President’s Message

Some explanation is in order. I am writing the President’s column because a couple of months ago Beth DeLuco, our president for the past fifteen months, resigned to free up some time for her young family. The are only so many hours in the week, and I know it was hard for Beth to give up her leadership position in an organization whose mission is so important to her. Beth did her job with grace and professionalism, and we are a better organization because of her work. Thank you, Beth!

I am also writing soon after our very successful Fall Conference. Our keynote speaker was Steven Goldberg, the President of the National Council for the Social Studies. A teacher at New Rochelle High School in New York, he opened the conference with a discussion of the many challenges and opportunities we face together in defending the role of social studies in our schools. The workshops and exhibits were outstanding, ranging from practical demonstrations to open-ended roundtables about how we can improve our efforts to make the social studies come alive for our students. Thank you to everyone who attended and volunteered to make it such a special day.

The Board’s focus for the remainder of this academic year will be finding ways to improve the effectiveness of CCSS in promoting our mission. Article Two of our Constitution requires us to:

(continued on page 2)

Editors’ Note

If you are reading this you now know we meant it when we said we were “going green”. We hope the word has spread sufficiently that the membership can find these issues in a timely and convenient fashion. As we have access to more members’ emails we can get the word out more efficiently. And speaking of membership, if you have not yet “re-upped” for the academic year 2010-2011, please find the appropriate membership forms on page 11. Join now.

There is a particularly important reason for you to be an up-to-date member of both CCSS and NCSS. As our brief announcement on page 6 reports, Connecticut has two teachers running for national office in NCSS: Steve Armstrong for Vice President (a position that leads to president in two years) and Elyse Poller for the “middle grade” representative on the Board of Directors. If teaching talent, commitment, experience and a balanced sense of what is important in social studies are qualifications, one need look no further for the most qualified candidates for these two positions.

But political realities being what they are, the relatively small teacher population of Connecticut places us at a disadvantage. Only NCSS members can vote – Steve and Elyse need your membership and your support.

Other items in this issue deserve your attention as well. We provide pictures of the CCSS fall conference along with a supportive article from the New Britain Herald on page 3. Congratulations are due John Tully and his team for producing an excellent professional experience. Pages 4 and 5 offer observations and reflections on the NCSS conference held in Denver. Subsequent pages contain information on several professional opportunities. Among them is the chance to identify and propose candidates for several CCSS awards presented at our spring conference and dinner. Please take a minute to support one of your talented colleagues.

Finally it is with some hesitation we print a column from the Boston Globe – one more example in the long history of “teacher bashing” (see page 7). While we do not claim to know enough to pass judgment on the accuracy (continued on page 2)
President’s Message continued from page 1)

a. Advocate and advance the study and teaching of the social studies in the schools, colleges and other educational institutions of the state of Connecticut.

b. Promote the professional interests of teachers and others engaged in social studies education in the state of Connecticut.

c. Promote research in the social studies.

d. Encourage and support meaningful development and implementation of social studies curriculum and instructional methods throughout the state.

e. Provide a program of professional activities throughout the state for social studies educators, students, and other interested persons.

f. Provide a vehicle for professional interaction, as well as exchanges among social studies educators and between CCSS and other professional organizations, especially the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

The Board just created a Strategic Planning Committee to help determine our priorities and activities for the next two years. I invite you to help in this effort by taking this short (I promise!) survey. Your responses will be an anonymous, but if you choose to provide your contact information at the end you will be entered into a raffle for a $25 gift certificate to Border’s. (see the broadside for more details - lower right.)

Finally, knowing full well I am preaching to the choir, I want to unveil the draft elements of our new communications strategy.

Social Studies skills and knowledge are critically important to the future of our state and nation.

• Only social studies classes have as their goal the creation of effective citizens who can understand the past and shape the future as members of a complex global political economy.

Social Studies education is being marginalized in Connecticut, and this trend must be reversed.

• State leaders, school districts, principals, and teachers must take an active role in defending and promoting social studies education.

Social Studies educators are the primary providers of citizenship education for the young people of Connecticut.

• Even in these tough economic times, we cannot afford to shortchange our children’s futures by denying resources and development opportunities to the professional educators who are helping shape our future communities.

I look forward to working with you for the next six months as together we forge a new future for CCSS and the social studies in Connecticut. Have a wonderful and safe New Year!

Best, John Tully

(Editors’ Note continued from page 1)

of some of the claims we do know that teachers generally and social studies particularly are under another wave of attacks. It does not help our case that Connecticut still does not have an approved state social studies framework while state and national committees of “experts” propose remedies for what ails our profession and our field. And it does not help our case that far too many teachers do not join and support their state and national organizations to provide the information and political pressure to publicize and promote the good work that we do.

And one last note: a warm “thank you’ to Beth DeLuco for her service to CCSS and social studies in her year as president. And with that go our best wishes to all of you for a restful holiday and a productive 2011.

Dan  Danielcoughlin@charter.net
Tim  Thomas.weinland@uconn.edu

Be Part of the Action!

Take the CCSS Strategic Planning Survey

It’s Short - sez CCSS President John Tully
It’s also Important
Go to:  http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/XKMBS85

And . . . ta da . . .

“. . . if you choose to provide your contact information at the end you will be entered into a raffle for a $25 gift certificate to Border’s.”
The earth is getting smaller. No longer do we live in ‘Fortress America,’ immune from the twists and turmoil of people across the oceans. We live today in a global society, touched by terrorists hiding in Southeast Asia and by economic growth in China. We are threatened by flu viruses that break out in Mexico and enlightened by artists and musicians from Europe and Africa. But, instead of teaching our children about this new reality, we are leaving them in the dark.

Recently, Central Connecticut State University hosted the annual conference of the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies, where National Council for the Social Studies President Steven Goldberg said, despite its importance, there is a “complete marginalization of our discipline.” There is no national testing on social studies like there is for math, English or other disciplines, he pointed out, and it is thus ignored and pushed to the periphery of importance. For example, Goldberg said that, especially at the elementary level, there is no time for social studies outside of constant rehashing of the story of Thanksgiving. Older students should be learning civics — the workings of our government — especially now that the voting age is 18. They should be learning economics, so as to understand our current troubles and how to prepare themselves to make a living.

Contrast this to an earlier time when youngsters were taught the history of their country, in essence instilling patriotism and a pride in being an American. They learned our nation’s story — the good and the bad — ensuring that they felt a part of our shared heritage. As we prepare to observe Veterans Day, we should be ashamed that our children know so little about the sacrifices these brave men and women made and, just as important, the values for which they were prepared to give their lives. Basic geography is also taking a back seat to those disciplines subject to standardized testing. Most younger Americans only learn about foreign countries if they are able to trace their heritage to them or if our nation is at war with them. (And, even then, how many can find Afghanistan or Yemen on a map?)

Moreover, social studies teaches many kinds of literacy, including the ability to understand the world around us as presented through geography, political cartoons, data and statistics, Goldberg said. We understand our public schools are overburdened and under-funded so rather than point to educational leaders to establish fault, let’s look at those who have decreed that every school should be judged solely by standardized testing. After all, as Goldberg said, the “primary goal (of social studies) is teaching students to be good citizens.”

A decidedly cool reception met Eastern travelers in Denver November 12-14, as the temperature hovered in the 30’s and low 40’s. VISTAS, VISIONS & VOICES opened with a Presidential breakfast featuring Sam Wineburg, director of the Stanford University History Education Group. He shared insights of his research of modern “texting/tweeting” students and how they interpret and relate to primary sources compared to professional historians. Ken Davis (DON’T KNOW MUCH ABOUT HISTORY) stressed the need to make history truthful and enjoyable. Both authors cited a recent Virginia grade school Civil War text that used biased and highly questionable research to distort the role of slaves in the Civil War.

A leadership briefing provided by NCSS focused on the newly elected Congress and the impact of a Republican majority in key leadership roles related to education, taxes and the deficit.

The House of Delegates saw Steve Armstrong, former CCSS and NEHTA president, nominated for the vice-presidency of NCSS. Steve emphasized his extensive background in teaching at the high school and college levels. Also, Elyse Poller, a Mansfield CT teacher, was nominated for the NCSS “middle grade” representative on the Board of Directors.

Da Chen (COLORS OF THE MOUNTAIN and SOUNDS OF THE RIVER) spoke of his childhood and early adulthood in Communist China, and treated the audience to a beautiful flute solo.

Maya Soetoro-Ng spoke little of her famous brother, Barack Obama, but concentrated on how to teach peace education and human understanding in the classroom.

A huge audience enjoyed delicious movie treats and an exclusive screening of THE CONSPIRATOR, a film about Mary Seurat and the men who were sentenced and hanged for the Lincoln assassination. The writer and producer spent 13 years in preparation, and it hits the theaters in April, 2011. Recommendation—see it and take your students.

Sunday’s program highlight was 7’ 2’ Kareem Abdul-Jabbar, student of history, author, and inspiration to all who experienced his eloquence and passion for education and social justice. Those present received a copy of his ON THE SHOULDERS OF GIANTS (which he spent hours autographing after the program), 4 cd’s of Harlem Renaissance music and watched a preview of a film he is producing about basketball greats.

Keith Dauer and I represented CT and NEHTA at a Council Presidents’ roundtable. The discussion centered on how to increase and retain membership and how to run successful conferences. This revealing discussion will be put on the NCSS website and should be the starting point for all state and regional councils seeking positive change. I also attended the Awards Committee session where a vote to simplify and streamline requirements for Teacher of the Year should encourage many more nominations. All other awards are also being reviewed with this goal in mind.

Exhibits, poster sessions, and hundreds of sessions combined to make this conference a big success. Congratulations to the Colorado and DC planners who brought it together. Put December 2-4 on your calendar for NCSS in Washington, DC for 2011.

Sandy Senior Dauer
A New Experience

This year brought my first opportunity to attend a National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS) conference, and I feel very lucky to have been there. I was impressed by the breadth of choices (by subject and grade level) for workshops, the variety of exhibitors, and by the diversity of attendees. Teachers and administrators from many states, types of schools and grade levels contributed to lively and informative discussions in workshops and other events. I have attended many conferences over the years and have experienced, as we all have, a range of quality in the workshops. At this conference, I took something immediately applicable from every workshop – and was inspired to revise and/or create new lessons and units based on our discussions. Presenters were extremely generous with their ideas, resources and energy, so I have (literally) CDs and handouts filled with lessons and primary sources.

In addition, the discussions among participants were great – it was exciting to share the way we bring social studies alive for our students. Publishers, NGOs, social action groups and other exhibitors offered an excellent variety of products and services – some of which were free for the taking. The ceremony for teachers of the year was inspiring and fun. I was also privileged to attend the House of Delegates meetings as a delegate for Connecticut. With all of our struggles to keep social studies relevant and taught in schools, it was reassuring - and rejuvenating - to be surrounded by so many committed, capable and energetic social studies professionals who are working hard to make changes on the local, state and national levels.

I know it’s often difficult to get professional development leave these days, but I would recommend others make the effort to attend an NCSS conference. Next year is in D.C. Hope to see you there!

Elyse Poller, Mansfield Middle Schol

Maya Soetoro-Ng

Peace educator and half sister to Barack Obama, Maya Soetoro-Ng spoke to delegates at the 90th NCSS National Convention on Nov. 13. Soft-spoken and articulate, Dr. Soetoro-Ng deflected discussing her famous brother and focused on ways to inject peace lessons into the Social Studies curriculum. Using the theme of the conference, “Vistas, Vision, & Voices” she suggested the following exercises:

-- Have students write a journal, poem, speech, or play showing empathy for an under-represented people or group
-- Play the doubting/believing game. Take a piece of historical fiction or fact and believe everything the narrator/protagonist says, then question everything. Put the two responses side by side and negotiate a ‘truth’
-- Star People game for younger students—imagine life in other solar systems and build a society including housing, customs, food, etc)
-- Rewrite history as a current news story
-- Locate English-speaking newspapers from around the world and critique how they handle and place the same story
-- Examine history/current events from the perspective of those with whom we are in conflict
-- Have students argue both sides of a controversial issue for deeper inquiry
-- Research peace gardens around the world and have students create their own peace garden (small, or with resources, in their school)
-- War and conflict—research a conflict and then develop ways it could have been avoided, or study the peace plans—what worked, what failed, what could have been more successful and why
-- Research the role of artists, educators and other leaders in the peace movement
-- Peace begins with us—Root causes of conflict, conflict resolution, anti-poverty goals
-- Non-violent means of change—teach that outcomes are not inevitable and there are simple powerful solutions to many problems
-- Change the endings of history (holocaust, dropping the A-Bomb, genocide) and have students rewrite history with other solutions, or research what went wrong
-- Narrative imaginings, honor the complexities and diversity of our world—tell stories of social justice, make murals of social justice, explore the importance of political activism in history (suffragettes, civil wars, etc.) and have students try to immerse themselves into that time
-- Have a dialogue with characters from history—debate with them
-- Research the role of soldiers in peace making—the potential for a military voice in the peacemaking process
-- Learn about countries through multiple perspectives—we need to share more stories of creation
-- Listen to music of peace/war and write a poem about the song(s)

In the question and answer period that followed, Dr. Soetoro-Ng noted that she speaks often with her brother but that she is just his little sister. Dr. Soetoro-Ng ended by emphasizing the we can raise kids to show courage to help combat cynicism and address poverty, health, and the environment in a friction-fueled world. Imagine.

Sandy Senior Dauer
COLUMN BY CHIEF JUSTICE CHASE T. ROGERS
MAKING CIVICS EDUCATION BOTH FUN AND MEANINGFUL

Just a few months ago, I had the immense honor of introducing Justice Sandra Day O’Connor at a Connecticut Bar Association dinner. The experience was made all the more pleasurable because of the subject matter: not only how to teach children about our courts, but to make a civics education both fun and meaningful.

As some of you may already know, Justice O’Connor is passionate about teaching our young people about the third branch of government. So much so that she’s developed an iCivics website designed to challenge and inspire. If you haven’t had an opportunity to review this wonderful resource, then I would urge you to do so. Lesson plans, educational games and a chance to ask Justice O’Connor questions are all available by going to this site.

This website also is a tremendous complement to the different programs that the Connecticut Judicial Branch has initiated in the area of civic education. For younger students, there is a coloring book in English and in Spanish, which explains the court process and the players in the system. Additionally, we have a workbook for upper elementary students that provides basic information about the role and function of the courts. It also explains the three branches of government and how they inter-relate.

For older students, we are currently updating the high school curriculum, which provides lessons, hand-outs, homework and in-class assignments, and an end-of-term test. The curriculum puts a focus on critical thinking skills, which are so important to an informed democracy.

There are also opportunities for high school students outside the classroom. For example, we offer a chance to spend a day working with a Judicial Branch employee, observing everyday operations and learning how the Branch functions through our Job Shadow Program. The companion to this program, developed in 2008, is the Court Aide Program, which provides college-bound seniors with a chance to spend two weeks volunteering in an office in the Judicial Branch.

It seems apparent that without a strong, independent judiciary, we won’t have a democracy and without a strong education in civics, future generations either won’t know or won’t care why an independent judiciary matters. So, again, thank you for all that you do.

website address is: http://www.icivics.com/

Two Connecticut Teachers Up for National Posts

Connecticut has two social studies teachers in the running for positions on the National Council for the Social Studies Board of Directors.

Steve Armstrong, a social studies chairman in West Hartford is seeking a position as Vice President of NCSS. Election to this position leads in two years to the Presidency. Anyone who has been active in CCSS knows the range of Steve’s efforts on behalf of social studies and the degree of his commitment to our field. One can also recognize his political savvy in his picture: standing close to Mark Twain with the American flag as a backdrop.

Elyse Poller, a candidate for the Middle Grade position on the NCSS board appears to lack Mark Twain’s endorsement but that is her only political deficit. Her talents and experience as a teacher in Mansfield Middle School and world traveler, as well as extensive service on the CCSS board, have prepared her well for moving on to the national stage.
Failure to educate: The Boston school system is churning out illiterate students whose only skills are to pass predictable standard tests

By Junia Yearwood, The Boston Globe, November 8, 2010

I DID not attend a graduation ceremony in 25 years as a Boston public high school teacher. This was my silent protest against a skillfully choreographed mockery of an authentic education—a charade by adults who, knowingly or unwittingly, played games with other people’s children.

I knew that most of my students who walked across the stage, amidst the cheers, whistles, camera flashes, and shout-outs from parents, family, and friends, were not functionally literate. They were unable to perform the minimum skills necessary to negotiate society: reading the local newspapers, filling out a job application, or following basic written instructions; even fewer had achieved empowering literacy enabling them to closely read, analyze, synthesize, and evaluate text.

However, they were all college bound—the ultimate goal of our school’s vision statement—clutching knapsacks stuffed with our symbols of academic success: multiple college acceptances, a high school diploma; an official transcript indicating they had passed the MCAS test and had met all graduation requirements; several glowing letters of recommendation from teachers and guidance counselors; and one compelling personal statement, their college essay.

They walked across the stage into a world that was unaware of the truth that scorched my soul—the truth that became clear the first day I entered West Roxbury High School in 1979 (my first assignment as a provisional 12th grade English teacher): the young men and women I was responsible for coaching the last leg of their academic journey could not write a complete sentence, a cohesive paragraph, or a well-developed essay on a given topic. I remember my pain and anger at this revelation and my struggle to reconcile the reality before me with my own high school experience, which had enabled me to negotiate the world of words—oral and written—individually, with relative ease and confidence.

For the ensuing 30-plus years, I witnessed how the system churned out academically unprepared students who lacked the skills needed to negotiate the rigors of serious scholarship, or those skills necessary to move in and up the corporate world.

We instituted tests and assessments, such as the MCAS, that required little exercise in critical thinking, for which most of the students were carefully coached to “pass.” Teachers, instructors, and administrators made the test the curriculum, taught to the test, drilled for the test, coached for the test, taught strategies to take the test, and gave generous rewards (pizza parties) for passing the test. Students practiced, studied for, and passed the test—but remained illiterate.

I also bear witness to my students’ ability to acquire a passing grade for mediocre work. A’s and B’s were given simply for passing in assignments (quality not a factor), for behaving well in class, for regular attendance, for completing homework assignments that were given a check mark but never read.

In addition, I have been a victim of the subtle and overt pressure exerted by students, parents, administrators, guidance counselors, coaches, and colleagues to give undeserving students passing grades, especially at graduation time, when the “walk across the stage” frenzy is at its peak.

When all else failed, there were strategies for churning out seemingly academically prepared students. These were the ways around the official requirements: loopholes such as MCAS waivers; returning or deftly transferring students to Special Needs Programs—a practice usually initiated by concerned parents who wanted to avoid meeting the regular education requirements or to gain access to “testing accommodations”; and, Credit Recovery, the computer program that enabled the stragglers, those who were left behind, to catch up to the frontrunners in the Race to the Stage. Students were allowed to take Credit Recovery as a substitute for the course they failed, and by passing with a C, recover their credits.

Nevertheless, this past June, in the final year of my teaching career, I chose to attend my first graduation at the urgings of my students—the ones whose desire to learn, to become better readers and writers, and whose unrelenting hard work earned them a spot on the graduation list—and the admonition of a close friend who warned that my refusal to attend was an act of selfishness, of not thinking about my students who deserved the honor and respect signified by my presence.

At the ceremony I chose to be happy, in spite of the gnawing realization that nothing had changed in 32 years. We had continued playing games with other people’s children.

Junia Yearwood, a guest columnist, is a retired Boston Public Schools teacher who taught at English High for 25 years.

**PBS Great Decisions:**
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Friend of CCSS
CCSS Service Award
Review award criteria at http://ctsocialstudies.org/awards.htm
Take the time to nominate a deserving colleague.
Send nominations to ctsocialstudies@yahoo.com by March 4, 2011.

**Young Women’s Leadership Program Essay Contest 2010/2011**

I hope that you will consider offering your students participation in the Young Women’s Leadership Program Essay (YWLP) Contest. The YWLP is part of the Permanent Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) which is part of the legislative branch here in Connecticut. Each year the YWLP conducts an essay contest for 12th grade students on a different topic. This year’s topic is: “Tell us about an inspiration female leader in your life. What challenges has she faced? Why do you look up to her? What makes her a leader in your eyes?” We will select a 1st and 2nd place winner and both will receive awards at the state capitol in March of 2011. They will be honored not only by the YWLP and PCSW but by their state legislators as well.

For all the details and to register your class/school click here: http://ctpcsww.files.wordpress.com/2010/07/school-
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Primary Source’s online courses are a fantastic way to learn about world history and culture on your own schedule, connect with educators from across the country, and explore resources for your classroom on a variety of topics. Participating educators in our Enduring Legacy of Ancient China and Changing China: History and Culture Since 1644 courses qualify for a study tour to China!

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MEMBERSHIP FORM

Membership in CCSS entitles you to:

- Reduced Registration for the CCSS Fall Conference
- Reduced Registration for the Northeast Regional Conference for the Social Studies (NERC)
- Free subscription to the Yankee Post, the CCSS newsletter
- Opportunity to apply for “mini-grants” of up to $500 for innovative curriculum in social studies and other special projects
- Opportunity to meet colleagues and develop a network of professional friends and associates
- Ability to keep up-to-date with developments in the social studies.

If you have always wanted to become a member of NCSS, now is the time to act. New membership subscriptions to NCSS will also give you membership benefits from Connecticut Council for the Social Studies for one year—a $20 savings. This offer applies to only new NCSS Regular or new Comprehensive members only who send in their form to CCSS. Joint member benefits include:

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- Regular and Comprehensive membership in NCSS includes a subscription to Social Education or Social Studies and the Young Learner
- NCSS Comprehensive membership also includes all bulletins published during the membership year.

Please complete membership form. Make checks payable to CCSS and mail this form to CCSS, P.O. Box 5031, Milford, CT 06460.

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