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James J. Montesano, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

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Dear Parents and Guardians:

I am writing to advise you of some recent information regarding the use of instructional materials in our Middle School. On Friday I became aware that, around December 18, two videos were made accessible to our sixth grade students that displayed historically inaccurate information and misrepresentation of the nature of Judaism. The videos were made available to students and were used as an optional classroom resource in a unit of study designed to teach our students the principle of religious freedom that is a part of our country's heritage. The teachers immediately removed the videos from the 6th grade Social Studies class page on January 4th when they were made aware that the videos failed to provide an accurate, non-biased perspective of Judaism.

I am sharing this information with you to inform you of the facts and recognition that our region has received recent media attention around issues of religious tolerance and bias. While the videos used in our 6th grade were different than the one shown in a neighboring school district, they did not meet our District standard of an accurate and inclusive perspective of different religions. On behalf of the Nyack Board of Education, administrators, and teachers, I extend my deepest apologies to our students, families and community. Be assured that we have been in contact with the company that produced the videos to express our concerns and have prohibited their videos from being used in our classrooms.

Our administrators and teaching staff met on Monday with representatives of the Jewish Federation of Rockland County, the Anti-Defamation League, Rabbi Ariel Russo of Congregation Sons of Israel and Rabbi Reuben Modek of Hebrew Learning Circles to openly discuss this situation and identify opportunities to strengthen our commitment to a learning environment in our schools that reflect diverse cultural traditions and contributions. We will continue the work of developing our curricula and vetting supporting services. The religious leaders we met with on Monday have offered their support in this process. The District appreciates this offer and will work with these organizations and others to ensure that our schools reflect the diversity and mutual respect that is a core value of our community. Mr. Johnson and his staff will also be addressing the misconceptions from the videos with the 6th grade students and parents that may have viewed the video.

As a school district, we recognize our students' learning experiences are enhanced when there is a continuing, open dialogue between the community and the schools. Given our community's high level of interest in the education of children, I wanted you to be aware of these events.

Sincerely,

James J. Montesano, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools