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Holocaust museum CEO: Education about genocide key to finding tolerance

Recently, the Jewish community observed the “10 Days of Repentance,” which is a period between [Rosh Hashanah](#), the Jewish New Year, and [Yom Kippur](#), the Day of Atonement. During this time, people of the Jewish faith are encouraged to apologize to those we have wronged and, importantly, reflect on the events of the past 12 months.

This year, that 10-day period was especially poignant given recent national and international events. Through my own reflection, I came out of the time believing now, more than ever, that the importance of education cannot be stressed enough.

The events that unfolded in Charlottesville, along with other incidents of hate that we’ve seen all over local and national news, are a sad reminder of how far our country is from true harmony and how the seeds of tolerance have yet to yield mature fruit.



Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld, CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center (*Photo:*

Supplied)

More than 75 years ago in Europe, the Holocaust killed more than 6 million people due to unstoppable hate and the inaction of bystanders. Since then, historians, museums, survivors and their families have been committed to acting so that such atrocities would not happen again – anywhere in the world – including the United States.

That is why we must learn from the critical lessons of the Holocaust and educate all, no matter their race, religion or background, about the importance of standing up and confronting hatred, anti-Semitism, racism and genocide. Education creates positive, empowering actions, helping to develop ethical decision-making and righteous behavior. It also inspires others to stand up in support of tolerance.

Last year, Gov. Rick Snyder signed the Revised School Code, House Bill 4493 into law. This requires that, in Michigan, the board of a school district or charter school must [ensure their schools' social studies curriculum](#) for grades eight-through-12 include age- and grade-appropriate instruction about genocide, including the Holocaust. This was an important step in laying a critical foundation of righteousness for future generations and is consistent with our mission to engage and empower the community by remembering the Holocaust and the political conditions in which anti-Semitism took root and flourished.

Having spent more than two decades in education, as well as having had the privilege to see hundreds of school and other groups, as well as thousands of individuals, visit the [Holocaust Memorial Center](#) Zekelman Family Campus in Farmington Hills, I have seen firsthand how such education can change a person's opinions and actions for the better.

Education not only teaches about what could happen if hate is not stopped, but also opens the lines of communication so people can think constructively about the events surrounding them.

Only through education and courage will our community, and communities throughout America drown out hateful and bigoted rhetoric, sentiments and actions.

Rabbi Eli Mayerfeld is CEO of the Holocaust Memorial Center.