


Social Studies Visiting Team Presentation to the Bedford School Committee



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Overview (by the numbers)

- # Goal: Identify successes and needs from an outsider's perspective.
- # Essential Questions: 3
- # Commendations: 46
- # Focus Areas: 24
- # Recommendations: 27
- # Our hope is that this report will aide BPS in the coming years as they outline a plan for the future to best meet the needs of their students.

Essential Question #1

To what extent are expectations and learning goals for skills and content well articulated and sequenced within and between grade levels in the K-12 Social Studies curriculum?

- *Curriculum development process is collaborative and authentic*
- *Development of critical thinking skills*
- *Alignment with district-improvement plan, building initiatives, and school-wide expectations*
- *Alignment with state frameworks*
- *Appropriate integration of technology*

Essential Question #2

How effectively does the department communicate its mission, program, coursework, and policies?

- *Course expectations are clearly communicated*
- *Grading policies are clearly communicated*
- *Homework expectations are clearly communicated*
- *Extra help is readily available*
- *Leveling policies and processes are clearly communicated*

Essential Question #3

- # To what extent do the Social Studies curriculum and its delivery meet the needs of all learners?
 - *Integration with district improvement plan*
 - *Class size*
 - *Differentiation of instruction*
 - *Opportunities for Social Studies enrichment activities*
 - *Currency and relevancy of courses*

Davis School: Strengths

- # Specialists (Music, Art, and Gym), ELL Teacher, and Librarian take the lead in piloting new SS materials. They are all highly competent and are some of the many examples of Davis Teachers going above and beyond the call of duty.
- # "Davis Town" is an exemplary unit that integrates Social Studies, Science, Math, and ELA.
- # Common projects at each grade level (such as Davis Town, Continent Rotations, and Antarctica) ensure equity and encourage Teachers to collaborate with one another.
- # K-5 Curriculum is becoming more aligned every year. Some of the non-aligned curriculum units (such as the Native American unit at Grade 2) are undergoing careful reconsideration.
- # Great use of technology in the library to teach Social Studies.

Davis School: Challenges

- # It is unclear whether the curriculum being taught by the Specialists, ELL Teacher, and Librarian is being reinforced and assessed back in the classroom.
- # Critical thinking is primarily in Open Circle lessons, but not as evident elsewhere.
- # The common assessments that the district wishes to implement have not been developed yet in Social Studies.
- # Several Teachers noted the need for professional development in content areas of Social Studies

Lane School: Strengths

- # "Team Teaching" between grade-level colleagues is a great example of making the job more sustainable. It also ensures that more of each subject is taught when it is formally scheduled and colleagues have to rely on each other.
- # There are several examples of creativity and collaboration with curriculum alignment (such as moving Social Studies units on Canada and Mexico into Grade three to parallel the French and Spanish language classes that begin in that grade).
- # Common assessments are being implemented. Teachers are also sharing Student work.
- # Technology was a tremendous focus for almost every lesson observed. Best of all, lessons were not just using technology for the sake of technology; they were using it to encourage Students to focus on the content and collaborate with each other.

Lane School: Challenges

- # There is less focus on critical thinking skills (despite a major focus on reading skills).
- # Teachers report that they are getting mixed messages about the amount of time they should be spending on Social Studies instruction as few meetings are dedicated to Social Studies.
- # Several Teachers noted the need for professional development in content areas of Social Studies.
- # As a general rule, Social Studies still appears to be quite separate from ELA.
- # The desire for *more* technology. Many Teachers noted that there was not enough technology to meet the demand.

John Glenn Middle School: Strengths

- # Teachers have strong professional relationships, are committed to improving their practice, and excited to make the connections between year-long questions, units, and daily lessons.
- # Emphasis on critical thinking skills and metacognition are clear in each class.
- # Teachers are not just *teaching* critical thinking skills, but *assessing* those skills at each level.
- # Curriculum at every grade-level appeared to be well aligned with the MA Curriculum Frameworks.
- # Encourage Students to question the reliability of online sources.
- # Teachers make good use of SmartBoards and other Teacher-used technology.

John Glenn Middle School: Strengths (cont'd)

- # Agendas are posted in most classrooms and Students reported that Teachers made it clear verbally why they were doing specific activities.
- # Essential questions are posted in classrooms and appear to be closely connected the curriculum.
- # Students feel they know what's expected through use of study guides, rubrics, and clear instructions on projects.
- # Students report that Teachers are accessible and available before or after school and during enrichment blocks.
- # Visual images and maps were consistently used to enrich discussions and provide better understanding of text.

John Glenn Middle School: Challenges

- # Committee wondered whether there was a clear plan for foundation texts to "ground" each course. There appear to be handouts and a lot of supplemental texts being used, which impact Special Education and ELL as it is difficult to track what is being taught in the classrooms.
- # Teachers and Students would like to use technology more for Student-created work, but are frustrated by outdated technology. Students report that they often wind up doing technology-based work at home more than at school.
- # Technology is being used primarily to *present* learning, but not necessarily for Students to collaborate *during* learning.
- # Several Parents worry about the difference between 8th and 9th grade in terms of challenge and rigor of workload.

Bedford High School: Strengths

- # This department seems to be especially collaborative.
- # Teachers take the initiative to improve instruction and engage in continuous revision of curriculum.
- # Major emphasis on critical thinking skills.
- # Teachers are not just *teaching* critical thinking skills, but *assessing* those skills at each level.
- # Curriculum at every grade-level appeared to be well aligned with the MA Curriculum Frameworks.
- # Teachers reported there was plenty of access to laptop carts, PC labs, and rooms are equipped with SmartBoards.
- # Students feel they know what's expected through use of study guides, rubrics, and clear instructions on projects.
- # Students all agreed that BHS Teachers love their subjects, care about Students and are available for extra help before and after school.

Bedford High School: Strengths (cont'd)

- # Many opportunities exist for enrichment such as Fed Challenge, Budget Simulation and National History Day.
- # Teachers make a great effort to connect the content of their courses to current events and Students' experiences.

Bedford High School: Challenges

- # There is less focus on reading skills (despite major focus on critical thinking skills).
- # Parents expressed concern about equity between tracked levels. Are Students at BHS getting the same level of challenge and support (regardless of level) and is there mobility between levels from one year to the next?
- # While strong on the skills, there was less evidence that the essential questions of Social Studies were as much a part of the fabric of courses at BHS.
- # Technology appeared to be primarily used to "push content out" rather than presenting Students with problems which require collaboration.
- # Not all opportunities, such as NHD, are available to all levels.

Major Commendations

- # Commitment to professional collaboration.
- # Effective use of technology.
- # Intense focus on critical thinking.
- # Increasing commitment to correlating their local lessons to the Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks.
- # Coordinated alignment of all district-wide documents.
- # Excellent organization of the site visit by Christine Butler.
- # Incredible attention and care provided by the Social Studies Host Team, including Christine Butler, Joe Casey, Karen Lerra, and Susan Nocera.

Major Recommendations

- # Encouraging BHS Teachers to make the shift to Student-centered learning.
- # Providing equity and opportunity in non-Level 5 classes at BHS.
- # Taking the lead of Teachers at Davis and Lane by explicitly teaching literacy strategies in Social Studies at BHS and JGMS.
- # Creating more common planning and meeting time to dedicate to Social Studies.
- # Giving Teachers access to resources such as content-area and technology-based professional development.
- # Exploring the expansion of 21st Century Skills to areas *beyond* technology literacy.

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