



COVINGTON — The work of Paul Revere helps fifth grade students in social studies classes at John G. Carlisle Elementary School want to learn more about the causes of the Revolutionary War.

Five years before he rode into legend with his midnight dash into the Boston countryside, Revere engraved and printed a shocking image of the Boston Massacre that roused public opinion against British forces. Now, his work and other historical artifacts like letters or public documents, are helping inform Kentucky students who are reading more and encountering authentic documents in social studies, science and other subjects.

“It helps students become more engaged and think about things from different sides,” said Tiffany Gruen, the fifth grade teacher who takes the lead on teaching social studies at Carlisle. “We talk about what is factual evidence, and what the words and ideas that we find mean. Students ask great questions and are going much deeper into what they are learning.”

Gruen points to Kentucky Academic Standards as prompting the deeper approach to social studies teaching. In an interesting twist, it is the state’s English language arts standards that have increased the emphasis on literacy in other subjects, prompting social studies and science teachers toward more reading of historical documents or scientific articles to strengthen student literacy.

In Gruen’s class last year, viewing and discussing Revere’s Boston Massacre art — now considered a

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ABOVE: Teacher Tiffany Gruen works with a fifth grade student on a writing assignment at John G. Carlisle Elementary in Covington. Kentucky’s language arts standards have prompted a greater focus on reading, writing and speaking in Gruen’s social studies classes.

KEEPING THE FOCUS ON KENTUCKY SCHOOLS

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classic of revolutionary propaganda — raised many student questions. The fifth graders' curiosity about feelings in the colonies led Gruen to back up and discuss how the French and Indian War (1754-63) set the stage for attitudes in the colonies as 1770 dawned. Students in modern-day Covington read diary entries from a Colonial soldier of the time, and writings from the French side, to understand people's thoughts.

"Answering the question of whether British soldiers were justified in their actions in the Boston Massacre led to a lot of study and debate that our students talked about all year," said Gruen, a teacher now in her 11th year. She added that the new focus on building literacy and examining authentic historical and scientific documents is causing students to make stronger connections with subject matter.

"It's more work to find primary texts, but it helps them to learn that, with my support, they can make sense of what was happening so long ago, understand the issues, and connect them to life today," the Covington teacher said.

Gruen's fifth graders read the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution — not just textbook paragraphs covering highlights. "That's meaty text for fifth graders, but they are so interested," Gruen noted.

Students' questions prompted by the historical documents meant the class spent four days closely reading the Preamble to the Constitution, taking in its words, phrases and concepts that shaped fundamental values of the country. Gruen said the focus on literacy is building stronger inquiry and learning skills than in the years before the state's new standards, when students worked through textbook chapters and history may have seemed like a parade of long-ago dates and names.

BOOSTING INFORMATIONAL READING

Kentucky Academic Standards in English Language Arts, launched in 2010, specify that reading, writing, listening and speaking are not just the domain of an English class. In fact, the standards state that "by reading texts in history/social studies, science, and other disciplines, students build a foundation of knowledge in these fields that will also give them the background to be better readers in all content areas."

The language arts standards carve out a bigger niche for informational text, a type of nonfiction, as a complement to literary text. In that way, the English standards are prompting more Kentucky educators to think about how students can learn from books and writ-



ings on social studies, science and the arts; biographies and autobiographies; and information in graphs, maps, charts and more.

The state's standards documents give teachers examples of informational texts matched to expected grade-level complexity and quality. Standards documents refer to *A History of US* by Joy Hakim for fourth- and fifth-graders or, for first graders, a book about science like *From Seed to Pumpkin* by Wendy Pfeffer and illustrated by James Graham Hale. Such examples go all the way to high school. Middle school

students, for example, might read John Adams' "Letter on Thomas Jefferson" in social studies class.

"Preparation for reading complex informational texts should begin at the very earliest elementary school grades," Kentucky's standards documents note in a section that offers examples of more than three dozen science-related titles.

As a result, students in a social studies or science class may be working on content from their own discipline while also practicing English language arts standards like one for eighth grade reading which states that students should be able to "determine a central idea of a text and analyze its development over the course of the text, including its relationship to supporting ideas" and provide an objective summary of the text.

TAKING LEARNING DEEPER

"I was taught all the way through college to memorize fact after fact," said Justin Bailey a social studies teacher at Magoffin County High School in eastern Kentucky. "These standards cover content but also address skills that help students formulate content in their minds by reading documents, differentiating bias

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DEFINING STANDARDS

A quick summary of the latest version of Kentucky's Academic Standards in the four basic subject areas.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS and MATH: Adopted 2010, tested statewide since 2012.

SCIENCE: Adopted 2013, new state tests for elementary and middle now under development.

SOCIAL STUDIES: Public feedback closed in September 2015. Proposed standards due to State Board of Education this school year.

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from sources, and steering away from just base-level learning.”

“Students today are spending more time analyzing information, formulating ideas, and discussing issues and opinions,” said Bailey, now in his eighth year teaching.

Following the standards, Bailey has increased the number of novels students read for his social studies class. A novel like *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published in 1852, provides not only significant literary elements, but also context to the growing anti-slavery sentiment ahead of the Civil War — a ripe topic for high school social studies. In the same way, Bailey’s students read the 1925 novel *The Great Gatsby* as literature but also as a commentary on American life in the Roaring Twenties to gain perspective on prosperity in America. Fiction like *The Grapes of Wrath* from 1939 describes culture and viewpoints from the Great Depression and the effects of natural disasters.

At Todd County Central High in western Kentucky, 27-year veteran teacher Penny Rogers said English language arts standards have also added depth to science teaching and learning. That direction is complemented by the new science standards’ emphasis on communication, Rogers noted.

Asked for an example of the presence of language arts standards in science class, Rogers described the lesson she taught earlier that day.

Teaching how earthquakes form inside the Earth in her ninth-grade integrated science class, Rogers asked students to consider in greater depth two tools for measuring earthquakes — the Richter Scale and the Mercalli Scale — by reading an article from a science journal detailing damage from five actual earthquakes. The article evaluated damage in detail that could help students rate the disasters on the Mercalli Scale, leading to a discussion about how the two scales differ because of their emphasis on magnitude and intensity.

Rogers said that the article helped students see how scientists evaluate evidence and exposed them to authentic scientific vocabulary and description.

“For years, we taught in a traditional way of covering facts, memorizing information, giving a test, and moving on,” Rogers said. “The approach now requires students to use knowledge to think and reason.”

She said the change has caused teachers to adjust, and is also requiring today’s high school students to alter their expectations of school. Both groups, she said, were



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— Tiffany Gruen,
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used to classroom lessons that didn’t ask or deliver as much.

“Once we can accomplish this shift in learning, which may take a few years, we will be able to build a real culture of inquiry where students will be able to think without expecting that the teacher is going to give them all of the answers,” Rogers said.

She added that students are recognizing how learning applies directly to real-life issues and skills, and how topics cut across different subject areas.

Kentucky’s science, math, and English language arts standards support each other by connecting knowledge and skills across subjects. For example, science standards point out that teaching about interdependent relationships in ecosystems can reinforce the math standard that expects students to understand how statistics can be used to study populations.

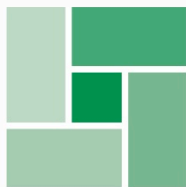
BUILDING TEACHER OWNERSHIP

The deeper focus of state standards comes at the same time that the state’s system for describing and evaluating quality teaching is also attempting to take a wider view. The state’s Professional Growth and Effectiveness System (PGES) also shows a bigger picture, which many teachers see as a significant step forward.

“We are now setting student growth goals, doing peer observations that allow teachers to see each others’ classrooms and get feedback from others, and considering more factors that create strong teaching,” Bailey of Magoffin County said. “All of that is creating more opportunities for self-reflection, which has been preached to teachers but hasn’t been practiced as much. The new system can be really valuable.”

Gruen of Covington said she liked that PGES helps teachers see ways to improve, no matter where they are. She said that the evaluation system, like standards, gives teachers more ownership and allows for more creativity in meeting students’ interests and needs.

“The new standards put more ownership back into teaching,” Gruen said. “For me, in a high-needs school, it has been heartwarming to move toward exposing all students to the same text and letting the text be the expert. What they have to learn and rely on is the information that’s in front of them, not so heavily on what they have from their background. When we teach students skills to conquer text, they can see how to understand, evaluate, and make sense of and use whatever is in front of them.”



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