

# AMERICAN HISTORICAL ASSOCIATION

Organized 1884

Incorporated by the Congress 1889

October 1, 2014

Ken Witt, President  
Members of the Board of Education  
Jefferson County Public Schools  
1829 Denver W Dr.  
Lakewood, CO 80401

Dear President Witt and Members of the Board:

The American Historical Association, which represents more than 13,000 professional historians, including teachers of college-level history and K-12 educators, has been following the reactions to the release of the College Board's revised curriculum framework for the Advanced Placement U.S. History Exam. We are concerned that the Jefferson County School Board's proposals for board review of the curriculum framework are inspired more by politics than a commitment to rigorous and professional history education. At the same time, we are deeply impressed with the enthusiasm of your students. To see students standing up for the integrity of their education, and in particular for the quality of historical thinking and teaching that takes place in their classrooms is refreshing – and quite frankly, impressive. We compliment you and the families of Jefferson County on raising a group of independent minded young people who recognize the value of critical thinking and high quality education.

Teaching history is about teaching historical thinking, and that means confronting history's inherent complexity. Simply put: there isn't only one story to tell. We teach our students that the history of the United States – or any other place – is a tapestry of overlapping stories. None of these stories is created from whole cloth, but rather woven together from the evidence left in the historical record. Multiple narratives exist because of the many angles from which one can view the past, and the plausibility of any narrative rests on the quality and organization of historical evidence. The AP framework is organized chronologically and thematically in order to enable teachers to use their expertise to select the individual stories that compose the broader narratives. It is designed to enable students to learn how to ask historical questions, to assess evidence, and to appreciate the complexities of a nation's past. These are skills and habits of mind that active and engaged citizens possess. A reductionist understanding of history that condenses its complexities to a set of facts to be memorized does a disservice to students seeking to become productive members of their communities. That vision of history as a straightforward tale of mileposts and achievements requires less work on the part of the students than the more complex approach offered in the new AP framework. We hope that you are proud to see your children demanding that they be held to higher standards of intellectual curiosity and achievement.

The educators and historians who worked on the AP U.S. History framework increased the exam's emphasis on historical thinking and analytical skills as an essential aspect of civic culture and the lifelong learning necessary to a successful career and active citizenship. The actions of students in Jefferson County schools demonstrate that they are ready to practice just that. They

display an eagerness for independent thinking and a willingness to engage with the complexity of history that suggests they are ready and capable of mature historical inquiry.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "James Grossman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.

James Grossman  
Executive Director