

# Model Curriculum Units: One District's Experience



*“With ‘buzz’ throughout the elementary schools about the quality of the curriculum unit, teachers are excited about teaching the unit during the upcoming school year.”*

*Laurie Regan, District Coordinator*

## Attleboro School District

### *Tryout Overview*

*Whose Story Is It? The Craft and Structure of Writing about History, English Language Arts and History/Social Science, Grade 3*

The three-week unit introduces students to concepts used by authors to write informational texts about history, including point of view, voice, chronological sequence, and cause and effect. Students learn about two approaches to writing history: the historical narrative about significant events, and the examination of everyday lives of ordinary people in a particular historical period. Texts are about Pilgrims, the Wampanoag people, and the first Thanksgiving.

### *Summary*

The Attleboro School District took the approach of involving two third grade classrooms in each of their elementary schools to participate in the tryout. This structure exposed more teachers to the UbD process for curriculum design. By involving two classrooms within each school to participate in the model curriculum unit tryout, the district set the conditions for concrete comparisons between the effectiveness of the model unit, including its emphasis on enduring understandings and big ideas, and the traditional Pilgrim unit studied within their elementary schools.

Although the unit was designed to be three weeks in length, the teachers aligned it to the district's third grade curriculum and core reading program and integrated the unit with social

studies instruction. The integration of the core reading program into the district's three days per week social studies recommendation resulted in the unit lasting longer than originally designed. The unit, in its entirety, was completed over a six week period. This allowed for the unit to easily merge with the district curriculum and ensure teachers had sufficient time to teach the unit in its entirety.

In each elementary school, the two teachers trying out the unit met together to review the lessons and plan for instruction. ***Professional learning was facilitated through collaborative planning sessions focused on a shared understanding of the unit's components and enduring understandings.*** Throughout the unit, teachers shared information and modified the lessons to meet the needs of their students. During the collaborative planning sessions, there was consensus that 'really good things' were happening in their classrooms and both teachers and students were excited about the unit. Teachers felt the focus on varying points of view was unique to third graders and captured their attention.

Teachers made a few changes to the unit to meet students' learning needs, specifically addressing the additional time required to read the text and perform the writing tasks. Additionally, the unit, as designed, focused on writing for a newspaper and incorporating the specific skills necessary for that task. Attleboro's third grade curriculum did not address newspaper writing before the model curriculum unit was presented. In order to resolve the issue, modifications were made to the unit to provide students with the content and skills needed to successfully write a newspaper article. The unit was easily adapted and the additional lessons did not present problems for teachers or students. Moreover, the teachers felt the additional lessons on newspaper-writing strengthened the unit and ensured students were provided opportunities to practice their new skills.

This unit included a Curriculum Embedded Performance Assessment (CEPA), which contained performance tasks for teachers to use when measuring students' understanding of the content and of the unit's enduring understandings. The assessments offered a variety of ways for students to express themselves, show their depth of learning, and actively engage in these authentic tasks. The various assessment choices allowed teachers to better meet the needs of students in their classroom including students with varying degrees of learning needs using the unit's additional built-in supports. There were many suggestions in the unit for authentic performance tasks that required students to demonstrate their learning. The many ways that students demonstrated their learning included designing brochures, building web pages, producing an exhibition, or creating a book. Both teachers and students were excited about the quality of student work demonstrated within the performance assessments.

To ensure district-wide consistency and lesson quality, teachers met with an outside facilitator who debriefed with them about their unit as part of the District's Literacy Partnership Grant. During a feedback session planned by the district, all teachers participating in the unit tryout examined student work from across the district. Additionally, the facilitator led teachers through a gallery walk of student work, asking them to assess both strengths and weakness of the model curriculum unit's assessment as written and its impact on the quality of student work. Specifically, they examined the UbD design and how students incorporated the enduring understandings into their final performance assessments. Teachers had the opportunity to collaborate in district-level teams, calibrating their assessment criteria to ensure consistency throughout all third grade classrooms.

***Due to the success of this year's model curriculum unit tryout, the Attleboro School District plans to incorporate the model curriculum unit into all third grade classrooms throughout the district during the 2013-2014 school year.*** The district believes that integrating the unit into the third grade curriculum will add rigor and expand third graders' thinking and understanding of point of view. With 'buzz' throughout the elementary schools about the quality of the model curriculum unit, teachers are excited about teaching the unit during the coming school year.

## ***Recommendations***

***What changes, if any, will you make to the unit design to better align with your district's needs?***

The changes to the instructional unit that were made this year, specifically adding the lessons on writing newspaper articles, will be part of next year's implementation of the unit. Additionally, the district will examine the time required to deliver the unit, realizing from this year's tryout that added time is necessary for students to successfully complete the lessons and deepen their understanding of the content. These recommended changes are not significant as most of the changes were made during this year's tryout.

***What recommendations would you give to other districts as they begin to implement the model curriculum units in their schools and classrooms?***

***The strongest recommendation to other teachers choosing to implement the unit is to focus on the enduring understandings and big ideas of the unit design.*** The unit heavily emphasized point of view, which for some third graders is a difficult concept to grasp. Teachers believed that, through continued reinforcement throughout the unit (i.e. the differing

point of view of the Pilgrims vs. Indians), the concept would help to deepen students' understanding. Continually asking the essential questions and focusing on the enduring understandings will support students in grasping the concept at a deeper level.

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### **Additional Model Curriculum Units**

ESE will be sharing approximately **90 model curriculum units** for K-12 teachers in ELA, mathematics, history and social science, and science, technology, and engineering content areas. These units will be made available to all districts throughout the Commonwealth beginning in the 2013-2014 school year. For additional information about the units: [www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/](http://www.doe.mass.edu/candi/model/)