



**U.S. Department of Education
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Executive Summary**

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The *Biographies of the Nation* (BON) TAH project offered a total of 104 hours of professional development during its first year. Project partners have remained unchanged since the grant was awarded. They include the three consortia districts—the Great Falls Public Schools (LEA), Helena Public Schools, and Bozeman Public Schools, and its partners—the Montana Council for History and Civics Education (MCHCE), Montana State University’s Departments of History and Native American Studies, and the American Computer Museum. Education Northwest is the external evaluator for the project. Teachers were primarily social studies and American history teachers from grades 3-12, with recruiting focused on teachers who had not received professional development in history over the last five years, teachers who did not have advanced degrees in history, teachers from schools identified in need of improvement under NCLB, and teachers who have never participated in TAH professional development programs. The content areas covered during this first year were the Colonial and Early National Periods, which included the NAEP Periods of Colonization, Settlement, and Communities (1607-1763) and the Revolution and New Nation (1763-1815). Professional development activities included a two-day colloquium in the fall, a three-day colloquium in the spring, a four-day summer institute in the summer, six, ninety-minute book study sessions offered throughout the year, which were led by mentor teacher leaders, a required instructional plan, and available graduate credit in history (for teachers who specifically registered and paid for the course).

Thirty teachers attended the fall two-day colloquium. During this first meeting (on October 21, 2010), teachers took a pre-test of their content and pedagogical knowledge in the eras of focus for the first year. Baseline evaluation data was also collected on this date to determine teachers’ habits for teaching American history at the start of the project. This baseline data points to the need for the project and opportunities for the project to have a significant impact on participating teachers. For example, a relatively low percentage (38%) of participants reported regularly using activities to promote students’ historical reasoning. For the content and pedagogy pre-test, 57% of the items were from a nationally validated assessment (NAEP released) and the other 43% from items developed by historians, project participants, and external evaluators and pilot tested and scored by independent raters during our previous *West as U.S.* TAH project (as per its objectives). We met again in January 2011 for a three-day colloquium. Thirty-two teachers attended. Our final whole group event was held in June 2011 for four days. Thirty teachers attended. On the final day of the institute (June 17, 2011), teachers took a post-test to evaluate their growth over the first year of the project. Education Northwest’s evaluation findings are preliminary, however teachers’ gains are evident. Findings include teachers’ gains in their understanding and pedagogy as evidenced by the assessment of their content knowledge (62% improved their scores from baseline to post-Year 1 with a mean pre-test score of 19/35 and post-test score of 21/35). Professional development sessions were well received by teachers who appreciated the balance of content and pedagogy interwoven in presentations.

The fall and spring book studies offered a total of 9 hours of professional development. Participants unanimously agreed that the book groups conducted at consortium member sites were of great value. The book study connected teachers to the project between sessions and promoted deeper understanding of content. Additionally, as a requirement for the project, teachers developed Instructional Plans with a set of common elements. Each teacher submitted a sample of a typical American history lesson plan at the beginning of the project, which will be used to provide baseline data. External evaluators scored the plans independently using a tailored scoring guide developed by project leaders and evaluators. Findings include: Fifty-nine percent of the plans were found to be of “acceptable quality” by rating an average of at least a “3” on a 5-point scale.” All plans included examples of primary sources used in lessons. Plans submitted during the first year provide additional support for the project’s need. A weakness of the plans was found to be in documentation of student work and achievement. This is an area for increased attention and establishing clear expectations for the coming year.

36 teachers were served during the first year of the project and 32 completed. Of those 32 completers, 27 (or 84%) participated in 75% or more of the professional development hours offered. The project had proposed to serve 36 teachers as completers, who will participate in each year of the program. During the second year, the project has recruited 36 teachers that have agreed to participate in 75% or more of the hours offered.