

WESTBOROUGH **PUBLIC SCHOOLS**

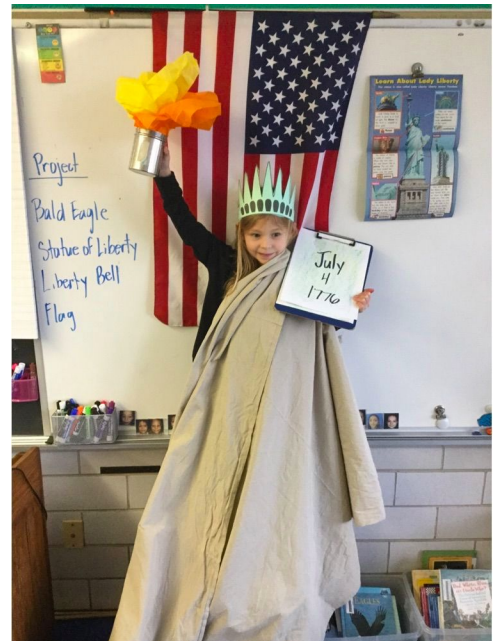


TO: School Committee
FROM: Daniel Mayer
DATE: 5/17/19
SUBJECT: Social Studies Curriculum Review Report

Introduction

In June 2018, Massachusetts released the [2018 History and Social Science Frameworks: Grades Pre-Kindergarten to 12](#). This document is 220 pages long and updates the *2003 Frameworks*. The Westborough Public Schools created two committees to study the new document and determine the ways in which Westborough should update our history and social science programs. Teachers, department heads, and I served on these committees. This report provides the findings and recommendations from both committees.

The report has the following structure: we first introduce you to the committee members; then we outline the role of history and social studies in our curriculum; after that we review the processes the committee took to determine what adjustments we should make to our social studies program; and finally, we present our findings, recommendations and timeline.



Committees

Grade PK-5 Committee		
Name	Grade(s)	School(s)
Elizabeth Berry	Grades PK-3 Literacy Coordinator	AES, HES, FES
Kerry Ciccone	Grade 3 Teacher	FES
Alex Cincotta	Grade 5 Teacher	MPS
April Knights	Grade 4 Teacher	MPS
Daniel Mayer	Assistant Superintendent	District
Lindsay Moynihan	Grade K Teacher	AES
Stephanie Nephew	Grades 4-6 Literacy Coordinator	MPS
Jennifer Quinlan-Flynn	Grade 1 Teacher	FES
Kristin Robertson	Grade 5 Teacher	MPS
Melena Streitman	Librarian	FES
Cathy Wallace	Grade 1 Teacher	AES
Kerry White	Grade 2 Teacher	HES



The Grade 6-12 Committee		
Name	Grade	School
Ed Belbin	Grades 9-12 Department Head	WHS
Casey Cullen	Grades 9-12 Teacher	WHS
Karen Gowen	Grade 6 Teacher	MPS
Marie Hopkinson	Grade 6 Teacher	MPS
Daniel Mayer	Assistant Superintendent	District
Andrew McIntyre	Grades 9-12 Teacher	WHS
Mark McNeil	Grade 7 Teacher	GMS
Frank O'Brien	Grade 9-12 Teacher	WHS
Brian Paulhus	Grade 8 Teacher	GMS
Bruce Powers	Grades 7-8 Department Head	GMS
Joey Teevens	Grades 9-12 Teacher	WHS

Why We Teach History and Social Studies

Appropriately, the Frameworks note that “The primary purpose of a history and social science education is to prepare students to have the knowledge and skills to become thoughtful and active participants in a democratic society and a complex world.” By the time students graduate from high school, the Frameworks lay out the scope and sequence districts should adopt to ensure students are “prepared to continue the legacy of democracy in the United States.” To that end, according to the Frameworks, students need the following skills and knowledge:

- “Know the fundamental ideas central to the vision of the 18th century founders, the vision that holds us together as one people of many diverse origins and cultures.
- Understand the intellectual and political tensions and compromises in the Founders’ ideas and how successive generations in the United States have worked to resolve them.

- Know how democratic ideas have been turned into institutions and practices, and the history of the origins, growth, and struggles of democratic societies on earth, past and present.



- Understand what economic, social, cultural, religious, and international conditions have helped to shape democratic practices.
- Understand the purposes, principles, and practices of the United States government as established by the Constitution, which includes their rights and responsibilities, and how to exercise them in local, state, and national government.
- Understand that, in the United States, the Constitution has continued to be vibrant and relevant through amendments and decisions of the federal courts.
- Understand how individuals, groups, organizations, and governments have addressed obstacles to democratic principles by working within the structure set forth in the Constitution.
- Are knowledgeable about local, state, and national politics and policies, and understand the current condition of the world and how it got that way.
- Are prepared to discuss complex and controversial issues and ideas with people of different views, learning to speak with clarity and respectfulness.
- Develop and practice habits of civic engagement and participation in democratic government.”

The revised Frameworks have a few important additions from the 2003 Frameworks that we will be carefully paying attention to as we adjust our history and social science curriculum. These improvements include the following features:

- “Increased emphasis on civics at all grade levels, including a new grade 8 course on civics;
- inclusion of standards that reflect the diversity of the United States and world cultures, with particular attention to the contributions of women and men of all ethnicities and backgrounds in the United States and the connections among world cultures;
- new Standards for History and Social Science Practice and questions to guide inquiry;
- stronger attention to the intersection of history, social science, and literacy instruction, through the inclusion of literacy standards for history and social science;
- expanded examples of primary sources representing significant texts, maps, photographs, and works of art and architecture in United States and world history;
- new standards for financial literacy and news/media literacy.”

The Standards for History and Social Science Practice are particularly important for us to unpack. These practice standards “encompass civic knowledge, dispositions, and skills and reflect the range of disciplinary skills often used by historians, political scientists, economists, geographers, historians, and ordinary citizens.” The seven practices “encompass the processes of inquiry and research that are integral to a rich and robust social science curriculum and the foundation for active and responsible citizenship.”



1. Demonstrate civic knowledge, skills, and dispositions.
2. Develop focused questions or problem statements and conduct inquiries.
3. Organize information and data from multiple primary and secondary sources.
4. Analyze the purpose and point of view of each source; distinguish opinion from fact.
5. Evaluate the credibility, accuracy, and relevance of each source.
6. Argue or explain conclusions, using valid reasoning and evidence.
7. Determine next steps and take informed action, as appropriate.

Findings

The approaches used by both committees were similar. We examined our current curriculum and compared it to expectations laid out in the 2018 Frameworks. We also surveyed other districts to compare our secondary level curriculum scope and sequence to that of the other districts. Almost every district we contacted was also taking stock of their current practices and making decisions about how to adjust their curricula.

Moving Away from Transmission-Based Learning

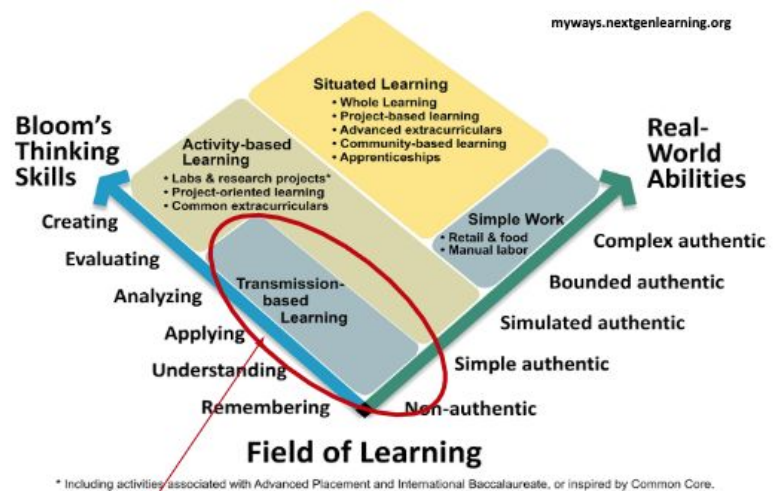
Top 10 skills

in 2020

1. Complex Problem Solving
2. Critical Thinking
3. Creativity
4. People Management
5. Coordinating with Others
6. Emotional Intelligence
7. Judgment and Decision Making
8. Service Orientation
9. Negotiation
10. Cognitive Flexibility

Both committees discussed the tension between memorizing content versus developing the skills embedded in the history and social science practices. Teachers currently struggle to teach all of the names, dates, events, vocabulary, and concepts laid out in the frameworks and the new frameworks are no less demanding. Committee members felt strongly that only by slowing down and engaging essential material would students be given the time they need to learn more advanced and important skills.

The kinds of skills our students need to acquire are the skills embedded in the social studies *practices* and the skills most employers are looking for. The list of the top 10 skills employers are looking for was developed for The World Economic Forum by chief human resource officers and strategy officers from leading global employers. The first three skills on the list are ones we would like to see incorporated more into our social studies classrooms: complex problem solving, critical thinking and creativity. The other skills on the list also should play a very important role in our social



studies classroom. What is particularly telling, and supports our argument for covering less material, is that memorizing substantial amounts of information is not a top 10 skill.

Andy Calkins, the Director of the Next Generation Learning Challenges group, created a powerful graphic to capture how the “field of learning” in schools needs to change. As you can see, the traditional approach to learning is a “transmission-based” system that focuses on lower level skills. If our teachers must cover large amounts of content at the expense of giving students the time to engage with the content then we are still perpetuating a “transmission-based learning” system.

Google, the internet, and today’s workforce requirements have rendered the transmission-based learning environment obsolete. Recognizing the tight link between what students learn and how we assess them, the committee discussed the importance of creating more authentic assessments that place a premium on analytic skills over memorization.

Changes in Curriculum Content

There are some major shifts in content in grades PK-12 that both committees identified as being important and necessary. One of the most talked about changes that has grabbed headlines in the newspapers is the call for “an increased emphasis on civics at all grade levels, including a new grade 8 course on civics.” While we will take a close look at the new civics requirements, we are pleased that our grade 8 course was established about a decade ago.

There are other important changes, too. At the elementary level, in grades 2

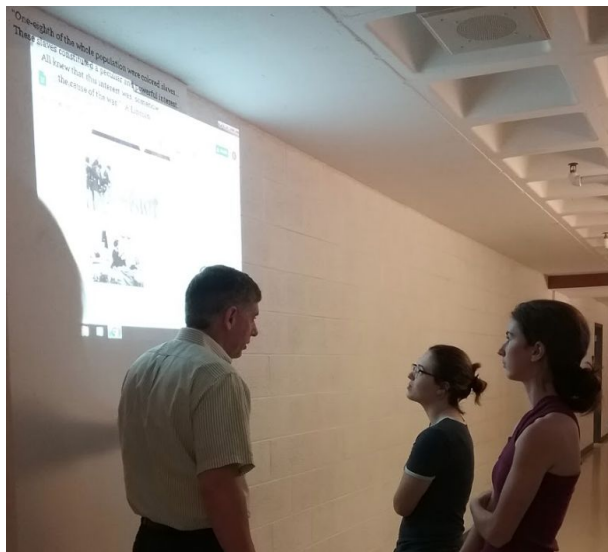
through 5 in particular, we will need to create completely new units and also remove some existing units. At grade 2, for example, “geography and its effects on people” is a completely new topic as is “civics in the context of geography.” At that same grade level the unit on Native Americans will be dropped and a list of several historical figures will no longer be studied. At grade 4, topics such as early European exploration and conquest and the expansion of the United States over time are new and units must be written and refined. Grade 4 will drop memorizing the US states and capitals; in addition students in this grade will no longer



learn about the regions of the US. At grade 5 we add a unit focused on slavery, the legacy of the Civil War, and the struggle for civil rights for all and we will take away the units on the Age of Exploration and the pre-Columbian Civilizations.

At the secondary level there are also some important shifts in content.

One of the most interesting and intense discussions the committee engaged in pertained to the grades 8 through 11 curriculum. Currently, we teach US civics at grade 8, world history at grade 9, US History I at grade 10, and US History II at grade 11. The standards call for high school to teach two years of US history and two years of world history. The state knows that most high schools, ours included, only require three years of history. Thus, each district is left with needing to make their own choice as to how to cover 4 years of content in three years.



Members of the high school history department lamented the fact that the current structure of our history curriculum does not allow for the teachers to get to important post World War II topics. The committee looked to rectify this for two reasons. First, students crave knowledge about current affairs because they are curious about today's world. Second, to be informed voters our students must understand more contemporary historical topics. The committee therefore came up with a plan to restructure the grade 11 course to become a course that focuses on

both US and World history. In addition, that course would spend a substantial amount of time examining more contemporary world issues. In order to make these changes the following ripple effect will take place:

- Grade 8 will pick up two US I units. Thus, the US Revolution and the US Constitution will move to grade 8;
- This allows US History I to start with the Federalist Era and will be retitled 19th and 20th Century US;
- Some US History II topics will move down to 10th grade and the US II course will be retitled Modern US and the World and the following units will be added:
 - The Cold War Era 1945-1991
 - The era of globalization and international markets 1991-present

- The politics of difference: conflicts, genocide, and terrorism

Making all of the above changes in our curriculum will take time, and the process for making these changes is discussed in the implementation section below.

Changes in Resource Allocation

The committees believe that the PK-12 social studies curriculum is under resourced relative to other content areas in Westborough. Committee members believe this is short sighted given the current state of our democracy, especially since “The primary purpose of a history and social science education is to prepare students to have the knowledge and skills to become thoughtful and active participants in a democratic society and a complex world” (Massachusetts Frameworks).

The most obvious areas where additional resources would be beneficial are the following: First, in grades PK-6 the district currently has curriculum coordinators in math, ELA, and science, but there is no social studies curriculum coordinator. Given that there are over 90 teachers PK-6 teaching social studies, the lack of a coordinator is problematic. Without a coordinator Westborough’s social studies curriculum is, and will continue to be, less refined and robust. Second, social studies is the only subject being routinely taught by unlicensed teachers. This became established practice when Gibbons dealt with a population bulge several years ago. By hiring just enough teachers to handle the bulge, the district created middle school teams without licensed social studies teachers. The teams had licensed math, ELA, and science teachers who each pick up a section of social studies. The third area of concern, mentioned by some committee members, pertains to appropriately funding the history department at the high school. If there are not enough paraeducators to support SPED students, then the classes end up becoming diminished in content coverage and depth because of the instructional support needs over stretching the teacher. These areas of concern are addressed in the recommendations section.



Recommendations

Curriculum and Instruction

1. Today's world requires that the old model of "transmission-based" teaching in social studies be replaced with a model where students learn in an active, creative and analytic based environment. We recommend that from PK through grade 12 our social studies curriculum emphasizes critical thinking, analysis, synthesis, and creativity. In addition, all units should be framed using essential questions that promote debate and deep thinking.
2. To ensure appropriate emphasis is given to higher level skills rather than content coverage, our curriculum maps need to identify the content that is *essential* to know and eliminate the *nice* to know. In addition, our assessments must place a premium on measuring analytic skills rather than memorization.
3. To ensure consistency all curriculum maps in grades PK-12 must be updated.
4. The curriculum in grades 8 through 11 needs to shift in the following way:
 - a. Move US I content down to grade 8 and US II content down to grade 10
 - b. Retitle US I to *19th and 20th Century US*
 - c. Retitle US II course to be *Modern US and the World*

- d. *Modern US and the World* will include three units from the World History II course presented on pages 157 through 161 of the Frameworks. The three units are the following:
 - i. The Cold War Era 1945-1991
 - ii. The era of globalization 1991-present
 - iii. The politics of difference: conflicts, genocide, and terrorism
- 5. Continue to explore and add high school electives that promote citizenship at the local and global level.

Resources

- 6. Hire a PK-6 Social Studies Curriculum Coordinator
- 7. Ensure all teachers teaching in grades 7-12 are certified in Social Studies
- 8. Continue to support heterogeneous grouping in core courses 9-12 by ensuring effective measures to ensure no classes become overburdened without support

Implementation Timeline and Process

We are planning for a partial implementation of new material and units during the 2019-2020 school year and then a full transition to our new curriculum by the 2020-2021 school year. The rewriting of our curriculum in grades 7 through 12 will rely on the social studies teachers coming together in teams to write new material. The secondary social studies committee will continue to meet next year and we will review all of the secondary curriculum documents and provide comments and suggestions for refinement.

For grades PK-6 we will rely on using the innovation teacher position as a means of developing our new social studies curriculum. The innovation teacher will work closely with me; however, given the scope of this project, I envision hiring a consultant using curriculum resources already allocated to my FY 2020 budget to help us expedite the PK-6 curriculum writing process.

We will not know until next fall whether there will be additional costs that we need to add to our FY 2021 budget in order to make this curriculum update successful.