President’s Message

Great success, but more work to do!

More than two years ago the CCSS Public Affairs Committee, under the leadership of Past-President John Tully, began working to build a strong coalition of support and to make the case for the importance of social studies in a K-12 education. Through formal presentations and numerous informal discussions with legislators, board members, CSDE staff members and educators throughout the state, committee members have clearly made the case that a critical goal of the public schools in a democracy is to develop informed, active citizens. A strong social studies program in every school district is at the heart of ensuring that students become these informed, active citizens.

The committee outlined three important goals to help reinvigorate the teaching of and respect for social studies in the state:

- Adoption of a Position Statement by the State Board of Education clearly stating the importance of the

(continued on page 2)

Editor’s Note

AT LONG LAST !!!! To John Tully, Steve Armstrong, Dan Coughlin, Alan Marcus and members of the CCSS Board: You Done Good, Real Good. Those of you reading these words – if you are not among those noted above – have no idea of the amount of hours spent developing the Social Studies Frameworks and then meeting with members of Connecticut’s political power structure to help secure adoption. From all reports those who presented the Frameworks at the CT Board of Education meeting on December 3 were nothing less than magnificent; the Board’s unanimous vote speaks to their work. See some excerpts from that testimony on page 3 along with an important notice from Steve Armstrong. In short, we are ninety percent home; your attention to local community and board reactions to the Frameworks over the next two months is critical. Please make every effort to review and understand the Frameworks; and if you encounter negative publicity in your local paper pass the word along to Steve Armstrong at the Department of Education.

While we are dispensing kudos we should also applaud the social studies leadership in New England – and especially Massachusetts – for producing a first rate national conference in Boston. Attendance exceeded expectations and feedback from those who attended sessions was very positive. The high-profile speakers were informative and challenging. One surprise for this editor: in this day of merging publishing companies I was astonished by the number of exhibitors and the quality of the materials they were offering. Are we

(continued on page 2)

SOCIAL STUDIES FRAMEWORKS GET UNANIMOUS “INTERIM” APPROVAL FROM CT STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

THANK YOU to everyone! Many, many people worked long and hard to be sure that we reached this point.
President’s Message continued

social studies in a well-rounded education and the need for social studies to be taught at every grade level. The board adopted such a statement last summer.

- Hiring a Social Studies Consultant at the State Department of Education. Last summer, our own CCSS and NCSS Past-President Steve Armstrong was selected from a pool of highly qualified candidates as our new consultant. Since joining the department, Steve has been virtually everywhere in the state making the case for social studies.

- Adopting new Social Studies Frameworks. On December 3rd, the State Board of Education voted unanimous “initial approval” of the new Social Studies Frameworks with a “final approval” vote scheduled for their February meeting. This is not quite what we had hoped for, but we are confident that the final approval will happen shortly. The Frameworks document is the work of a large number of Connecticut educators with input from the greater social studies community from throughout the state.

So, great progress has been made, but it is now up to us, the social studies professionals in Connecticut, to keep this momentum moving forward. First, we need to gather support for the new Frameworks to be sure the State Board of Education votes for final approval in February. Please send comments to Steve at Stephen.armstrong@ct.gov. We need to begin planning the companion document that will be developed this spring. The companion document will include, among other things, scholarly essays making the case for suggested content at each grade level along with sample inquiry lessons for this content. We need to plan a series of roll-out workshops that will be held in schools throughout the state this spring. Finally and most importantly, we as a social studies community need to work together to share ideas, lessons, resources and assessments that encourage this shift to inquiry in our classrooms.

Thank you for all you have done to help begin moving social studies to a more prominent place in Connecticut’s schools. Your attendance at workshops on inquiry; conversations with colleagues, administrators and local board members; letters to the editor in area papers and emails of support to the State Board of Education and CSDE all have a very positive effect. Please continue these efforts. CCSS really appreciates your support.

Dan Coughlin

Editor’s Note - continued

moving away from the textbook? Certainly there are plenty of options for those who wish to try. If you missed the conference, pages 4 and 5 offer you some pictures.

Much of the rest of this issue takes us beyond Connecticut’s borders. As states debate standards and tests, Texas continues its textbook review – see page 12 for a discussion on that process and see whether you think Sam Houston was a “liberal”. Then you might ask whether you care! There’s more on the standards debate and the controversy surrounding the US History advanced placement test - on pages 9-11. If you wonder what all the fuss is about, look no further than the lessons learned in the struggle to secure adoption for Connecticut’s social studies frameworks. Check out page 6 and the proposals for changing graduation requirements in New York, Missouri and elsewhere. Finally, there are two moving pieces on approaches to including multicultural materials in history and social studies –pages 7 and 8.

At the back of the issue we have some of the usual opportunities for students and teachers - pages 13-14. And please don’t neglect page 15. If you haven’t renewed your membership, make it a New Year’s resolution to support Connecticut Social Studies. That’s one way you can thank those cited above for their efforts on your behalf.

Have a safe, restful and enjoyable holiday,
Tim                    thomas.weinland@uconn.edu

Join CCSS - See Membership Form - page 15
Historians tell stories. Here is my story for you:
A girl – let’s call her Laura Mason – is born in Windsor to a family of shade tobacco growers who trace their roots back to the founding of Connecticut colony.
A boy – let’s call him Fernando Garcia – is born in the state of Veracruz Mexico to a farm worker who finds a way to bring his family to join an uncle living in Danbury.

Laura and Fernando are kids from very different backgrounds, but today both of them are children of Connecticut, and they deserve a social studies education that gives them both a sense of pride, and a sense of place. They deserve an education that shows them that history – important history – the history of a great nation – has happened/is happening all around them. That the very streets they walk reflect every important change in the American story – and that they are not bystanders but powerful actors in the great drama of human existence. **Walter Woodward, Connecticut State Historian**

One of the most important goals of public education, arguably the most important goal, is to develop well informed, actively engaged citizens. We believe this framework will encourage social studies classes where students are actively engaged and become better informed every day. Engaged, informed students become engaged, informed adult citizens. **Dan Coughlin, President, CCSS**

We believe it is essential that students understand how the lives of people living in Connecticut, throughout time, have impacted larger events around the country and the world. Teaching national and international history through a local lens makes content personal, immediate, relatable and relevant. Ultimately, it makes history meaningful. And, when students learn about the historical events that happened in their own communities and the long-term, broader implications of these actions, then they are able to see how their own actions impact a larger community and the lives of others; this is the first step in taking informed action. **Jody Blankenship, CT Historical Society**

**From the State Department: “After the Frameworks Are Approved…”**

**Stephen Armstrong**

Once the Connecticut Social Studies frameworks receive final approval from the State Board of Education, the State of Connecticut and Connecticut Council for the Social Studies have definite plans to help Connecticut districts and social studies teachers become familiar with and utilize these frameworks. Upon approval, we will be holding 10-12 late afternoon/early evening sessions at various locations around the state, where the frameworks and the inquiry process will be explained in detail. We will also be presenting a 5-session webinar series on the frameworks and on inquiry. These will be archived, so that teachers can see them at any time.

Many teachers have asked for additional assistance in creating curriculum documents at the district level. We will be creating a companion document, which will dig much more deeply into content, inquiry activities, and assessment for each grade. We hope to make it available by the end of summer. Districts can use this document as they see fit. We will be looking to identify and work with 6-8 “model districts” that would be willing to work with the state frameworks to create new social studies curriculum documents. We will provide assistance to these districts as they do this work. Information on this will be available soon.

This coming summer, we will be running two four day conferences for teachers and curriculum leaders, one in June and one in August. Unlike last year, we will run two strands: one those who have had experience with the C3, inquiry and the state frameworks, and one for “newbies”. In addition, on the fourth day teachers and curriculum leaders can attend a specific strand that they want to attend: strands would include working with museums, inquiry and Connecticut history, civics, human rights, and elementary school.

If you have questions, contact state Social Studies Consultant Stephen Armstrong at Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov.
NCSS National Convention
Boston, 2014

REATIONS?
Hard at Work - the
Connecticut Delegation:
Steve Armstrong
Dan Coughlin
Ken Dunaj
Tony Roy

A Sense of the Past

Overwhelming

Inspiring
Left: Jose Antonio Vargas
Above: Nick Kristof
(pictured here with wife
Sheryl Wudunn)

Thought Provoking

Please Pass It On
If you have enjoyed this issue and found it useful, please pass it on to a colleague. If you have suggestions for improving Yankee Post, please contact the editor at thomas.weinland@uconn.edu
Honoring Achievement

Above: Ken Burns with Keith Dauer (L)

Right: Jim Moran - American Antiquarian Society with Ken Burns (R)

Meeting some strange people . . .

Sharing Information and Ideas

. . . and some long-time friends . . .

. . . and thinking about how much fun it will be next year!
Missouri Students May Soon Have to Pass U.S. Citizenship Test to Graduate

Linda Ong

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. -- Students statewide may soon be required to pass the U.S. citizenship test. It’s all part of an initiative by the Missouri Civics Education Initiative to ensure future generations understand American Government and U.S. History. This initiative would require a passing score in order for students to get their high school degree or G.E.D equivalent. Current state law requires students to pass some sort of test on the U.S. and Missouri Constitution-- but this initiative would standardize the exam statewide.

Most students taking the course Law and Liberty at Parkview High School can name all three branches of government. But more difficult questions like how many justices make up the Supreme Court can stump to students. These are the kinds of questions immigrants must answer correctly in order to earn U.S. citizenship-- questions students in Missouri may soon also have to answer.

“When our citizens don’t understand basic American civics, they’re not likely to vote or take part in policy,” said Sam Stone, Campaign Manager for the Missouri Civics Education Initiative. Stone said the test would be made up of 100 questions from the U.S. citizenship and immigration exam. Stone said by using the existing citizenship test, there would be no cost for test development, administration, nor study materials which are available online. “This state legislative initiative allows schools to administer the test any way they deem fit,” said Stone.

Missouri law already requires students to take some form of an exam. Currently, Springfield Public Schools students are required to take a course in American government and pass U.S. and Missouri constitution test in order to graduate. The test was developed from national assessments and teacher input. “When you look at the test we’ve developed, we’re not asking students to just memorize information about government, we’re asking them to read excerpts from the preamble of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights,” said Nancy Schneider, SPS Coordinator of Curriculum and Materials Design. Schneider said the district is open to change. “As long as they’re asking the information the students are learning so the student have the adequate learning to pass, I think that’s fine,” said Schneider.

Those who support the initiative point out that a heavy national focus on science, technology, engineering, and math has put civics in the backburner-- something former Missouri governor Bob Holden worries will affect the future of Missouri. “This initiative incorporated into our educational system at the high school level, is the right place, at the right time to educate America’s youth on civic education before they become fully-fledged citizens with responsibility that voting entails,” said Holden. Six other states are pursuing similar legislation, including Oklahoma and Utah. There is no one yet sponsoring a bill for the legislation.

To see the test: http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/quiz/learners/study-test/study-materials-civics-test/naturalization-self-test-1
http://www.ozarksfirst.com/story/d/story/missouri-students-may-soon-have-to-pass-us-citizen/15894/9RGu9hPTKmT_XvkmR3OxA?utm_source=dvr.it&utm_medium=twitter
Deepening cultural understanding and appreciation within students through in-country and virtual educational dialogues among teachers.

Donna P. Leake and Tim Flanagan

Mohamed is a primary teacher who lives in Azrou, Morocco and teaches 70km from the city of Larache, which is over 300km from Azrou. He leaves for school on Sunday and takes a combination of taxis, buses and a long hike to arrive at his school. He stops in Larache for supplies, including food for two weeks. He has to be careful not to purchase too much since he will have to walk the last few hours of his journey.

Hassan is a middle school teacher in the Al Akhawayn School of Ifrane and lives with his family in Azrou about a 15-minute drive from the school. His school is modeled after what is believed to be a “typical” school in America. Although it may not have as many specialized spaces for learning it is equipped with electricity, running water and Internet access. His classroom is equipped with teaching materials and other resources needed for science instruction.

This summer twelve Connecticut educators embarked on an experiential learning journey during which they acquired valued information about the educational, cultural, political and economic conditions of countries located in the Middle Eastern North African (MENA) region. More importantly, these educators had opportunities to reflect deeply upon their roles as educators and as citizens in a global community. They took time to better understand their own sense of self; to examine their own biases and beliefs; and to become more skilled at evaluating issues from various perspectives.

This journey was funded, in part, by a $55,000 grant awarded to the University of New Haven for the Fulbright Hays Group Study Abroad Program: “Global Classrooms and Cultural Connections for 21st Century Learners: Morocco’s Bountiful Perspectives.” Participants were assessed a fee to cover the remainder of the costs. The successful grant application was the product of Drs. Khadija AlArkoubi, Halima Belemlih, Donna Leake, and professional colleagues at the University of New Haven. Participants included a mix of pre-service and practicing Connecticut teachers. Taji Hailey, Kasey Carter, Janelle Chong, and Ross Kelly are students from the graduate education program at the University of New Haven. Practicing teachers included Sarah Stolli (Meriden), Tim Flanagan (Stonington), Caterina Zdrowski (Woodbridge), Dana Gilland (Westport), Ruby Hsu (Wallingford), Emily Phillips (Hartford), Erik Flaucher (Norwich Free Academy), and Lindsay Rosario (Connecticut River Academy).

Perhaps one of the most valued components of this experience was the opportunity the Connecticut educators had to meet and hold Socratic conversations with Moroccan educators from a variety of school settings. The language barriers fell away as they shared their passion for their profession, their commitment to their students, and the similarities and differences within their teaching experiences.

The conversations among the educators changed preconceived and existing mindsets about education in Morocco as well as their own teaching situations. They discovered not all schools and teaching circumstances were alike in either country. In the same way there is no typical American school there is no typical Moroccan school. Similar to Mohamed and Hassan, the Moroccan educators included those that taught in rural one-room schools that lacked running water as well as educators from large cities, such as Rabat, that taught in well-equipped schools that had modern amenities including advanced technological resources.

Whereas teachers in Connecticut faced the challenge of designing curriculum instruction informed by the Common Core Standards, teachers in Morocco needed to adhere to a government mandated curriculum. Teachers in Connecticut, worried about job security and tenure rights, were impressed that once appointed as teachers in Morocco, job security is guaranteed. However, this was balanced by the fact that the government maintained the right to assign teachers to any school across the country. The transfer process was not often easy; therefore, teachers assigned to what might be perceived as difficult teaching situations could potentially remain there throughout their careers.

Although teachers from Connecticut often purchase supplemental resources for their students, the Connecticut teachers were respectful of the resilience of the teachers in Morocco to make do with what they had, and to solve problems on their own, without relying on the government. For example, some teachers purchased most of the basic school supplies for their students, and many of the Moroccan teachers use their own mobile devices and purchase their own laptops for classroom use and Internet connections.

The more surface differences were explored the more inner similarities were recognized. These educators were all committed to providing their students with optimal learning experiences. “Meeting teachers in Fez who have the utmost love for their students, even when struggling against the many obstacles, reminds me that we are all working towards the same purpose, the love of our students,” noted Emily Phillips, a teacher in the Hartford Public Schools.

Whether they taught in rural or city schools in Morocco or in Connecticut, the educators came to recognize that in spite of differences, they faced similar obstacles including inequality of resources, varying levels of parental involvement and limited access to quality education for all students. Although sometimes more pronounced in Morocco due to the cultural perspective regarding young girls from rural areas living away from home to attend middle and high school in a city, the challenge to keep students attending and/or engaged in school was universal. Likewise, in both countries, the value students and parents placed on the importance of education varied, and this impacted students’ desire and often willingness to learn.

(continued on page 8)
Morocco is a multilingual society. The U.S. educators discovered that Moroccan students learn several languages at home and in school. For most students, this includes Moroccan Arabic, which is learned at home, and Modern Standards Arabic and French, which are taught in school. French is the language of instruction at universities, so mastering it is essential in order to gain a coveted spot at one of these tuition-free institutions. In addition, most students begin taking English in middle school. Tamazight, the language of the Amazigh people, has recently been mandated as well. Although the knowledge of languages is impressive, Moroccans are struggling with helping students truly master all of these languages, and, although they are all a part of daily life in Morocco, some wonder if there is too much emphasis on language instruction. This seems to be the opposite problem that U.S. teachers face, where students typically do not begin second language instruction until middle or high school and tend to learn just the basics.

All of the educators recognized and embraced the importance of cross-cultural dialogue among themselves as educators as well as among their students. There was interest in and desire to share plans, form partnerships, and maintain communication, whether through the use of technology or the exchange of letters and artifacts, with American educators and students. They believed that extending such opportunities to their students would provide students with opportunities to examine and develop a true sense of their identity and place in the world community, as well as the ability to critically analyze information sources produced from a variety of perspectives in order to develop viable solutions to local and global community issues. The U.S. teachers have written curriculum units based on their experiences in Morocco and are planning community presentations. A blog by teacher Tim Flanagan (moroccotflanagan.blogspot.com) of Stonington contains more details about the group’s experience in Morocco.

Both sets of educators left with a more personal understanding and deeper appreciation of “the other” that will impact their classroom instruction and interactions with students from cultures different than their own. Dana Gilland, a teacher from Westport Public Schools recalled a response of a Moroccan educator who had traveled eight hours to meet his American counterparts. “When we asked why he had come so far, he said, ‘I have to open the world to my students so they see people are people. You may not like what a government does but that doesn’t mean the people are not like you and me with the same desires, goals and ambitions for their lives.’” Ruby Hsu, a teacher from Wallingford Public Schools points out another benefit of this program: “As an educator, the most valuable lesson you can give a child is how to interact with others. Building community means accepting all differences and knowing how to handle them when you are given the opportunity. Understanding cultural diversity and social cognitive diversities are key factors in building a peaceful world.”

Malala spreads memoir, inspiration to classrooms

By STACY A. ANDERSON  Nov. 13, 2014 2:54 PM EST

WASHINGTON (AP) — Malala Yousafzai, a Nobel Prize winner and global icon for girls’ education, is spreading her philosophies of human rights and youth empowerment to college and high school classrooms across the world. George Washington University, The Malala Fund and the publisher of a memoir about the Pakistani teen are launching a free, online resource guide for college and university classrooms to use while teaching her book, “I Am Malala.” A high school version of the online guide will be available next year. The free syllabus will look at her story and reflect on eight themes, including violence against women and girls, education as a human right for girls, cultural politics, religious extremism and global feminism.

Malala’s father Ziauddin Yousafzai, an educator who wrote the guide’s preface, said the curriculum can help girls and boys, men and women. “This is also the story of her father, who supports his daughter,” he said in an interview with The Associated Press. “This is the story of a father who always says that if you ask me ‘what I did for my daughter?’ Don’t ask me what I did, rather ask me, ‘what I didn’t do?’ I didn’t clip her wings. And this is a very powerful message, because, really I didn’t do anything special.”

“Every parent, every brother, every husband, every father can get this message from this book that we have kept our women suppressed,” he said. “So, it tells the world, ‘let’s stop it.’ It is unjust, it is unfair to (hold) back half of the population.” Yousafzai said the curriculum will help Malala’s experience move from a media sensation to a “story for all generations” for years to come. The school curriculum on the memoir was created last year by George Washington faculty members and first taught during the fall 2014 semester.

In 2012, a Taliban gunman walked up to a bus taking Malala and other children home from school in Pakistan’s volatile northern Swat Valley and shot her in the head and neck. Malala, 17, now resides in Britain, where she was flown for medical care after the attack.

http://bigstory.ap.org/article/a05063eca7f649f5b816bfeea0a78becf/malala-spreads-memoir-inspiration-classrooms
The Hechinger Report: Is the new AP U.S. History really anti-American?
What changed and what didn’t in the latest “Common Core” version of the class
By Emmanuel Felton  September 30, 2014

http://hechingerreport.org/content/new-ap-u-s-history-really-anti-american_17513/

Martin Luther King Jr., Benjamin Franklin, George Washington Carver, James Madison and Rosa Parks. If you’ve heard that the new AP U.S. History course description doesn’t mention these legendary Americans, you have not been misled. But whether the new version of the class skips over key moments in United States history – and even disparages the nation – are still being hotly debated across the country. Here’s a look at how the controversy began, what’s really different in the new APUSH (a nickname for the class that critics and supporters still agree on), and how the national war over Common Core is influencing the battle.

The controversy

WHAT’S ALL THE FUSS ABOUT?

What has changed: Before: College Board released topics, but didn’t guarantee they’d be on the test. So teachers taught everything.
Now: College Board has published a curriculum with all the topics that will be tested. Teachers have some wiggle room to choose specific areas they’ll teach.

What hasn’t changed: Before: College Board didn’t mention specific historical figures like Martin Luther King Jr. and James Madison.
Now: Those figures are still omitted, although the course’s creators say that doesn’t mean they shouldn’t be taught.

In October 2012, College Board, a nonprofit that develops and distributes not only the AP exams but also the SAT, revamped APUSH to encourage teachers to go more in depth into fewer topics. The class is College Board’s second most popular, after AP English Language and Composition, with 442,890 students taking the exam in 2013. After the changes, the course description for the first time also called for encouraging teachers to impart critical thinking skills to their students, ideas in line with the Common Core, a set of guidelines for math and English that most states have adopted. These changes first went into effect this school year.

The new course description raised little notice until July, when some members of the Texas State Board of Education expressed concern that the class would bring Common Core into Texas schools. State law bans Common Core. In August, the Republican National Committee brought national attention to the controversy when it passed a resolution asserting that the new curriculum “reflects a radically revisionist view of American history that emphasizes negative aspects of our nation’s history while omitting or minimizing positive aspects.”

The fight reached a boiling point in September. On September 19, the Texas State Board of Education passed a resolution asking that the AP U.S. History curriculum be rewritten “in a transparent manner to accurately reflect U. S. history without a political bias.”

Around the same time, Julie Williams, a school board member in Jefferson County, Colorado, a district of more than 84,000 students just west of Denver, proposed completely revamping the college-credit-earning course in the local schools because she said the new version had “an emphasis on race, gender, class, ethnicity, grievance and American-bashing while simultaneously omitting the most basic structural and philosophical elements considered essential to the understanding of American History for generations.” In response to the proposal, hundreds of Jefferson County students skipped school in protest, citing concerns that the plans would lead to censorship. And in South Carolina, a group calling itself S.C. Parents Involved in Education also raised concerns about what isn’t explicitly mentioned in the new course – the founding fathers, civil rights leaders and wartime heroes – and what is – “wartime experiences, such as the internment of Japanese Americans.”

The critics are correct that the class has seen some significant changes, but not all claims about the new APUSH pan out.

What’s new, and why

Previously, College Board only released a list of suggested topics APUSH teachers should cover, but did not guarantee those would be the only ones covered on the exam. There were concerns that this led to an encyclopedic approach, where teachers tried to teach everything that could possibly appear on the test.

Now, unlike in the previous APUSH course description, there is a curriculum that outlines specific concepts that must be covered. The concepts are broad. For example: “Africans developed both overt and covert means to resist the dehumanizing aspects of slavery.” For this concept, the guide suggests that teachers could use slave rebellions, acts of sabotage or escapes to illustrate this point. So while students would need to understand the concept for an exam question, they could, for example, cite the specific rebellion they were taught.

Critics and supporters alike have linked the changes to the Common Core State Standards, and the AP controversy is in some ways an offshoot of the ongoing political fight over Common Core. Though the shift to Common Core in most American schools doesn’t directly apply to AP U.S. History, the math and English standards were meant to influence the teaching of other subjects, (continued on page 10)
(The Hechinger Report - continued from page 9)

the College Board has acknowledged that elements of the new course align with the goals of the new standards.

“The redesigned AP U.S. History course emphasizes developing students’ ability to analyze historical texts and to support their written responses using valid reasoning and relevant evidence,” reads a Frequently Asked Questions guide put out by College Board. “This emphasis dovetails with the Common Core State Standards for reading and writing literacy in history.” Critics have pointed out that David Coleman, who is sometimes called an “architect” of the Common Core, is now the president of the College Board. But Coleman didn’t step into the role until after the AP U.S. History framework was released.

Instead of responding directly to questions, a representative from the College Board pointed to a series of documents and prior statements on the topic. But in response to concerns over anti-American bias, the College Board released a full sample exam for the new AP U.S. History course. The group says the new course is more balanced than previous versions, as it requires “teachers and students to look at multiple sides of an issue.” And while it’s true the new course framework does not mention Martin Luther King Jr., Benjamin Franklin, George Washington Carver, James Madison or Rosa Parks, neither did the previous course description, in effect from the 2010-2011 school year through the end of the last school year.

“Any United States History course would of course include King as well as other major figures such as Benjamin Franklin and Dwight Eisenhower,” read an open letter penned by the authors of the new AP U.S. History course, a group of current and former high school and college history teachers. “These and many other figures of U.S. history did not appear in the previous AP framework, either, yet teachers have always understood the need to teach them.”

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Escaping from History

The daily dose of bad news has been so overwhelming lately that this one fragment of good news almost passed me by. But I was tremendously encouraged to read the story about high school students, teachers and parents in Colorado who launched a mass protest against curriculum changes that would, in effect, have sanitized the teaching of history. If there is anything worse than not teaching history at all it is teaching fake history, a comforting, patriotic fairy tale with no social protests, no imperial adventures, no bitter race or class conflict, in short no inconvenient truths, and above all nothing that might encourage students to challenge authority. Well, they have challenged authority and good for them. One of their placards read: “Our education is not your political agenda,” which shows a nice understanding of what citizenship means. Their teachers are obviously doing a good job.

The idea of smiley face history may be attractive to some school boards, but students are already overprotected, and feeding them lies about the nature of reality is an insult too far. It’s an insult to the teachers too. Teaching itself is hard enough without being pressured to teach nonsense.

Anyone who tries to teach real history is already up against movies, television, and video games, that offer cartoon versions of a past that consists entirely of Hollywood-style battles between good guys and bad guys in which the good guys usually win. It’s depressing enough to see some of the stuff that passes for history in the mass media, without asking schools to add to the confusion. No wonder the kids do badly on their tests.

And they do very poorly. When Abraham Lincoln addressed the United States Congress in 1863, he began with these words: “Fellow citizens, we cannot escape history.” It was a noble sentiment, and perhaps it was true then. But it’s not true now. Not only can we escape history, we have escaped history, by the simple process of forgetting most of it.

The education system has allowed this historical amnesia to creep up on us by reducing and sometimes eliminating history as a subject. Report after report confirms that our knowledge of our own past is pathetically thin, The Department of Education discovered that six out of ten high school seniors couldn’t say how the United States came into existence. (Answer: through illegal rebellion against the authority of the British King). Fifty per cent of high school seniors couldn’t say what the Cold War was. (Answer: the Cold War was a political mistake, but an economic stroke of genius). National history knowledge tests show that most fourth-graders can’t identify the opening passage of the Declaration of Independence, and that most high school seniors can’t explain the checks-and-balances theory that is (or used to be) the rationale behind the three branches of the United States government. These young people will be voting soon, and some are voting already.

Part of the problem is that it’s hard to teach authentic history today. It’s too full of dynamite political correctness issues that can blow a teacher right out of a job. It’s too carved up into tiny fiefdoms: black history, women’s history, gay history, and so on – until it is impossible to make any sense of the past as a whole. So the students of Jefferson County, Colorado are leading the way by demanding more history, and more real history. They have done themselves and all of us a great service.

Copyright: David Bouchier
http://wshu.org/post/escaping-history
L.A. Unified adopts free history curriculum from Stanford University

By TERESA WATANABE

Venice High sophomore Vanessa Pepperdine had always hated history class: the dry lectures, the boring textbooks, the forgettable factoids about famous dead people. “You just read out of the textbook, and it wasn’t interesting,” Vanessa said. But during a recent period of World History, Vanessa and her classmates were engaged in excited discussion about the 1896 Battle of Adwa between Ethiopia and Italy. Their teacher, Daniel Buccieri, showed them an illustration of the event and peppered them with questions. Who do you think won? How do the American and Ethiopian accounts differ and why? How was Ethiopia able to defeat Italy in this pushback of European imperialism?

With that, the students became sleuthing historians in search of truth rather than passive recipients of a droning lecture. That’s the aim of a free, online Stanford University curriculum that is picking up steam nationally as educators grapple with widespread evidence of historical illiteracy among U.S. students.

Only about a third of Los Angeles Unified School District high schoolers were proficient on state standardized U.S. and world history tests last year; nationally, 12% were proficient in U.S. history in the 2010 National Assessment of Educational Progress exam. L.A. Unified became the curriculum’s largest booster this year when it signed an 18-month, $140,000 contract with the Stanford History Education Group for training and collaborating on more lesson plans. So far, 385 teachers and administrators — including about 40% of the social science instructors in the nation’s second-largest school system — have attended Stanford-led workshops this year.

Nationally, the curriculum has been downloaded 1.7 million times by educators in all 50 states since the program was launched in 2009. As the teaching of history comes under national scrutiny, with critics attacking the new Advanced Placement U.S. history guidelines as anti-American, the Stanford program takes no sides. With more than 100 ready-made lesson plans covering a range of U.S. and world events, the curriculum features a central historical question and provides primary documents for students to use in shaping their own answers, backed by evidence.

Was ancient Athens truly democratic? Were the “Dark Ages” really dark? Why did Chinese students support the Cultural Revolution? Did Abraham Lincoln actually believe in racial equality? What made the Vietnam War so contentious? “This overturns the traditional textbook,” said Sam Wineburg, the Stanford education professor whose research more than two decades ago laid the groundwork for the approach. “Students explore questions with original documents and cultivate a sense of literacy and how to develop sound judgment.”

In a 2001 book, Wineburg argued that students must be trained to question history in order to understand it, just as professionals do; the curriculum is called “Reading Like a Historian.” The ability to question the credibility of information and its sources, he said, is critically relevant in today’s digital age — judging claims, for instance, that President Obama was born in Kenya.

The Stanford group has also developed free assessments, more than 65 so far, that gauge mastery of the targeted skills through short essay questions rather than traditional multiple-choice tests. In a test run five years ago, 236 students in five San Francisco high schools using the curriculum outperformed peers in factual knowledge and reading comprehension compared with those in traditional classes, Wineburg said.

For school systems such as L.A. Unified, the curriculum came at an opportune time — just as the district is shifting to new learning standards known as Common Core. The standards focus on cultivating such skills as reading complex texts and integrating and evaluating information from multiple sources. “The Stanford curriculum aligns almost perfectly with Common Core,” said Kieley Jackson, a district coordinator of social science curriculum.

Not all teachers have embraced the lessons. Some say they take too long, typically four days, although Stanford trainers say they can be adapted for one or two. Others say they are short on content. And some instructors prefer their approach of lectures and textbooks. Only about a quarter of social science teachers at Hollywood High use the curriculum, said Neil Fitzpatrick, the department chair. But Fitzpatrick and many of the 60 colleagues who attended a training this month praised the curriculum and shared ideas on how they modified it — actions that Stanford fully supports — with bingo games, film clips, Play-Doh, poetry, poster sets, Google images.

Buccieri, of Venice High, said he added the Italian perspective of the Battle of Adwa to further enrich the lesson. He said he began incorporating elements of Wineburg’s approach after reading his book more than a decade ago and found the Stanford curriculum on his own four years ago. “History isn’t a set of answers I’m passing down to kids,” he said. “It’s more a set of questions and problems. To me, that’s more exciting.”

Many students seem to agree. Michael Corley, a history teacher at Polytechnic High in Sun Valley, said nearly 90% of about 100 students he polled preferred the Stanford curriculum over their textbook. Students don’t feel they can argue with the textbook, he said. But using the Stanford lesson on Prohibition to debate why the 18th Amendment banning alcohol was adopted and evaluating perspectives about it from a medical doctor, anti-saloon activist and children’s rights advocate? Now that excites them, he said.

He added that the Stanford curriculum seems to especially engage boys, perhaps by appealing to their competitive “gamer mentality,” and said his students who typically earn Cs and Ds also do well because the lessons spark their interest. “You can see what they’re truly capable of,” he said.

At Venice High, Buccieri’s 10th grade students said their teacher’s approach has completely changed their attitude toward history. Rosio Salas said she had 10 substitutes in one year who did nothing but assign textbook readings and worksheets. She didn’t remember anything she learned. “You just did it because you had to do it.”

Now, students say history is exciting. They understand it. They even remember it — as classmate James Gregorio proved by explaining that a Serbian terrorist’s assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria ignited World War I. “You’re not just sitting there having to listen to him,” sophomore Drew Anderson said. “You get to figure things out for yourself.”

http://www.latimes.com/local/education/la-me-history-stanford-20141126-story.html#page=1
Texas Takes Last Pass at Social Studies Textbooks
by Morgan Smith Oct. 24, 2014

Two hours into a meeting called to parse revisions to new social studies textbooks for Texas schoolchildren — and a month before the deadline for final approval — the State Board of Education found itself confronting a tricky question. Was Sam Houston a liberal?

Board member Pat Hardy believed that Houston, hero of the Texas revolution and two-time president of the Texas Republic, might balk at the description. “I don’t know if he would like that or not,” said Hardy, a Republican from Fort Worth. “I just never hear Sam Houston referred to as a liberal. And those of us who liked Sam Houston want to keep him on our side.”

In November, the 15-member elected board is set to approve new social studies materials, including books and online tools that will be used in Texas public schools for the next eight years. Publishers have spent 18 months developing their versions of world, U.S. and Texas history and shepherding them through rounds of expert reviews, revisions and public comments, hoping to get their texts into the Texas market. The final edit is now in the hands of a Republican-controlled board whose bruising political battles over curriculum standards — including infighting over everything from creationism to causes of the Civil War — have previously flared into national view.

In textbook-approval, state law limits the role of the education board to vetting instructional materials for factual errors and ensuring they meet Texas curriculum standards. But the process can still provide an opening for strong-willed state board members to wield outsize influence, pushing to include pet historical figures or alter the presentation of politically charged topics like climate change or Islamic fundamentalism.

Guidelines from the Texas Education Agency define a factual error as an objective inaccuracy or a bias so severe that it interferes with student learning. The latter category creates a large gray area, said Thomas Ratliff, a Republican board member from Mount Pleasant.

“In the nebulous world of interfering with student learning,” said Ratliff, whose district crosses 31 counties in Northeast Texas, “when does bias become so bad that it becomes an error?”

Case in point? The question whether Sam Houston, who opposed secession, was a liberal. Asked by a colleague to explain how that constituted a factual error, Hardy said it was “methodological.” “When you give a modern context to a historical event, that is a factual error in my opinion,” she said. “It’s almost like an anachronism.”

The process of reviewing the more than 100 products submitted for eight different social studies courses has revealed obvious mistakes like grammatical errors or incorrect answers on end-of-chapter quizzes. But more often, potential flaws have fallen into less objective territory: whether an account of the Arab-Israeli conflict strikes an appropriate balance, for example, or whether a profile of Hillary Rodham Clinton should be included in a section on American leaders.

At the recent meeting, board members suggested that publishers make it clearer that Jews were the primary target of the Holocaust, add context to show that not all anti-abortion campaigners use violence and note that the bodyguards who assassinated the Indian leader Indira Gandhi were Sikhs. Another time, as “food for thought,” board Chairwoman Barbara Cargill, R-Woodlands, told a publisher that while she appreciated a text’s discussion of the role of religion in the French Revolution, there could be greater coverage of how it played in the American Revolution.

An exchange between a board member, Ken Mercer, R-San Antonio, and Rhonda Haynes, a vice president of textbook publisher Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, illustrated the challenge that publishers face. Mercer questioned whether a section on world religions included balanced coverage of “the good and the bad” of Islam, as required by the state curriculum standards known as the Texas Essential Knowledge and Skills, or TEKS.

It depended on “who is defining balance,” Haynes said. “The size of a textbook and then the need to meet certain TEKS, it limits opportunities to include a greater discussion,” she said. “To add more, we are just stuck. There is not enough room to do it.”

A 2011 law diluted some of the board’s control over instructional materials, in part to limit the ability of members to force publishers into making last-minute changes. The law ended a requirement that any approved materials cover 100 percent of Texas curriculum standards, which curbed the board’s ability to knock a textbook off the list over a few errors. It also shifted the responsibility for buying instructional materials from the state level to the local level, allowing school districts to buy products outside of the state board’s recommended list. But most Texas school districts still look for the state board’s seal of approval when selecting their instructional materials.

The boards’ vetting process carries weight as an assurance that instructional materials meet a certain quality threshold, said Alicia Thomas, who has served as an academic officer for both San Antonio’s North East Independent School District and the Houston school district, where she worked until 2012. “It provides a foundation upon which school districts can make individual decisions,” she said, adding that without the board, each school district would need to undergo that process at the local level.

Board members continue to control the state curriculum standards — last updated for social studies in 2010 — which publishers aim to follow. “The whole structure is in a way a charade,” said Jacqueline Jones, the chairwoman of the history department at the University of Texas at Austin. In September, Jones delivered a detailed report to the state board identifying severe biases and “omissions of fact” in an American history textbook up for approval that she said encouraged “ideological biases that are either outside the boundaries of established, mainstream scholarship, or just plain wrong.”

(continued on page 13)
It was “very frustrating,” she said, to realize when she testified before the board in September that most of the errors were the result of publishers following curriculum standards set by the state four years ago, meaning they were unlikely to be corrected. “The whole thing is very bizarre to me that people can just say we want to glorify this country, and we don’t want students to dwell on unpleasant aspects of the past,” she said. Such a version of history would cause students to alternate between “getting cynical and being bored,” she added. “They know we live in a hyperpartisan society today, that there are real debates about all kinds of things,” she said. “For textbooks to sweep that under the rug strikes me as very odd.”

Disclosure: The University of Texas at Austin is a corporate sponsor of The Texas Tribune. A complete list of Tribune donors and sponsors can be viewed here.

http://www.texastribune.org/2014/10/24/texas-takes-last-pass-social-studies-textbooks/
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