

**Response To Program Review
K-12 History/Social Studies**

Weston Public Schools

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Submitted by:

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and

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INTRODUCTION

On March 19 and 20, 2009, a team of six educators visited the Weston Public Schools to conduct a K-12 History/Social Studies Program Review. The team visited each Weston Public School, met with teachers, administrators, students, and parents, observed classes, reviewed materials, and discussed the role of Social Studies in Weston from K-12. The School Committee voted to officially receive the report at their June 1, 2009 meeting. The Program Review process then requires the curriculum leaders to meet with faculty and prepare a response to the report and proposals for future actions.

GENERAL OBSERVATIONS

In terms of general observations, the committee was highly impressed with History/Social Studies curriculum and instruction in Weston. Commitment to Global Education K-12 was apparent, and the visiting team found that efforts to create and deliver “a curriculum from K-12 in which an understanding of the wider world [is] emphasized...has been impressively instituted.” It was also observed that teachers at all grade levels reported feeling “supported and trusted” by the school community, and that Weston has an environment of ongoing improvement to curriculum and instruction.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND RESPONSES

The visiting team found much to commend. Positive comments about specific instructional programs such as Open Circle, initiatives in areas like Global Education and closing the achievement gap, as well as efforts to improve teaching and learning by making use of new instructional approaches and technology are to be found throughout its report. The team made recommendations as well, and these have been the subject of discussion and some action since last June. The following is a summary of the Social Studies Review Team recommendations, department response(s) to them, and timelines for future work.

Recommendation 1

Elementary course outlines and teaching guides lacked consistency in the K-5 schools. They should be reviewed to create a format that would more easily support teachers new to the system or those who might be changing grade levels.

Response:

The K-5 Curriculum Leadership Team worked across the span of 2008-2009 to begin a review of our Weston Standards and Benchmarks. Recommendation 1 focuses on work that is already underway and will move forward to accomplish the consistency and formatting noted by the committee.

Action Items:

- Clearly articulate the K-5 Standards, benchmarks, and learning goals
- Align units to new SS (Weston) standards
- Explore ways to balance the scope of content in all grades
- Research scope and sequence of SS in comparable school districts (Wayland, Wellesley, Sudbury, Concord, Lexington, Belmont)
- Recraft current units of study in the elementary grades as needed in order to align with standards.
- Address Benchmark Assessment Tasks (BATs) to update for 21st Century standards and rigor.

- Collaborate with other departments to effectively accomplish integration
- Integrate ELA and SS with writing in content areas as a focus (nonfiction research and writing).
- Define learning goals for content writing (nonfiction) in our units.
- With Grade 4 teachers, meet to discuss and review efficacy of current textbook and assessments. Research alternate approaches to teaching frameworks.

2009-2010 Action Items Implementation Steps:

- New elementary social studies teacher binders, minimum of one unit per grade by end of summer 2010.
- Program of Studies (Elementary) to be looked at using NCSS core History/SS content areas (grid) by spring 2010.
- Grade 5 American History/ELA unit (writing in a variety of genres with history as the umbrella), spring 2010
- After review of depth v. breadth, potentially move units to other grades to balance core course of study, 2010-2011.
- Clearly articulated writing goals for each grade.

Recommendation 2

The curricula in the sixth and seventh grade would profit from a series of meetings for the faculty. In the struggle between depth and breadth, breadth has won out in the seventh grade, and it isn't clear that that works the best for the students in Weston.

Action Items:

- Clearly articulate the 6-12 Standards, benchmarks, and learning goals
- Align to new SS (Weston) standards
- Explore ways to balance the scope of content in particular grades
- Research scope and sequence of SS in comparable school districts (Wayland, Wellesley, Sudbury, Concord, Lexington, Belmont)
- After review of depth v. breadth, potentially move units to other grades to balance core course of study, 2010-2011.

2009-2010 Action Items Implementation Steps:

- Conduct a series of across-grade meetings to act on articulated action item curriculum goals.
- Utilize department meetings to further align curriculum goals.

Recommendation 3

Continue the fine work to make the Global Connections theme that works so well at the elementary level, explicit at the Middle School as well.

Response:

During the 2008-2009, a Global Education Committee was formed (consisting of administrators, teachers, and parents) to draft K-12 standards in response to changes in the world and to capitalize upon the many ways teachers at ALL levels have moved to incorporate the world in their teaching.

Action Items:

- Continue working on global standards and move to next steps
- Look for natural connections and delineate these connections

- Find additional places to fold/add in
- Assess the variety of previously piloted global connections

2009-2010 Action Items Implementation Steps:

- Post a collection of piloted global connections on internal web by spring 2010.
- Assess piloted global connections by end of summer 2010.
- Identify “natural” places in which to fold global standards by fall 2010.
- Implement working draft of Global Standards for Weston Public Schools (preK-12) by fall 2010.

Recommendation 4

Collaboration between fifth and sixth grade teachers would be very helpful to ease the transition to Middle School social studies. Since we hope that sixth and seventh grade teachers would also work together, it would, we think be useful to have teachers in grades 5-7 to make sure that the curricula they are teaching reinforce and build upon each other.

Response:

Communication between and within our buildings is a high priority district-wide. We agree that the need to have grade 5, 6, and 7 teachers work together would be beneficial to all--faculty and students alike.

Action Items:

- Articulate the Weston Standards, benchmarks, and learning goals of each of these grades.
- Identify and address areas that require smoother transitions within these grades.

2009-2010 Action Items Implementation Steps:

- Jim Murphy and Pam Bator will chair meetings of combined grades 5, 6, and 7 social studies teachers.
- Clearly articulated understandings of the transitions and expectations of these three grades by end of summer 2010.

Recommendation 5

In order to help students write more effective papers, we urge the social studies and language arts faculty at the middle school level to meet to see if they could combine forces to help support student writing.

Response:

The department 6-12 does a great deal of work helping students to develop their analytical writing skills, and there is evidence to suggest that it is successful in doing so. Document-Based and Free Response essay scores on Advanced Placement World History, US History, and European History exams suggest that Weston students are consistently and well above national averages, and there is anecdotal evidence that Weston graduates compare quite favorably to their peers at the college level. That work begins in Middle School, and is reasonably well articulated from grades 6-12. Still, the recommendation that History/Social Studies teachers get together with their Language Arts colleagues to talk about a more coordinated approach to student writing is one that the department fully supports.

Action Items:

- Preliminary discussions among teachers in both disciplines should be undertaken over the course of the 2009-2010 school year.

- A two-day summer workshop designed to formulate specific proposals for where the two disciplines can increase coordination/cooperation should be planned for the summer of 2010.

Recommendation 6

We urge the High School Social Studies Department to continue and even expand upon their efforts to encourage greater diversity in the students enrolled in higher level courses in the department.

The Department is currently in year three of this initiative, and is pleased with the results. At this point, METCO students are in AP and Honors sections in grades 9-12, and we feel it is a direct result of early efforts to encourage them to take on higher levels of challenge from grade nine. Not all students have continued to take Honors/AP classes in History and Social Studies, but that was not the overarching goal. The original initiative has expanded into other subject disciplines, and now includes a significant percentage of METCO students in grades 9-11 who have taken and succeeded in Honors and Advanced Placement courses.

Action Items:

- Continue to meet with Boston students and METCO staff to identify students who should request Honors and AP courses.
- Continue to offer and support summer programs in all subject areas designed to help students prepare for Honors and AP class work.
- Track patterns of course requests, Grade Point Averages, and standardized test scores as the program moves into year 4.

Recommendation 7

Senior year electives in social studies should be revisited. It is, of course, impossible to keep up with all of the changes in the world, but updating senior electives can be one way to do so.

Response:

The department currently offers eight electives, all of which are open to seniors. Nearly all seniors take at least one elective in History/Social Studies, and many take more than one. Contrary to what was suggested in the report regarding the relative unattractiveness of US Government in a non-election year, the course has ballooned from two sections to four, and now includes an honors option. It goes without saying that a vibrant curriculum requires review and change, but we are a small school, many of our established courses are very popular, and the addition of new courses, especially “singletons” is very difficult in a school of our size.

Action Items:

- Continue to review courses on an annual basis.
- Provide the opportunity for students and staff to bring forward recommendations for changes as the Program of Studies is considered.

Recommendation 8

As in point four, it would, we think, be worthwhile to encourage some summer workshop times for the Middle and High School faculties to discuss secondary social studies. With US History crossing both schools, that is one obvious thread. The installation of Smartboards in both schools would also serve as a common subject of interest.

Response:

The department values discussions between grade levels. Summer workshops have provided a

vehicle in recent years for dialogues between 9th and 10th grade teachers of World History, and 8th/11th grade teachers of US History. In both cases those summer experiences have provided the basis for curricular cooperation and change. We fully support the notion of continuing those cross-grade conversations, and wish to expand them in World History to include 7th grade teachers.

2009-2010 Action Items Implementation Steps:

- Teachers in grades 8 and 11 will discuss potential summer workshop proposals during the school year, and will develop one for the summer of 2010.
- Teachers in grades 7, 9, and 10 will discuss potential summer workshop proposals during the school year, and will develop a proposal for the summer of 2010.
- The department will seek completion of the installation of Smartboards in the History/Social Studies classrooms in the High School to more effectively foster the use of technology and facilitate curricular cooperation between teachers within and across grade levels.
- A two-day workshop to train teachers new to Smartboards will be proposed for the summer of 2010.

CONCLUSION

This review afforded an opportunity to closely examine curriculum and instruction from grades K through 12. It has prompted introspection and reevaluation of what we do, and underscores the importance of an internally consistent, responsive program. Our History and Social Studies program is effective because of a faculty that is committed to the particular needs of Weston's students. The recent revision of Weston's K-12 History and Social Studies Standards (adopted December 2007) is a case in point. State, national, and even international standards will continue to inform our practice, but we continue to be at our best when we engage on the basis of who our children are and how we can best support their development.