.
- Outcomes evaluation is challenged by limitations of available measures.
- Need for further development, validation, and dissemination of teacher and student assessment tools.
- Use of school-based, on-site approaches would make it easier to reach the widest spectrum of teachers and students

