

DAILY NEWS

No patriots in Kentucky history

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By Jim Waters

While the proposed revisions to Kentucky's social studies standards resemble something akin to the policy equivalent of a half-cooked turkey, they also highlight the need for more real choices when it comes to public education in the Bluegrass State.

It's important, for instance, to most Kentucky families that their children learn about what a "patriot" is and what "patriotism" means. Yet those words are among 25 history subjects that don't even warrant a mention in the proposed dumbed-down standards.

Perhaps a more egregious sin of curriculum omission is the fact that neither of the world wars – which no doubt required great sacrifice on the part of many of these same families' ancestors – is even mentioned.

This is all very different from other states. In Massachusetts, a simple search of social studies standards reveals 10 mentions of "pilgrim" or "pilgrims," five references to the "Mayflower Compact," four nods to the "Thanksgiving" holiday and seven different variations of "patriot" or "patriotism."

The Bay State social studies standards, which are an outline of what should be covered in third-grade classrooms, include: "Identify who the Pilgrims were and explain why they left Europe to seek religious freedom; describe their journey and their early years in the Plymouth Colony."

The standards also include teaching "the purpose of the Mayflower Compact and its principles of self-government, challenges in settling in America (and) events leading to the first Thanksgiving."

It's worth noting that Kentucky's education bureaucrats apparently don't consider events surrounding some of these important concepts crucial enough to include in the standards.

Maybe you don't, either. But if you do, offer your input to the Department of Education at this quick-response site: www.surveymonkey.com/s/KYSSpublic. One important reason to give such feedback is that items excluded from stated standards are unlikely to get top billing in teachers' lesson plans.

A vital question in Kentucky's curriculum tugs of war is: What incentives exist for the commonwealth's education policymakers to heed the voice of parents who may choose to speak out?

The answer: Very few, if any.

But what if parents could choose between schools that teach those important events and those that don't? What if parents had the option to remove their children from traditional public schools and enroll them in charter schools or even in private schools that include such important concepts and events in American history?

Such choices could have a tremendous impact on all decisions regarding public education – from what's taught in classrooms to how money gets spent.

Kentucky's laws allow neither charter schools nor private-school alternatives where parents can receive a scholarship through a voucher or tax-credit program – options available in a growing number of other states – to send their children to a nonpublic school.

Right now, Kentucky's education elites, not parents, firmly control public schools. Parents have very few options when it comes to alternatives that include the teaching of events and values important to them.

Giving parents more choices also could help prevent school districts from being torn apart over such emotional issues as whether to schedule around religious holidays.

In Montgomery County, Md., for example, the school board recently voted to officially remove all religious holidays from the district calendar in order to appease Muslim families. But the more the school board tried to fix this situation, the worse it became. The final decision – driven by the fact that Montgomery County is rigidly forced to operate as a freedom-cramping, one-size-must-fit-all system – left everyone angry.

“Montgomery County's school calendar fight shows that it is impossible to treat all people equally with a single system of public schools,” Neal McCluskey of the Cato Institute writes. “To foster peace and real unity, educational freedom is key.”