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February 12, 2016

TO: Chief School Administrators
Charter School and Renaissance School Project Lead Persons

FROM: David C. Hespe 
Commissioner

SUBJECT: New Jersey Amistad Legislation
New Jersey Social Studies Standards

As the New Jersey Commissioner of Education, I serve as vice-chair of the New Jersey Amistad Commission (Commission). Assemblyman William Payne, author of the legislation establishing the Commission, all Commissioners, and I want to ensure that children in New Jersey's K-12 classrooms are achieving the important learning goals set forth by the New Jersey Legislature in the "Amistad Bill." (http://www.njleg.state.nj.us/2002/Bills/PL02/75_.HTM). We require your support and oversight to ensure that the Amistad curriculum is fully implemented into your district's social studies classes.

Although African-Americans have always been central to the events of American history, too often their contributions have been distorted or omitted. While Black History Month and Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. holiday programs, activities and lessons celebrate these seminal calendar events, they clearly do not satisfy the expectation and legal mandate that an inclusive curriculum, infused with the multiple, overlapping and complex national narratives and global history of African-Americans, be taught throughout the academic year.

To fully implement the vision of the law and to encourage and support inclusion of the Amistad curriculum, it has been aligned to New Jersey's Social Studies Standards (<http://www.state.nj.us/education/cccs/2014/ss>) and PARCC assessments. In addition, the Commission provides classroom teachers and their supervisors easily accessible resources and professional development to ensure effective teaching of New Jersey's inclusive social studies curriculum which infuses the central role of African-Americans into the local, state, national and global narratives of the human story. The Commission hosts a website (<http://www.njamistadcurriculum.net>) that provides all teachers access to inclusive K-12 social studies teaching materials and, throughout the academic year and during the summer, Commission staff offer professional development workshops facilitated by scholars and experienced teachers. Ultimately, we rely upon your administrative expertise and leadership to ensure educational excellence in the implementation of the Amistad curriculum.

Excellence in social studies teaching and learning is especially critical as the 21st century affirms what educators have known for several decades: civic engagement and literacy, as well as global cultural competence equips and empowers our students to engage the world successfully. Our students should have a deep knowledge of the past and present complexities within our national story and how our nation has been and continues to be inextricably connected to the entire world. The Amistad curriculum and the Social Studies Standards require that students learn about the world and about themselves through inclusive course content, for example, the co-existence of slavery and freedom in colonial Jamestown, Plymouth Rock and Princeton. The complexity of these stories deepens the critical thinking that shapes our students' personal identities as local and global citizens and it prepares our students to be intellectually and personally engaged in the world.

Regardless of the diversity within any specific New Jersey school district, a fully inclusive curriculum is necessary to comply with the spirit of the law. This broad, inclusive approach to teaching and learning history and social studies is important for all children, especially because we live in a state that is culturally diverse, where students need to understand the roles all people played in shaping major historical events. Successful implementation of the Amistad curriculum enhances children's self-esteem and, in doing so, fosters their awareness that they too can play an important role in the development of our nation and the world. Furthermore, the infusion of African-Americans into the curriculum is critical if we expect children to become full and active citizens of this country. We will be doing our students, our state and our nation a disservice if we fail to convey to children core knowledge about, an appreciation of, and respect for the richness of the many cultures and people that inhabit our nation and the world.

In order for students to achieve, they must be taught by teachers with deep content knowledge, who have an appreciation for multiple perspectives, and who possess unending enthusiasm for the discipline. Social studies teachers must address the content in a culturally responsive manner, creating a community of learners who respect individual differences. The Amistad Commission, its staff, website, scholars and experienced teachers provide the means to achieve these goals.

New Jersey has set the highest standard in the nation for creating an inclusive K-12 social studies curriculum. Our transformative Amistad goals have caught the attention of other states as the model to be followed. I know that we can count on your continued support as we work together to ensure that we meet our own expectation that all of New Jersey's children master our academic standards in ways that are inclusive of the African-American story. I will continue to address these issues regularly in order to affirm the importance of meeting the highest levels of implementation. The Commission and my office will continue periodic assessment of implementation to determine where professional development is needed and to determine which districts may serve as the models for the rest of the state. We will also be reviewing the guidelines for teacher licensure and Master Teacher qualifications to ensure that new teachers and Master Teachers are prepared to infuse African-Americans into the entire history and social studies curriculum. We will continue to offer professional development workshops for teachers and strongly recommend

that administrators and supervisors attend in order to offer the most effective leadership in infusing the Amistad curriculum into history and social studies classes.

If you have any questions, please contact Stephanie James Wilson, Executive Director of the Amistad Commission at the New Jersey Department of Education, at 609-984-6428 or at amistad@doe.state.nj.us or stephanie.wilson@doe.state.nj.us.

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