President’s Message

On behalf of the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies, thank you to all of the attendees, presenters, speakers, sponsors, and others who helped to make the 48th Northeast Regional Conference on the Social Studies a memorable professional development experience. We also extend our sincerest appreciation to our NERC co-chairs and committee chairs for their dedication and efforts over many months. An event of this magnitude, with so many details and moving parts, takes a tremendous amount of planning, time, and energy. The members of CCSS, many of whom sacrificed untold hours for NERC 48, are proud to have provided this platform in support of our organizational focus on pedagogy, advocacy, networking, and professional growth. There was a lot happening in Hartford in mid-April, and we hope all NERC attendees were able to truly experience the “Power of Place,” both through the conference offerings and in the city itself.

Following our all-day, pre-conference sessions, NERC 48 officially opened with words of welcome from Commissioner of Education, Dr. Dianna Wentzell. Our lead keynote presenter, Dr. Larry Paska, Executive Director of the National Council for the Social Studies, provided a compelling and informative overview of the national social studies landscape, and Dr. Bob Bain, of the Big History Project, presented an engaging luncheon keynote. In each instance, we were encouraged to think more deeply about social studies education and our roles as practitioners and advocates.

A special bonus this year was not only the opportunity to include our annual awards reception as part of NERC, but to combine this event with the New England History Teachers Association. Congratulations to all of the award winners from both CCSS and NEHTA. As usual, the acceptance speeches were inspirational and moving, and it was

(continued on page 2)

Editors’ Note

If you missed this year’s NERC, you missed a winner. Kudos to Tony Roy, Valerie McVey and Jennifer Otte for their imaginative planning and scheduling. Those who remember earlier Hartford NERCs will recall the multi-building schedule and trudging through rain to attend a session down the street. The Hartford Marriott Downtown was a great site, which made connecting with friends easy and enjoyable. On pages 3 and 4 you will find pictures of some of the activities with one page devoted to the joint awards reception shared by CCSS and NEHTA. For your editors of “long experience”, hearing the achievements and the brief comments of the awardees never gets old.

If there is a theme to this issue of Yankee Post, it would be “challenge”. The events of the spring, rising out of the horror of the Parkland shooting have challenged students, teachers and administrators to address the efforts of students to make their voices heard. Reports from two Connecticut schools, and one from Vermont, are scattered throughout this issue. Likewise, events, words and attitudes from various sources remind us that the challenges of our multi-racial, multi-ethnic nation will always be a “work in progress.” Two articles, including one reviewing National Geographic’s mea culpa on race, appear on pages 5 through 7.

And if you find yourself in a self-congratulatory bubble, thinking that social studies is the wave of the future, we offer two articles that will challenge your comfort level. One is by Chester Finn, a frequent critic of our field; the other suggests that the push for STEM be augmented to include STE(A)M. We have occasionally suggested that STEM include history, hence becoming S(H)TEAM. Cute? Maybe, but a challenge to all of us to continue to make a responsible and supportive case for our discipline.

But wait! There is more! With challenge comes opportunity (continued on page 2)
President’s Message - continued

another enjoyable event of celebration and camaraderie. We are grateful to have been joined by Secretary of the State Denise Merrill, a longtime friend of CCSS, and we thank Senator Richard Blumenthal for providing official citations to the awardees. As an organization, we are honored to recognize educational excellence in our field and we thank all of our award recipients for what they do every day in support of social studies education.

Even as NERC 48 was taking place, we have begun the process of planning for our annual conference, the theme of which is “Finding Our Voice: Supporting Students to Take Informed Action.” Given our current political landscape, we feel that this theme is timely, relevant, and crucial. More information will be forthcoming. In addition to our efforts in preparation for this event, CCSS continues to provide various offerings in conjunction with a number of our statewide partners. Be sure to visit our website, ctsocialstudies.org, for updates.

As I enter my fourth year as president of CCSS, I remain humbled and impressed by the dedication, volunteerism, and enthusiasm of our Board of Directors. We are comprised of K-12 teachers, college professors, museum educators, and others. We come from all over the state of Connecticut. We have varied backgrounds, interests, roles, and expertise. We have a range of professional experience, from relatively new to veteran to retired teachers. Some members have been with the organization for over 30 years and some are emerging as teacher leaders in their school communities and professional organizations. What we have in common, though, is what contributes to the ongoing success of our organization: a passion for our discipline that translates into efforts to ensure that a robust social studies education remains a pillar of our educational system.

As we enter the final weeks of the 2017-2018 academic year, please take some time to look back on the many successes that took place in your classrooms, schools, communities, or other professional setting. Most importantly, take a moment to recognize the critical role you played in making such positive - and often powerful - occurrences a reality. Wishing you a well-deserved, restful, and enjoyable summer.

Editor’s Note - continued

and at least two opportunities present themselves in the coming months. Check Steve Armstrong’s news from the State Department of Education on page 11. And please note that CCSS will hold a Fall conference on October 26 at the Four Points by Sheridan in Meridan. The theme is “Finding Our Voice.” We can hardly imagine a more timely opportunity to consider how we can make citizenship “real” for our students and support significant learning. Save the date NOW.

And as always, we wish you a safe and restful summer.

Tim  thomas.weinland@uconn.edu  
Dan  danielcoughlin@charter.net
NERC AWARDS DINNER

CCSS AWARDS
left: CCSS and NEHTA Awardees with Commissioner of Education Dianna Wentzell and CCSS Officers David Bosso and Elyse Poller

below: l to r
Carol Fellenstein - Excellence in SS K-8
Nicole Fontaine - John Stedman Award
Olivia Traina - Pre-Service 4-8
Rachel Riendeau - Excellence in SS 9-12
Elizabeth Willett - Pre-Service 9-12
Robert Regan - Bruce Fraser Friend of SS

NEHTA KIDGER AWARDS
Left - Jon Willson - Secondary Teaching
Center - Dr Manisha Sinha (with Keith Dauer) - Research
Right - Kristen Borges - Hicks-Kennedy Award
It’s Time to Make It Clear Where You Stand on Race and Equity in Schools

Posted: Mar 11, 2018   Innstoy – Teachers Leading
By David Bosso

As a White man I can recall only a few times in my life when I have been viscerally aware of the color of my skin. The first was when I visited the Bahamas with my college roommate, who had grown up there. I was uncomfortably self-conscious. Still, this was the first time it occurred to me that being perceived and treated differently along racial lines is what my roommate and friend experienced every day. Years later, I traveled to Ghana and heard little kids calling out, “Obruni! Obruni!” when they saw me. The term is the Twi word for “foreigner,” and usually is translated colloquially as “White person.” Although I had read that the expression is not meant derogatorily, I could not shake the feeling of being acutely cognizant of my identity. Such incidents made it starkly evident to me that I have an extremely limited understanding of the lived experiences of people of color. I never have had to deal with prejudice and discrimination in all its insidious forms. I never have been confronted with racially-charged aggressions. I have lived my life and I have spent my teaching career under a blanket of privilege.

I am used to “White spaces.” I teach in the same high school I attended as a student, and I live in the same insular, predominantly White, town where I grew up. As a student, I had exactly one teacher of color until college. The faculty and staff in my school district are overwhelmingly White, and at every educational event I attend, there is a noticeable lack of educators of color. 2016 Washington Teacher of the Year, Nathan Bowling, in his recent piece, rightly affirms that “[s]tudents of color need to see more people of color in positions of expertise and authority.”

White students need to see more educators of color in our classrooms and schools as well. If I had more teachers of color as a student, and if, during my teacher training, issues of race and privilege were explicitly addressed, perhaps I would have been more mindful of how identity as a White teacher has shaped my perceptions. I would have read Jonathan Kozol’s Savage Inequalities and Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man less as social discourses that seemed distant and inconceivable and more as reflections of reality. I would not have been so taken aback the first time a student addressed me as “Mister” without my surname, as I had learned to expect. I would have been more unequivocal in explaining why “All Lives Matter” is a perfunctory, misguided rebuttal to “Black Lives Matter.” I would have been more aware of how the hidden curriculum of our educational system inherently favors some students and marginalizes others, and I would have been more aggressive in questioning such institutional practices.

As a social studies teacher, I have always prided myself on cultivating a sense of open-mindedness, acceptance, compassion, and respect for others. I want all of my students to feel welcome and supported, and I want them to learn to ask deeper questions, understand and care about global events, and feel inspired to tackle significant social challenges.

Despite these ideals, I used to think that it was my responsibility as a teacher to remain impartial and to allow students to arrive at conclusions through their own acts of critical thinking and discovery. Last year, though, in the midst of our ongoing political and cultural tensions, I felt I needed to be more forthright. I wrote the following statement, printed it, and posted it on the door to my classroom:

American ideals are valued and practiced in this classroom. Regardless of your national origin, religious beliefs, racial identity, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship status, socioeconomic background, ability, or any other characteristic, you are welcome, safe, respected, supported, and have a voice here.

Perhaps because of the tenor of our times, the sign received quite a response on social media, from colleagues, and from students. As determined and proud as I am to stand by these principles and to ensure that such beliefs are embraced and carried out in my classroom and school community, I am also dismayed to feel the need to proclaim them. Still, simply displaying these words means very little if they are not supported by action: initiating discussions with students and colleagues, calling out bigotry, advocating for fair policies, and taking a stand against injustices.

I can see now that my experiences as a student and as a prospective teacher essentially prepared me to teach students who look like me. This is true for many White teachers. As professionals and moral beings, we cannot claim to carry out the ideals of education in a democratic society if teachers and schools do not provide for the academic, emotional, and social needs for all students, including students of color. The only way that we can begin to disrupt the institutional structures that prevent all students from reaching their full
potential is by challenging the very norms, values, and expectations that perpetuate a cycle of disillusionment and disenfranchisement. Among the most important first steps that white teachers can take to upend the status quo is to “acknowledge the difference that difference makes,” as 2012 Maryland Teacher of the Year, Josh Parker, suggests in a recent video. Parker means that, among other measures, White teachers must recognize and confront their own views and biases. Although unnerving, it is necessary if we want to move from rhetoric to action. NNSTOY’s Courageous Conversations About Race in Schools provides an introspective starting point for those seeking to spark dialogue and further thinking about the role of race in our schools.

In one of the Courageous Conversations videos, Ken Patterson, a teacher in Baltimore County Public Schools, asserts that we cannot begin talking about equity if we do not have a strongly held belief that all students can achieve. As teacher and activist José Luis Vilson states, “We have to respect the idea that we are all fully human and all fully capable.”

Now is a good time to take stock of where our biases may exist. This is difficult for some of us because we have yet to realize the ways by which our experiences influence our thoughts and actions. As teachers, we must believe in the promise and potential of all of our students. As a White teacher, I am doing all of my students a disservice if I am not making efforts to examine, criticize, and transform the attitudes, policies, practices, and expectations from which I, and those like me, have benefited. Neutrality and objectivity are no longer options. Our students cannot afford for their teachers, especially White teachers, to remain quiet about such pressing issues of race and equity in our schools.

David Bosso is the 2012 Connecticut Teacher of the Year and a member of the National Network of State Teachers of the Year (NNSTOY). He teaches Social Studies at Berlin High School in Berlin, Connecticut.

National Geographic confronts its past: ‘For Decades, Our Coverage Was Racist’

The Washington Post    By Derek Hawkins March 1, 2018

Months ago, when National Geographic set out to make race the sole focus of its April 20 issue, it decided to engage in some soul-searching. For much of its 130-year history, the magazine depicted people of color in crude stereotypes. Its archives are loaded with pictures of brown-skinned “natives” gazing in apparent awe at Western technology, articles referring to tribal peoples as “savages,” and of course many, many photos of bare-breasted Pacific island women striking vaguely seductive poses. Those glossy Geographics, stacked up in attics and basements, were favorites of more than a few curious young boys — with little interest in New Guinea or Polynesia.

So in preparation for its examination of race, National Geographic editor in chief Susan Goldberg tapped John Edwin Mason, a University of Virginia professor specializing in the history of photography and the history of Africa, to dive into the magazine’s past. On Monday, she discussed his findings in an editor’s note. “What Mason found in short was that until the 1970s National Geographic all but ignored people of color who lived in the United States, rarely acknowledging them beyond laborers or domestic workers,” Goldberg wrote. “Meanwhile it pictured ‘natives’ elsewhere as exotics, famously and frequently unclothed, happy hunters, noble savages — every type of cliche.”

The title of Goldberg’s piece put it more bluntly: “For Decades, Our Coverage Was Racist. To Rise Above Our Past, We Must Acknowledge It.” It was an extraordinary concession from the magazine. Renowned for its photography and its coverage of science, history, anthropology and the environment, National Geographic has also faced criticism over the years for reporting on the world through a narrow, white, Western lens.

Breanna Edwards of the African American-focused news and culture site The Root called the move “the first step to righting a long-overlooked and perhaps even taken-for-granted wrong.” “Bluntly acknowledging its own past in this way is indeed powerful, but it is not necessarily something, I think, that we should applaud, as much as we should expect,” Edwards wrote, “especially at this time in our lives when race and discussions of racism and even general cultural insensitivity can be volatile, tense and perhaps even deadly.”

Others were more critical, including Vox’s Kainaz Amaria, who tweeted that the magazine’s “colonial visual legacy” had, in effect, trained nonwhite, non-Western people to allow themselves to be “exploited and otherized.” Mason, the professor, touched on a

continued from page 5

continued on page 7
Taking civic action is at the heart of inquiry and young people should participate in schoolwide endorsement/participation. The Department supports students' right to political speech and would like to support efforts to participate in a nationwide walkout under the following conditions:

- Taking civic action is at the heart of inquiry and young people should have the power to make positive changes. This should be supported at NFA.
- A walkout should be planned with the entire school community and with the support of administration and the SAB.
- Students must be able to choose to participate.
- Social Studies teachers must take time to discuss the issues with students and share a variety of high quality resources/readings to help students decide how they may want to use their political speech.
- Schoolwide endorsement/participation should center on the theme of school safety, rather than one side of the political debate on gun control.
- The Social Studies Department would like to participate in administrative discussions surrounding schoolwide plans.

Goldberg noted that she is the first woman and the first Jewish person to serve as editor in chief, so she’s sensitive, she said, to the magazine’s legacy of discrimination. “It hurts to share the appalling stories from the magazine’s past,” she wrote. “But when we decided to devote our April magazine to the topic of race, we thought we should examine our own history before turning our repertorial gaze on others.”

She highlighted several examples of racist content the magazine published over the decades. In one instance, National Geographic in 1916 ran an article that called Aboriginal Australians “blackfellows” who “rank lowest in intelligence of all human beings.” A 1941 piece used a racial slur to describe black California cotton workers. And a 1962 photo depicted a white photographer showing his camera to a group of Timorese men. “The native person fascinated by Western technology” was a recurring theme, Mason told National Geographic. “It really creates this us-and-them dichotomy between the civilized and the uncivilized.”

Goldberg and Mason also found that National Geographic was racist in what it omitted from its coverage. A 1962 article on South Africa neither quoted black South Africans nor mentioned the massacre of 69 black people by police in Sharpeville 2½ years earlier. “That absence is as important as what is in there,” Mason said in Goldberg’s piece. “The only black people we saw were doing exotic dances … servants or workers. It’s bizarre, actually, to consider what the editors, writers, and photographers had to consciously not see.”

Until the 1970s, National Geographic did little to challenge stereotypes in white American culture, Mason found. “National Geographic wasn’t teaching as much as reinforcing messages they already received and doing so in a magazine that had tremendous authority,” he said. “National Geographic comes into existence at the height of colonialism, and the world was divided into the colonizers and the colonized. That was a color line, and National Geographic was reflecting that view of the world.” As for the bare-breasted island women the magazine regularly featured in glossy, full-color photos: “I think the editors understood this was frankly a selling point to its male readers,” Mason told NPR.

Goldberg said the magazine has improved in recent years — in part by putting cameras in the hands of the people who were often on the other side of the lens. In one project in 2015, for example, the magazine gave cameras to young Haitians and asked them to shoot pictures of their world. That would have been “unthinkable” in National Geographic’s past, Mason said.

Goldberg said she wants to continue on that course by hiring more diverse journalists at the magazine. “The coverage wasn’t right before because it was told from an elite, white American point of view, and I think it speaks to exactly why we needed a diversity of storytellers,” Goldberg told the Associated Press. “So we need photographers who are African-American and Native American because they are going to capture a different truth and maybe a more accurate story.”

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**Addressing Student Activism - One Department’s Policy**

The Department discussed how to best support students planning to participate in nationwide walkouts and/or use their political speech in some other way. We arrived at the following conclusions:

- Taking civic action is at the heart of inquiry and young people have the power to make positive changes. This should be supported at NFA.
- A walkout should be planned with the entire school community and with the support of administration and the SAB.
- Students must be able to choose to participate.
- Social Studies teachers must take time to discuss the issues with students and share a variety of high quality resources/readings to help students decide how they may want to use their political speech.
- Schoolwide endorsement/participation should center on the theme of school safety, rather than one side of the political debate on gun control.
- The Social Studies Department would like to participate in administrative discussions surrounding schoolwide plans.

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**Addressing Student Activism - A High School Response**

As a senior at Windsor High School, I knew that this year I would be expected to be a leader. I am the president of multiple clubs and have various academic leadership positions. However, the Parkland shooting on February 14 changed the story of my senior year. As soon as I got wind of students taking action, I emailed my principal and started planning.

On March 14, we led my school’s walkout in solidarity with the national movement. At 10am, over 1,000 of my peers filed into the gym pep-rally style for 17 minutes of thoughtful programming planned by a committee of students. We read a list of major shootings since Columbine, had a moment of silence, sang “Imagine” by John Lennon, heard a reading of the poem “Violins” by Rowan Ricardo Phillips, and had students lead chants. Standing in the center of it all, surrounded by my peers, participating in a program I helped create, I got a glimpse of the power students can have when they take a stand.

Mackensie Harrison
Can Social Studies Get Even Worse?

Chester E. Finn, Jr.   Thomas B. Fordham Institute

Way back when you were young (i.e., 2003), the Thomas B. Fordham Foundation published a hard-hitting report titled Where Did Social Studies Go Wrong? It lamented the manifest failures of social-studies education, identified a number of culprits, and recommended a series of fundamental rethinks and reforms.

Among the shortcomings that we cited was “hostility on the part of many educators at all levels to the kinds of basic knowledge ordinary Americans think important for their children to learn.” Another was the displacement of discipline-based education in history, geography, politics, and science with something far more amorphous, touchy-feely, and non-substantive known as “social studies.” Recounting its emergence in our pages, Diane Ravitch wrote:

Educational theorists complained that teaching about heroes and history stories was nothing more than “daydreaming.” They wanted the schools to deal “realistically” with the problems of the world. They encouraged the schools to socialize their students by centering their activities on home, family, neighborhood, and community. They said that the schools should teach the present, not the past. One state after another began to eliminate history from the elementary grades and to replace it with expanding environments (home, neighborhood, community). The very idea that students would have fun learning about long-dead kings, queens, pirates, heroes, explorers, and adventurers was dealt with contemptuously by prominent educational reformers as a form of unacceptable escapism from the real problems of society.

Plenty of culprits turned up in the pages of our report, but most prominent among them—both because of its widespread influence in American K–12 education and because of its ceaseless flow of bad curricular and pedagogical ideas—was the National Council for the Social Studies (NCSS).

One example (again from our 2003 publication):

Astonishingly, the website of the National Council of the Social Studies in September 2002 stressed the teaching of tolerance as an antidote to “the anti-democratic” forces at work in the United States represented by the Bush administration, and listed as its first recommended lesson plan a look at the internment of Japanese-Americans that followed Pearl Harbor. This was consistent with the advice given by a keynote speaker at the annual meeting of the National Council for Social Studies just two months after 9/11, who “warned against patriotic displays like the singing of ‘God Bless America.’”

Fast forward to today and nothing much has improved—except that the world (and nation) in which we live has greater need than ever before for its young adults to possess a solid grounding in the country’s history, values, and civic institutions. In an earnest attempt to do something about the civic illiteracy that besets the overwhelming majority of Americans, a number of people started wondering why we don’t expect kids, as a condition of high school graduation, to pass the same test that the U.S. requires of immigrants seeking citizenship.

It’s not a high bar. A few years back, the test itself was overhauled into a hundred basic questions about U.S. history, government, and geography, all of which have straightforward factual answers: Name the three branches of government, for example; or name one right or freedom from the First Amendment. Some of the questions resemble trivial pursuit: How many Amendments does the Constitution have, for instance; name one of the authors of the Federalist Papers. But it’s far from burdensome. You could pass it with a few hours diligent study. Frankly, if a seventh grader, much less a high school student, can’t already answer six out of ten questions chosen at random from a set of one hundred questions—that’s what candidates for naturalization must do—it’s an indication that something has gone quite awry in your education. Check out the test for yourself and see if you don’t agree.

With the encouragement and support of a non-profit organization called the Joe Foss Institute, another non-profit called the Civics Education Initiative has been urging state leaders to mandate passing the citizenship test as a high school graduation requirement. To date, some seventeen states have adopted some version of this recommendation. But, true to form, NCSS takes a dim view of the initiative. In a position statement issued last month (fifteen months after passing a similar resolution at their annual meeting), that organization doesn’t exactly denounce the citizenship test, terming it an “admirable effort,” but NCSS then declares that the exam “threatens to derail the effort at implementing both a quality civic education and an effective associated assessment.”

A curious reader at this juncture might well ask, “Derail what effort?” In the 2014 round of National Assessment testing, a mere 23 percent of U.S. eighth graders scored at or above proficiency in civics; just 18 percent in U.S. history. Given these alarming scores, one might expect NCSS to grab like a drowning man reaching for a life preserver at any excuse to inject history and civics content into America’s classrooms.

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The organization, however, sees things quite differently. It goes on—at some length—to beg educators and policymakers instead to implement its own preferred approach, which turns out to be both pie in the sky and far more controversial than anything in the citizenship test. For it seeks not just “classroom instruction” and “discussing current events and controversies,” but also such things as “school governance” (and “school climate reform”), “social and emotional learning,” service learning, and, potentially most controversial of all, “action civics,” which is a little nebulous but seems to boil down to advocacy and protests. Those are certainly fundamental rights of Americans, but how public schools approach them, particularly in today’s overheated, polarized climate, is a very touchy matter indeed.

I would never suggest that memorizing the answers to a hundred questions turns one into a great citizen, much less that we shouldn’t expect much more from a proper civic education in our schools. But when almost no schools are delivering a proper civic education, and just a third of states hold either schools or students to account for imparting or acquiring such an education, it seems not unreasonable to start with the basics. If nothing else, it’s a matter of simple fairness. If we demand that naturalized citizens master a few rudimentary facts of U.S history and civics, it seems churlish to exempt our seventeen-year-olds from the same extremely modest demands.

Something is better than nothing. In that spirit, requiring all kids to learn the stuff that new citizens are expected to know is a whole lot better than what passes for civics (and social studies) education in most of the U.S. today. Could and should schools do more than that? Of course. But why not start with something that’s both doable and laudable, rather than damning it with faint praise and substituting something that is both unworkable for schools and apt to stick in the throats of many parents, voters, and taxpayers? This isn’t a case of the best becoming the enemy of the good. It’s an example—the NCSS is really good at this!—of the questionable becoming the enemy of the plausible.

Addressing Student Activism - A Middle School Response

“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.” ~MLK Jr.

In some schools across the country kids held up signs. And in other schools students stood in silence to remember the lives lost. All the action taken on the date of March 14th was in spite of the fear that a day at school could turn deadly and be one’s last. All action taken was a result of students’ commitment to raise awareness for all lives lost to gun violence across the country.

This is just what happened at Mansfield Middle School when a group of student leaders came together to ensure all student voices were heard. They organized an event in the school auditorium where a student-made video was shown. A video in which kids throughout the MMS community had been welcomed to speak and share their own opinion on how we could limit gun violence.

At this event, each of the student organizers and a few others spoke, spoke in a way that they hoped would spark action and remind all students that their voices matter. Showing this was merely the first step of a miles-long race. This event was not centered on policies, or one particular way to fix the problem.

It was a place of grieving, a place of remembrance, and a place centered on the question of how many more lives have to be lost for action to be taken. Most importantly, it was a place in which student voices were heard, student action was taken, and a place where students at MMS provided hope.

The event that took place in the MMS auditorium on March 14th was filmed and is being made into a video to be sent to state legislators, along with note cards filled out by students proceeding out of the auditorium, to encourage any action that could be taken to save lives, not only in schools but in every corner of the country.

While some students wanted to participate in the assembly, others wanted to participate in a “walk-out” where they stood silently to remember those lives lost in Florida for seventeen minutes. Once the seventeen minutes was up, many of those students came to the auditorium for the rest of the assembly. Each group respected each other’s decisions and coped in their own way. It was a truly remarkable stance by all students.

• Written by Nick Lanza, 8th grade student, MMS and one of the student organizers for the MMS “walk-in” assembly on March 14, 2018
Julie Zaumer wrote an article in the Washington Post on April 12th about Americans' knowledge of the Holocaust. Her conclusion was that adults in this country have a frighteningly limited knowledge of the Holocaust. This conclusion was based upon interviews with 1,350 American adults. The interviewees were «recruited by telephone and an online non-probability sample». Although a small sample, conclusions about the Holocaust were, to us, astounding. Admittedly, one of us brings Jewish heritage to this perspective and the other brings years of experience as a history teacher. Baby boomers lived World War II and its aftermath. The stories were personal. Schools had veterans visit children's classrooms and generals like Patten and Eisenhower were heroes. And, we grew up wanting to ensure that such a thing could never happen again. Not just the war, itself, but the killing of 6 million Jews. So imagine our dismay, when we read two of Zaumer’s conclusions about millennials. Here they are.

• Two-thirds of American millennials surveyed in a recent poll cannot identify what Auschwitz is.

• Twenty-two percent of millennials in the poll said they haven't heard of the Holocaust or are not sure whether they’ve heard of it -- twice the percentage of U.S. adults as a whole who said the same.

The study and the articles that followed its publication raise some interesting points. Whether the sample was too small, or biased, it does reveal there are some adults who went through our schools and did not learn or retain what was being taught. World History and American History are taught in all public schools as far as we know. Units on WWII are included and how can one teach those without teaching the Holocaust? The comments that followed the article defended education saying the topic was taught in high school. So why are the findings so disappointing? Why teach history if it isn’t going to have some impact on the future?

Time Magazine’s contributing author Katy Steinmetz offers this definition of the derivation of the word ‘history’.

The short version is that the term history has evolved from an ancient Greek verb that means «to know,» says the Oxford English Dictionary’s Philip Durkin. The Greek word historia originally meant inquiry, the act of seeking knowledge, as well as the knowledge that results from inquiry. And from there it’s a short jump to the accounts of events that a person might put together from making inquiries -- what we might call stories.

How do we facilitate student learning and retention of the information we want them to acquire? Certainly, the dedicated work of history teachers is not to get students to pass a test revealing they memorized what was taught. Nor should that be the goal of the leaders who support them. How have so many younger Americans lost hold of the certain horrific reality that was the Holocaust? Is reading that between 5 and 6 million Jewish people were ‘exterminated’ dwarfed by reading that (according to Brittanica.com) 8,528,831 people died or were killed in WWI? Unless the context and the story are told well, it will be.

There are lessons in the history we teach... human lessons, lessons about what human beings are capable of accomplishing and are also capable of doing, what motivates us and what deters us from our highest actualizations. They are more than facts, more even than stories, they are life lessons. We know many found history classes boring and irrelevant. But, history isn't dead. It lives in us.

Teaching With STE(A)M

We wonder if in teaching history as a story of facts, we have scrubbed it clean of the emotional story that carries the important messages. It may surprise you (or not) that we turn to STE(A)M here. The foundations of STE(A)M teaching and learning are in the ways subjects are related to each other, problem solving, projects based learning, creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication. We have written before about the integration of subjects but we cannot let history be the stand alone, isolated, representative of the past. No, it is too important and has too much offer if we are to survive and thrive, wisely and humanely as a nation.

From a US perspective, entry into WWII was a response to the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbor. How many can answer why Japan did that? What was the value of the relationship built between Prime Minister Winston Churchill and FDR? How did that relationship affect the war? What was the basis of the motivation of Adolph Hitler and his supporters? What are the values students hold about rights for all human beings and the respect for all human beings? For the Holocaust, we have the Shoah Testimonies on video to provoke questions and investigations. It is the questions and how the learning is designed that can take the string of facts that are history and turn them into a journey that touches and remains with the students. For every history teacher who wants students to remember lessons as adults, we suggest looking to the STE(A)M world. The arts, mathematics, and the use of problems that provoke learning hold the key to helping history become personal lessons that can be felt and understood. We cannot afford to lose these lessons and we need them to reach all.
State Department Activities

Update on Recent Legislation Mandate

Many of you may have seen that the state legislature recently passed legislation mandating the teaching of the Holocaust and Genocide in Connecticut schools. The State Department of Education will be releasing additional information and guidance on this legislation shortly.

Interest In Popular Music in Social Studies Classroom Webinar Series

A group of educators has formed to increase the use of popular music in social studies and other classes. Next year the group plans to conduct a webinar series and do workshops on ways to use music in the classroom. If you are interested in becoming involved or learning more about this, contact state social studies consultant Stephen Armstrong at Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov.

Ideas for Webinar Series

Next year the Connecticut State Department of Education and the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies will be partnering on a series of webinars for Connecticut social studies teachers. If you have an idea of what you would want in a webinar series, or would like to be a webinar presenter yourself, contact state social studies consultant Stephen Armstrong at Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov.

Teaching the 2018 Elections

I know that in mid-May no one wants to look to the fall, but I would encourage you to think about how you are going to teach about this fall’s elections. I know that teaching the 2016 presidential elections was incredibly difficult in many cases; in some Connecticut schools the elections were NOT taught. However, we owe it to our students to make them aware of the critical issues facing our state and our country. Some approaches that might be tried as you teach this fall’s elections:

- It will greatly improve classroom discussion if you establish from the beginning a firm set of ground rules for political discourse. Most importantly, insist that students follow the discussion rules you set. All sides should be comfortable expressing their opinions. Most research shows that students don’t really want you to express yours; they want you to be “above the fray”. A classroom where all students can express their views without fear of ridicule should be every teacher’s goal. The teacher has to set the rules to make this happen.
- There are elections for House of Representative seats that many people don’t care about in presidential election years. This can be a year to work with students to find out what congressional district they are in and who the candidates in that district and what their positions are.
- At the same time, keep a strong focus on the issues. In many cases the discussions will be richer; classroom discourse can focus on students expressing their views on the critical issues facing us.
- Many observers say that the race for governor of Connecticut this year is critically important for the future of the state. Have students study the issues facing state government in Connecticut and how the candidates proposed to deal with these issues.
- This fall have students track the type of sources that they and their parents use to receive their news. The issue of “fake news” is not one that is going away.

Embrace the teaching of the elections this fall. Set the ground rules so that classroom political discussions are respectful. Analyze the key issues facing both the country and the state. You owe this to the future students that are in your classroom.
Addressing Student Activism – A High School Response

Brielle Jewell (NFA Senior Class President):

Since 2013, there have been 301 school shootings nationwide. As children of a “mass shooting generation,” we have been impacted in a different way than our previous generations. We were born into a world reshaped by the Columbine High School shooting in 1999. We talk about huddling in a corner during lockdowns and being silent just in case we are in an emergency situation. We discuss the possible threats to our school and safe steps that are necessary to provide a secure school environment for all of us. We express our concerns to those trusted adults when something seems off. And we have had enough.

Most importantly, we are growing up. There is no better time than now to stand up and use our voices to keep our schools safe. Today, we will unite in solidarity for not only the survivors and victims of Parkland, Florida, but for all victims of school violence around the country.

Kathleen Kelly (NFA Student Government President):

“There comes a time when one must take a position that is neither safe, nor politic, nor popular, but he must do it because his conscience tells him it is right.”

So declared Martin Luther King, Jr., more than half a century ago, yet his words ring ever true on this day. As young activists, we follow in Dr. King’s words, and by doing so, we are making his dreams of a more free and democratic America come to fruition. I first want to thank all of you, as students and more importantly as young leaders, for listening and fully exercising your rights to free speech. Whether you choose to walk outside or stay inside, NFA supports your decision.

I also want to thank the many students who contributed to the planning of this day. In our public display against school violence, we are respectful, we are appropriate, and we are impactful. We are a living example of Dr. King’s work, and we are proud to be. We should also take this opportunity to thank all of the people who made this day manifest from roundtable discussions and ideas on paper to a full-fledged event.

Thank you, Campus Safety, for spending countless hours in meetings to ensure the logistical aspects of this walk. We understand just how unpredictable and troublesome the weather can be and your accommodation of this event in the wake of yet another snowstorm is noted.

Thank you administration, for letting this event be BY the students and FOR the students. We are aware that this luxury was not granted to all schools, and we are grateful for your full support in making this day meaningful for the NFA student body.

Thank you, teachers, for educating and nurturing us, so that we may think sovereignly and decide how we want to react to current events like the shooting at Marjory Stoneman Douglas.

While planning this day, one point was made very clear by all students: This would NOT be a “one and done” event. We are willing and eager to lend our support to the Marjory Stoneman Douglas community. Our condolences and prayers go out to the students, teachers, administrators, parents, and friends of this community who will endure the lasting effects of this trauma their entire lives. But this is not where we finish; this is not the end of the road for us at NFA.

There will be a growing memorial in the atrium for the rest of this week. We encourage you to contribute in any way that you see fit: posters, cards, pictures, teddy bears, etc. Take respectful pictures, post them on your social media, and spread the word. Social media is a tool that we should use to connect with others. Use it conscientiously. Engage in conversation with those who oppose your ideas, hear their perspectives, respectfully discuss the controversial topics and resolutions that adults now in power are FAILING to accomplish. Be better than those who precede you.

In the coming weeks, there will be several events for you to continue to exercise your interests on the topic of school violence. Politics class and Amnesty International are holding letter writing drives. We will be holding voluntary informational and educational assemblies. We want to inform the classes about the many factors that contribute to school violence and invite lawmakers to answer our questions.

By hosting these assemblies, NFA will equip you with all of the tools you need to formulate your OWN opinion about how to end school violence. We cannot make collective decisions for the entire student body; we encourage each student to think individually and go from there. Form a new organization on campus, connect with peers, reach out to lawmakers, make change happen. We as students have to understand the extraordinary capabilities we possess. We are full of potential; we are the next generation of voters; we truly are the future of this country. Let us guide this nation into a safer tomorrow where schools are havens of education, not four barricaded walls.
Permission to Walk Out: They Didn’t Ask, I Didn’t Give It

T. Elijah Hawkes co-principal at Randolph Union Middle/High School in Randolph, Vermont. March 20, 2018

They didn’t ask for permission to walk out, so I didn’t give it. But 40 percent of the ideologically diverse, rural Vermont student population at my school walked out anyway. I asked teachers to note the names of students who left class without permission, and then I stood outside to watch and listen. I applauded when their remarks concluded. For many students and families, the fact that I didn’t grant permission and yet expressed support has been confusing. This is how I’ve explained it: a letter to each student who earned a disciplinary referral by participating:

Last week, a large segment of our student community engaged in a student-organized “Safety & Solidarity Walkout” with the purpose of “promoting safety in our school and standing in solidarity with victims of school violence.” The students who spoke delivered a message of sympathy and compassion for the 17 victims of the recent school shooting in Florida, and expressed solidarity with students across the country who are engaging in similar walkouts. The students shared a letter to school administration containing a list of concerns and requests related to school safety and security. The student organizers also implored the student community to be generous with each other, to connect to 17 new people on this day in an effort to build a strong and kind community. The walkout was documented on the school website, and by local print and television news. I was proud to watch and listen.

I was proud to be part of a school community with student activists who organized a public demonstration of dissatisfaction with the status quo, demanding that their school and country become a safer place for all. I was also proud that students were willing to become part of a long tradition of civil disobedience by non-violently breaking a rule for a cause they believe in. The student organizers did not come to me to ask permission for this event. They did not ask me to set aside time and space for an assembly in the auditorium. They asked their peers to show their convictions by walking out of class. What this means to me is that the students organized an act of peaceful and courageous civil disobedience, joining a tradition strong with names like Rosa Parks, Henry David Thoreau, Martin Luther King, and Gandhi. Such citizens chose to courageously break rules to draw attention to a cause they believed in, and they accepted the short-term consequences, including arrest and greater hardship. But in the long-term, they did not accept the status quo. Their courageous acts of peacefully breaking a rule drew attention to their larger cause and helped make the world more safe and just.

The students at our school who chose to participate in the walkout are, in my mind, now part of this tradition. Why didn’t I give official permission to walk out? If I had granted permission for the walkout, it would be impossible for it to be part of this proud tradition of civil disobedience. Nor would students have had to weigh the short-term consequences of breaking a rule with potential long-term impact of being part of “student led change.” My decision was consistent with guidance from the State Secretary of Education, the Vermont Principals’ Association and the National Association of Secondary School Principals, which told principals to “make it clear to students that a walkout protest is an act of civil disobedience and, by definition, a violation of rules. Those infractions will be handled in the standard manner, typically as unexcused absence.”

I know that students and families do not take breaking rules lightly. It is for this reason that, as soon as I knew what was being planned—just two school days prior—I made sure to write to all students to convey that “students who choose to leave classes or school grounds without permission will have their choices documented with a disciplinary referral.” I will not be assigning a detention for this instance of leaving class, but I will be following our procedure of noting it in the log in the student information system and having a conversation with the student. Because of the number of students participating—over 100—we will have group conversations, and I will not be asking the office to process the normal paperwork. What the log will say is this: “On 3.14.18, this student left class and joined peers in a student-organized walkout to promote safety in our school and stand in solidarity with victims of school violence. The walkout was peaceful and students returned to class after 17 minutes.”

Another topic I addressed in the letter was whether the teachers who went outside with students were also breaking a rule? My response was, “No, they were asked to be present to help supervise students on school grounds as a duty during their prep period. Teachers across the country are a powerful political force and have their own means of protest, including rule-breaking, which are ways for them to draw attention to a cause. But in this case, the acts of courageous civil disobedience were on the part of the RU students, not the teachers.”

I wish I had written in my letter, as I will tell them when we meet, that their actions are not only part of a tradition of adult actions of non-violent civil disobedience, but youth-led civil disobedience, including: the 1963 Children’s Crusade in Birmingham, Alabama; the protests of students at Garfield High School in Seattle, Washington, who joined teachers united against standardized testing and budget cuts; the students in Arizona who, in 2011, chained themselves to chairs at a Tucson school board meeting to protest the banning of Mexican-American studies; the youth who have led Black Lives Matter protests for years across the country, including the girls in Chicago who, in 2016 led 1,000 people in peaceful protest, shutting down city streets, in outcry against the deaths of Alton Sterling and Philando Castile.

It is inspiring to reflect on youth activism past and present. The idealism, daring and energy of youth is a life force unlike any other. It’s why my job is so hard sometimes, and why I love it.
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Most of you know that the Taft Education Center in Watertown offers summer courses for new and experienced Advanced Placement and other teachers. For social studies teachers, this summer Taft is offering Advanced Placement training in Psychology, World History, Government and Politics, Comparative Government and Politics, Human Geography, Macroeconomics, and US History for the new AP teacher. In addition, there will be a course on “Protest Movements in American History” taught by Steve Armstrong. Lenore Schneider of New Canaan High School is teaching the courses on World History and Ken Keller, former teacher at Danbury High School, is teaching the course on Human Geography.

For additional information, go to www.TaftSchool.org/TEC.

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