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July 10, 2019

Dr. Donald E. Fennoy II
Superintendent
School District of Palm Beach County
3300 Forest Hill Boulevard
West Palm Beach, FL 33406

Dear Dr. Fennoy,

As you know, public schools in Palm Beach County have an obligation to faithfully teach the history of the Holocaust. Specifically, the law requires this instruction to be given on this topic with the highest standards for historical accuracy in a manner that leads to an understanding of the ramifications of prejudice, racism and stereotyping:

(2) Members of the instructional staff of the public schools, subject to the rules of the State Board of Education and the district school board, shall teach efficiently and faithfully, using the books and materials required that meet the highest standards for professionalism and historical accuracy, following the prescribed courses of study, and employing approved methods of instruction, the following:

....

(g) 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. (§ 1003.42(2)(g), F.S.)

Please provide a detailed report of all that the schools in Palm Beach County are doing to fulfill this obligation.

During the 2019 Legislative Session, concerns about increasing discrimination motivated by anti-Semitism around the globe led to the passage of the Florida Educational Equity Act. This legislation requires discrimination motivated by anti-Semitism to be treated like racial discrimination:

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A public K-20 educational institution must treat discrimination by students or employees or resulting from institutional policies motivated by anti-Semitic intent in an identical manner to discrimination motivated by race. For purposes of this section, the term “anti-Semitism” includes a certain perception of the Jewish people, which may be expressed as hatred toward Jewish people, rhetorical and physical manifestations of anti-Semitism directed toward a person, his or her property, or toward Jewish community institutions or religious facilities. § 1000.05(7), F.S.

The statute goes on to provide examples of anti-Semitism which include but are not limited to, “[a]ccusing Jews as a people or the State of Israel of inventing or exaggerating the Holocaust.” As indicated by this legislation, anti-Semitism will not be tolerated in Florida. The Department is preparing guidance for K12 Schools as well as for the Florida College System institutions on the implementation of this important legislation.

Reported comments and communications by Principal William Latson with parents of students at his school regarding the Jewish Holocaust during World War II, and speculation on the part of Principal Latson as to whether or not the Holocaust actually took place, are outrageous and unacceptable and cause me to seriously question the integrity of the principal and the school’s programs intended to educate students on the Holocaust and Jewish history in general.

As you investigate this matter, I trust that you will take all actions necessary to address this issue, to correct any negative impacts on student education, and to hold accountable Principal Latson and/or any individuals whose conduct or actions perpetuate an environment of discrimination within your school district.

For my part, I intend to exercise all avenues afforded to me through Florida statutes and rules to investigate and act. I will swiftly, and to the limits of my office and resources, investigate and prosecute any individuals who threaten the equity and cultural sensitivity of the educational experience in our public schools.

Thank you for your continued support as we work together to provide the best possible educational experience for the students of Florida public schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Richard Corcoran", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Richard Corcoran
Commissioner of Education