

# **Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School**

## **Teaching American History Grant**

***“Citizenship, Property, Identity & Representation:  
the Historical Journey of Southern New England’s Native Peoples”***

**Funded by the U.S. Department of Education  
External Evaluation Year 1 – 2007-2008**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

In July of 2007, the Abby Kelley Foster Charter Public School (AKFCS) of Worcester, MA, was awarded \$499,998 by the U.S. Department of Education to implement a three-year Teaching American History program. Under an agreement with the AKFCS, the UCLA School Management Program Northeast Region office (SMP) is conducting an evaluation of the program, entitled *“Citizenship, Property, Identity & Representation: the Historical Journey of Southern New England’s Native Peoples.”*

The evaluation is focused on four comprehensive questions:

1. Is the content, delivery and training of professional development improving over time as a result of formative evaluation feedback?
2. Are teachers effectively delivering instruction and content based on the professional development concepts and strategies?
3. Is the demonstrated content area knowledge of students improving?
4. Is the demonstrated content area knowledge of teachers improving?

## **SUMMARY OF PROGRAM IMPLEMENTATION – Year One**

### *Organization and Partnerships*

The program's Steering Committee held its organizational meeting on August 15, 2007 at the offices of the American Antiquarian Society (AAS) in Worcester, MA. The Committee is comprised of representatives of each of the project's partners: John Daly---AKFCS; Thomas Doughton---College of the Holy Cross; Amy Gazin-Schwartz---Assumption College; James Moran---AAS; and, Landy Johnson---Assumption College. Three staff members from SMP were also in attendance.

The goals of the program were confirmed and staff of SMP described its plan for formative and summative evaluation of the program and its activities. The Committee established dates and general topics for the five day-long professional development seminars to be held during the school year, and for the week-long Summer Institute scheduled for July, 2008. The Committee also agreed to a calendar for its own meetings, to be held monthly through June, 2008.

### *Professional Development*

The seminars were scheduled so that three would occur during school time, and two on Saturdays. This was done to balance the burden of finding substitutes for teachers during school hours, and to minimize conflict with teachers' personal time.

October 3, 2007	<i>Archaeology and Native American History in New England</i>
October 27, 2007	<i>Plimoth Plantation and the First Thanksgiving</i>
February 14, 2008	<i>Indian Historiography/Tribal Identity and Recognition</i>
April 4, 2008	<i>Voyages of Discovery, the Pequot War, King Philip's War</i>
May 16, 2008	<i>Mashantucket Pequot Museum</i>

The first professional development seminar was held on October 3, 2007. Two sessions were conducted at AAS; one at the AKFCS school site; one at Plimoth Plantation, Plymouth, MA; and, the final one at the Mashantucket Pequot Museum, Ledyard, CT. The first program year ended with plans set for the initial Summer Institute to be held the week of July 14-18, 2008 at the AAS facilities.

### *Participation and Recruitment*

A total of nine teachers, including project director Daly, were in attendance at the first professional development seminar. During the course of the year, one participant dropped out, but five others joined. Eleven teachers participated in

the final seminar held on May 16, 2008. Daly made efforts throughout the year to recruit additional participants from area schools, and will continue to do so. At the time of this writing, an additional three teachers have enrolled in the Summer Institute, for a total of sixteen participants in the program. It is hoped that those who have signed on for the Institute, and perhaps others, will continue as participants during the upcoming school years.

### Dissemination

In the fall of 2007, project director Daly developed a Web site for the program: [www.teachingamericanhistoryakfcs.org](http://www.teachingamericanhistoryakfcs.org). During the course of the year, he regularly posted source materials for the professional development sessions, notes from each of the seminars, links to related programs and activities, and lesson plans that program participants developed from the content and pedagogy of the workshops. The site also features a “blog” through which program participants can interact with each other. The Web site provides a running record of the program’s progress and serves to disseminate and publicize the growing resource that the program is beginning to become.

### Classroom Observations

Starting in November, Daly, in his role as “mentor teacher”, conducted observations in selected classes of a number of the participating teachers. The purpose of his classroom visits was to review and evaluate lesson plans developed by the teachers from content and pedagogy of the professional development seminars. As stated above, lesson plans were shared by posting them on the program’s Web site, and Daly posted a written record of three of his classroom observations.

## **EVALUATION METHODOLOGY**

The longitudinal evaluation plan was designed to measure program results as well as to monitor program activities and provide on-going feedback to the project director and the Steering Committee on the design, implementation and effectiveness of the program. To those ends, information was gathered through a mixed methods approach, utilizing on-site visits and observations, seminar evaluations, teacher and student assessments of content knowledge, and participant surveys. As described in our agreement with AKFCS, we have also collected assessment information from a number of control sites (teachers and students) that will serve as a pre-test measure and will eventually be matched with non-control site data.

### *ON-SITE VISITS*

In order to facilitate the “continuous improvement” emphasis of the evaluation plan, SMP made the commitment to a presence at all program activities during the first year. At least one SMP staff member participated in all of the monthly meetings of the Steering Committee and attended each of the five, day-long professional development seminars.

SMP staff took an active role with the Steering Committee to ensure that each professional development seminar had measurable and appropriate content and pedagogic objectives. Collaboratively, they developed a feedback/evaluation instrument to be completed by the teacher participants at the end of each of the professional development seminars. The instrument was designed to have teachers rate the extent to which each session’s content and instructional objectives were met, and to elicit their thoughts on how each session did, or did not, meet their needs and expectations.

SMP staff administered these evaluations at each of the professional development seminars. Within 2-3 days after each seminar, SMP shared the aggregated responses with the Steering Committee and then facilitated discussion of that information at the Committee’s next meeting, in order to prepare for subsequent professional development sessions.

### *ASSESSMENTS*

Working with members of the Steering Committee, SMP staff developed a set of assessments of content area knowledge for participating teachers, control group teachers, and their students. These assessments are intended to be used as a pre-intervention measure; and compared post-intervention measures over the course of the three project years. Committee members Daly and Doughton first identified some 40 items from “released” Advanced Placement U.S. History exams related to Native peoples. SMP staff then created alternative versions of the assessments for use by different grade levels and populations. Assessments

for teachers were completed online, and were administered and scored in class by participating and control group teachers for their students.

Complete versions of all assessments are included as an attachment to this report.

A total of 302 students of participating teachers completed the “pre-tests.” A “control group” of 128 high school students from a neighboring school community also completed the “pre-test.” An interim report of the results of the “pre-tests” was provided to the Steering Committee in early winter, 2008, and updated in the early spring.

In May, 2008, three of the participating teachers volunteered to have their high school U.S. History classes re-take the assessment as a “post-treatment test.” These teachers were selected because they had more fully incorporated content from the seminars into their classrooms during the year than had other participating teachers. A total of 85 students completed the assessments.

### *SURVEYS*

In April, 2008 SMP staff created two survey instruments. The first was for participating teachers, asking them for several brief reflections on the year’s activities. The second survey was specifically for the Steering Committee, directing them to focus on the extent to which the year’s activities had addressed the program’s stated objectives.

Of thirteen year one participants – eleven completed an exit survey. Respondents included 3 elementary level teachers, 2 middle level teachers, and 7 high school teachers.

Four of five steering committee members completed the longer reflection survey (one steering committee member is currently unavailable because of health concerns).

Complete results of each survey are included as attachments to this report.

## FINDINGS AND OBSERVATIONS

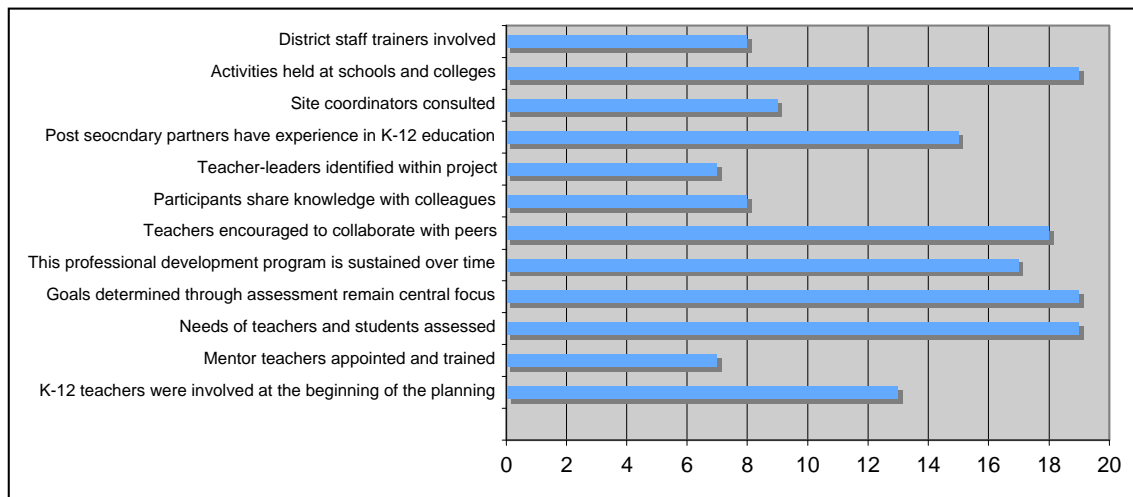
### *Meeting project goals*

The AKFCS TAH proposal laid out a large number of goals and objectives when the proposal was originally written. As part of our first year evaluation, we encouraged members of the steering committee to reflect on how successful they have been in making progress towards meeting these goals.

A comprehensive *Steering Committee Reflection* form was created and completed by steering committee members Daly, Moran, Gavin-Schwartz and Landy in May of 2008 – after the completion of the final professional development session for the year. Full results are included in the appendices, and were provided to the steering committee members.

Participants were asked to rate how completely benchmarks had been met this year (from *fully met* to *not addressed at all*). Comments were also allowed and solicited. For purposes of comparison, the ‘degree of agreement’ was calculated by assigning a numerical value of ‘5’ for each participant to who indicated the benchmark was fully met; and a numerical value of ‘1’ for each participant who indicated the benchmark was not addressed at all; with corresponding values assigned to responses between the two extremes. With only 4 respondents, 20 would be the highest score (benchmark fully met) possible.

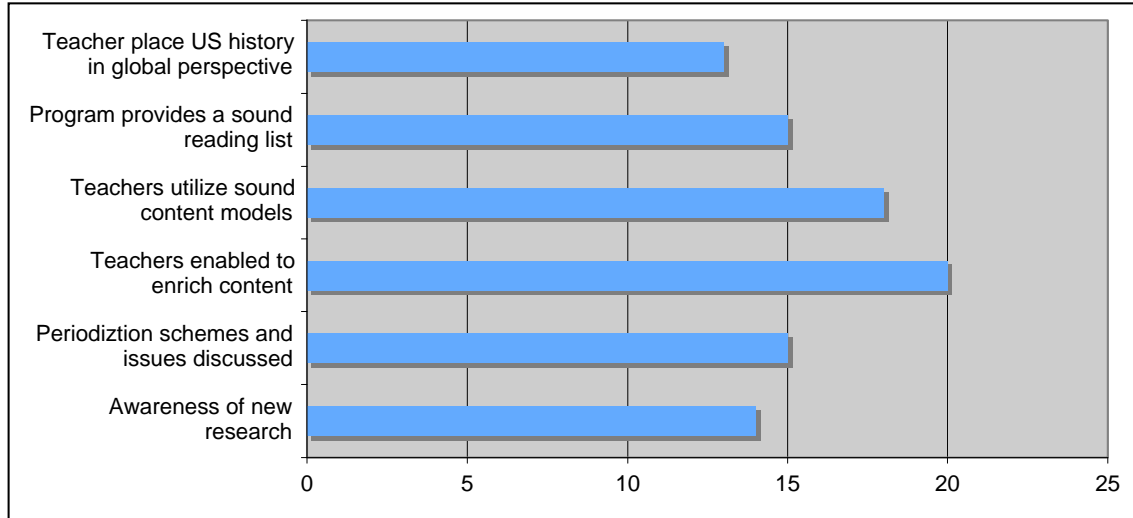
### Collaboration benchmarks



Comments and reflections around the degree of collaboration promoted by this project seem to be a function of project size – these things are happening at

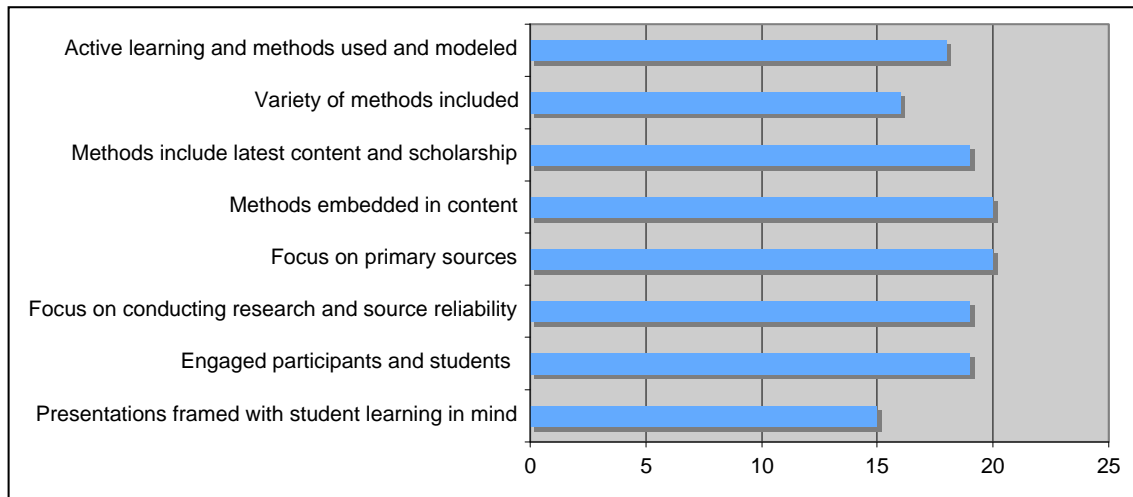
AKFCS but where single participants from other schools are involved it has not been possible or practical to mentor and collaborate with their colleagues.

### Content benchmarks



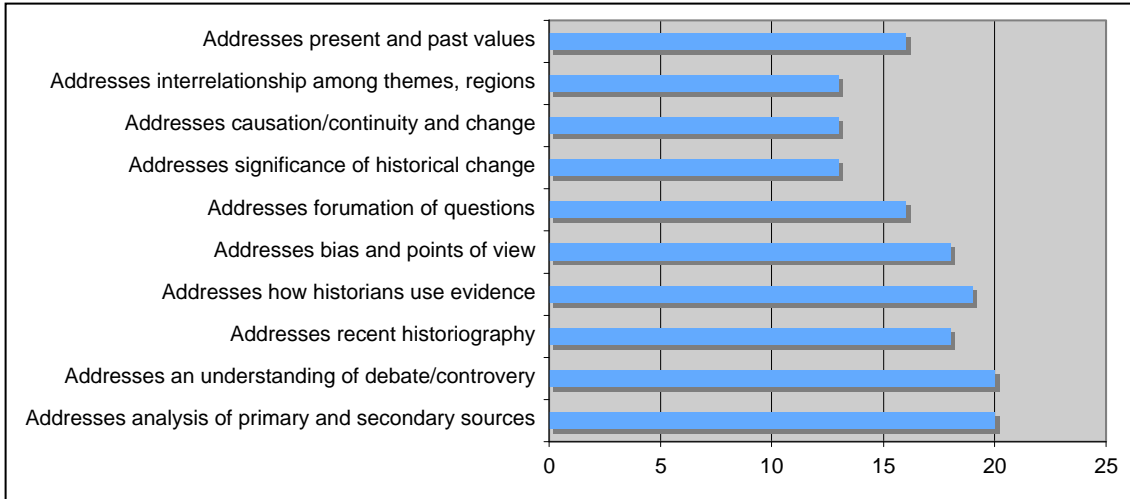
Comments included a note that reading and study *about how children learn history* has not been included to date. It is also noted that workshops have been increasingly aligned with state frameworks and standards.

### Pedagogy benchmarks

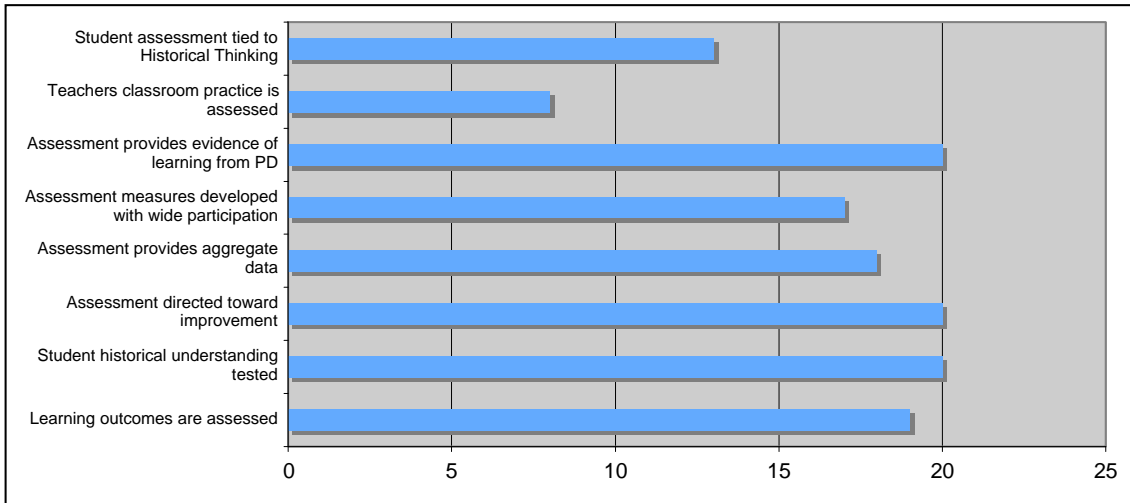


Comments echoed an ongoing 'hands on' approach. The inclusion of special needs teachers has 'helped greatly in meeting these goals'.

### Historical thinking benchmarks

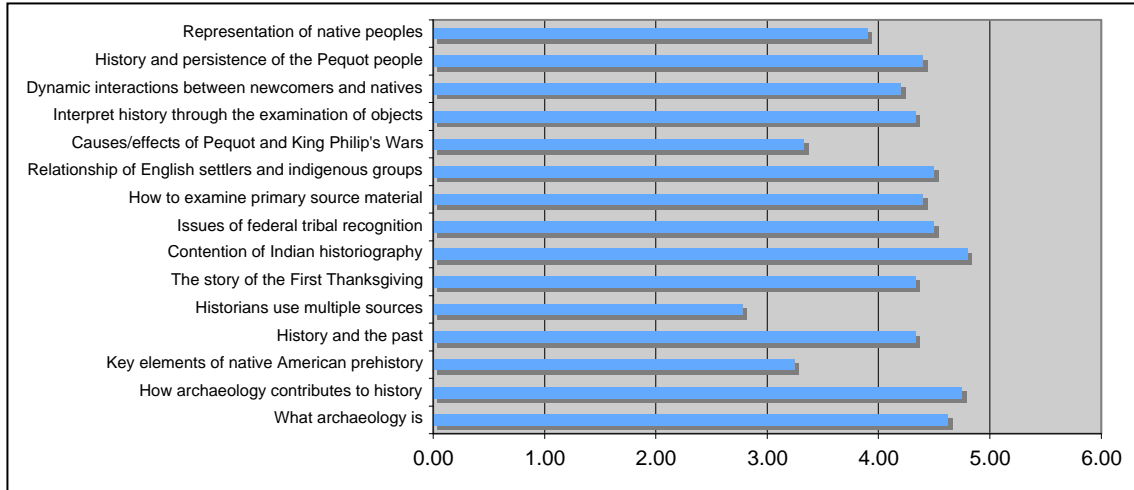


**Assessment benchmarks**



There are several comments indicating a lack of awareness of certain activities – perhaps underscoring a need to improve reporting or information flow to the entire steering committee.

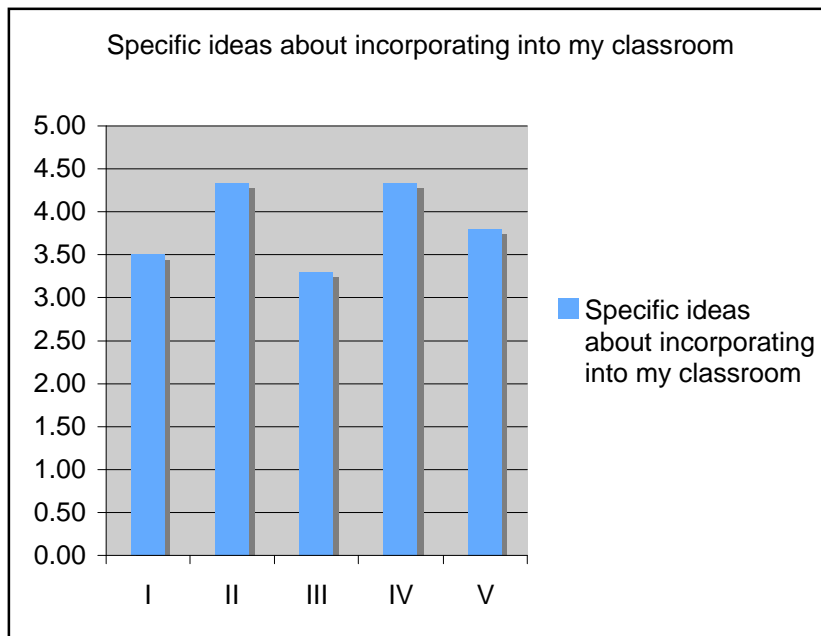
Participants were also asked to rate to what extent each professional development session’s objectives were met at the conclusion of the five days. Each session had three PD objectives specified relating to the content and pedagogy of the day. Responses were weighted and factored to account for differing numbers of participants. A ‘5’ would indicate all participants believed the objectives was met to a great extent; a ‘1’ would indicate the objective was not met at all.



**Question 1. Is the content, delivery and training of professional development improving over time as a result of formative feedback?**

Feedback on the five professional development seminars was solicited from the teacher participants in the form of an evaluation instrument administered at the close of each of the sessions. Teachers rated the extent to which the session had addressed specific content and pedagogical objectives and responded to open-ended questions related to how the sessions were meeting their personal and professional needs.

Participants were also asked to indicate to what extent they “have specific ideas of how they will incorporate content and concepts in their own classrooms” as part of the end of day evaluation at each session. Using a rated scale to account for differing numbers of participants – ‘5’ would indicate all participants believed the objectives were met to a great extent; a ‘1’ would indicate the objective was not met at all. The chart below tracks the response to this question over the course of the five professional development sessions.



The teachers’ responses were aggregated and shared via e-mail with the Steering Committee within several days of each seminar.

At the Steering Committee meeting following each of the seminars, the teachers’ responses were discussed for the purpose of reflection and to inform the planners and presenters of the subsequent professional development session. Ratings and comments from the teachers were generally positive and sometimes laudatory.

However, several issues that surfaced in the evaluations during the course of the year caused the Steering Committee to make adjustments in the agendas and activities of later seminars.

An issue raised in the evaluations by many teachers was how to incorporate their new knowledge into prescribed curricula based on state frameworks that reflect material their students will encounter in state assessments starting next year. As one teacher wrote at the first seminar in October, *“I feel the biggest challenge in going to be integrating it into the classroom.”* In the evaluation of the second seminar in late October, another teacher wrote, *“I’m still unsure how the broad history of a people can be included into instruction when the state frameworks require so much.”*

Based on discussion at Steering Committee meetings of these and numerous similar evaluation responses, as well as on interactions that project director Daly had with his teaching colleagues at AKFCS, agendas at subsequent seminars included, thanks to Daly, specific citations of which curriculum standards were to be addressed at that session. Daly also produced and provided to participants a three-page document citing all references in the Massachusetts state history frameworks to Native peoples and related issues.

In addition, specific time was built into the agenda of the remaining three seminars for teachers to work together to develop ways to apply what they had just learned, both content and pedagogy, into their classrooms. And, the curriculum and agenda for the five-day Summer Institute now features a daily focus on incorporating the learning into grade-level appropriate instructional activities.

Early seminar evaluations reflected that teacher participants appreciated the variety of learning activities of the seminars, especially the “hands-on” activities. As a result, subsequent sessions were planned to include a mixture of activities, designed to address different learning styles and to demonstrate transferability to students in a range of ages.

Review of the student and teacher “pre-tests” also provided valuable information for planners of the professional development seminars. As part of its interim report to the Steering Committee on the fall 2007 student assessments, staff of SMP conducted an item-analysis of the students’ responses. The results of this analysis provided seminar planners with additional data regarding content areas on which to focus in the interest of improving student and teacher knowledge.

The end-of-the-year Participant Survey asked teachers to respond to the following statement:

*“TAH project planning staff have used feedback from participants to improve the quality of professional development sessions for the year.”*

Three of the participants (27.3%) responded “Don’t Know”; the remaining eight (72.7%) agreed with the statement.

It would be advisable for the Steering Committee to be more overt about its planning efforts in the future. One way to do so would be to share the aggregated evaluation responses with all participating teachers. Another might be to invite a teacher, in addition to the project director, to be a member of the Steering Committee.

***Question 2. Are teachers effectively delivering instruction and content based on the professional development concepts and strategies?***

There is considerable evidence that participating teachers have begun to incorporate material, content and instructional practices they have derived from the five professional development seminars. Teachers began submitting new lesson plans to the TAH Web site in late fall 2007. As of the date of this report there are now six lesson plans posted, some with accompanying student work. For three of the lesson plans, there is an accompanying report written by project director Daly in his role as “mentor teacher”, documenting his observations of the lessons being conducted by the participating teachers.

It should be noted, and several teachers made this point in their seminar evaluations, that the content of the first year of the program did not necessarily coincide with the curricula they teach, or with the chronology in which the curricula are organized. This is an even greater issue to be considered for future planning in that the participants represent a range of grade levels and teaching assignments, from elementary to high school, and from social studies to U.S. History to World History.

However, in the Participant Survey all but one respondent reported having “*incorporated CONTENT learned at the professional development sessions in my classroom this year.*” Five teachers (45.5%) made specific reference to using the content and materials from the seminar conducted at Plimoth Plantation to develop lessons for their students. One used “*information on tribes within the Northeast in my Character & Culture class reading Bury My Heart at Wounded Knee.*” Two teachers (18.2%) who enrolled in the program in the spring spoke to ways in which they planned to incorporate what they had learned thus far into lessons in the upcoming school year.

The evidence of lessons plans produced, and teachers’ reports during the seminars of these and other instructional activities they are engaged in bodes well for the program as it moves into its second year. Project director Daly was able to make some classroom visits during the year in his role as “mentor teacher.”

However, he reports that he feels it is too early at this time to critique the “effectiveness” of instruction based on these lessons. Such qualitative judgments will be addressed starting in Year Two, with input from the participating teachers. He anticipates doing far more classroom observations, starting in the early fall.

### ***Question 3. Is the demonstrated content area knowledge of students improving?***

There is evidence to suggest that students of teachers participating in the program have gained related content area knowledge during the seven months from October, 2007 to May, 2008.

As with any professional development activity, it takes time for participating teachers to absorb the new material and different instructional approaches. They then must determine how and when to incorporate this content and pedagogy into their own classrooms---a great challenge, judging from their evaluation comments, because of the prescribed curricula they are required to follow. The diversity of grade levels and subjects that the program’s participants teach adds to the hurdles they face in trying to import new learning into their different educational environments.

In the year-end Participant Survey, more than half of the teachers (54.5%) reported that they believe *“the content knowledge of...STUDENTS is improving as a result of...participation in this TAH project.”* Several teachers (27.3%) reported that they have not yet been able to incorporate content of the professional development seminars into their classrooms; therefore, an improvement in student knowledge in related content could not be expected. Two of the teachers (18.2%) reported that they had used or adapted content from the seminars into classes other than U.S. History, with a result being that students learned about topics such as racism and stereotyping.

As noted in the previous EVALUATION METHODOLOGY section, a content knowledge assessment was administered in October 2007 to students of the teachers participating in the program. In May 2008, three of the participants, all high school teachers, were selected to have their classes re-take the assessment. These teachers and classes were identified as those that had most focused on incorporating content from the year’s professional development seminars. As in the fall, half of the students completed one twenty-question version, and half completed another.

A total of 173<sup>1</sup> high school students participated in the October “pre-test.” In May, 85 of those same students completed the assessment as a summative “post-test.” The students who took “Version A” in October posted a combined average score of 34.6%; the 43 students who took “Version A” in May scored a combined average of 37.0%---a gain of 2.4%. In October, the students who completed the “Version B” assessment scored 28.5%; in May, 45 of those students posted an average score of 32.2% on the same test---a gain of 3.7%.

This data, when combined with the teachers’ comments and reflections, indicate positive growth. It will be important for the program’s planners and participating teachers to work together to develop multiple opportunities and methods for demonstrating and documenting improvements in students’ content area knowledge as the program progresses. SMP will continue to work with the Steering Committee to devise additional methods and materials to continually assess student content area knowledge over the course of the program, including the administration of post-tests to a selected group of teachers and students each year (control and non-control).

#### ***Question 4. Is the demonstrated content area knowledge of teachers improving?***

Thirteen (13) participating teachers completed an assessment of content area knowledge prior to their first professional development seminar. Three additional teachers have enrolled for the 2008 Summer Institute, and they too have taken the “pre-test”.

As new participants enroll in the program, they will complete the assessment as a pre-requisite for participation. It is planned that all teacher participants will re-take the assessment at the end of the third year of the program in 2010 as one measure of their “improving content area knowledge.” SMP will retain the results of all current and future teacher assessments.

Most of the evidence that the content area knowledge of the program’s teachers’ is improving comes in the form of self-reporting---the teachers’ own comments and reflections. Additional support comes from the classroom visits and observations that project director Daly has conducted throughout the school year.

Starting with their evaluations of the first professional development seminar in October, teachers began reporting that they were learning new content and, as importantly, gaining fresh perspectives on material with which they thought they were familiar. Many teachers commented on how they better understood the role

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<sup>1</sup> Student pretests administered in October and November 2007 by Bien, Connors, Daly, Davila, Gervais, Hureau, Penney, Small, Werme, and Zussman. Posttests administered in May 2008 to the same students by Daly, Davila and Penney.s

of archaeology in the study of history of all eras, not just of “ancient” times. A number spoke to how they would approach study of “the first Thanksgiving” in a very different manner after the subject was addressed in both of the October sessions.

The following are teachers’ comments and thoughts from the seminar evaluations and the end-of-the-year reflective survey:

- *“[I have] a more personal understanding of living cultural perspectives (How people in the present perceive & experience the past.”*
- *“I was taught the myths; now I need to research where to find the facts.”*
- *“I have a better understanding of the process which an Indian tribe must go through to become recognized federally.”*
- *“I’ve learned about the political and economic interactions of not only the Europeans and Native Americans but also between the Native tribes.”*

With the first year of professional development seminars completed, and the first TAH Summer Institute ahead, participating teachers now have a better sense of the content of the program and time before the next school year to think and plan the content they might incorporate into their classroom activities. In the second year of the program, the research that teachers will undertake and the lesson plans they will continue to develop will provide numerous sources of evidence over time of their improving content knowledge.

## **APPENDIX**

1. Steering Committee meetings – Agendas and summary notes
2. TAH Web site – Home Page and Description of Partners
3. Teacher Assessments
4. Student Assessments
5. Student and Teacher Pre-Tests---Fall, 2007 report
6. 2007-2008 Seminars Schedule
7. Summary of Professional Development Seminars
8. Teachers' Evaluations of Seminars – aggregated responses
9. Selected Lesson Plans and Observation Reports
10. Curriculum Frameworks Addressed by the TAH Project
11. TAHAKFCS Participant Survey Year 1
12. AKFCS TAH Steering Committee Reflections – Year 1
13. TAH Summer Institute 2008 – Announcement and Tentative Schedule