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Minnesota House of Representatives

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Mr. Doug Paulsen
Minnesota Department of Education
1500 Highway 36
Roseville, MN 55113

Mr. Paulsen,

We believe that in this time and especially in this state we are called to be bold in how we help Minnesota students learn about their state and country and develop civic responsibilities. We encourage the standards review committee to embrace an anti-racist approach to the social studies standards including standards defining the history and current expression of white supremacy and anti-Semitism.

We are pleased that the Department has agreed to reverse itself and include study of the Holocaust in the next draft of the proposed academic standards in social studies. We believe that is a critical aspect of world history that Minnesota students should learn. There is much more that students need to learn, however. To fully understand our country today, students need to understand the long history of white supremacy as well as the parallel history of resistance to it. This is not just history but a current threat to our democracy.

The Department of Homeland Security identified violent white supremacist extremists as a growing and “most persistent” threat to our country in their October 2020 Homeland Threat Assessment. It is widely acknowledged that young people are targeted for recruitment, especially online, by white supremacist groups. We believe that education has a role to play in inoculating young people from ideologies of fear and hate that lead to violence.

The first draft of standards does take a strong statement on our states history with the states indigenous people in Standard 17.6.2 “Define political, economic, spatial and historical perspectives and apply them to the boundary disputes and genocide that occurred in the past within the land that is Minnesota today.” It again raises important issues in 21.5.1 “Describe how rivalries among European nations and their search for new opportunities fueled expanding global trade networks and, in North America, colonization and settlement and the exploitation and genocide of indigenous peoples and theft of indigenous lands.” These standards are good starts but there is more to do to meet our shared responsibilities.

In the introduction to the first draft of Academic Standards in Social Studies the committee states “Social studies prepares students to live and interact in diverse communities through examining their identities, respectfully engaging with different perspectives, and addressing powerful social, cultural, and political inequities, as well as their connections to other axes of stratification, including gender, race, class, sexuality, and legal status.” We couldn’t agree more.