President’s Message
As this year comes to a close, I hope that it was a productive and smooth one for all. As we look forward to the next academic year, the CCSS is planning some new and innovative ideas for its members to help better meet your needs. This is the time to join the CCSS and be a part of the plans to expand our resources available to teachers to help meet current needs.

Next year we are hoping to be able to offer discounts for members on educational programs at various locations. We will also be creating a library of resources that will be available to our members. Membership in the coming year will truly have its benefits. In addition, as a member you will have the option of getting involved in planning some new programs and opportunities for your fellow teachers. Also remember to register for our annual fall conference. The conferences always offer teachers fantastic resources and innovative and creative teaching strategies as well as content to support your teaching.

I wish everyone a rewarding, fulfilling and exciting end of the school year and a new academic year full of new and creative ways to instill wisdom in the minds of your students. I also hope you will consider joining us in this exciting time of renewal, expansion and renovation!!

Aloha,
Beth DeLuco, Esq.

“Most of the things worth doing in the world had been declared impossible before they were done.” – Louis D. Brandeis

Editors’ Note
This is the last: last issue of the school year and likely the last of the paper issues of Yankee Post. As our “green” announcement on this page states, we plan to distribute Yankee Post via email - with back issues available on the CCSS website. All those black and white pictures will now be available in color and we will likely spruce up the masthead to take advantage of multi-color options. To facilitate this transition we urge you to send a viable email address to: Mary.skelly@po.state.ct.us.

It is also important that you provide the same email address when you re-up your membership. (see membership form at the back of this issue). And remember: some school districts block “outside” emails; if you use your school address be sure it can receive our mailings.

Apart from mastering a new medium we have other challenges to meet. The last two issues have urged you all to update your membership – it’s a September-to August term so you now have the summer to get current for 2010-2011. (And as noted above, be sure to include an email address.) Another concern: conference attendance for the fall CCSS conference and NERC continues to decline somewhat each year. We hope you will reserve October 29 for the one-day fall conference to be held once again at CCSU. Remember that the first “C” in CCSU is “Central” – the campus can’t be any more than an hour’s drive from any part of the state. If

(Continued on page 8)
CCSS Annual Awards Dinner
CCSS Congratulates:

Top: Lou Addazio Awardee Ed Dorgan (Lewis S. Mills HS) (r) - with Steve Armstrong

Left: Matt Warschauer presents Erin Gaucher (Lebenon Middle School) - with the John Stedman “Passion for Teaching” Award

Center: Excellence in Social Studies Education Award - Jacqueline Stack (Cheney Tech)

Right: CCSS Service Award - John Tully, CCSU

Unable to attend: Bruce Fraser (Connecticut Humanities Council) - Friend of Social Studies

Below: And special thanks to our host - Craig Hotchkiss of the Mark Twain House

Below: Alan Marcus, Past President - UConn

CCSS Officers and Board 2009-2010

Beth DeLuco, President - CCLCE
John Tully, Vice President - CCSU
Lea McCabe, Secretary - Bristol Central HS
Charles Moakley, Treasurer - Joseph Foran HS
Louise Uchaczyk, Membership - Joseph Foran HS

Past President:

Max Amoh - Maurice Nelson
Stephen Armstrong - Elyse Poller
David Bosso - Sandy Senior-Dauer
Robert Cotto - Jean Shortliffe
Daniel Coughlin - Mary Skelly
Victoria Crompton - William Silva
Keith Dauer - Caryn Stedman
Ed Dorgan - Ann Marie Ward
Nick Gelbar - Matt Warschauer
Daniel Gregg - Honorary Members
Ken Keller - Thomas Weinland
Mark Mishriky - Tedd Levy
Carol Moakley -
2010 CCSS Fall Conference Proposal Form
Hosted by the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies
October 29, 2010
Central Connecticut State University

PROPOSAL DEADLINE: July 1, 2010

PROPOSALS:
The Program Committee of the CCSS is now accepting proposals for individual sessions. Due to printing deadlines, the proposals must be postmarked by July 1, 2010. Notification will be sent by August 20, 2010. ALL presenters and co-presenters must pay the appropriate registration fee for the conference.

NATURE OF INDIVIDUAL SESSIONS:
A session is a demonstration, discussion, presentation or participation session. All sessions will be 50 minutes in length. All presenters are encouraged to provide at least one handout.

SELECTION CRITERIA:
1. Objectives clearly and specifically stated.
2. Based on valid and reliable information obtained through research, practice or development.
3. Overall clarity and coherence.
4. Potential for educational improvement.
5. Hands on “practical experience.”

PRESENTER: _________________________________________________________________________
Day Phone: _______________________ Evening Phone: _______________________
E-mail address: ____________________________________________________________________
Address: _________________________________________________________________________
City/State/Zip: _____________________________________________________________________
Title & Affiliation/School: ____________________________________________________________

CO-PRESENTERS: List Name and Title and Affiliation of each confirmed co-presenter.

DESCRIPTION: Attach a separate page describing your proposed presentation. Include the objectives, content, and techniques of the workshop or session. This description should be approximately 100-150 words.

ABSTRACT: If your proposal is accepted, an abstract of your workshop/session will be published in the conference program. Please state exactly how you wish to describe your presentation in 50 words or less. The abstract may be added to the same page as the description and stapled to this application.

INTENDED AUDIENCE
GENERAL PRIMARY UPPER ELEMENTARY MIDDLE/JR. HIGH
SECONDARY COLLEGE/UNIVERSITY SUPERVISORS/ADMINISTRATORS

RETURN COMPLETED PROPOSAL FORM BY JULY 1st TO:
Email proposals to David Bosso at dbosso@berlinschools.org or Stephen Armstrong at Steph17895@aol.com.
Proposals may also be sent to 23 Lake St. South Windsor, CT 06074.
Please direct questions to David Bosso at dbosso@berlinschools.org or Stephen Armstrong at Steph17895@aol.com
Why NERC?
Let’s Count the Reasons

- Reuning with Long-time Friends
- Learning New Approaches - Meghan Connelly and SEEdebate
- Honoring Career Achievement - Joe Ellis - with Keith Dauer
- Inspiration - Liz Walker Shares Her Sudan Experiences
- You just never know who will show up!
- Checking Out the Latest Textbooks
Common Core State Standards Initiative and Social Studies

In December 2009, Ted McConnell, executive director of Civic Mission of Schools Campaign (CMS), offered the support and resources of CMS to NCSS for a special purpose. Together, we would convene leaders of national organizations in civics, economics, geography, and history to discuss working together to establish Common Core State Standards in Social Studies. Planning for the meeting also included Learning Point Associates, in particular Beth Ratway, a member of the NCSS Board of Directors.

The Common Core Standards Initiative is a joint effort by the National Governor’s Association (NGA) and Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO—the nation’s state school superintendents). It is backed by the Administration of President Obama; the Gates Foundation; Achieve, Inc.; and supported by many national education groups.

How It Began

Most knowledgeable observers long ago came to the conclusion that the current system of state-developed standards are a problem. They are too broad, too low in expectations, and too poorly written. There has been a growing call for what was once seen as the unthinkable—nationally developed and mandated standards and assessments. The Common Core State Standards Initiative (CCSSI) is an effort to develop better, deeper, and clearer standards for all states, developed by the states, rather than an effort led by the Congress or White House (www.corestandards.org).

Growing Momentum

Forty-eight states (all but Alaska and Texas) have agreed that they will support the development of the common standards developed by NGA and CCSSO, with 15 percent of the content left up to each state. By signing on, the states agree to implement the standards (and subsequently developed assessments). Over the past seven months, NGA & CCSSO, assisted by Achieve (with advisory groups from the discipline areas) have developed common standards for math and literacy/English. Those standards are in public review at this time.

The Obama Administration clearly supports CCSSI. One of the key requirements of the “Race to the Top” Funding from the US Department of Education (the largest Federal aide to education ever) is that states join together to develop common standards in the core disciplines. NGA and CCSSO have stated that once they have completed standards in Math English/Literacy, they will take up the development of standards for science and (a more vague promise) for the social studies.

The Road Ahead

Of all the education reforms currently being developed or talked about, the CCSSI has the greatest support and offers the most promise to improve education through better standards and assessments, and by ending the disparities in expectations between the states. If done incorrectly (or if a subject is left out), it also has great potential to harm a subject. Social studies standards must be developed by cooperation among stakeholder organizations in civics, economics, geography, and history. There will not be separate discipline standards. This single set of standards will drive assessment systems, as well as curriculum and instructional practices. Parallel guidelines will include suggestions and requirements for professional development.

We would like to build a more comprehensive approach to the development of standards that also includes assessment, instruction, and professional development. We estimate that the first part of the process, the actual development of Common Core State Standards in Social Studies, will cost $5-10 million. Funding is not currently available from NGA and/or CCSSO. That is the reason NCSS took action with other discipline organizations to become involved in this effort, and why NCSS and CMS convened the Common Core State Standards Summit.

Any process would include each organization that agrees to be involved as well as others who may offer particular strengths. The work would likely be organized by creating a small decision-making group and a large advisory group that would include every signatory organization. Such a structure would accommodate all important perspectives, but be enabled to get the work accomplished within a reasonable time frame. This is similar to the model currently being used by NGA and CCSSO.

Participants & Colleagues

Below is a list of the participating organizations as of February 15, 2010, our first deadline for signatures. (Details at www.socialstudies.org/CommonCore.) We will work toward adding other organizations.

- American Bar Association
- American Historical Association
- Center for Civic Education
- Civic Mission of Schools Campaign
- Constitutional Rights Foundation/USA
- Constitutional Rights Foundation/Chicago
- Council for Economic Education
- National Council for Geographic Education
- National Council for History Education
- National Council for the Social Studies
- National History Day
- Street Law, Inc.
- World History Association

Next Step

Our next step will include the development of research-based proposals to be read by supporters who we hope will fund the work in its entirety. One possible source of funding is an i3 grant (Investing In Innovation) from the Department of Education. If our groups were to apply together, all organizations would receive some degree of compensation for participation. Stay tuned. We’ll keep you posted!
Texas Board Approves New Social Studies Curriculum
by The Associated Press    May 22, 2010

Texas schoolchildren will be required to learn that the words “separation of church and state” aren’t in the Constitution and evaluate whether the United Nations undermines U.S. sovereignty under new social studies curriculum.

In final votes late Friday, conservatives on the State Board of Education strengthened requirements on teaching the Judeo-Christian influences of the nation’s Founding Fathers and required that the U.S. government be referred to as a “constitutional republic” rather than “democratic. The board approved the new standards with two 9-5 votes along party lines after months of ideological haggling and debate that drew attention beyond Texas.

The guidelines will be used to teach some 4.8 million students for the next 10 years. They also will be used by textbook publishers who often develop materials for other states based on those approved in Texas, though Texas teachers have latitude in deciding how to teach the material.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan said after the votes Friday that such decisions should be made at the local level and school officials “should keep politics out” of curriculum debates. “Parents should be very wary of politicians designing curriculum,” Duncan said in a statement.

But Republican board member David Bradley said the curriculum revision process has always been political but the ruling faction had changed since the last time social studies standards were adopted. “We took our licks, we got outvoted,” he said referring to the debate 10 years earlier. “Now it’s 10-5 in the other direction ... we’re an elected body, this is a political process. Outside that, go find yourself a benevolent dictator. GOP board member Geraldine Miller was absent during the votes.

The board attempted to make more than 200 amendments this week, reshaping draft standards that had been prepared over the last year and a half by expert groups of teachers and professors.

As new amendments were being presented just moments before the vote, Democrats bristled that the changes had not been vetted. “I will not be part of the vote that’s going to support this kind of history,” said Mary Helen Berlanga, a Democrat.

At least one state lawmaker vowed legislative action to “rein in” the board. “I am disturbed that a majority of the board decided their own political agendas were more important than the education of Texas children,” said Rep. Mike Villarreal, a San Antonio Democrat.

In one of the most significant curriculum changes, the board diluted the rationale for the separation of church and state in a high school government class, noting that the words were not in the Constitution and requiring students to compare and contrast the judicial language with the First Amendment’s wording.

Students also will be required to study the decline in the U.S. dollar’s value, including the abandonment of the gold standard.

The board rejected language to modernize the classification of historic periods to B.C.E. and C.E. from the traditional B.C. and A.D., and agreed to replace Thomas Jefferson as an example of an influential political philosopher in a world history class. They also required students to evaluate efforts by global organizations such as the United Nations to undermine U.S. sovereignty.

Former board chairman Don McLeroy, one of the board’s most outspoken conservatives, said the Texas history curriculum has been unfairly skewed to the left after years of Democrats controlling the board and he just wants to bring it back into balance.

Educators have blasted the curriculum proposals for politicizing education. Teachers also have said the document is too long and will force students to memorize lists of names rather than learning to critically think.

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Summer Resolutions:
• Renew CCSS Membership for 2010-2011
• Send email address to Mary.skelly@po.state.ct.us
Support Connecticut Social Studies
American history -- right and left

Liberal and conservatives have differing views; why not give students both sides and let them decide?

Opinion, March 17, 2010 | By Jonathan Zimmerman

Once upon a time, Americans did some very bad things. They enslaved Africans, displaced Indians, oppressed women and exploited laborers. Then the Great American Government came to the rescue. Spurred by protest movements for freedom and equality, the government instituted changes that brought the nation progressively closer to its founding promise. That’s the theme of most American history textbooks. And it’s also what offended the Texas Board of Education, which voted last week to approve a new set of social studies standards that emphasize America’s timeless virtues. The current standards, one board member explained, “are ripe with leftist political periods and events: the Populists, the Progressives, the New Deal and the Great Society.”

And here’s what most of my fellow liberals won’t admit: He’s right. These bursts of reform are the spine of the story that we tell ourselves, about who we are and who we want to be. When a social problem arises, we press our elected representatives to devise new laws and institutions that will make America more compassionate, decent and fair. That’s how most liberals -- and, I should add, most historians -- see the world. Our heroes are the champions of social justice -- Frederick Douglass, Jane Addams, the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and so on -- and the presidents who tried to put their ideas into practice: Abraham Lincoln, both Roosevelts, John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson.

It’s not an unalloyed embrace, mind you. Many of us have criticized these politicians for their errors, blind spots and inconsistencies. Kennedy takes a pummeling every few years for the Bay of Pigs, as does Johnson for escalating the war in Vietnam. But even our disparagement of liberal icons demonstrates our overall adherence to the liberal script. In the great national drama, our leaders are supposed to harness the power of government to the principle of social justice. And when they don’t, we take them to task.

Our scholarship about conservatism reflects a similar bias. Over the last few decades, historians have produced brilliant studies of Richard Nixon, Ronald Reagan and the rise of the so-called Christian right. But most of this work proceeds from the basic assumption that the right was wrong: about religion, race, the economy and everything else.

And now -- surprise -- conservatives are fighting back. Look closely at the new Texas social studies standards and you’ll find attacks on every sacred cow in the liberal pantheon, starting with the separation of church and state. While liberals often impute the principle to the Founding Fathers, the Texas standards hold that the founders imagined America as a “Christian nation.” The new standards also reject the idea of American imperialism, preferring to call it “expansionism.” They insist on the superiority of America’s “free enterprise system,” which will replace the prior standards’ reference to “capitalism.” (Capitalism, one school board member explained, “does have a negative connotation. You know, ‘capitalist pig.’”) When we get to the Cold War, the new standards note that recent archival discoveries “confirmed suspicions of communist infiltration in the U.S. government.” And for the 1960s and beyond, the standards advise, students should examine the “unintended consequences” of Great Society legislation, affirmative action and Title IX.

Conservatives on the Texas school board claim that these changes will simply provide “balance” to the dominant liberal paradigm. But their red-meat rhetoric says otherwise. Would these people rest easily if students -- following a “balanced” discussion -- concluded that the Great Society and affirmative action were really great ideas? I think not. And the same goes for liberals, who would bridle if the students walked away from class believing that ‘60s-era reforms were failures. For the most part, Americans do not enter this arena to make the case for “balance.” Instead, they want their side to win.

And that’s the real back story of the tragicomedy that’s unfolding in Texas. It’s easy for coastal liberals to scoff at the unlettered rubes of the Lone Star State, who are obviously revising history to fit their present-day predilections. But most of us all do, all the time, and then we foist these ideas on our kids.

What if we gave them multiple points of view instead? Recent history gives us a perfect opportunity to do precisely that. After the arch-liberal author Howard Zinn died in January, his “A People’s History of the United States” shot to No. 15 on the New York Times paperback nonfiction list. Just behind -- at No. 15 -- was Larry Schweikart and Michael Allen’s conservative “A Patriot’s History of the United States,” which received a big boost when Glenn Beck pumped it on his radio and TV shows.

So here’s a modest proposal: Instead of bickering about the “correct” version of the past, the Texas school board should decree that every high school history class use both of these texts. That would teach students that Americans disagree -- vehemently -- about the making and the meaning of their nation. And it would require the kids to sort out the differences on their own.

Most of all, though, it would require adults to be more “liberal” in the dictionary sense of the word: tolerant, reasoned and open-minded. And we would all need to be willing to lose, of course, if our children decided that our version of history was wrong.

Will we let them?

Jonathan Zimmerman teaches history and education at New York University. He is the author, most recently, of “Small Wonder: The Little Red Schoolhouse in History and Memory”.

It’s Never Too Early to Plan For Next Year’s Exciting Opportunities!!

By Beth J. DeLuco, Esq. CCLCE, Inc. Executive Director

Due to overwhelming demand and popularity the high school mock trial competition will move to December in the 2010-2011 academic year. Regional competitions will take place in the first two weeks of December. Case materials will be available on-line in mid-August, prior to the start of school. Quarterfinals, semi-finals and finals will be in January, 2011. This will also allow the winning team to go on to represent Connecticut at the National Mock Trial Competition for the very first time in 2011!!

Likewise, the middle school mock trial regional competitions will move to February in 2011 with quarterfinals, semi-finals and finals in late February, wrapping up the season prior to standardized testing dates. Case materials will still be available on-line the first week of September. Please keep an eye out for registration dates as deadlines will also change next year.

In addition, watch for both a fall and a spring high school debate competition in October and March, middle school debates in April and May, our annual fall Law Related Education Teacher Conference at WCSU in October, high school We The People competition in December/January, middle school We The People showcase in April, Project Citizen showcase and hearings in May, and the high school forensics crime scene investigation competition in the spring.

New events to look for include a Constitution Day Celebration at the Old State House for grades 3-8 on Thursday, September 16th. This event will have various stations of hands-on learning activities for your students and will both meet the federal mandate requiring activities in recognition of Constitution Day and also help students prepare their Constitution Day Contest entries!! At the elementary level, we will be showcasing new curriculum materials and resources to help 3rd, 4th and 5th grade teachers meet the new state mandate to teach the branches and levels of government. Also available to elementary schools is a new Civics Bee which can be done at an individual school level or at a district level.

As always, the CCLCE offers a wide variety of print resources on our website ranging from 800 primary source documents to full texts of books that can be downloaded and printed for free!! There will also be a new edition of Play By The Rules student books released in the coming year and we will be holding trainings for teachers for this program. We are also always available upon request for in-service or on-site trainings in any of our programs, materials or in content based-topics.

Please keep these programs and events in mind when planning your activities and lessons for next year.

For more information on our programs, please visit us at www.cclce.org or contact us at cclce@mindspring.com or (860) 509-6184.

Editors’ Note - continued from page 1

you have a date-book that includes October, write it in NOW. Better yet, use the workshop proposal form on page 3 and submit a workshop proposal. Share your talent with your colleagues.

Your editors promise not to have another conference session on the Connecticut Social Studies Framework. There is little more to say – and it’s difficult for us to say it through clenched teeth. The draft Framework is still on the CSDE website and we are not aware of any major revisions or plans to adopt another state’s standards for Connecticut. As you know, we are still without a social studies advocate at the CSDE, so it is difficult to get much news about what the state’s educational leaders are thinking about our field. Yankee Post will continue to be a vehicle for sharing information when we know it – yet one more reason for you to maintain your membership. In that spirit we have included a selection from the NCSS publication TSPP (aka The Social Studies Professional) that describes the early stages of a national effort to build a common set of social studies standards (page 5).

This issue contains a pot-pourri of information on a variety of topics. We have excerpts from a review of Diane Ravitch’s new book – our March issue provided a teaser (page 10). We have an article by Berlin’s David Bosso reporting on an exciting program he and two colleagues will experience next year (page 11). We have pictures from two conferences you may have missed – NERC and the Spring Awards Diner at the Mark Twain House. And, along with a report on the Texas social studies curriculum, we have an article by Jonathan Zimmerman of NYU (again we printed a teaser in March) commenting on the Texas standards dust-up and elaborating on our need to approach history with a more open mind (see pages 6-7). And don’t ignore several items on teacher resources.

So the year ends as it began for all of us: a challenge and an opportunity to get involved, a little controversy, some teaching resources and reportage from our membership. If one of those elements were missing, things would be very dull – indeed it wouldn’t be social studies. With that thought go our best wishes for a safe and restful summer and the hope to see you all on the web this coming fall.

Dan and Tim

danielcoughlin@charter.net    thomas.weinland@uconn.edu
NCSS Summer Professional Development Workshops

Innovative Approaches to the Teaching of World History
July 14-16, Yale University, New Haven, CT
Participants in this intensive three-day workshop will discuss and experience innovative approaches to both the content and the pedagogy of the teaching of world history. Faculty from Yale and other universities and master high school and middle school teachers of world history will discuss the most recent research information and teaching techniques relating to the teaching of ancient and modern world history and world cultures at both high school and middle school levels. Michael Yell, National Board Certified Teacher of middle school social studies and NCSS past-president, will present practical and engaging teaching strategies that are effective in grade 5-12 history and social studies classes. This workshop is sponsored by NCSS, the Programs in International Educational Resources (PIER) of the MacMillan Center at Yale University, and the U.S. Department of Education through Title VI National Resource Center grants and will be lead by Stephen Armstrong, past-president of Connecticut Council for the Social Studies and Maxwell Amoh, Director of PIER, Yale University. A fee of $350.00 includes tuition, materials, breakfast, and coffee during the day. Participants are encouraged to sample the many international restaurants in New Haven for dinner. Lodging at Yale University is available for an additional fee.

Powerful and Authentic Social Studies (PASS): A Teacher Training Institute
July 26-30, Santa Clara University, Santa Clara, CA
The PASS Teacher Training Institute will describe PASS criteria and standards for curriculum design, assessment construction, and effective instruction and will provide participants with the materials and expertise necessary to lead their own PASS training workshops in their schools and school districts. In small learning communities, participants will examine videotaped K-12 vignettes of teaching and create examples of curriculum units and assessment tasks to share with their learning community. Workshop fee, which includes snacks and lunch during the institute, PASS training materials, and continuing education credit, is $695.00 for NCSS members and $725 for non-members.

Teaching with Documents and Works of Art: An Integrated Approach
National Archives and Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, DC
Workshop 1, July 28-30 Focus: Civil Rights
Workshop 2, August 11-13 Focus: Norman Rockwell and the Four Freedoms
The National Archives and Records Administration, Smithsonian American Art Museum, and NCSS present two workshops in Washington, DC that will provide a varied program of lectures, demonstrations, collaborative work, and analysis of documents and works of art in order to introduce teachers to the holdings of the NARA and American Art. Participants will develop classroom activities that utilize both artworks and primary source documents as teaching tools in ways that sharpen students’ skills and enthusiasm for history, social studies, and the humanities. The fee for each workshop is $200 per participant.

American Confederation
Reaches a Constitution”
July 12-16 and July 19-23
Montpelier: The General Henry Knox Museum in Thomaston, Maine
The program of the Center for the Study of Early American History is still accepting applications for the fifth Summer Teacher Institute at Montpelier: The General Henry Knox Museum. Teachers can register for one or both weeks and apply for college credit. The program is free to attend with limited free housing is available and teachers will receive a $100 stipend for classroom implantation. For more information and application visit: http://knoxmuseum.org/cseah.html

Free Civil Rights Education Resource
“Finishing the Dream” (www.nbclearn.com/finishingthedream) is a new, free online video series for teachers, students, and parents bringing the civil rights movement to life so that students can see what actually happened and hear and see the people who actually participated in the movement. Some details:
More than 100 stories from the NBC News archives Includes events as they happened as well as retrospectives which allow students to see and understand the impact of history. Grouped into 10 thematic collections to explore the movement from different perspectives, such as political, legal, sociological, and personal. Embeddable video widget is available and will be updated monthly with new video content. Offered by NBC Learn in conjunction with the W.K. Kellogg Foundation Includes the most significant moments of the movement, such as the Montgomery bus boycott, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., the integration of Central High School in Little Rock, the Freedom Riders, and original documentaries featuring ordinary people, like Rosa Parks who risked their lives to fight for equality.


Attending high school in Houston in the 1950s, Diane Ravitch came into contact with a teacher named Ruby Ratliff. A passionate lover of literature and a fierce editor of homework, Ratliff, following Tennyson, told Ravitch “to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield.” The student evidently followed the teacher’s advice. Ravitch, a historian of American education and assistant secretary of education under the first George Bush, has long sought to find out what makes schools work. She has now found what that is, or at least what it isn’t: choice and testing. Her case against both is unyielding.

… Education was once considered purely a state and local matter. In the past 30 or so years it has become a national political football, with left and right fighting over various proposals, while nothing ever seems to get fixed. Meanwhile, many schools remain essentially segregated; how much you earn has a great deal to do with where you were educated; and even the best and brightest seem to know less geography and grapple with less history than [in Ravitch’s high school days]

Ravitch’s offer to guide us through this mess comes with a catch: she has changed her mind. Once an advocate of choice and testing, in “The Death and Life of the Great American School System” she throws cold water on both. Along the way she casts a skeptical eye on the results claimed by such often-praised school reformers as New York’s Anthony Alvarado and San Diego’s Alan Bersin, reviews a sheaf of academic studies of school effectiveness and delivers the most damning criticism I have ever read of the role philanthropic institutions sometimes play in our society. . . .

The trouble all started, in her telling, with Milton Friedman, whose 1955 article “The Role of Government in Education” advocated the idea that parents should be given vouchers that would enable them to purchase schooling of their choice. In the Reagan administration, Friedman’s essay provided the rationale for efforts to promote what Secretary of Education William Bennett called the three C’s: content, character and choice. Before long, support for school choice became bipartisan when urban public officials, many of them black Democrats, saw in vouchers a way to give minority parents the same options available to middle-class families who could afford houses in desirable school districts.

Testing, as Ravitch shows, also has something of a trans-ideological intellectual history. Though conservatives historically opposed a strong federal role in education, in the 1990s they began looking with dismay at evidence that schools were failing and turned to the idea of national standards as a way to overcome the problem. Liberals, meanwhile, hoped to see more money made available to the schools, and if testing was the price to be paid to identify schools that were failing poor and minority children, so be it. No Child Left Behind, passed in the fall of 2001, seems to belong to another political century.

Choice never fulfilled its promises, Ravitch argues, because its advocates spent more time talking about how education should be delivered than examining what education is. With so little effort devoted to the promotion of a sound curriculum, voucher schools, like those established in Milwaukee, turned out to offer few if any gains for those who attended them. As for charter schools, they have skimmed off the most motivated students without producing consistently better results than traditional public schools. She is skeptical of the charter movement’s free-market model of competition and choice. “At the very time that the financial markets were collapsing, and as regulation of financial markets got a bad name,” Ravitch points out, “many of the leading voices in American education assured the public that the way to educational rejuvenation was through deregulation.” Instead of treating markets as a panacea, she argues, we should look at the data, the latest of which shows that charter schools as a whole do not do better than traditional schools. Given that result, we should be working harder to preserve the benefits of community and continuity that neighborhood schools offer.

Testing experienced much the same fate as vouchers. Knowing that their students would be tested and that the results would be used to evaluate which schools would be rewarded, educators began teaching to the tests, at the expense of sound curriculum. But educational testing, Ravitch shows, is inexact, roughly the way public opinion polling is. Far from holding schools accountable, testing resulted in massive cynicism. Meanwhile the level of education received by many students remained “disastrously low.”

… Some may ask whether we should trust someone who was once widely viewed as a conservative but now actually says nice things about teachers’ unions. But for all the attention paid to Ravitch’s change of heart, she has always been less an ideologue than a critic of educational fads, whether the more touchy-feely forms of progressive education popular in the 1960s and ’70s or the new nostrums of choice and testing. Ravitch now supports ideas associated with the left not because she is on the left. She does so for the simple reason that choice and testing had their chance and failed to deliver. . . .

Alan Wolfe, a political scientist at Boston College, is writing a book about political evil.
Three Social Studies teachers from Connecticut have been selected for the 2011 Teaching Excellence and Achievement Program, a highly competitive and prestigious program of the Bureau of Educational and Cultural Affairs of the U.S. Department of State and IREX (the International Research and Exchanges Board). David Bosso from Berlin High School, Dawn Saari from Thames River Academy, and Wendy Youngblood from Shepaug Valley High School are the 2011 Social Studies recipients from Connecticut who will travel to a host country next year. Bosso, Saari, and Youngblood are scheduled to travel to Ghana, Bulgaria, and Peru, respectively. The key objectives of the TEA Program are to "contribute to improving the quality of secondary education" and to "develop professional and personal relationships between American and international teachers." In March, the three educators were among the American teachers who attended a two-day, pre-departure conference to prepare for their involvement in the program, the highlight of which will be a trip to their respective host countries in the Spring or Summer of 2011 to team-teach with a TEA international fellow and to participate in other educational and cultural experiences.

The TEA program “provides secondary-school teachers from Europe, Eurasia, South Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa, and the Western Hemisphere with unique opportunities to develop expertise in their subject areas, enhance their teaching skills, and increase their knowledge about the United States.” To this end, international teachers participated in a six-week professional development program in the U.S. this past February and March, that included “coursework and intensive training in teaching methodologies, lesson planning, teaching strategies, and the use of technology for education,” and a two-week internship at a secondary school “to actively engage participants with American teachers and students.” The workshop culminated at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, at which Bosso, Saari, and Youngblood met and worked with the 2011 American cohort and their international counterparts. The reciprocal visit by U.S. teachers will focus on teacher-training projects in TEA alumni schools overseas, and will involve classroom instruction, professional development workshops, visits to cultural and historical sites, and meetings with educational and civic leaders.

All three Connecticut participants have traveled extensively and have been engaged in numerous professional development endeavors. Each plans on maintaining the working relationship with their international partner in order to enrich the educational experience of their students and to bring greater awareness and understanding of other cultures. Bosso has been teaching Social Studies at Berlin High School for the past 12 years, including a world history course and several electives. In 2009, he was recognized by CCSS for its Excellence in Social Studies Education award, and currently serves on the Board of Directors. He earned a B.A. in History/Social Sciences from ECSU, a Masters degree in Educational Computing and Technology from the University of Hartford, and a Masters degree in History from CCSU. In addition to presenting at the CCSS Annual Fall Conference and NERC, he has written articles for Connecticut History, and has developed lesson plans for Connecticut Explored. Bosso received a Fulbright-Hays grant to Egypt and Israel in 2000, and has also traveled to Japan, Saudi Arabia, and China as a member of past educational delegations.

Saari is in her eleventh year of teaching at Thames River Academy, an alternative high school in Norwich, and is currently its acting assistant principal and work-experience coordinator. She is heavily involved with several local organizations for the purpose of providing TRA students with extra-curricular learning opportunities, most notably, the Jewish Federation of Eastern Connecticut (Encountering Holocaust Survivors Interview Project), the Norwich NAACP, and Bully-Busters. Saari earned her B.A. in History from Connecticut College and a M.Ed./Alternative Education degree from Lock Haven University in Pennsylvania. In 2008, Saari was a Fulbright-Hays participant to South Africa, a trip that focused on Student Achievement and Workforce Development in Student Populations.

Youngblood teaches American Studies, Sociology, and Women’s Studies at Shepaug Valley High School in Washington, CT. She is also an active member of the school’s extracurricular life as JV soccer coach, senior class advisor, and other activities. Prior to teaching in Connecticut, Youngblood served as a Peace Corps volunteer in Moscow and taught English in Western Japan. She has a B.A. in French and American Studies from Wellesley College and a Masters in History from WCSU. In 2009, Youngblood traveled to Turkey as part of a Fulbright-Hays delegation, and was recently awarded a National Endowment for the Humanities grant for this summer.

Bosso, Saari, and Youngblood are honored to have been selected to participate in this program and are greatly looking forward to this very rewarding experience. They will be among the more than 50 American teachers and 200 international fellows who have participated in, and benefited from, the TEA Program since its inception. Undoubtedly, their students, their colleagues, and indeed, the status of Social Studies in Connecticut will be enriched by this extremely worthwhile endeavor as well. For more information on the TEA Program, go to http://www.irex.org/programs/tea/.