



October 6, 2020

VIA EMAIL

Donald Fennoy II
Superintendent, Palm Beach County Schools
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Frank Barbieri
Chairman, Palm Beach County School Board
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Chuck Shaw
Vice Chairman, Palm Beach County School Board
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Dear Superintendent Fennoy and Palm Beach County School Board Members,

We write on behalf of the StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism concerning the upcoming hearing to determine whether William Latson will be reinstated to his former position as principal of Spanish River High School. We understand the Palm Beach County School Board will consider that issue tomorrow, October 7, 2020. In light of Mr. Latson's previous misstep in refusing to acknowledge the historical fact of the Holocaust, in which some six million Jews were murdered at the hands of the Nazi regime, and his related failure to ensure that students within his school receive appropriate education about this historical genocide, we urge the Board and the district administration to take all necessary steps in this process to restore confidence within the community that the individual in this position is appropriately suited to it.

We understand Mr. Latson has clarified that his initial statements do not reflect his personal views, but we remain concerned that he may still view the question of whether the Holocaust occurred as a matter of personal or political belief. As an initial matter, Holocaust denial is, whether intentionally or not, quintessentially antisemitic. Indeed, the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) definition of antisemitism—the international consensus definition, adopted by countries around the globe, as well as the Florida legislature—acknowledges as much. This is entirely unacceptable for a professional educator, especially one in a position of influence over impressionable young minds. It is as difficult to fathom an educator genuinely questioning the historical fact of the Holocaust as it would be to fathom questioning the historical fact of the Trail of Tears or the existence of slavery within the United States. Aside from the grievous affront to the victims of those experiences that would necessarily result from such doubts, it would be a tremendous disservice to students to educate them in a way that encourages them to question whether these events in fact occurred. The dangers of teaching students in this manner cannot be overstated, for, as Edmund Burke recognized, “Those who don't know history are doomed to repeat it.”

We urge the Board, as it considers this important matter, to ensure that its decision here focuses first on the proper education of the district's students, which includes ensuring that individuals in positions of authority and influence over those students are appropriately suited to such roles. Should the Board decide to reinstate Mr. Latson, we ask that the Board, as is consistent with its own policies, ensure that Mr. Latson receives proper—and more importantly, measurable—oversight, especially where matters of curricular education are involved. We understand that Mr. Latson visited the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington, D.C., during the summer. While we applaud this proactive measure on his part, we also urge the Board to require that Mr. Latson undergo further appropriate education and training, including meeting with a Holocaust survivor, and attending training sessions about antisemitism.

Additionally, we remain ready, as we have previously offered, to connect the district with Holocaust survivors and/or provide education regarding antisemitism.

We trust that the Board will make a decision in this matter that is in the best interest of those it has been entrusted to serve.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Carly F. Gammill". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and title.

Carly F. Gammill
Director, StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism