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May 19, 2021

RE: Docket ID ED-2021-OESE-0033 Proposed Priorities – American History and Civics Education

To Whom It May Concern,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Office of Elementary and Secondary Education's Proposed Priorities for American History and Civics Education. The purposes outlined for the grant are honorable. We do not support, however, the example activities listed in the Proposed Rules by the U.S. Department of Education under Proposed Priority 1 – Projects That Incorporate Racially, Ethnically, Culturally, and Linguistically Diverse Perspectives into Teaching and Learning. We believe the department's emphasis on the examples listed (I.e., "1619 Project" and Kendi's approach) will result in classroom instruction that is harmful in students' development and ability to unite as American people.

Our role as educators is to help young people build understanding of our past and to equip them with the skills to uphold the best of our American traditions, including equality and respect for all people, as they become leaders in their homes and communities. Our students should understand the full picture of our nation's history – our fundamental values, our greatest achievements, and the long struggles to overcome injustice. They should learn about the mistakes as well as the triumphs in appropriate contexts. It is not the role of the U.S. Department of Education to prioritize curricular models that promote classroom environments where discrimination is combatted with more discrimination. No student should be victimized or held responsible for actions by former generations.

Proposed Priority 2 – Promoting Information Literacy Skills is a worthy priority. The activities listed in the proposed rules illuminate needs that have been made blatant in recent years in our country. Please consider the dissonance between what's prioritized under this area with the language included under Proposed Priority 1.

If we discriminate against or victimize students for the actions of our ancestors, we're impeding their ability to learn in the classroom today and their ability to lead with civility tomorrow. Classroom time should be spent developing knowledge based on facts and evidence and developing skills that require significant reflection and cognition. Strong instruction in social studies promotes skill development and understanding that serves students well in the present and in adulthood: critical thinking, empathy, unity, hope, collaboration with peers and professionals, the ability to synthesize disparate perspectives, the capacity to communicate with tact, and the know-how to sift fiction from fact.

South Dakota is currently taking action to strengthen civics and history education in our state. Our work includes a broad group of educators, citizens, civic leaders, indigenous people, and professionals.

Together, we will review and revise our content standards for social studies education to establish learning expectations of our students; develop instructional materials on South Dakota history, geography, and government; offer professional development for educators; share information with local decision makers on the alignment between curricular materials and our content standards; and provide grants to our K-12 schools to strengthen their civics, government, and history education.

Thank you for your consideration regarding the department's role on this important matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Tiffany Sanderson".

Tiffany Sanderson, Secretary