



YANKEE POST



DAVID BOSSO, President

December, 2016

TIM WEINLAND
DAN COUGHLIN, Co-editors

President's Message



Over the years, and perhaps no more so than this year, a number of national and global events have impacted the tone of our discourse, how we feel about ourselves and the world around us, and the obstacles we face as social studies educators. In some shape or form, many of these issues have found their way into our classrooms, our households, our public spaces, and our collective consciousness. In the midst of these changes, we are witnessing seemingly inexorable threats to our principles and values. It seems that we are becoming far more influenced by the social media we consume and the material comforts we seek than the human interactions we need and the ideals we hold dear. It does not need to be this way.

Like many of you, I have struggled with how to best approach the pressing issues of today, especially in light of how they have affected some of my current and former students' sense of self, their perspectives, their relationships, and their aspirations. As a veteran social studies teacher tasked with guiding students through controversial and complex topics, complicated and multifaceted historical and cultural dynamics, and a wide range of moral dilemmas, what has often felt overwhelming over the years now seems altogether Sisyphean. I'm sure I am not alone, as many of our family, friends, colleagues, and students have experienced the confusion, anxiety, and uncertainty of these times as well. With so many hypocrisies and absurdities defining this emergent zeitgeist, the challenges in our classrooms, schools, and communities have become more pronounced. Accordingly, what has been demanded of us as social studies educators has become that much more imperative. If our purpose involves

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Editors' Note

So what did we learn this past semester? Certainly we learned that so-called "expertise" might be overrated – see political polls. Certainly we learned that behavior that would get you sent to the office, if not suspended, is acceptable in political campaigns. Certainly we learned that we have a lot to learn about the political impact of "social media" and other forms of communication. And while we are certainly "preaching to the choir", we learned that in the age of STEM, social studies has a critical role to play in the preparation of citizens.

All this is highly interesting in the current rush to promote "civic education" as a separate subject in social studies. In the interest of raising some questions about those efforts we offer three articles in this issue. **See pages 6-9.** Is civics about knowing the Constitution and the political process or is it more about using current issues to understand how the process actually works? Carolyn Ivanoff, from Shelton High School offers a discussion of the relationship between schools and the press, opening up the question of how we can learn about civics. Following on that theme, a news report raises that old chestnut about the place of such books as Huckleberry Finn and To Kill a Mockingbird in school libraries and the school curriculum. As students consider that question and countless other tough issues, both historical and contemporary, will they learn more about being a citizen in a democracy than via a more traditional civics course? We would submit that ducking controversial issues is the worst form of civic education.

Moving on: if you missed the Fall Conference you missed a marvelous program. Jahana Hayes, Connecticut's and the nation's Teacher of the Year for 1916, was inspiring. Following on her heels was Elena Tipton, Connecticut's Kid Governor. You expect confidence from a teacher of the year; but from a 5th grader? Wow! What a great kick-off for the day from those two. The afternoon's speakers, Dianna Wentzell and Kenneth

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President's Message - continued

preparing students for college and career success, and more importantly, cultivating civic engagement, global awareness, and kindness - and we genuinely believe this - then our mission is now even more coherent and unequivocal. Sisyphus does not stop.

Regardless of where you stand politically, as educators, we have a fundamental obligation to make certain that our students always feel welcome, safe, and supported, no matter their individual circumstances. We have a responsibility to stand up to bigotry and to speak out against injustices, however subtle. Certainly, such dynamics have always existed, but they have reared their ugly heads once again. They can never become tolerated, acceptable, or normalized - and being a model of compassion and an advocate for what is right are far more important than being a pedagogical expert. As an educator, what you do goes far beyond what is in the curriculum, and it is certainly not limited to a textbook, a bell schedule, or a standardized test. We are uniquely positioned to make a difference in our students' lives and to offer them hope and wisdom - especially when they are insular or disheartened. Education is anathema to ignorance as much as it is to despair.

There have been few times in my teaching career during which I have found it difficult to find the right words or to accentuate the positive aspects of what is undoubtedly a trying and contentious era - and will be so indefinitely. What I do know, and why I feel emboldened to continue to do such important work, is that social studies educators are among the most critical forces at work in our ongoing effort to ensure a better future for all of us. Despite the unpredictability and apprehension of our times, of this I am certain.

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Editor's Note - continued

Davis maintained the same standard. Kudos to Gene Stec, Tony Roy and their committee for producing a great day. Pictures on pages 4-5 will provide some of the flavor.

On another note, the Common Core has been something of a target over the last few years and Donald Trump's nominee for Secretary of Education has made no secret of her opposition. Connecticut is fortunate in having Commissioner Dianna Wentzell and Steve Armstrong as our advocates for a social studies curriculum that is challenging and promotes thoughtful exploration of issues. Pages 10-11 offer yet one more take on approaches to the Common Core. While Connecticut may avoid the terminology for political reasons, the near future may call on all of us to stand up and promote the best practices of our social studies curriculum.

Finally, we extend our best wishes to all of you for this holiday season and the year ahead. May your holiday be safe, restful and inspiring.

Tim and Dan

**Join CCSS: See Mem-
bership Form on page 13**

State Department Activities



Steve Armstrong with Education Commissioner Dianna Wentzell

Red, White & Blue Schools



There are several upcoming social studies professional development opportunities being offered by the Connecticut Department of Education and Connecticut Council for the Social Studies. Beginning in late January we will be sponsoring a 3-part webinar series on the Teaching of Africa. This series will be co-sponsored by the PIER program at Yale University. This program will focus on the history and geography of Africa, with a special emphasis on issues facing Africa today. This program will be especially relevant for teachers of grades 6 and 7 and teachers of high school Modern World History courses.

On March 17 we will be having a workshop for teachers and curriculum leaders entitled “Inquiry Instruction: From Theory to Practice”. During this full-day workshop we will focus not on theory but concrete ways to locate inquiry practices within curriculum documents and into social studies classrooms. Our main speaker and guest for the day will be Dr. John Lee, co-author of the national C3 social studies frameworks. The workshop will be located at Central Connecticut State University.

On the same day we will be having a session for third grade teachers at CCSU on “Teaching Connecticut and Connecticut History”. On this day teachers will be provided with general themes they should emphasize while teaching Connecticut history and appropriate resources that can be utilized with third graders. We will also discuss the geography of Connecticut and issues facing Connecticut today, all in terms that third grade students can understand.

For your calendars: we will again we having social studies summer institutes this summer. These will be held from June 26-29 and August 7-10 (these will be held at two different locations). A focus of the first day of these workshops will be on “Teaching Controversial Issues in the Social Studies Classroom”. We will be having separate sessions for high school, middle school, and elementary school teachers. More details forthcoming. We will also be having several in-person and online sessions in the spring on helping students to enhance their civic knowledge and engagement: more details to come on this as well.

Finally, if you have an exciting inquiry that you have written for your classroom, we would love to publish it in our companion document for the frameworks. Please let me know if you have something that you would be willing to contribute. For questions or information on any of the above contact Stephen Armstrong, Connecticut social studies consultant, at Stephen.Armstrong@ct.gov.

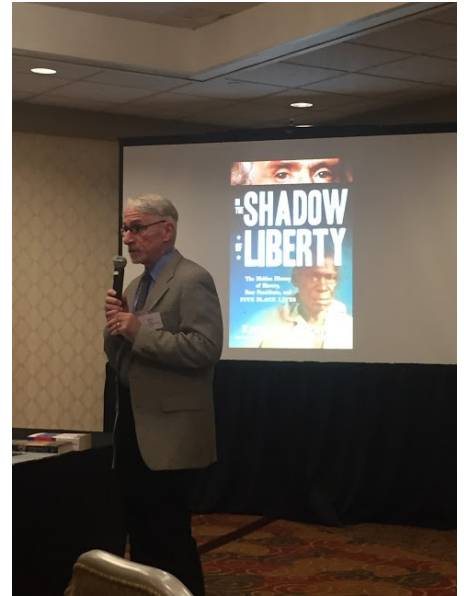


Top: Breakfast for early birds; Education Commissioner Dianna Wentzell with Steve Armstrong

Right: Kenneth C. Davis

Below: National Teacher of the Year Jahana Hayes; with Kid Governor Elena Tipton

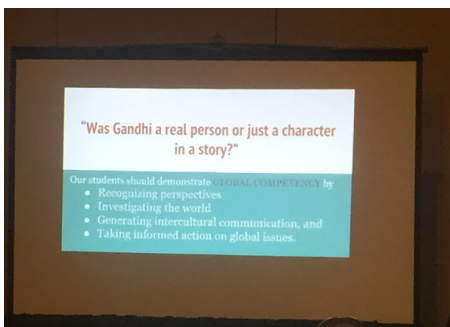
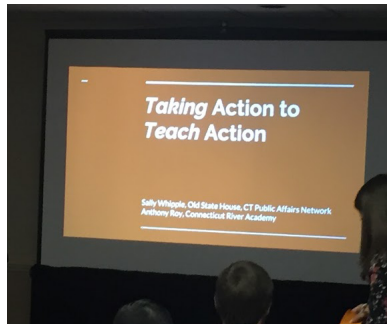
Bottom: CCSS President David Bosso with Elena Tipton; Carolyn Ivanoff; Melissa Thom with Jahana Hayes



CCSS Fall Conference



Fall Conference Workshops and Exhibits



Earlier and more often: Washington teachers seek broad boost to civics education

By [Claudia Rowe](#), *Seattle Times* staff reporter

Updated November 28, 2016 at 10:09 am

Fake news sites are only the latest trend prompting teachers to join a statewide effort aimed at educating students about how to engage with government. The next generation of voters show “a dismaying inability” to tell the difference between online advertisements and legitimate news stories, according to a study of nearly 8,000 middle, high school and college students released last week by Stanford University.

“Overall, young people’s ability to reason about the information on the internet can be summed up in one word: bleak,” [the researchers said](#). “In every case and at every level, we were taken aback by students’ lack of preparation.”

The findings were no surprise to social studies teachers in Washington, who will ask the 2017 legislature pass an initiative dramatically boosting civics education statewide.

Between high-stakes testing and a growing emphasis on the so-called STEM subjects — science, technology, engineering and math — education about the workings of government has been reduced to an afterthought, said [Margaret Fisher, a law professor](#) at Seattle University who is leading the effort.

Moreover, the civics education that does exist varies widely in quality from school to school. Carinna Tarvin, a National Board Certified social studies teacher said even she would benefit from deeper training and a more coherent approach. “Social studies in this state is all over the place. Districts all do different things. Last year, I had to teach civics, and we didn’t even have textbooks,” Tarvin said. “I was just kind of winging it.”

The district-to-district discrepancies are particularly concerning to Fisher. “Middle- and upper middle-class kids tend to get quality programs,” she said. “Our special priority is youth of color, rural and immigrant and refugee groups. There are some high quality programs in Washington, but the percentage of students that get access to them is very small.”

Fisher and her team plan to ask the legislature for \$250,000, some of which would be used to give teachers better training in civics education and expand it to middle- and elementary schools.

“Knowing the three branches of government and how many stripes are on the flag doesn’t teach you how to be a citizen, how to participate and be a critical consumer of the news,” said Anthony Jonas, a social studies teacher in Bellevue who co-chairs the [Washington State Council for the Social Studies](#).

He would like to see the basic foundation — for instance, how to talk through differing viewpoints — set in elementary or middle school. Then media literacy and assessing the quality of information.

“I’d like to see kids evaluating politicians and what they’re doing, and applying knowledge — not just memorizing facts from 240 years ago,” Jonas said. “This feeling has been bubbling for a while, but the election really pushed people to see that education can’t just be all about STEM.”

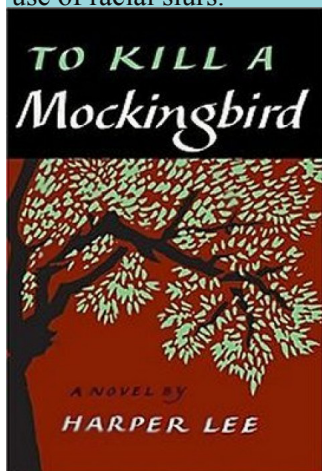
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Washington Post, December 3, 2016

School district weighs ban of ‘Mockingbird,’ ‘Huckleberry Finn’ after complaint

By [Moriah Balingit](#) December 3

A Virginia school district has pulled copies of “To Kill a Mockingbird” and “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” from classrooms and libraries while it weighs whether it should permanently ban the American classics because of the books’ use of racial slurs.



In response to a formal complaint from a parent, Accomack County Public Schools Superintendent Chris Holland said the district has appointed a committee to recommend whether the books should remain in the curriculum and stay in school libraries. District policy calls for the formation of the committee — which can include a principal, teachers and parents — when a parent formally files a complaint.

The parent, Marie Rothstein-Williams, made an emotional plea at a school board meeting Nov. 15, saying the works had disturbed her teenage son, a biracial student at Nandua High School on Virginia’s Eastern Shore.

“I’m not disputing this is great literature,” Rothstein-Williams said. “But there is so much racial slurs in there and offensive wording that you can’t get past that, and right now we are a nation divided as it is.”

School libraries and curriculum are frequent culture war battlegrounds, and it is not uncommon for parents to raise objections to books that many consider classics but that also contain offensive language or mature themes.

Mark Twain’s “The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn” is the book most often targeted for removal from school classrooms and libraries among the titles the American Library Association tracks. “To Kill a Mockingbird,” the Harper Lee classic set in 1936 Alabama, is also high on the list of works that people seek to remove from schools. Both books use the n-word liberally.

A Montgomery County, Md., student in 2006 appealed to the school board to toss a lesson about the n-word that was meant to prepare students for reading “Mockingbird.” A Fairfax County, Va., mother launched a campaign in 2013 to remove Toni Morrison’s “Beloved” from classrooms because its portrayal of an escaped slave included bestiality, a gang rape and an infant’s murder. Parents also have objected to some modern children’s literature — including the popular Harry Potter series — because they worry that it promotes occultism.

James LaRue, director of the American Library Association’s Office for Intellectual Freedom, said he understands the challenge of teaching books laced with language that is deeply upsetting to some. But he said schools should approach such works carefully instead of throwing them out. He said teachers can avoid having students read the works aloud, for example, and talk to them about the historical context in which they were written.

Removing the books from classrooms and libraries is censorship, he said.

“America is still deeply uncomfortable with its racial history,” LaRue said. He said that hiding the books — which many consider seminal works of American literature — amounts to “forgetting history.” [Sign up](#)

In her remarks to the Accomack school board, Rothstein-Williams said she understands that the works are considered classics, but she worries that they teach students it is okay to use racially charged words.

Rothstein-Williams did not respond to a request for comment.

“What are we teaching our children? We’re validating that these words are acceptable,” Rothstein-Williams told the school board. “They are not acceptable.”

She urged the school board to consider the appropriateness of the books given the polarization of issues about race. The tiny Accomack County School District, on the northern end of Virginia’s Eastern Shore along the Chesapeake Bay and the Atlantic Ocean, educates about 5,000 students, 37 percent of whom are black.

“Truly we are divided,” Rothstein-Williams said. “We will lose our children if we continue to say that this is okay, that we validate these words when we should not.”

Schools and the Press – Then and Now

By Carolyn Ivanoff, Shelton High School

As a teacher and administrator I often reflect, as do so many of my colleagues, on the nature of the relationship between the press and schools. Obviously we love positive press about our schools and students. So much is so good in our buildings and the world of education. Why can't all that is good be covered and broadcast? Instead it seems that so often, even daily, education is the victim of negative coverage. In education today we contend not only with the press itself, but the social media aspects that can take an issue from zero to viral in a matter of minutes. As teachers, especially social studies teachers, we always try to instill media savvy in our students. We want them to understand that where information comes from, who is sending the message, why they are choosing to send that message is as important as the message itself in evaluating the value and integrity of that information. We want our students to be able to think critically. We want our students to be able to evaluate the information they are receiving and not simply take information at face value. We want our students to be able to carefully discriminate among the informational shades of gray that bombards them continuously. Our students are our future citizens and we want them to use information to make the best choices in everything from their futures to their next social media post. How do our students form their understanding of the world and people around them and make decisions in a rational manner when they, and we, are often on information overload? I once read that a single, daily edition of the New York Times contains more information than a person would be exposed to in a lifetime in 1492! How do we handle the deluge of information we are bombarded with in the 21st Century? As hard as it may be we need to continue to convey to our students, their parents, and even ourselves that we must rationally evaluate information in a way that allows us all to be media savvy and to use the overwhelming information we are continuously flooded with in a respectful, positive manner.

Was any of this easier in the “good old days?” Was the relationship between the press and schools easier then, more positive? Were citizens better able to think critically and evaluate information from the traditional news sources, print, radio, TV without the complications of social media?

At the beginning of this school year, I began to follow an issue that occurred at Buckeye Union High School located in a suburb of Phoenix, Arizona. I caught the headline on August 30 in the Washington Post and soon saw it proliferated on social media and in other newspapers and news reporting on the Internet. It was Tuesday, August 30 and picture day at the Arizona high school. A 15 year old female student picked out an outfit she wanted to have her picture taken in for that year. It was a Black Lives Matter T-shirt and the vice principal of the school had her change because the shirt was “disruptive to the educational environment.” Now just an aside here, but having students change a T-shirt, or turn it inside out, is not an unusual thing at our high school, or perhaps any school in America. In asking the student to change the administration of Buckeye Union High School cited an important school governance tenant that can be termed a common law for all schools, that schools reserve the right to curtail or ban any fashion, behavior, speech, activity that is disruptive, or potentially disruptive, to the educational environment.

The student took the plain white shirt she was handed and went into the lav to change. In the lav she did what many students might do under the circumstances, she took a selfie in the mirror while still in her Black Lives Matter T-shirt before she changed. She posted her selfie to Facebook and described the incident. The next day, Wednesday, her friend wore a Black Lives Matter shirt to school and she was also told to take it off. The friend, also black, spoke to 12 News saying, “I felt like I was punished for who I am.” The third day, Thursday, the first student’s mother met with the school administration and told NBC affiliate 12 News “She was asked to change and she didn’t question them. She was being respectful.” On Friday a school administrator asked the 15-year old to remove her sweatshirt in order to investigate whether she had worn the Black Lives Matter shirt again according to the Arizona Republic. Almost immediately fueled by the selfie, social media was heating up. According to the Washington Post, the student had called the white T-shirt “meaningless and non-political and said it “has nothing to do for what I’m standing for.” “While wearing the shirt I have been verbally attacked MANY times,” she wrote. “I never meant to imply because black lives matter others don’t!”

What troubled her further was that she claimed she had seen classmates wear other political shirts that certain factions of society find offensive: supporting same-sex marriage, the confederate flag, white power. To her knowledge, those students hadn’t been censored. “At this point I’m starting to believe (there’s) a problem with the word black?” she wrote on Facebook. The Washington Post reported that at one point there was even talk that fights could break out over the controversy. Some students said they would wear Black Lives Matter shirts; others said they would come to school

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SCHOOL BARS ERIN'S COLOR.

**Ejection of Pupils Wearing Green Stirs
Ansonia Irish-Americans.**

Special to The New York Times.

ANSONIA, Conn., March 17.—“For the wearing of the green” several pupils of the Seymour High School were ordered from the building by Principal William E. Parker this morning, and the Irish-Americans are up in arms against what they claim to be an insult to the sons of Erin.

A number of the pupils displayed green ribbon at the morning session, and the Principal demanded the removal of the colors under threat of ejection. Many complied with the request, but Timothy O’Keefe, George Ahern, Edward Mahoney, and Philip Spoonhelmer refused and were expelled.

When the facts became known publicly at noon the Principal was severely condemned for his actions, and at the afternoon session all the pupils wore green by order of their parents.

A mass meeting of Irish-American citizens will be held to-morrow night and a protest will be handed to the Board of Education, demanding an explanation.

The New York Times

Published: March 18, 1905

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bearing confederate flags. The student told Fox 10 that administrators announced neither shirt would be allowed in class and on Monday joined eight other students in a walkout from morning classes, chanting “Stand up, fight back.” as they exited the building. These students wore Black Lives Matter T-shirts and carried white signs with red lettering that said “vision for black lives.”

The Washington Post reported in some photos the teens raised their fists in the air, a symbol of solidarity.” The original student’s friend who also was told to change her Black Lives Matter shirt by administration stated, “We’re not trying to start a race war, we’re trying to end one.” Protesting students were joined by their parents and local politicians and civil rights groups voicing support for their cause. The Arizona Republic reported the Washington Post stated that the student’s mother embraced her daughter and addressed a small crowd that had gathered Monday, “When they wear their shirts that say Black Lives Matter, they’re just telling you that their lives matter too. They have made death threats to the students here on Snapchat, Facebook, social media. The students that have made these threats have not had any consequences.”

Representatives from Black Lives Matter Phoenix, the NAACP, and the ACLU encouraged the students to voice their grievances in an intelligent, nonviolent way, the Republic reported a statement of pride for the students from a state congressional candidate and just afternoon the students returned to class. Confronted with the media and social media storm the school administration would not answer specific questions about the dress code policies and did release a statement on its website and Facebook.

Originally my attention in the Washington Post article was caught by the Morning Mix headline, *An Ariz. School banned her Black Lives Matter T-shirt. So she boycotted her school.* Other headlines followed in other news agencies in print and on-line: *Buckeye HS student forced to remove Black Lives Matters....., Arizona high school student sent home for wearing....., She Was Banned from Wearing a Black Lives Matters T....., Arizona school district apologies for banning....., KING: Black Lives Matter T-shirts not welcome at....., Students Protest After Arizona School Bans Black....., Students Protest after Classmate is Made to Change.....* I can imagine how the school administration felt faced with this blitz, especially with the surrounding viral, social media onslaught.

I often research historical and social issues and turn to historical newspapers for information. Even in the late 19th century and early 20th information would flow like water through multiple print sources. The issues that are faced and reported on in our 21st century schools can be read in any historic paper I have ever researched. Education news has always been about lack of funding, poor facilities, absenteeism, delinquent students schools were expected to reform, immigrant children whose learning was hindered by their lack of English, over crowded buildings and classrooms, teacher preparation or criticisms thereof, teacher pay, merit pay, tenure, the opinion that public schools were doing a poor job of educating their students. Like the saying goes the more things change the more they stay the same. I came across the following article from March 18, 1905 in the New York Times about a small local Connecticut town in the lower Naugatuck Valley. Reading the article, we in the 21st century can easily understand how this issue would make our local news and could spread like wildfire on social media. It’s interesting to note in 2016 that in 1905 this local school issue made it to the mighty New York Times and was reported on a national level.

Common Core: Teach Literacy in Every Subject

By Jaelyn Zubrzycki

In high schools across Denver, chemistry teachers are working from a new set of lessons. The topic: “Should the United States say yes or no to nuclear power?” On their way to answering that question, students are asked to learn new scientific vocabulary and concepts, including the difference between nuclear fusion and nuclear fission. They’re also offered Spanish/English cognates, root words, and a strategy for decoding unfamiliar words alongside worksheets on scientific content.

It may not sound like a traditional chemistry unit. But this is just one example of how schools, districts, and states are increasingly shaping what happens in science and social studies classes around the **Common Core State Standards for literacy** in history, social studies, science, and technical subjects. These lesser-known standards, tucked in the back of the English/language arts section of the common core, aim to teach students to read, write, and analyze text like a historian, a scientist, or some other disciplinary expert.

“We’re asking all teachers to be teachers of reading and writing in their disciplines,” said Bridgett Bird, the senior manager of content literacy for the 90,000-student Denver public school system and the head of the group that developed the chemistry lessons and other discipline-based literacy lessons. “Literacy is the key to equity. If we’re only focused on literacy in [English/language arts], we’re leaving out seven-eighths of the day.”

Bird leads a **2-year-old department focused on content-area literacy** whose reach is spreading quickly: While some 15,000 of the district’s students were taught using the content-literacy lessons in the 2015-16 school year, that number is up to 30,000 this year. Though the common-core standards have included literacy standards for science and history since states started adopting them in 2010, many schools are just now turning their attention to preparing teachers and resources for literacy teaching in those subjects. In some states, that focus is being pushed along by common-core-aligned assessments that ask students to employ the science and social studies literacy skills laid out in the standards.

Reading Like a Historian

The common-core standards include 10 standards for subject-specific literacy in history and social studies, and 10 in science and technical subjects for grades 6-12. (In the elementary grades, a similar set of standards is laid out more broadly for informational text.) Each set includes skills and practices associated with the particular discipline.

The history standards, for instance, refer to primary and secondary sources and ask students to be able to distinguish between “fact, opinion, and reasoned judgment” in a text. In science, students are asked to be able to “integrate quantitative or technical information expressed in words in a text with a version of that information expressed visually.” Those standards came about in part due to the efforts of Timothy Shanahan and Cynthia Shanahan, both professors of education at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

The Shanahans helped conceive of “disciplinary literacy.” Bolstered by research on linguistics and reading and writing habits in different professions, they argue that each discipline has its own way of using language and approaching text. Timothy Shanahan describes various professionals’ literacy styles: the historian, for example, who might prioritize learning the source of a historical document in order to put it in context, or the scientist, who might write in the passive voice so maligned by English teachers in order to imply objectivity.

Shanahan said he often asks teachers to consider the readings that they had to do in their field and to remember when those readings became difficult for them. “You’re asking them to try to think about what it is they’re doing and what’s special about it,” he said. Disciplinary literacy isn’t intended to be a way to ask content-area teachers to shoulder part of an English teacher’s load by assigning writing or readings in class, Shanahan said; it’s teaching students to read, write, and think like experts in a given field. “We have to start apprenticing them in these fields,” he said.

That idea has caught on with school boards and educators focused on preparing students for college and careers. It has also resonated with schools hoping to disperse the task of teaching literacy among more teachers in a school. Disciplinary reading’s focus on authentic texts also aligns with increasingly popular inquiry-based approaches to education, which aim to ground content in science and social studies in real-life questions, scenarios, and texts. The state of Wisconsin, for one, has **adopted the idea of disciplinary literacy for all subject areas**. But Shanahan said the idea also has trickled out beyond the 42 states where the common core is still in effect: Texas, which never adopted the standards, and Indiana, which dropped them, both include disciplinary-literacy ideas in their literacy standards.

Slow Introduction

In some cases, states and districts introduced the common core’s literacy standards to content-area teachers at the same time they were rolled out to English and math teachers. But others focused first on standards in math and English/language arts and are only now focusing on disciplinary literacy, and some have yet to ask science or social studies teachers to concentrate on the literacy standards.

In general, history teachers are more apt than science teachers to see the literacy practices in the standards as in line with their teaching and resources, according to Shanahan and several practitioners. One expert described a science teacher who belligerently approached him after a training on the common core: “I have my own standards,” the teacher said, referring to the Next Generation Science Standards, which 18 states and the District of Columbia have adopted. The science standards’ authors say that the literacy standards are meant to complement,

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not replace, the NGSS, and that the science standards address practices, core ideas, and concepts rather than reading and writing skills in the subject.

At West Chicago Community High School, in suburban Chicago, history teacher Mary Ellen Daneels said that all history teachers were asked to create maps connecting their curriculum to the common-core literacy standards soon after the state adopted the standards in 2010. She said it was a natural fit with the way she taught the subject. “It gave us a common language, a core that people across disciplines can use to talk about what they’re doing,” she said.

The 2015 introduction of Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers, or PARCC, tests, which are aligned to the common core, gave disciplinary literacy another boost. “It was very much on the mind of teachers that we had to help students be successful on those high-stakes tests,” Daneels said. (Illinois has since decided to use SAT tests instead of PARCC’s.) The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which also makes common core-aligned tests, also tests students on the literacy standards.

In Springfield, Mass., Sara Macon, an English/language arts master teacher at Forest Park Middle School, said that her school’s literacy department had started to focus on literacy in all subject areas last school year. Before that, she said, “we as school leaders were so focused on ELA and math.” “We realized that everyone needs to support this,” she said. “It can’t be done for an hour a day in English. . . . We found that testing was really falling on [English teachers], and others weren’t taking accountability for how kids read and write.” Macon said that some teachers weren’t initially interested in teaching literacy along with their own content-area standards. But, she added, once teachers began actively tagging their lessons to the literacy standards, “they saw they were already doing a lot.” Her school’s team has since started providing science and social studies teachers with models of how they can incorporate disciplinary literacy.

Both the Next Generation Science Standards and the College, Career, and Civic Readiness Framework, which was created to guide social-studies-standards writers, draw connections to the common-core literacy standards’ aims: synthesizing multiple texts in the C3 framework or analyzing technical readings in the NGSS.

Links to Content Standards

Several surveys have found that many available textbooks aren’t fully aligned to the common core in reading and math. In science and history, it’s even harder to find materials that are explicitly aligned to the literacy standards, according to Michael Manderino, an assistant professor at Northern Illinois University who has studied disciplinary literacy. Manderino said that the idea is for teachers to eventually be able to develop their own resources, but that some online offerings, such as Stanford University’s Reading Like a Historian, fit the bill for history.

In Denver, Bird’s team uses the Literacy Design Collaborative, an online tool that helps teachers craft curricula in all subjects that tie to the common core, to design science and social studies units. Her department’s goal is to introduce the standards to teachers and give them resources that enable them to get comfortable teaching them. In a district where many students are learning English, her department also makes materials that are tailored to English-learners.

Denver’s district has an unusual structure, in which schools have the option to opt in or out of programs issued by the district’s central office. Bird said that about 80 percent of secondary schools had opted into the content-literacy offerings. Individual schools and teachers also can tweak the materials to meet their students’ needs. Many teachers also have literacy goals wrapped up in their performance plans, so the lessons are presented as a way to help teachers meet those goals.

While the Literacy Design Collaborative allows teachers to make their own units, Bird’s department provided teachers with samples to help them manage teaching literacy along with “all the other initiatives we have going on.” “There are so many things floating around that it’s difficult to know what to grasp onto and what to focus on,” she said. Her hope for the literacy modules “is that we can wrap it all up into one.”

Coverage of the implementation of college- and career-ready standards and the use of personalized learning is supported in part by a grant from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, at www.gatesfoundation.org. Education Week retains sole editorial control over the content of this coverage.

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I remember Pearl Harbor. I was five and a half years old and my sister had her 11th birthday party on December 7, 1941. We went to the movies—*Sergeant York* with Gary Cooper—about a Medal of Honor recipient in World War I. In the middle of the film, it stopped and the manager brought a mic out on the stage and said: "All servicemen report to your bases." And all over the theater, soldiers, airman, sailors and marines got up and left. When we got out of the movie there was an extra edition of the paper out saying Pearl Harbor had been attacked.

Today, a survivor of the Pearl Harbor attack wrote in *The Boston Globe* that when he asked a high school girl what she knew about Pearl Harbor, the girl said, "Who is she?"

Will Fitzhugh

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