
National Blue Ribbon Schools Program

EXCELLENCE IN EDUCATION SINCE 1982

Plainview-Old Bethpage John F. Kennedy High School
Plainview, NH

Educating for Democracy: Helping Students Understand the News Video Transcript

James Murry, Principal: It really has come to the forefront that we needed to be able to work with our students, in helping them to be able to identify the differences between real news and fake news. So, we created a course, in partnership with Stony Brook University here on Long Island.

Howard Schneider, Executive Director, Center for News Literacy, Stony Brook University: And what we did was invite all of their teachers to a summer academy where we had four days of intensive training in our curriculum. We then worked with them over the summer to adapt that curriculum for their own school district. We followed that out with ongoing professional development.

Thomas DeMartinis, Social Studies Teacher: So some of the ways that we have our students, first approach a news article or news story is by thinking of it in terms of its fairness, it's balance and bias. And so... when they see a headline they should be thinking in terms of fair language, does the headline include words like "slams", does it include loaded language, fair play, does it try to reach out to the different sides of the story, and then fair presentation, what images do they see? And do those images themselves sort of create a narrative in their own mind before they actually read the contents of the article? And then we actually go through and we take a look at balance. So we highlight in different colors, um, the amount of time that's spent in a story for each side of the issue. And then we start to think of those patterns over time in terms of bias. And so that's just one of the ways that we approach a news story.

Kimberly Muller, English Teacher: We're helping develop this mindset that it's okay to question information and it's necessary to question information. So when I have a student in the classroom that says, "Wait a minute, this just says scientists, or researchers. It doesn't explain where they have the info, where they got the information from. What are their credentials?" I want them to know that that's an important step we have to take in the world to question information.

Jessica, Grade 12 Student: You're going to need to know this skill whether you're a doctor, you're a lawyer, you're a teacher. Any sort of job, you have to be able to decipher what's real, what's not real, and what sources you could trust.

Howard Schneider: So, when we work with teachers we hear two concerns. The first concern is, "I'm already overburdened. I'm teaching so much. How am I going to fit this into my curriculum?" Teaching news literacy, uh, can be adapted in multiple ways, we don't impose one model we very much encourage school districts to adopt a model that fits their schools and their students. And the second

concern is, "Are we going to face problems from parents when we begin to introduce controversial news topics into the classroom?"

Maria Carnesi, Social Studies Chair: So the message to teachers has been that we support courageous teaching and those courageous conversations sometimes create controversy.

Dr. Mary O'Meara, District Superintendent: The important thing of any initiative is really the communication. So we talked about the importance of the work, and what the community could expect in the rollout, which included a parent workshop, in partnership with our public library.

James Murray: In order for us to be able to have accomplished our goals the way that we have, we've only been able to do it because we've listened to our constituents, we've built relationships that are embedded in trust, and we're risk takers. We take advantage of opportunities to be able to try something new, and we're not afraid to make a mistake. Those are all important lessons for our students.

Sam, Grade 12 Student: So advice I would have for departments looking to add a news literacy course is that you can give your students choice. They should be able to study and analyze and research any topic they're interested in.

Jacob, Grade 12 Student: Because media literacy and news literacy is something that falls into every single category. It doesn't just exist in math or science or social studies or English. There's, there's an article about everything in the world today.

Maria Carnesi: It's also been enormously empowering for students because one of the effects of fake news is that our students really question and have difficulty believing in things. This is the way in which they're empowered to interrogate the news and, and know that they have an informed, accurate understanding. And that's really exciting for us. We're not just teachers of history. We're educating for democracy.