



**Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.**  
State Superintendent of Schools

September 18, 2019

The Honorable Dana Stein  
251 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Shelly Hettleman  
311 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

The Honorable Michele Guyton  
306 House Office Building  
6 Bladen Street  
Annapolis, MD 21401

Dear Delegate Stein, Delegate Hettleman, and Delegate Guyton:

The Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) supports the efforts of the Maryland House of Delegates, the Baltimore Jewish Council, and the Jewish Community Relations Council to bring greater attention to the Holocaust in classrooms across the State. We appreciate your willingness to enter a conversation regarding the teaching of this significant period in world history. One means of addressing your concerns is through the State Social Studies Frameworks.

Currently, the elementary social studies framework is being revised. The present draft proposes that grades four and five be taught as a two-year arc that covers the history of the United States through the lens of Maryland History. Including a unit which addresses the Holocaust does not go beyond the scope of the proposed final grade 5 unit and MSDE will advocate for this recommendation with the teacher workgroup currently revising the elementary social studies framework.

The middle school social studies framework in Maryland is structured so that students explore the world through a chronological framework. Sixth graders examine the ancient world through the early middle ages and 7<sup>th</sup> graders continue this investigation through the age of exploration. Grade 8 students finish their middle school social studies education by examining the history of the United States from the colonization of North America through the 1890s. Situating a study of the Holocaust within this framework would have students learning about a significant event in an anachronistic manner. In 2020, MSDE is scheduled to initiate a revision of the grade 6 and 7 frameworks. When this revision occurs, MSDE will advocate for the addition of an objective(s) regarding the roots of antisemitism that would help students to contextualize the study of the Holocaust when they get to high school.

Additionally, the High School United States History framework is in the last steps of its revision process. The current draft of the framework includes the objective "Students will assess the progression of US involvement in world affairs by tracing the origins of the Holocaust and the American response." MSDE feels strongly that the addition of this objective will require teachers to address the American response to the Holocaust by first helping students understand the origins of the



Holocaust. We see this as a significant improvement over the current objective which you correctly state only asks students to examine the American response without any understanding of the events that precipitated the reaction. The revised high school United States History framework is scheduled for release in spring of 2020.

The aspect of your letter that most resonates with MSDE are your concerns around the Modern World History framework. The lack of the word Holocaust was not intended to downplay its significance but instead employ an economy of words so that the atrocities executed by the Nazi regime in Europe was studied along with the atrocities committed by the Japanese in Asia. The existing objective will be reduced to focus on just Japanese atrocities committed in Asia and a new objective will be added that states, "Students will evaluate the cause, course, and consequences of the Holocaust." In doing so, it would highlight that students are required to learn specifically about the Holocaust as a part of this unit.

Although state frameworks provide guidance for local school systems to develop their own curriculum and professional development for teachers, the strongest tool to promote the teaching of the Holocaust with fidelity is to provide consistent, content-rich, professional learning for teachers. Given the high turnover rate among teachers in Maryland, professional development around such an important topic cannot not be sporadic. It must be consistent so that all teachers can develop the tools necessary to teach the Holocaust with confidence. To this end, MSDE will emphasize with school districts the need to dedicate some of their Title II funds towards substantive professional learning around the teaching of the Holocaust.

MSDE appreciates your attention to the need to enhance Holocaust education. In doing so you are upholding your mission to "advocate at all levels of government for social justice and public resources on issues of concern to the Jewish community." You are also helping to improve education on behalf of all students across the state. MSDE looks forward to working with you to find a collaborative solution for this concern. Please reach out to Mrs. Monica Bias ([monica.bias@maryland.gov](mailto:monica.bias@maryland.gov)) if you would like to schedule a meeting to further discuss these issues.

Best Regards,



Karen B. Salmon, Ph.D.  
State Superintendent of Schools