

# Social Studies in Vermont

The newsletter for Vermont's Social Studies Educators and Supporters

## September 2019

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## Welcome

As you can see, the format for my updates has changed; it is a work in progress, but I will continue to get information out to you in a timely manner. If you know of co-workers who would like to be added to the listserv please email me; likewise, if you would like to be removed from this list, please let me know. Hope you have a great start to the new school year!

## Equity Literacy

The following information was culled from the Equity Literacy Grant application which provided background information to applicants, but is equally pertinent to all educators in Vermont:

The Agency of Education (AOE) has engaged in multiple initiatives to develop an equity framework for education at the state level. As part of a multi-faceted effort, the AOE also completed the [Supporting Educational Equity \(SEE\) project](#) – a project whose goals were to ascertain what classroom level and systemic improvements are needed to fully leverage the equity-related changes in Vermont's ESSA State Plan. Educators who participated in the project made many recommendations, including that Vermont's PreK-12 educators have increased opportunities for professional learning as it relates to equity literacy.

The AOE stands with Vermont educators to improve equity literacy for all learners and to protect Vermont's most vulnerable populations by reducing disparities and addressing inequities that exist in our state related to race, disability status, poverty status, gender, sexuality, English Learners status, religion, cultural literacy, immigrant status, and refugee status. Paul Gorski defines equity literacy:

“ . . . as the skills and dispositions that enable us to recognize, respond to and redress (i.e., correct for) conditions that deny some students access to the educational opportunities enjoyed by their peers. Equity literacy also describes the skills and dispositions that allow us to create and sustain equitable and just learning environments for all families and students.”

[\(Gorski, 2014\)](#)

While the Social Studies seems to be an obvious place to include culture, tolerance and social justice, equity literacy requires whole-school ownership. I created a [resource](#) page earlier this year for the grant applicants; it is helpful to all, as we learn to distinguish between *equity* and *equity literacy*. [The National Board Professional Teaching Standards](#) does a great job defining Equity in Instruction and Pluralism in the Curriculum, both within the Social Studies. (It is a great K-12 resource for all content areas - share with your friends!) Throughout the 2020 school year, I will continue to provide equity literacy resources, as we are all on this journey together.

“Few of us will be scientists or mathematicians, but we're all going to be citizens.”

- Stan Harris, Indiana We the People teacher

### **Constitution Day is September 17, 2019**

Sign up for a [classroom exchange](#), and have your students discuss a constitutional issue with students that live somewhere else in the country. Or, reach out to the [Vermont Bar Association](#) (VBA) to have a VBA member share free copies of the Constitution with your students and discuss the importance and relevance of this living document.

A Vermont Civics Task Force, a non-partisan group comprised of educators, legislators and interested Vermonters was created about two years ago to get an understanding of how civics is taught (and learned) in Vermont. They would love to hear what is happening in your classroom to celebrate Constitution Day. Please email [Martha Deiss](#) with stories that I can share in this newsletter and with the members of the Task Force.

### **Elementary Level Civics Resource**

The Center for Civic Education has created an entirely new text titled *We the People: The Citizen & Democracy*. The Center's new textbook for grades 3-5, is an affordable textbook that introduces students to the foundational ideas of American representative democracy. Just create an account on [Center for Civic Education website](#), then email them at [sales@civiced.org](mailto:sales@civiced.org) if you would like to preview the entire textbook. Be sure to indicate the email address you used to sign up for Center for Civic Education.

A printable sample lesson "[What Is a Democracy?](#)" is also available online (no registration required).

### **Civic Online Reasoning**

To help teachers address the critical skills of identifying false claims and misleading arguments, Stanford History Education Group (SHEG) has developed [assessments of civic online reasoning](#)—the ability to judge the credibility of digital information regarding social and political issues. Through these tasks and assessments, students are asked to evaluate and make informed decisions regarding digital information that they see on a regular basis on platforms such as Twitter and YouTube.

### **Vermont Educator Writes Lesson for iCivics**

Liz LeBrun, a teacher at Poultney High School, developed a high school lesson called [Got Grievances?](#) which allows students to look at the economic, political and social factors that led the to the writing of the Declaration of Independence. [iCivics](#), founded by Sandra Day O'Connor in 2008, provides educational online games and lesson plans to promote engaging civics education and that will encourage students to become active citizens.

### **Save the Date: VASS Conference**

The annual [VASS](#) Conference will take place on Friday, November 8, 2019 at the Hilton Burlington. Submit a presentation proposal on the VASS site; information regarding registration is forthcoming.

## We the People

I have been asked to be the Vermont coordinator for the Center for Civic Education's We the People program; for those of you who know former coordinator Dan Deganaïs, this role was his suggestion, as it is easier for me to try to build interest since I am here in Vermont (he is in NH).

For those of you that are not familiar with the program, I suggest that you visit the [We the People](#) website. I am hoping to be able to provide more free PD next summer from the Center and the James Madison Foundation. Stay tuned for further info regarding possible financial assistance for teams interested in competing at the High School level (or email me).

## Take Your Students to the State House

A field trip to the Capitol District offers exciting learning experiences for students of all ages. In addition to tours of the State House, a field trip may include a visit to the Vermont History Museum and/or participation in a 'mock trial' at the Vermont Supreme Court (limited available). At the State House, students walk through one of the nation's oldest and best-preserved state capitols, learn about Vermont history and government, and can even observe Vermont's legislature when it is in session. Students may be able to meet with their representatives, and even the Governor. School tours focus on the idea of citizenship—What does it mean to be a fully engaged and responsible citizen? How does voting and participating in the political process produce a responsive government? What is democracy, and how are all Vermonters represented at the State House? How do the three branches of government work, and how can students become actively engaged citizens themselves. If you would like to schedule a field trip, contact the [State House Tours Coordinator](#).

## Legislative Page Application

Eighth grade students can apply to be a Legislative Page for the 2020 legislative session. Each year a small group of young Vermonters are selected to work as Legislative Pages in the Vermont State House. Pages deliver messages for the members of the Senate, the House of Representatives, and the various legislative offices. The [application](#) must be postmarked on or before Monday, September 30, 2019.

## Weekly Field Memo

If you don't already receive the Agency of Education's (AOE) Weekly Field Memo, you easily can [subscribe online](#). The AOE created the weekly field memo to keep subscribers up-to-date with current education policy, state-wide education initiatives, and official messages from the AOE. The field memo may also include education-related items from other state agencies. And, at the AOE's discretion, they may include other events or information from other organizations not directly affiliated with the AOE.

Disclaimer: The views, opinions, and resources shared in this listserv are solely those of the original contributors. The Agency of Education does not endorse the views expressed by these contributors and reserves the right to refuse submissions. Questions related to any of these resources should be directed to the organizations, people and opportunities as shared.

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