

Ms. MaryEllen Elia
New York State Education Department
Commissioner
89 Washington Ave.
Albany, N.Y. 12234

Dear Ms. Elia,

Of the many ways to teach critical thinking, clearly an area that needs work in our educational system, Oswego County high school teacher Michael DeNobile, had CiTi/Boces New Vision students prepare an argument in favor of or against exterminating Jews. Is this question really open for debate? Is the goal of this assignment to teach critical thinking or hate? We think the latter.

The history of Hitler's attempt to systematically exterminate Jews is well-documented in a variety of forms. Six million Jews and five million others, including Christians, gypsies, mentally infirmed, gays and lesbians were systematically murdered. Its occurrence is definitive, beyond question, despite the sickness of Holocaust deniers in the world.

What has Mr. DeNobile accomplished through this assignment? Is he attempting to reopen the case for genocide? Is there conceivably any justification for genocide? Any logical step taken to answer this question in the affirmative is simply irresponsible and a failure in civilization. But this was reportedly an exercise in critical thinking and, ironically, the Oswego County New Visions program exercised very little in suggesting creative ways to share this lesson.

Every community in the country cries for creative ways to solve a myriad of problems. Why not tackle a subject that currently resonates with students in this age group? The possibilities are endless.

That a New York education commissioner and an Oswego County school administration official would defend this assignment is simply shocking. You oversee 46 schools in nine districts. If this is the kind of education you support, you are failing your students, except for at least two young women from Central Square and Hannibal who reported the incident, and your communities. We assume this is an aberration to what otherwise must be positive experiences. Academic freedom, however, doesn't excuse educators from exercising discretion. Frankly, better oversight and a public apology are in order.

Regards,

Gary P. Saltzman
B'nai B'rith International President

Daniel S. Mariaschin
B'nai B'rith International CEO