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BY E-MAIL & REGULAR U.S. MAIL

June 11, 2021

Richard Corcoran, Commissioner
Florida Department of Education
325 West Gaines Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0400

Dear Commissioner Corcoran,

On March 24 and April 2, we shared our concerns about the draft prepared by the Department of Education (DOE) regarding Holocaust Education standards with Chancellor Oliva and you, respectively. As DOE prepares to release the final standards, we once again write to express our deep concerns about them.

We firmly believe that the final standards do not comply with the Holocaust Education mandate found in Florida Statute § 1003.42(g)1., which states:

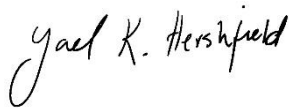
(g)1. The history of the Holocaust (1933-1945), the systematic, planned annihilation of European Jews and other groups by Nazi Germany, a watershed event in the history of humanity, to be taught in a manner that leads to an investigation of human behavior, an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism, and stereotyping, and an examination of what it means to be a responsible and respectful person, for the purposes of encouraging tolerance of diversity in a pluralistic society and for nurturing and protecting democratic values and institutions, including the policy, definition, and historical and current examples of anti-Semitism, as described in s. 1000.05(7), and the prevention of anti-Semitism. (Emphasis added).

The term “stereotype” does not appear in the proposed final standard. Furthermore, the concept of racism appears only once, and prejudice appears only twice. Any legitimate Holocaust education expert would advise that in addition to historical review of the period 1933-45, the seminal reason for teaching about the Holocaust is not only to explore antisemitism but to also inspire students to make connections between the past and their own roles and responsibilities today. The lessons of the Holocaust are both unique and universal. It appears that the current standards favor only the unique nature of the Holocaust at the expense of its universal lessons.

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We had in previous communications recommended the inclusion of core concepts such as diversity, empathy, responsibility, and fairness, which are not included in the proposed final standards. If we truly want to educate our next generation to understand the evils of hatred, as exposed during the Holocaust, so that history does not repeat itself, as it did in Rwanda and other genocides, we must address the universal lessons. Failure to do so effectively makes the last proposed standard- "...recognize the significance of "Never Again" a mere label without any meaning or substance. That is a great disservice to our children and society as whole.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Yael K. Hershfield". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'Y'.

Yael Hershfield
Interim Regional Director
ADL Florida