President’s Message

This past week, I participated in the 2nd of the web-series, “Digital Dialogues: Achieving Balance on A Shifting Landscape”. This series is co-sponsored by CCSS, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), and the Connecticut Democracy Center at Connecticut’s Old State House, and was the brainchild of Sally Whipple (CT’s Old State House) and Steve Armstrong (CSDE). As the series’ inaugural announcement stated, “the group’s overarching mission is to create and maintain communities and promote citizenship through productive and civil dialogue.” When we started working months ago to bring this idea to life, our planning sessions were focused on providing models for conducting productive face-to-face dialogues within the classroom, among educators, and more generally across political or other divisions. As the pandemic struck, we shifted the platform to online discussions and shifted our focus to how we are managing, as educators and as individuals, in these most challenging times.

The discussions at both of the first two sessions of the series were rich and full. I was impressed by the many perspectives shared, the varying definitions of community, and the myriad issues and ideas raised relating to life and education during COVID times. But what struck me most this past session was our discussion about how being away from our schools and students has highlighted all the intangible ways schools support and educate our youth. We are deeply missing our personal connection with kids - the quick comments, the gentle probing based on a student’s body language, the honest discussions about events in the news, the shared frustrations and the shared smiles. We are all figuring out innovative ways to teach content and support skill development from a distance, but not being able to be with our students is the biggest struggle. It is also a potent reminder of the critical role schools and teachers play in the lives of our students and our communities.

Earlier this spring, a colleague from UConn’s history department noted that he was keeping a diary for these days of the Covid-19 crisis. He noted that he considered that we were living in an historic moment and it would be worth keeping a record for family as well as possible researchers at some future date. We often say that we live in an historic moment – something of a hackneyed phrase – but in this case we think he is on to something.

Along the same lines, an item came in over the transom noting that a class of high school seniors in Wisconsin were reading letters each of them had written to themselves in seventh grade. See page 4. All this is by way of suggesting that teachers might encourage their students to write a letter to themselves reporting on their impressions and experiences during this truncated school year. How the letters are stored – in the “cloud” or on a thumb drive or both – might be a good topic for discussion: where should an historical record best be stored.

We would note that your two editors are retired but, like you who are still teaching, we chose teaching as a career in large part because of the opportunity to interact with people and be part of their growing up. To a large degree, Covid-19 has taken that option away; however clever the lesson, Zoom cannot recreate the dynamic of a lively class discussion. As one commentator put it, teachers have been tasked with reinventing themselves. This issue contains some thoughts about “distance teaching and learning” – see pages 9-11.

Elsewhere you can find commentary on the recent NAEP scores in history, geography and civics (page 7) and a provocative discussion from North Carolina on how schools should treat the issue of confederate monuments. Should schools be silent about “Silent Sam”? See page 5. We also stumbled across an article suggesting that much of what we know about Ponce
President’s Message - continued

Listening to the other social studies educators during the Digital Dialogues sessions - and during CCSS Board meetings - gives me hope. These intelligent, creative, and committed social studies professionals are helping to develop informed, caring, civic-minded members of society. I am so often humbled and inspired by these colleagues. Our discipline lends itself well to helping students to learn from the past, to open their minds and hearts to others, and to create a better future. I thank each of you for the efforts you make every day in your classroom (physical or virtual!) and your communities toward this end.

It has been an honor to serve as president of CCSS this year. The organization is a robust advocate for social studies in the state, and provides important support and services to social studies educators. A prime example of the excellent professional development we provide is our annual Fall conference. Plans are already underway for our 2020 conference to be held on Friday, November 6, 2020, with the theme of CONNected: Our Community, Nation, and World. It will be a virtual conference - a different format than we’re used to - but with meaningful and effective workshops and sessions. See you there (well, sort of).

I look forward to the continued growth and development of the organization. Thank you to all the members of the Board for all you’ve done, are doing, and will continue to do for our profession. Finally, I wish everyone an especially well-earned summer break and healthy, happy days ahead.

Join CCSS . . .

And be eligible for reduced rates for conferences

See Membership Form on page 16

CCSS Officers and Board 2020-2021

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| de Leon’s role in discovering Florida may fall into the category of myth. (page 12). Many years ago, one of us heard a museum director comment that they were replacing their museum historian with a naturalist since “we know all the history of this place; it isn’t going to change.” (Sorry we can’t resist: It would be nice to know that person’s score on NAEP!)

Special congratulations to Milken Award winner Lauren Sepulveda, middle school social studies teacher in New Haven. Congratulations as well to CCSS award winners -See Page 15. And finally, congratulations to CCSS President Elyse Poller, to Connecticut State Social Studies consultant and many others who have “seized the moment” in these difficult times,. To all of you: a safe, healthy and restful summer. May we find open, healthy classrooms for the fall term.

Tim  thomas.weinland@uconn.edu
Dan  danielcoughlin@charter.net
I would like to commend the teachers of Connecticut for all of their work this year. The vast majority of teachers have handled the transition to online instruction in professional and innovative ways. Teachers were in the difficult situation of creating learning activities for their students “on the fly”: and they did it well. I have no doubt that teachers will handle whatever happens in the fall with an equal amount of skill and compassion for their students.

The CSDE in conjunction with the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies and other partners have sponsored numerous webinars this spring to support the professional growth of teachers. Sponsored webinars have included series on Teaching Women’s Suffrage, Teaching the Holocaust and Genocide, Effective Online Instruction in Social Studies Education, Using Music in the Social Studies Classroom, and Teaching the 2020 Elections. All of these webinars have been well attended: thanks to all of those who presented and participated in these webinars.

The Connecticut Council for the Social Studies and the CSDE are continuing to partner on a project that will create a model K-5 Social Studies curriculum for Connecticut. Many districts are asking for assistance on what to teach in K-5 social studies; this document is being produced to assist those districts. We will be having an introductory online meeting sometime over the summer; if you are interested in becoming involved in this project please contact me at Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov.

We are also be producing a civics/social studies challenge that will be available this summer for elementary school, middle school, and secondary school students. The CSDE, Connecticut Council for the Social Studies, the Democracy Center at the Old State House, and CT Public are all involved in the creation of this student challenge program. More information will be available shortly.

We are already beginning planning for fall professional development. We will be doing a webinar series on Teaching the 2020 Elections and will continue our series on Effective Teaching Strategies for Online Education. If you would like to participate in either of these series, or have other ideas for webinars or webinar series that you think we should be producing, please contact me.

Stephen Armstrong, Social Studies Consultant, Connecticut Department of Education
Wisconsin Graduating Seniors Look Back at Their 7th-Grade Selves

BY MEGAN CARPENTER      MAY 18, 2020

FOND DU LAC, Wis. (SPECTRUM NEWS) -- It’s tough to imagine what life will be like five years from now. Imagine having to ponder that idea in 7th grade. “I totally forgot we made these letters and I read it and all these emotions came flooding back,” says Fond du Lac senior Daniel Bestul. “Most of the things I wrote are mostly true still.”

Bestul remembers writing a letter to his future self in Mrs. Rieder’s 7th-grade social studies class “Do you know how to spell better,” he reads. “I do not know how to spell better.” Every 7th grader will do this in Gina Rieder’s class. Five years later when they’re about to graduate, she mails it to them, along with a class picture and her own letter. “It’s fun either way for them,” Gina says. “It’s fun for them to see how much has changed, but also to see whether they were wise.”

Gina teaches at Sabish Middle School, though for the latter half of this year, she taught from home. “It’s a love-hate relationship with remote learning,” she says. “It’s a love-hate relationship with remote learning,” she says. “The hate is not interacting with the kids in person and seeing their personalities.”

Writing a letter to your future self during a global pandemic could elicit some unique questions too. “It’s so interesting to read my letters to the first-semester class and now that we’re in this pandemic, my letters to the second-semester kids will look totally different,” Gina says.

The letters will look different aesthetically as well. “It’ll have to be typed because we have to do it electronically and this year, we couldn’t take a class picture, so we took a class Zoom picture,” Gina says. “Just to have some happiness during this time is nice,” says Marissa Gravelle, who also got her letter this year before graduation.

Marissa predicted she would get into UW-Madison. “Halfway through the letter I wrote ‘please tell me we’re going to Madison’ and that is where I’m going is UW Madison,” she said.

For Gina, it’s a welcomed gift to be able to help her students hold on to who they are and who they were. “They’re a pretty special group of kids,” she says.

Dear Ms. Sepulveda,

On behalf of the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies, CONGRATULATIONS on your Milken Award! We recognize what an incredible achievement it is to receive this award, and are extra proud that it has been awarded to such a deserving social studies teacher.

Your teaching embodies the ideals of a strong social studies education. You make history personal and relevant to your students through your guest speakers series. You encourage informed action through activities like the mock legislative process and leadership field trips. You develop critical thinking by challenging history texts and identifying the gaps and bias that often exist in them. And through it all you create informed, empathetic, active citizens – and avid social studies students.

Your philosophy of providing love and opportunities for your students emboldens them to learn, grow and work to make the world a better place. You are a role model of leadership and social responsibility – for your students, your colleagues and for educators everywhere. We are proud to have you as a representative for our profession.

Thank you for all your efforts and for shining such a positive light on social studies. And congratulations on this – and your many other achievements.

Sincerely,
Elyse Poller President, CCSS

Clinton Ave. School
New Haven
RALEIGH — State education officials are backing away from a proposal to begin requiring North Carolina third-grade students to study and highlight monuments such as Confederate statues. The latest draft for new statewide K-12 social studies standards includes a new requirement that third-grade students “summarize how monuments and memorials represent historical events and people that are valued by a community.” Some teachers complain the language about monuments and other changes in the standards are a backdoor effort to inject a conservative focus into the curriculum.

“All the changes seem to go in one partisan direction,” Angie Scioli, the founder of the Red4EdNC teachers group, said in an interview Wednesday. “You seem to feel that there’s partisan decision making.” Amid all the complaints, the state Department of Public Instruction says it’s recommending dropping the new wording on monuments when the next version of the standards is released for public comment. The State Board of Education could approve the new K-12 social studies standards later this year.

State revising social studies standards

The state is revising the social studies standards both as part of a periodic review and to reflect changes required by state lawmakers in high school graduation requirements. Newly approved changes mean high school students will have to take a course on personal finance before they graduate. But squeezing in the financial literacy course means other changes to the social studies curriculum, such as eliminating one of the two U.S. history courses now required in high school. The first draft of the new standards was released in December. A second draft was released April 6 for a public comment period that ended Monday.

Scioli said Red4EdNC noticed several changes between the first and second draft that concerned the group, including:

• Removing references to sustainability, climate change, natural resources and consumption of resources and empathy from World History standards.

• Eliminating objectives in the civics class such as “determine the effects of institutional discrimination on cultural and national identity” and learning about how governments maintain the welfare of the public and protection of citizens.

Silent Sam

Red4EdNC also is concerned about the new wording in draft two on monuments. The first draft aid third-grade students should categorize ideas and contributions that different groups made in terms of influence on local history. By the second draft, the standards included suggested activities such as third-grade students writing tweets that summarize how “monuments represent values by a community.” “Are changes designed to ensure our children value North Carolina’s monuments but reduce their exposure to content about climate change and discrimination really indicative of what professional educators thought was best for students?” Scioli and Justin Parmenter, a member of Red4EdNC’s board, wrote in a blog post. “Or are influential individuals with access to the process reshaping North Carolina education to match their particular worldview?”

The proposal comes at a time when people in North Carolina and the rest of the nation are hotly debating what to do with Confederate statutes erected after the Civil War. Towns around the state have Confederate monuments, although some groups are calling for their removal.

In 2015, the General Assembly passed a law limiting how public monuments could be removed. In February, an Orange County judge voided a settlement requiring UNC-Chapel Hill to pay $2.5 million and give the Silent Sam Confederate monument to the Sons of Confederate Veterans, the News & Observer reported. Protesters had toppled the statue in August 2018. In November, Chatham County removed the Confederate statute located in downtown Pittsboro, the News & Observer reported.

continued on page 6
The monument issue is so contentious that several North Carolina towns canceled Christmas parades out of concern that it could lead to conflicts between Confederate heritage groups and their opponents, the News & Observer reported. “There are 100 counties in NC,” Katrina Smith, a 5th-grade social studies teacher in Nash-Rocky Mount Schools, said in an email. “I’m more than positive that you’d get 100 different sets of values. This standard is too broad, and can be used to leave negative thoughts of values in minds that are so impressionable.” Smith said it would be more appropriate to have it taught to middle school or high school students who have the capacity to question why the landmarks are up or argue for or against them. Smith, who isn’t a member of Red4EdNC, said she doesn’t think there was an intention to give credence to Confederate statutes and monuments.

DPI is distancing itself from the monument recommendation for third-grade students. Lori Carlin, DPI section chief for K-12 social studies and arts education, noted that students already learn about monuments in 4th- and 7th grades and in high school. “We were pleased with the objective in draft one and are unsure as to where or why the writing team determined a more specific focus was necessary for the 3rd grade,” Carlin said in an email. “At this time, we are recommending that draft 3 revert to the original language from draft 1.”

Scioli, a social studies teacher at Leesville Road High School in Raleigh, said they’ve been unable to find out how the changes were included because the teachers on the writing teams signed a confidentiality notice. She says Red4EdNC will continue to track the revision process for the new standards. “I think the lack of transparency in the process prevents us from feeling great about the process,” she said.

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**Congratulations to History Day CCSS Outstanding World History Prize Winners**

**Outstanding Entry in World History – Senior Prize**  
**Sponsored by the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies**  
**History Day**  
**Project: A Tale of Passion and Perseverance: Marie Curie’s Legacy of Breaking Barriers**  
**Teacher:** Courtney Hawes  
**School:** Greenwich High School  
**Students:** Veronica P-D

**Outstanding Entry in World History – Junior Prize**  
**Sponsored by the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies**  
**Project: Valentina Tereshkova: Launching New Horizons for Women**  
**Teacher:** John Smith-Horn  
**School:** Timothy Edwards Middle School  
**Students:** Taruni P. and Saanvi R.
8th Graders Don’t Know Much About History, National Exam Shows

By Stephen Sawchuk and Sarah D. Sparks  Education Week. April 23, 2020

Eighth graders’ grasp of key topics in history have plummeted, national test scores released this morning show—an alarming result at a time of deep political polarization, economic uncertainty, and public upheaval in the United States. Except for the very top-performing students, scores fell among nearly all grade 8 students in history on the National Assessment of Educational Progress, also called the Nation’s Report Card, since the last history administration, in 2014. The decline of four points overall erased fully half of the overall gains made in the subject since 1994, the first year the exam was given. Federal officials described themselves as “disappointed” and the results as “pervasive” and “disturbing.”

Scores fell in geography, too. In that subject, the overall decline of three points since 2014 was largely due to a downturn in the performance of the lowest-performing students—those at the 25th percentile and below. Only in civics, the third subject tested, did students’ scores remain flat. Learning in that subject has historically proved difficult to budge: Since its first administration, in 1998, scores in that assessment have increased by only three points.

U.S. Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos called the results “stark and inexcusable.” “In the real world, this means students don’t know what the Lincoln-Douglas debates were about, nor can they discuss the significance of the Bill of Rights, or point out basic locations on a map,” she said. National concern about the quality of young people’s civic and historical preparation and knowledge of global events has been steadily growing over the last two years, with some states introducing new coursework and testing requirements. But the coronavirus pandemic has upended K-12 education, and it is unclear whether states will continue to pump the gas on those efforts.

On the other hand, the temporary suspension of the reading and math tests many blame for focusing schools too narrowly on those subjects provides an opportunity to seize the moment, noted Louise Dubé, the executive director of curriculum provider iCivics. She also helps lead a coalition of some 90 groups supporting civics and history education. “Are we going to be able to focus on these integrative disciplines that have a great deal of connection with what’s happening right now and feel a great deal more relevant in people’s lives?” she asked. “I don’t know, but it’s all I can hope for.”

A Consistent Pattern

The history, civics, and geography exams were given in early 2018 to a national sample of nearly 43,000 8th graders. It is also the first time these subjects have been assessed using digital devices as well as traditional paper-and-pencil forms. (There are no state-by-state results for the three subjects as there are for math and reading.) Prior research has shown that switching to a new testing mode can depress scores, so NAEP officials used statistical methods to equate the digital results to prior years’ paper-and-pencil scores. The overall findings were distinctly subpar. In history, students scored lower on all four areas measured by the test—the evolution of American democracy; culture; economic and technical changes; and America’s changing role in the world. The poor results were consistent across all racial and ethnic categories too, with the exception of students identifying as Asian or Pacific Islander.

Across the three subjects, a quarter or more of students fell below the “basic” performance category, meaning they didn’t have even the fundamental prerequisite skills to master the content. Thirty-four percent of students fell below the “basic” performance category in history, compared to 29 percent in 2014. In geography, 29 percent fell below that mark compared to 25 percent in 2014. There was no significant change in civics. Tina Heafner, president of National Council of the Social Studies, said she was dismayed by the first decline in U.S. history and geography achievement in middle school. “One factor that also is really disturbing for me is just the general low level of proficiency: Less than a quarter of our students are proficient or above proficient level in the three subject areas, and we’re talking only 15 percent in U.S. history.”

The history and geography findings add to growing evidence of a broad-based widening of learning gaps between top performers and the most struggling students. In 2019, NAEP’s 4th and 8th grade reading and math scores and the Program for International Student Assessment of 15-year-olds in the same subjects showed that the highest-achieving 10 percent of students held steady or improved, while the lowest 10 percent to 20 percent of students declined over the same time. “The bottom of the distribution is dropping at a faster rate,” said Peggy Carr, the associate commissioner of the National Center for Education Statistics, which administers the NAEP. “These results are not designed to point to why this is also happening, but we clearly see a correlation here that’s disturbing.”

Different groups of 8th graders took NAEP’s 8th grade reading and its civics, geography, and history tests, but Carr surmised that students who struggle to read would likely face an uphill fight with the social studies subjects. At least a third of the questions require that when writing in response to texts students must “be clear about their answers and justify their answers,” she noted. Widening gaps between low- and high-performing students “are really concerning,” said Emily Swafford, the director of academic and professional...
affairs at the American Historical Association. “And the reason I think they’re concerning is because I’ve seen that history is good preparation for success in your future, whatever you do, whatNew Haven ever course of study you have and then whatever job that you have after that.

“But we have seen trends that history, rather than being a gateway to success in college is a barrier for our students, for [low-income] Pell grant students, for African-American students, Native American students, Latinx students, and first-generation students. That’s worrying and something that we’re actively trying to change,” she added. Those trends ought to be concerning in the context of the coronavirus, as the nation shifts to an unprecedented experiment with distance learning. At least 37 states, comprising more than 55 million students, have closed school buildings and moved to remote learning in response to the pandemic. Researchers and educators alike point out that the digital divide and other disparities are likely to exacerbate opportunity and learning gaps among students.

Data from the NAEP’s background questionnaires, meanwhile, suggest that differential access to learning and course quality also might have contributed to the patterns. About half of students in the top quarter of performance said that they regularly were asked to “compare and evaluate different points of view about the past,” compared to less than a third of those students in the bottom quarter of performance. In civics, just 22 percent of students had teachers whose primary responsibility was teaching that subject—and those students scored, on average, six points higher than students whose teachers said civics was not their primary responsibility.

While these data do not conclusively explain the results, they do bolster what some social studies experts have called a “civics gap”—the idea some groups of students are less likely to receive high-quality programming in civics and history. “You know, your high-achieving students are more likely to be in your higher level classes, perhaps AP classes or honors-level classes,” Haefner said. “And so it would raise the question of, what’s the quality of instruction that’s occurring depending on the type of class a student takes? So then this test becomes a measure, a cumulative quality of what content knowledge they were exposed to,” she said.

It’s possible, too, that classroom teaching has changed in ways that could affect scores. Swafford said more high schools have emphasized “historical thinking” over content memorization. The NAEP exam covers historical content from 1607 onwards, as well as asking students to analyze various sources. “What I care about in history education is this sense of, are you learning about what the value of studying history is, and how historians know what they know and how history can help you in your career and adult lives,” Swafford said, “and that’s not easily measured in the assessment tool that NAEP has.”

A Call to Action

Through 2018 and 2019, many states and districts had been bolstering their social-science curricula by adding new course requirements, assessments, and hands-on projects. Voting rates among young people, too, had been increasing, thanks to surging youth activism following the devastating school shootings and warnings about climate change. It’s not at all clear in the middle of the coronavirus whether states will continue to push forward on those policies, given skyrocketing unemployment and mounting financial concerns.

The decline in history scores mark a bitter irony given present circumstances. The coronavirus has sent historians, public health officials, educators, and armchair pundits alike to interrogate the past—like the 1918 Spanish Flu epidemic, the polio scare of the early 1950s, and the HIV/AIDS tragedy of the 1980s and 1990s—in search of clues on how to handle the current crisis. In that sense, the motto of the U.S. Archives, which houses the nation’s most important historical documents, feels especially relevant: What’s past is prologue. Similarly, geography does much to explain how the virus spread around the world from one province in China. And as for civics, Congress is now immersed in debating and rolling out legislation aimed at minimizing the effects of the virus.

Some teachers say they’re committed to history and civics learning even as they move to remote learning. Indeed, they view it as a wake-up call. Andres Perez, an 11th grade humanities teacher at High Tech High School Chula Vista, in California, often has his students produce authentic work products as part of their civics and history learning. They’ve submitted policy memos at city council and school board meetings, written op-eds, and are currently taking photographs for a local museum contest.

In May, he’ll begin a unit focused on some big civic questions raised by the pandemic on the nation’s economic safety net, health-care infrastructure, and disaster preparedness: Why are lines for food banks so long? Why are policymakers concerned about a shortage of hospital beds? Was the United States as prepared for the pandemic as other countries?

The point is to get students thinking about their civic choices and convictions, he said. “Students are participating in civics every day. They’re wearing masks if they go to the grocery store. They’re standing six feet apart from each other,” Perez said. “It’s important to understand why that is practicing civics, and that participating in it means something.

“All citizens should be aware of what the government is asking them to do—and why the government really is, more so than usual, expecting extra behaviors of its citizens.” Whether most U.S. schools are poised to do the same is unclear, but social studies advocates pleaded with them not to lose sight of the topic in their distance learning plans. “Learning comes alive when students can experience what’s happening in the real world and see it in action. And it’s not just about writing letters to your congressman. It’s being prepared for this world—a world of complex systems,” Dubé said. “And to only focus on reading and math is really disappointing.”
As a social studies educator I never envisioned that I would be teaching my students from my home and learning about our nation’s past through webinars. During this pandemic, teachers have had to assist students in learning remotely and consider the social emotional health of all students, as they (and their teachers) struggle with technology and try to replicate the support they had in school. Interestingly, I (and many others) have discovered the joys of learning history through Zoom Meetings (webinars) offered by a national (Gilder Lehrman) and state historical organizations (Connecticut Historical Society and Mystic Seaport).

During the spring of 2020 The Gilder Lehrman: Institute of American History has offered the following events:
- ‘Inside the Vaults’ where the Gilder Lehrman curators analyze 2-3 primary source documents with a guest educator; with suggested inquiry-based teaching activities. Some of the documents analyzed include Paul Revere’s historic engraving, “The Bloody Massacre in King-Street,” that was based on an engraving by artist Henry Pelham, who created the first illustration of the episode. Also, there is a letter from cadet Hiram Ulysses Grant in 1839 during his first semester at West Point. Then there is the political cartoon “The Old Bull Dog on the Right Track” (1864), showing General Grant staying on the right track (i.e., the Weldon Railroad to Richmond, Virginia) against Generals Lee and Beauregard.


The Connecticut Historical Society has offered Online Coffee Hour Zoom programs on “Spies of the American Revolution”, “Women’s Suffrage in Connecticut”, and “Witches in Connecticut”. These are free for CHS members and a suggested donation of $5 for non-members.

Finally, Mystic Seaport has offered webinars on “Gerda III and Henry Sinding: Acts of resistance during the Holocaust” and “The New London Whaling Fleet in the Eastern Artic”. They also offered an online workshop on “Navigating the collections and doing research at Mystic Seaport Museum”; that provided beneficial information for those seeking to research the vast collection of resources virtually and in the future onsite. So, during these trying times, you can continue to find informative and inspiring stories of our past, through these great online events for those who love history.

Special Notice on Membership Dues and NERC Registration
Membership in CCSS runs from July 1 to June 30th each year. Members who are current on their dues for the 2019-2020 year will be sent a discount code for registration for NERC. To be eligible for reduced rates for the NERC conference, please be sure to renew your membership as soon as possible. Dues may be sent to CCSS, PO Box 5031, Milford, CT 06460.
Reflections on Distance Learning
Brenda Fernandes. May 2020

I expected to face some challenges while student teaching, but I did not expect to face a global pandemic and transition to online teaching halfway through my program. I am sad that I missed out on the rest of my time in the classroom with such a great cooperating teacher and wonderful group of students. However, I am grateful that I had a mentor teacher and supportive faculty members from my university to help guide me along the way. I student taught at Warren Harding High School in Bridgeport and used the Microsoft Teams platform for distance learning. I commend the Bridgeport Public Schools district for acting quickly to get distance learning up and running; from making paper copies of material available to students, to distributing electronics with internet connection, they made incredible efforts to reach as many students as possible.

I had the advantage of living through this pandemic as both a student and a teacher. I used what I was experiencing in distance learning to navigate my way through distance teaching. As a student, I felt confused and overwhelmed with all of these new changes. I knew that my students likely felt the same way. I empathized with them, so as a teacher, I lead the class in a way that would make the transition to online learning as smooth as possible. I enjoy getting creative in the classroom. I am always seeking out new resources to share with students through different mediums; with distance learning, however, I did the opposite. As much as I loved seeing teachers on social media share all these great new websites and tools that they were using, I wanted to keep it simple with my students, as to not overwhelm them. From website links to pdf attachments, I made sure that all of the information students needed were in one place. My mantra became “less is more.”

I am currently applying to teaching positions across the state. I am eager to see what schools will look like in the Fall. This experience has reinforced my beliefs in technology integration in the classroom. Technology is a major part of our daily lives, so students should be exposed to and prepared to use different technological equipment and online platforms. As education and jobs transition online, it is essential that our students become more familiar with different technology, in order to succeed in the 21st century.

Student teaching was supposed to be the culmination of my undergraduate experience, and it was cut short. Initially, I could not help but feel robbed of such an important experience. Instead, I think I gained an even more valuable experience. This is not the world that I pictured beginning my career in, but it is a world that my generation of teachers have spent our lives preparing for. We grew up with technology. We engage with various devices and platforms daily. We were trained for this. I enter this career energized and confident that I can handle whatever is thrown at me.

Edutopia: Connecting Lessons to the Pandemic
By Benjamin Barbour May 28, 2020

Educators frequently hear from their students, “How am I going to use this stuff in the real world?” Now is the perfect time to answer that question. The coronavirus pandemic presents a unique opportunity for educators looking to underscore the relevancy of their subject matter.

Students, the vast majority of whom are learning remotely and living under social distancing guidelines, are experiencing this emergency every day. Teachers can draw upon the crisis that our nation faces to convey valuable lessons about a host of different subjects, as well as emphasize the importance of their disciplines in the “real world.”

IDENTIFY LEARNING OBJECTIVES Begin with an assessment of the current curriculum and the primary objectives of each unit. Then consider ways these objectives might be achieved using examples from the current situation.

For example, one key concept in social studies is the balance between individual liberty and collective health, safety, and well-being. The pandemic clearly shows the tension in creating policies that will uphold the rights of the individual while also preserving the overall health of the community.

A conversation about this friction would make for an engaging debate or persuasive writing assignment. Using the pandemic as a framework, create lessons around elements of the tension such as the following:

- Cell phone tracking and possible violations of the Fourth Amendment.
- Statewide lockdowns and the rights of habeas corpus.
- The rights of protest and assembly versus social distancing rules.
- How can the government shut down private business?

Ask students to examine the consequences of public policy in their communities.

MAKE IT RELEVANT Connect concepts in the curriculum to current events. The study of American government typically relies heavily on historical events, but the pandemic provides an opportunity for modern examples.
For instance, a lesson might focus on the American conception of federalism. According to Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, federalism allows the states to become “laboratories of democracy,” allowing each to try “novel social and economic experiments...” Today, we see the laboratories at work.

Assign students two different state governors—one from their home state and one from a neighboring state—to research. Ask, “How did Covid-19 affect their respective states?” and “How were the governors’ responses similar or different?” Examining differing results in the current context makes the lesson more timely for students than a historical hypothetical.

DON’T REINVENT THE WHEEL There’s no need to scrap a syllabus or modify lesson plans extensively. Many curricula likely remain applicable to world events. Remain flexible, keep an open mind, and stay informed.

For example, when a group of sheriffs publicly refused to enforce the Michigan governor’s quarantine orders, I sent the sheriffs’ press release to my class and asked the students to consider how it fits into our conversation on civil liberties during a crisis. The prompt noted how different news organizations portray the sheriffs’ dissent in different ways to emphasize how the media can shape a narrative.

Obviously, we can’t all stay glued to the media around the clock. Lighten your load by asking the students to find parallels between the curriculum and current events. For example, I asked students to identify the principles of the Constitution in the news. Students cited the Covid-19 stimulus bill as an example of separation of powers. One young man determined that the measures states are taking to uphold voting rights during the pandemic represent Americans’ commitment to popular sovereignty, even during a crisis. Having the students make connections between curriculum and current events empowers them and allows for student-led inquiry.

Professional learning communities—the networks we have formed on social media or colleagues we meet via videoconference—are valuable resources for curriculum development around the pandemic. I have a weekly meeting with a colleague to discuss ways to make the curriculum relevant to our students, adhering to standards while also incorporating world events in a meaningful way.

LEVERAGE THE UNCERTAINTY When Covid-19 first struck the United States, my students were clamoring for facts on the virus. However, they faced the same problem that everyone else did: The seemingly endless amount of news on the virus proved difficult to decipher. Moreover, much of the information was conflicting.

Never has there been a more critical time in recent history to emphasize the importance of a discerning and even skeptical approach to news and information.

Present students with a website or newspaper article focusing on the virus or the nation’s response. Ask students to evaluate the source using the CRAP test, which stands for currency, reliability, authority, and purpose/point of view.

- When was the resource published? Has it been updated or revised? Could circumstances have changed since it was published?
- Are there references, citations, graphs, or footnotes? Is there sufficient evidence to support the author’s claims?
- Who is the author or publisher? Can they be relied upon?
- Does the author or publisher have an agenda? Are they trying to persuade you? Can you detect bias?

FIND REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS Science and math teachers can use the pandemic to answer questions that students may have about their own safety and well-being. Consider ways to develop lessons that help decode the often-opaque and jargon-filled language of the everyday news. Easy questions like “Why is it called ‘herd immunity’?” and “What is the process for developing a vaccine?” can lead students to better understanding of the situation.

Make connections between these objective findings in all academic fields and students’ lives. Explain how a vaccine might allow for more freedom of movement or the ability to visit grandparents without fear. Using the disease as an example, students can learn how “comorbidities” such as obesity or smoking can put individuals at heightened risk, as well as the importance of regular checkups and staying healthy.

By helping students understand the news—how it directly affects their lives and the well-being of their loved ones—we underscore to our kids that the material they learn every day in the classroom has a pertinence beyond the walls of the school.
Evidence debunks myth that Ponce de Leon discovered Florida
Linda Robertson, The Miami Herald/Associated Press. March 27, 2020,

MIAMI – Of all the outlandish myths about Florida’s outlandish history, one of the most stubborn holds that Ponce de Leon discovered it in 1513 when he was searching for the Fountain of Youth. But evidence compiled by a Florida Keys map collector, a South Florida archaeologist and a Naples ocean engineer further debunks the tall tale of the Spanish conquistador whose name graces textbooks, schools, boulevards, hotels, parks, statues and the most popular tourist site in St. Augustine, where Juan Ponce de Leon never set foot. Ponce de Leon may have named the place then known as Bimini — which he thought was an island — after the Easter time “Feast of Flowers,” but he was not the first European to land in La Florida.

If not Ponce de Leon, who? The three authors of a new book released Friday (March 20), “The Florida Keys: A History Through Maps,” present a compelling theory that Floridians ought to be naming more stuff in the Sunshine State in honor of John Cabot, the Italian explorer who sailed to the coast of North America in 1497 and claimed it for King Henry VII of England. Some historians believe Cabot was the first European to find Florida when, after failing to locate a Northwest Passage to China, he journeyed so far south from Canada that he could see Cuba to the east, according to an account by Cabot’s son, Sebastian.

“That would put Cabot off the Florida Keys long before Ponce de Leon got here and named them the Martyrs,” said Brian Schmitt of Marathon, an avid map collector and owner of the oldest real estate company in the Keys. “Lots of what we’ve been taught about Ponce de Leon is fanciful creation passed down through the centuries. Maps show Florida was well known by Europeans before Ponce de Leon arrived.” Archaeologist Bob Carr’s analysis of conch shells he unearthed in Fort Lauderdale supports what the maps illustrate. “Floridians need to stop living under the illusion that Ponce was our famous founder,” Carr said. “We need to get beyond the tourism hoax of the Fountain of Youth and learn about our complicated history.”

Schmitt’s most prized acquisition is the 1511 Peter Martyr Map made by the prolific Italian historian who worked for the royal court of Spain. Peter Martyr D’Anghiera wrote the first accounts of explorations in Central and South America in a gossipy style. He interviewed all the intrepid mariners of the day, including Christopher Columbus, Amerigo Vespucci and Sebastian Cabot, and examined their ships’ logs and charts. The map shows details of the Florida coastline and what clearly appear to be the Keys and the Dry Tortugas north of the islands of Cuba and Hispaniola. Schmitt purchased the map from a San Diego dealer for $250,000.

“If you are a map collector, it’s the Holy Grail — the earliest attainable map of the New World,” Schmitt said. His presentation of the map and book on Friday in downtown Miami was originally planned to coincide with the Miami Map Fair, which was cancelled because of coronavirus concerns. “But it is only about 8-1/2 by 11 inches in size, not particularly pretty, a woodcut on hand-laid paper, with some print-through Latin script on the back side. “Maps are the confluence of art and science, and some are breathtakingly beautiful. Not this one. I tell visitors if you can identify the one in my collection that’s worth more than all the others combined, you can have it.”

Two other maps buttress the anti-Ponce argument: The 1500 Juan de la Cosa map depicting vast lands north of Cuba shows British flags planted along the east coast of the U.S., which would dovetail with the theory that England’s claim to the original 13 American colonies was a byproduct of Cabot’s discoveries. A second map, created in 1502 and called the Cantino Planisphere, depicts the peninsula of Florida with a remarkably accurate rendering of its inlets and bays. Alberto Cantino, a spy for an Italian duke, smuggled the map out of Portugal when European countries were in competition for claims to New World territory. The original was found hundreds of years later being used as a screen at a butcher shop.

“Once aggregated into maps, this geographic information was jealously guarded, allowing Spain and Portugal to maintain an advantage in trade and colonial expansion over other European countries,” Schmitt said, describing how maps were pieced together like puzzles, as cartographers compiled sketches and descriptions of the coastline made from the deck or crow’s nest or from expeditions on shore. “It wasn’t until 1600 that they had instruments for more accurate measurements.”

In the book, co-author Carr presents an archaeological argument that adds to the body of evidence that Ponce didn’t discover Florida. Carr, who excavated the prehistoric Tequesta Indian villages at the mouth of the Miami River, discovered a mound of 22 conch shells when he was surveying land at the Bonnet House Museum and Gardens in Fort Lauderdale in 1984. He found uncharacteristic gaping holes in the middle of the shells and one with a distinctive thin metal blade hole. Radiocarbon tests showed the shells dated from the late 15th century.

“These can’t have been opened by Spanish explorers because the Spanish had already been in the Caribbean by that time and knew how to open conch shells efficiently, the way the indigenous people opened them by piercing a hole in the crown, severing the tendon attachment and extracting the conch for a meal,” he said. “Whoever did this really labored to bust them open and eat them.”

Carr concluded the shells were proof of a European landing that pre-dated Ponce. “Christopher Columbus knew how to open conch shells and Ponce had traveled with Columbus. These were opened by people who were not Spanish and had never been in the Caribbean but who likely arrived in South Florida from the north along the Atlantic coast or had sailed directly from Europe,” Carr said.

Among Schmitt’s collection of 1,000 maps is the first map of New Providence in the Bahamas, the only full copy of which is likely the first English map of the West Indies or Spanish Main, and the only copy of one of the first maps to name the Tortugas and Los Martires (the original name of the Keys).

“I’ve been collecting for 25 years and my focus is on the Keys, the Bahamas, Cuba and South Florida, the areas where I’ve been boating and diving my whole life,” said Schmitt, 66. His family moved to the Keys from Detroit in 1955 and started a real estate company. Schmitt has never left. His boat is named the Hippocampus, after Neptune’s horse. “I grew up in the real estate business and developed a sense of the land and a love for the islands.”

The second part of the new book is about the mapping of the Keys, and the first to do it, in 1770, was William Gerard De Brahm, whose skill as a cartographer earned him the title of Surveyor General of the New World for England. One of his most unusual printed charts — perhaps a precursor to the climate change projections of the 21st century — depicted Florida 10,000 years ago when water levels were lower in order to demonstrate that the Keys were part of Florida and refute Spain’s claim that the Keys were geologically linked to Cuba. “Spain tried to claim the Keys as part of Cuba when Spain traded Florida to England,” Schmitt said. “With this very odd map, De Brahm defended England’s claim.”

continued on page 13
De Brahm wrote incredibly detailed journals about the Gulfstream and Florida’s flora and fauna, including its insects, bears, panthers, snakes and crocodiles, of which he had heard “instances that they have attacked Children without the House, and carried them off the Land into the Water, but cannot vouch for its Truth.” And he warned that “Tempests will be seen more than in any other part of the Globe.”

Of the Keys he said: “None of the islands is inhabited by any of the human species, but constantly visited by the English from New Providence, and Spaniards from Cuba, for the sake of wrecks, madeira wood, tortoise, shrimps, fish, and birds: of the latter a variety exist on the islands and about Cape Sable, amongst which is peculiarly a large red bird, which measures six feet from the toe to its bill’s end, (which is crooked, and has its maxillary motion on its upper part, as on that of a parrot) and is called flamingo.”

Maps help explain why the Ponce de Leon legend has persisted. “The most chronicled story was Ponce’s story,” Schmitt said. “Spain controlled Florida for 250 years. They owned the place and they publicized the history they wanted believed. “Why is this called America? Because of a mistake by Martin Waldseemuller,” Schmitt said of the 1507 world map by the German cartographer that used the name America for the first time. “Vespucci exaggerated his accomplishments and Waldseemuller said we might as well name it after Amerigo and it took on a life of its own.” In subsequent versions — I have a 1513 Waldseemuller map — America is gone and it’s called Terra Incognita.” Other historians believe Gaspar and Miguel Corte-Real, brothers from Portugal, reached Florida first on voyages in 1500, 1501 or 1502.

“The argument against Sebastian Cabot is that he made things up. And nobody really knows exactly what happened to John Cabot,” Schmitt said. “There’s no written record of his voyages. You find different versions of the same events when you’re doing historical research, so you’ve got to find the most credible one. Maybe I’m too confident in Peter Martyr but I don’t share those reservations about Sebastian, who became the pilot major of Spain.”

Ponce de Leon did land in Florida in 1513 but somewhere near Cape Canaveral, 125 nautical miles south of St. Augustine. He then sailed south, recorded interaction with the native “Chequesta” people at the mouth of the Miami River, rounded Cape Florida and headed north up the Gulf coast, where he was chased away near Fort Myers by Calusa Indians. “Having received a charter from the King of Spain to colonize the land, Ponce certainly had prior knowledge of Florida, which at the time was called Beimeni, or Bimini, not to be confused with today’s small island in the Bahamas,” said Todd Turrell, co-author of the book with Schmitt and Carr. “The Columbus family, who had the charter for Cuba and the Bahamas, was angry that the Beimeni/Bimini charter had not been issued to them. Ponce renamed Bimini as Florida, a fact confirmed by Spanish explorer Alonso Alvarez de Pineda, who noted by hand on his 1519 chart of the Gulf of Mexico: ‘Florida, formerly Bimini.'”

Ponce returned to the Gulf coast eight years later for another attempt at settlement with two ships crammed full of 200 people and 50 horses. Near present-day Marco Island he was attacked by Calusa tribesmen and hit in the leg with an arrow. He retreated to Cuba where he died from an infection of his wound. American author Washington Irving inflated the Fountain of Youth myth when he wrote two books on the Spanish conquest of the Americas that combined history and fiction.

“Thanks to Irving’s narrative skills the false Ponce became a star performer in a fiesta of illusion that persists to this day,” T.D. Allman writes in “Finding Florida: The True History of the Sunshine State.” Celebrations in 2013 of the 500th anniversary of Ponce’s discovery reinforced the myth as “millionaires donated money, academics composed screeds, and politicians lauded Florida’s made-up history while people all over the state were caught up in the street parades, the beauty pageants and, occasionally, the attempts to convene serious intellectual colloquia in commemoration of Florida’s definitive fake event. ... For the latest of countless times people in Florida cavorted, ignorant of the events that had led them to perch on this soggy former annex of the sea — unearcing, too, as to what this disregard for the past might bode for their future.”

**Special Opportunity for Social Studies Students and Faculty**

Discovering Amistad (DA), a nonprofit organization that operates the re-creation of the schooner, Amistad provides programming that uses the history of the Amistad rebellion as a lens to examine current day issues of social justice and equity within the United States. Discovering Amistad provides professional development for social studies teachers participating in partnerships and provides academic programs aligned to CT Frameworks for the Social Studies to students and teachers in schools often made possible through fundraising. In addition, the organization offers an annual overnight camp to Connecticut students during the summer months implementing a culturally relevant program of study in African American history, civics and college readiness. Students travel aboard the ship during week long sessions taught and are mentored by expert researchers and teachers. Most students attend via scholarships.

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
Special Opportunities for Social Studies Students and Faculty

Holocaust Speaker  As a young professor I faced a colleague who was a Holocaust denier. I realized then the importance of sharing my experience and becoming a Holocaust educator. Sadly, Holocaust denial, antisemitism, and attacks on Jews continue today in the United States and globally. This troubling reality led me to write my memoir which was published in 2019 as A Boy’s Journey: From Nazi-Occupied Prague to Freedom in America.

I am a retired sociology professor and an experienced Holocaust educator. I’ve taught at Wm. Paterson University, the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and now at the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in DC where I meet with adult and student groups from all over.

Sadly, the COVID-19 Pandemic has halted my in-person educational speaking events, but I am still very active online. I would be thrilled to visit your virtual classroom and share my story with your students or perhaps contribute to a virtual teacher training event. I have presented many of these events in person over the years for teachers on how to teach the Holocaust. From 2014 to 2016 I served as the Holocaust Scholar for the NC Council on the Holocaust. I have spoken about my experiences via Zoom, where I give a lecture, share Powerpoint images, and engage in a Q & A afterward. If needed, I have an assistant who handles the technical aspects of the event from start to finish so that all you, your colleagues or your students need to do is log in.

I am now scheduling online events for summer enrichment programs and for the 2020-2021 academic year. Perhaps an event like this will be of interest to you, your students, or fellow educators in your organization; if so, feel free to contact me.

Warmest regards,
Peter Stein  (914)564-6313
aboyjsjourney@gmail.com    facebook.com/steinpeterj

Institute for Curriculum Services (ICS)  I am a trainer and educator for ICS, and I wanted to let you know of a FREE PD opportunity that ICS is offering to teachers as we all navigate through teaching virtually.

ICS is known for providing free professional development workshops to teachers around the country on topics related to Jewish history, Israel, and the Middle East. While we love the opportunity to work with teachers in face-to-face settings, current events are preventing that from taking place. As a response to COVID-19, and to ensure that we continue to support teachers in their efforts to provide accurate, balanced and rigorous instruction for their students, we are now offering live, virtual workshops by our three trainer-educators presented through Zoom. The workshops feature the following topics: Teaching About Religion in the Classroom, History of European Antisemitism, and Teaching the Arab-Israeli Conflict and Peace Process Using Primary Sources. They are presented in one hour sessions for three consecutive days. Participants will receive a $100 stipend for participating in the three-hour (over three days) workshop, and will have access to ICS’s multitude of online resources including lesson plans, primary source documents, maps, and related multimedia resources needed to successfully incorporate these topics into virtual classrooms.

We are offering our next workshop opportunity for the teachers of Connecticut on Monday, June 8, Tuesday, June 9, and Wednesday, June 10 at 3:00 pm EST. The attached flyer explains the session topics and how to register. The direct link to register is: http://Bit.ly/ICS-PD. Teachers who register will get a confirmation with Zoom instructions.

Steven Goldberg <stevengoldberg1010@gmail.com>
ANNUAL AWARDS CELEBRATING EXCELLENCE

Excellence in Social Studies Education (K-8)
This award recognizes exceptional classroom social studies teaching in an elementary, middle, or junior high school setting.
2020 recipient: Erin Rooney, Hillcrest Middle School, Trumbull

Excellence in Social Studies Education (High School)
This award recognizes exceptional classroom social studies teaching in a high school setting.
2020 Recipient: Brian Moore, Bullard Havens Technical High School, Bridgeport

Excellence in Social Studies Education (Pre-service)
This award recognizes excellence in student teaching of social studies.
2020 Recipient: Brenda Fernandes, Southern Connecticut State University

Bruce Fraser Friend of Social Studies
This award recognizes an individual who furthers the interest of social studies teaching and/or social studies in Connecticut.
2020 Recipient: Jason Mancini - Executive Director, Connecticut Humanities and Co-founder, Akomawt Educational Initiative

Pamela Bellmore Gardner Social Studies Leadership Award
Given in honor of the late Pamela Bellmore Gardner, this award recognizes an administrator who has supported social studies in elementary, middle, and high school settings.
2020 Recipient: Ian Lowell, Masuk High School, Monroe

CCSS Service Award
To recognize an individual or organization who has shown dedicated, continuous service to further the goals of the Connecticut Council for the Social Studies.
2020 Recipient: Thomas Thurston - Director of Education and Public Outreach, Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition at Yale University

Thank you for your hard work, creativity and dedication to the social studies.
We are humbled and inspired by your efforts, and honored to recognize your achievements.

For more information on these and other annual awards, please visit the CCSS website at www.ctsocialstudies.org
Membership in CCSS entitles you to:

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

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

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

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

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