

**Remarks by
Jim Buckheit
Pennsylvania Council for the Social Studies Conference
Lancaster Host
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I am honored on both a personal and professional basis to be here with you today. As the Executive Director of the State Board of Education I get to talk with many educators representing everyone from school nurses to school board members. But I have to say that I am feeling most at home with you. My personal dream when I was in high school was to be a social studies teacher. I had the good fortune of having a number of wonderful social studies teachers in both junior and senior high school. I pursued my dream enrolling as a history-education major in college. It turned out I loved the history and political science course... but not the education courses. I had the good fortune of having an opportunity earn a Masters degree in public administration. That offer was too good to be true so I put aside my dream and continued my education.

So I ended up in government service rather than a classroom. So I live vicariously through your work and occasionally have opportunities to work with the discipline I of my passion.

We're here to talk about public education policy in our state. National and state policies drive curricular decisions now more than anyone thought was possible.

In this age of strong accountability for reading, writing, math and science what can we do to ensure that the social studies and civic learning are not relegated to a back seat in our schools.

In our role as a lead partner in PennCORD, the Department of Education is building upon the ongoing efforts of our Bureau of Teaching and Learning and our Social Studies advisor, Jeff Zeiders, in three ways.

First we are raising visibility of civic learning both to schools and educational organizations and within the Department itself.

- First Lady Marjorie Rendell addressed the State Board of Education in September and encouraged it to make efforts to expand civic learning opportunities for Pennsylvania's students.
- Former Secretary sent a letter to superintendents advocating improvements in civic learning. We expect that Acting Secretary Zahorchak will issue a similar letter of support upon his confirmation by State Senate.
- State Board of Education adopted a resolution that was transmitted to school superintendents supporting the expansion of civic learning.
- We are reminding school districts of the long-standing provision in the School Code that requires all schools, public, private and parochial to integrate in the social studies curriculum courses of study provided in the School Code. To quote

"Such instruction shall have for its purpose also the instilling into every boy and girl who comes out of our public, private and parochial schools their solemn duty and obligation to exercise intelligently their voting privilege and to understand the advantages of the American republican form of government as compared with various other forms of government."

- Together with your activities to recognize and celebrate Constitution Day we held an event with the assistance of students from two Harrisburg area schools at the State Museum.
- As in the past we again will be issuing a proclamation from the Secretary designating a week in December as Bill of Rights week.
- A copies of the State Board Resolution, the model local school board resolution and excepted Section 1605 of the Public School Code was distributed to your tables.

Second, we continue to raise awareness among state policymakers of the impact of educational accountability and high stakes testing on instruction in the social studies. Through this event we hope to incorporate civic learning into the fabric of state initiatives.

- One example is Project 720, the Commonwealth high school reform initiative. Project 720 seeks to increase the rigor of high school curriculum to prepare all students for be ready to successfully enter college or entry-level employment upon graduation. Project 720 requires that participating schools provide all students with at least 3 years of Social Studies including US and World History, with attention given to civic learning.
- Continue to explore how the current academic standards in social studies are providing their intended results. The State Board is currently working to finalize the final set of academic standards, that of Career Education and Work. The Board will sometime in the future begin to reevaluate each of the 13 sets of standards. Are the current social studies standards organized and structured best to assist teachers, students and parents to clearly understand what students must know and be able to do? Are they reasonable? Are there too many standards? Are teacher preparation and certification requirements properly aligned with the academic standards? These are just a few of the questions that will be explored when the State Board considers when it reviews the social studies standards in the future.
- We recognize that one of the challenges facing the social studies, as well as other disciplines, that are not assessed on the state level, is that challenge of holding on to class time, particularly on the elementary level. Although there are currently no plans to develop a social studies state assessment I suggest that you use the leverage provided in the local assessment requirements of the Chapter 4 regulations to advocate for the development a district assessment. Under Chapter 4 school districts are responsible to ensure that students are proficient in meeting the academic standards for each discipline. Many districts use satisfactory course completion as evidence of proficiency. However, the intent of the State Board was

for school districts to develop their own assessments to measure student proficiency in the areas in which there is no state assessment.

Third, we are actively supporting PennCORD and its work to advance the civic mission of schools by devoting our time and resources in support of its work.

- participate in meetings and planning sessions
- use PennLINK, PDE web site and Jeff Zeiders distribution list to communicate information to schools
- maintain communications with educational groups such as Pennsylvania School Boards Association, Pennsylvania Association of Elementary and Secondary School Principals and Pennsylvania Association of School Administrators.

As you can see we are working hard to support the great work you are doing.

Through our joint efforts we will be successful in restoring the civic mission of schools in our wonderful Commonwealth.