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Around the Community

Southern NCSY's JSU Increases Efforts to Provide High School Students Holocaust Education It's importance has been magnified by PBC School's Rehiring of William Latson



The Jewish Student Union (JSU) will provide high school students with an unprecedented and exclusive opportunity to virtually tour Auschwitz and Birkenau, two of the most infamous and deadly death camps where the death toll included almost 1 million Jews. Southern NCSY has been on high alert since last year's controversy surrounding Spanish River Community High School's former Principal William Latson.

This live, innovative, and deeply meaningful virtual tour of Auschwitz, through the generosity of community leaders and philanthropists, is being made available at no cost to public and secular private high schools and other organizations through JSU. This recently developed and launched proprietary platform is *not yet* available to the public.

"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," said Latson. Once Latson's comments were made public, they created an uproar in the South Florida Jewish community – a



community that has one of the highest Holocaust survivor populations in the world. Latson, who was subsequently fired from his position, was recently rehired by the Palm Beach County School Board by a vote of 4 to 3.

Last year, Southern NCSY's JSU screened the film, *Who Will Write our History* (a film about a group of spiritual resistors who risked their lives so that the truth about the Holocaust would survive, even if they did not) to over 2,400 students at Spanish River Community High School and over 4,000 in Palm Beach County. With the renewed generosity of Richard Hirsh and Danny Abraham, JSU is once again working to insure that Holocaust education is not only offered to students, but that the education is robust and interactive. "The Palm Beach County School District and the greater Jewish community need us now more than ever," remarked Hirsch, "Our future leaders will look back at this time and reflect on how we rose to the challenge of pushing our educators to educate our children on the horrors of our



past so that we don't repeat them."

Genocide awareness, including Holocaust education is a top priority for Southern NCSY. "Will we continue to double and triple our efforts on Holocaust and genocide awareness", explained Evan Levitt, Director of Special Projects for Southern NCSY, "NCSY, JSU and our international Jewish community will not stand by while there is an opportunity to educate our next generation of leaders."

JSU Private School's Give Back program, has focused their efforts on connecting teens with Holocaust survivors. Recently these teen leaders created personal videos for the survivors, made calls to them and painted inspirational rocks for them. This summer, JSU will be bringing a group of teens to Rwanda, Africa to engage in important dialogue and hands-on educational experiences revolving around the genocide which took place and it's long lasting impacts. This journey will also include a trip to Israel where teens will visit Yad Vashem (The World Holocaust Remembrance Center) to experience



more about the Holocaust. Southern NCSY is determined not to allow Holocaust denial to become acceptable. Through introducing meaningful programming geared towards teens, they will continue to work towards that goal.

Jewish Student Union is a program of NCSY. Locally, JSU has a presence in many Palm Beach County schools and it's growing at a rapid pace. The Jewish Student Union operates in 60 high schools across South Florida – including Spanish River Community High School and engages over 4,000 students in these schools. For more information about Southern NCSY and JSU, visit: www.southernncsy.org or 561-445-3810. To donate go to southernncsy.org/donate or contact levitte@ncsy.org 561-343-0952.

Sha'arei Bina TAG to Feature Virtual Open House

On November 22 at 10am Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls will be hosting its annual Open House – this year an entirely virtual program due to Covid-19. The school invites anyone interested to register to attend this virtual event, featuring a tour of the school led by students, an "interactive" opportunity to engage facul-

ty and administrators, and separate tracks for those entering middle school and high school to explore Sha'arei Bina and learn about all it has to offer. Sha'arei Bina would love to open its physical doors to show its warmth, vibrancy, and academic excellence to the world, however in order to meet the needs of all those who want to attend the Open House in a safe and

healthy manner the school, in consultation with its Covid-19 Medical Advisory Board, has decided to keep the event entirely virtual. However, anyone who would like to see the school in person is invited to schedule a time to stop by, see the school, and meet students and staff.

For reasons of safety and security, anyone who would like to attend the Sha'arei

Bina Virtual Open House must register in advance. Please contact the Sha'arei Bina office to register.

Sha'arei Bina is located in Hollywood, serving the South Florida communities. For more information contact the school office of Sha'arei Bina Torah Academy for Girls at (954) 927-5544 or email us at office@shaareibina.org.

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PALM BEACH JEWISH NEWS

JEWISH JOURNAL

Virtual tours of Auschwitz and Birkenau to be offered to students

By SERGIO CARMONA

SOUTH FLORIDA SUN SENTINEL | OCT 23, 2020 AT 2:22 PM



Todd Cohn is the executive director for Southern NCSY, which is launching virtual tours of Auschwitz and Birkenau.

South Florida high school students will have the opportunity to broaden their Holocaust education and virtually tour sites of concentration camps.

The virtual tours of Auschwitz and Birkenau are being launched by the Jewish Student Union of the Boca Raton-based Southern NCSY, which will facilitate them for teens, schools and organizations in its service area from Florida to North Carolina. NCSY is a youth group of the Orthodox Union.

Todd Cohn, Southern NCSY's executive director, said the virtual tours could be launched as soon as next month. Cohn explained their goals.

"This is the closest that most of these students will ever get to Poland, yet alone to Auschwitz or any other important Holocaust landmark.

"That's the beauty of the digital age. We recognize that many of these students will probably never go half way across the world to see these landmarks for themselves so we're bring the experience to them."

Cohn said the virtual tours are "really powerful."

"We want to be on the cutting-edge of innovation of Holocaust education, and this is the platform that is the most innovative and the most cutting-edge," he continued. "It's the most interactive and relevant to the students."

Maya (whose last name could not be disclosed for privacy reasons), a senior at Suncoast High School in Riviera Beach who went on an NSCY The Anne Samson Jerusalem Journey trip to Israel in 2019, praised the organization for the virtual tours.

“I think it’ll be something that so many people could benefit from,” she said. “I went to Hebrew School, and I learned about the Holocaust my whole life. It’s been part of Jewish studies, but I think a virtual walkthrough is a different outlook. It solidifies how real the Holocaust is. It’s obviously something terrible that happened, but it’s real and it’s something that we need to teach and learn about so it never happens again.”

Cohn said that although the organization has had a Holocaust education initiative for a while and has also been doing other innovative things, these efforts have come to forefront since the [2019 revelation of former Spanish River High School principal William Latson’s controversial comments in an email exchange with a parent.](#)

Latson wrote in the email exchange from April 2018, “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.”

Although Latson was fired from his position, [he was recently rehired by the Palm Beach County School Board.](#) However, [the School Board will reconvene on Nov. 2 to decide whether to move Latson to a new role, or to reverse its decision to rehire him.](#)

Cohn said Latson’s reinstatement has caused the organization to redouble and intensify its Holocaust education efforts.

“We were already running our Holocaust education program, but we’re going to continue expanding our Holocaust education initiative,” he said.

Cohn said the organization’s Holocaust education initiative is a free resource for all private and public schools, as well as Jewish youth groups regardless of denomination or synagogue.

Visit southern.ncsy.org for more information.




Sergio Carmona
Florida Jewish Journal


CONTACT





Fact vs Fiction, Why Can't We Tell the Difference?

NOV 1, 2020, 8:16 PM

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56 members of Congress signed the Declaration of Independence. Pablo Picasso was a brilliant artist. The adult human body has 206 bones. Israel is the most beautiful country in the world. 6 million Jews perished in the Holocaust.

If one has a problem discerning the two opinions above from the three facts — and I believe that they do — we have a massive issue on our hands.

As a society, we don't question whether World War II occurred. We don't think the War of 1812 was imagined. We don't debate the French Revolution as fiction. These events that occurred as history were memorialized in photos, books, films and through first-hand accounts. They are taught as part of curriculums in high schools, colleges and universities across the world. The Holocaust, although it has been memorialized in the same ways, is not being treated the same way.

This is happening across the country and specifically in my backyard. Schools in my county where I personally know teachers, students and administrators have teachers, students and administrators who deny the existence of the Holocaust. At Spanish River Community High School, former Principal William Latson said – in a crushing blow to Jews across the globe, “I can't say the Holocaust is factual.” When someone in a position of power makes such a remark, the results are exponentially

damaging and far-reaching. It demonstrates a systemic problem not only in our school system but in society as a whole.

What can we do to change that?

We need to have a zero tolerance for anyone – whether they work in the school system or not (but especially if they do) that cannot freely and easily state that the Holocaust is a fact. And through Southern NCSY, we will do this. We are doing this. Not next week or next month, but today. Our Jewish Student Union runs clubs in 60 high schools throughout our region (including Spanish River Community High School) and that list continues to grow. We welcome any student into these clubs regardless of religion. With the generous support of a passionate group of visionaries, we have become a valuable Holocaust education resource for school districts in our region and beyond.

We have a plethora of unique and engaging educational resources that are being made available to any school who simply asks for them. Currently, we are bringing a virtual tour of Auschwitz and Birkenau – a look inside two of the most infamous Nazi death camps – to high school students. A virtual tour so comprehensive that they will feel as if they are touring in person. If we have to go school to school and door to door to make the availability of this program known, we will.

The great Jewish sage Hillel stated, “ If not now, when?”. There’s a valid sense of urgency to take action right now. Now is the time for responses and plans, not words and empty promises. Whether you are Jewish or not, it’s time to stand up for history, for those who are discriminated against and for peace over hatred.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Todd Cohn was born and raised in Overland Park, Kansas. He earned a degree in Advanced Hebrew Studies and began a career in the oil export business. By the time he was 25 he had started three businesses. Todd then decided to redirect his energies to inspiring the Jewish future with NCSY. Before ultimately settling in Boca Raton, Florida, Todd, his wife and 3 children spent eleven years in Kansas building this small community and its humble NCSY chapter into one of the most distinguished chapters in North America. Todd is currently the Executive Director of the 7 state area of Southern NCSY. This area services Jewish teens across Florida and the Southern US. In addition to being the Executive Director, he has also served as a Director for March of the Living, The Jerusalem Journey NCSY summer program for public school teens, was awarded the “Best of the Best” award from International NCSY, and was the Director of the Judaica Institute program of the Commission for Jewish Education, a beneficiary of the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach.

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Auschwitz virtual tours coming to Palm Beach County schools

Tours will be given by a guide from the camp in Poland

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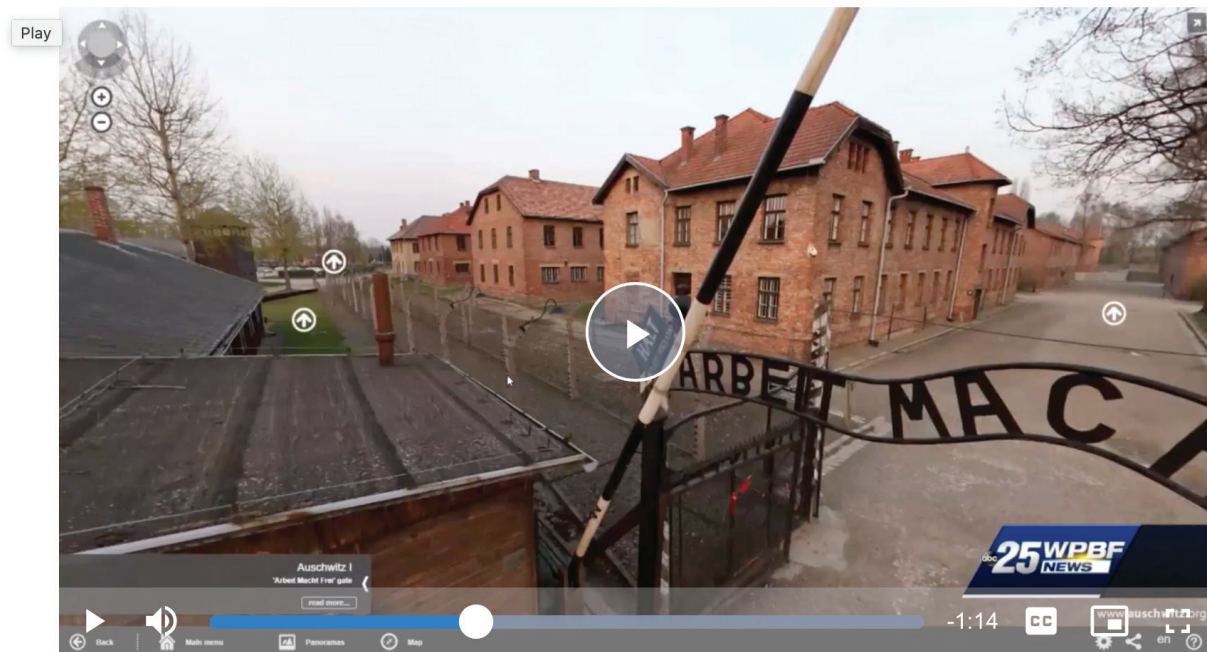


Updated: 11:25 PM EDT Oct 26, 2020

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Ari Hait f t ✉
Reporter



BOCA RATON, Fla. — It's the site of some of the world's most horrific atrocities.

The Auschwitz concentration camp is well known as a symbol of the evil of the Nazis.

It's a place Todd Cohn wants everyone to know about.

"It is absolutely our responsibility to make sure that things like this can't happen again," Cohn said.

Cohn is the executive director of Southern NCSY, an organization based in Boca Raton that develops programs mostly for Jewish teens.

Boca Raton is also the place where a high school principal, William Latson, told a parent he couldn't say for sure if the Holocaust was a real event.

“Then it became very sobering,” Cohn said. “And the question was, ‘How is this happening?’”

That’s when NCSY began working more with the Palm Beach County School District to better its Holocaust education.

That’s when NCSY began working more with the Palm Beach County School District to better its Holocaust education.

For many students, their next lesson will come straight from Auschwitz.

“It was really important for us to be able to bring that experience to them, to their classrooms,” Cohn said.

And Jerzy Wojcik is the man who will bring that experience.

“I can reach every corner of the globe,” Wojcik said. “I can reach every country today with a message from Auschwitz.”

Wojcik was born and raised in the town of Auschwitz.

He’s been a tour guide at the camp for 14 years.

The pandemic ended in-person tours, so Wojcik made it all virtual.

Wojcik uses photos and videos from the war and combines them with images from what the camp looks like today.

He can show you where the gas chambers were located and where prisoners were confined to barracks.

In the next moment, he can show you an aerial view of the camp today followed by an aerial view of the camp on the day it was liberated.

While you look, Wojcik talks, educating about the site where more than a million people were killed.

So far, NCSY is working with nine schools in Palm Beach County.

One of those schools is Spanish River High School, the school where William Latson was principal.

The other seven schools are Suncoast High School, Polo Park Middle School, Wellington High School, St. Andrews, John I Leonard High School, Atlantic High School, and Woodlands Middle School.

Wojcik is also offering tours to the public several times a month.

For more information, you can go to his Facebook page at <https://www.facebook.com/memorialpartnership>.

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.