

OCTOBER 29, 2020 3:54 PM 7

## 'It's Very Scary' — Florida Jewish High School Student Expresses Fear Over Reinstatement of Principal in Holocaust Denial Scandal



by Ben Cohen



William Latson, the Florida high school principal who told a parent, 'not everyone believes the Holocaust happened.' Photo: Screenshot.

The prospect of the Florida high school principal at the center of a Holocaust denial scandal returning to the state's education system is "very scary," a Jewish student at the school where he served has told *The Algemeiner*.

The principal, William Latson, was [fired from Spanish River High School](#) in Palm Beach County last November after sending an email to a parent who inquired about Holocaust education programs that stated, "not everyone believes the Holocaust happened."

In the same email, Latson told the parent that when it came to the subject of the Nazi murder of six million Jews and millions of other people from minorities including Roma gypsies and the disabled, "you have your thoughts, but we are a public school, and not all of our parents have the same beliefs."

He concluded: "I can't say the Holocaust is a factual, historical event because I am not in a position to do so as a school-district employee."

Following a year-long appeal process, however, the Palm Beach County School Board voted at its Oct. 7 meeting to [rehire Latson](#) by a narrow margin of 4-3. Latson's appeal had received an earlier boost in August when the judge at his appeal, Robert Cohen, ruled that his offense was not serious enough to warrant termination.

On Monday, Latson's case will be debated once again at the school board's regular monthly meeting. For one Jewish student at Spanish River — who spoke to *The Algemeiner* on condition of anonymity — his potential reappearance in the education system amounts to a “very scary” proposition.

“There are lots more students who feel the way I do, there are many Jewish students at the school as well, but they are scared to say so,” said the 10th-grade student, during a phone conversation on Wednesday.

---

In advance of Monday's meeting, Latson [posted a video](#) on YouTube in which he apologized for his original comments. At the same time, he issued a plea to the school board to “please let stand my reinstatement and assignment to the assessment department which you previously approved.”

“I was wrong,” Latson said in the video. “I apologize to the Palm Beach County community, the school board, the school administration, the parents, students, teachers of Palm Beach County, the Jewish community and everyone offended or hurt by my mistake.”

Latson then declared: “I am not a Holocaust denier. I have never been a Holocaust denier.”

The 10th-grade student at Spanish River was unconvinced by Latson's words, however.

“I don't believe that all of a sudden he has changed his mind,” the student asserted.

The student explained: “One of the things I'm concerned about is how school programs studying the Holocaust might be affected by his being reinstated. Another concern I have is how students are going to perceive him, because some people will say, ‘well, he got away with it, so why can't I?’”

The student began attending Spanish River in 9th grade, shortly after Latson was fired in 2019. “When I heard that I was going to that high school, I was pretty upset about it actually,” the student said. “Learning about the Holocaust is very important to me. The thought that my future principal might not believe the Holocaust even occurred left me afraid of not getting equal treatment, simply because of who I am.”

Continued the student: “The Holocaust was a horrifying event and there is so much evidence that it happened. So what was his [Latson’s] reason for not believing in an event that we have so much evidence for? What was his reasoning? There is clearly so much that we know, there are many survivors alive today who tell their stories, and he still doesn’t believe it happened — I just found that very disturbing.”

The student emphasized that Latson nevertheless had a constitutional right to express his opinions. “But he said what he said as someone who has great influence on a high school with a population of 2,500 students,” the student argued. “So he has the right to say it, but he shouldn’t say it.”

Holocaust education programming — which the student is deeply committed to, coming from a family of Lithuanian Jewish Holocaust survivors — could well be “marginalized” by Latson’s reinstatement, the student warned.

“If we don’t educate about the Holocaust, there’s a danger of it happening again,” the student said, going on to assert that public officials such as Latson who raised doubts over the fact of the Holocaust could not serve the public faithfully ever again.

One of the Jewish representatives slated to speak at Monday’s school board meeting strongly echoed the student’s view, contending that Latson’s reinstatement would set “a very dangerous precedent.”

Todd Cohn — regional director of the National Council of Synagogue Youth (NCSY) — questioned the seriousness of Latson’s video apology as well.

“It’s a little bit insincere when you include a phone number to call to help him get his job back,” Cohn remarked — referring to Latson’s entreaty in his apology video for his supporters to call the Palm Beach County public comments line.

Cohn argued that the fundamental credibility of the education system was being undermined by the continuing controversy over Latson.

“What does education stand for if we can’t trust educators with the basic truths?” Cohn said. “This isn’t just about Latson, it’s about our schools, our education system and our society more generally.”

Cohn said NCSY stood ready to expand its Holocaust education programs for public schools. He added that 50 schools in Florida were already working with his organization.

He highlighted the virtual tours of Auschwitz presently offered by NCSY to schools across the US, at a time when the coronavirus has made educational travel abroad almost impossible. Other recent projects have taken students to Rwanda on a genocide awareness program, as well as to Poland, where several German concentration camps were located, and Yad Vashem, Israel’s national memorial to the Holocaust in Jerusalem.