

Governor Phil Murphy

Governor Murphy Signs Legislation to Establish the “Amistad Commission Exemplary Award Program”

08/31/2021

TRENTON – Governor Phil Murphy today signed S3654 into law establishing the “Amistad Commission Exemplary Award Program.” The program is charged with identifying outstanding educators who have shown a commitment to furthering student knowledge on the African slave trade, slavery in America, the vestiges of slavery in this country, and the contributions of African Americans to our society. Under this new law, school districts will submit their nominations through an application created by the Amistad Commission. Two recipients of the Amistad Commission Exemplary Award will be named by the Amistad Commission Exemplary Award Committee and will each receive an award of \$2,500 in recognition of their extraordinary contributions. Additionally, each school district in which a teacher award recipient is employed will also receive an Amistad Commission Exemplary Award in the amount of \$2,500. The award monies will be used to assist other teachers in the school district with the implementation of the curriculum and teaching techniques of the teacher award recipient.

“There is no way to understand American history without learning about the struggles and triumphs of our African American community,” **said Governor Murphy**. “This legislation honors the incredible educators who are committed to this important mission and ensuring that future generations of students understand the realities of the slave trade, America’s history of slavery, and the rich contributions of African Americans to our nation’s story.”

“The Amistad Commission Exemplary Award

Program continues to advance the Amistad Commission’s mission in ensuring that African-American history and experiences are taught in schools across New Jersey,” **said Acting Commissioner of Education Dr. Angelica Allen-McMillan**. “This legislation is indicative of the support of the Amistad Commission in the work transpiring in classrooms across the State.”

“The Amistad curriculum is a highly regarded educational program that infuses the history of African-Americans, the hardships they have overcome and the important contributions they have made to society into lesson plans,” **said Senator Steve Sweeney**. “By honoring educators who have implemented this curriculum effectively, we are supporting an honest accounting of the shameful legacy of slavery, the rich history of African-American accomplishments and the many reasons for cultural pride.”

“The story of America is one that was built with many people, but oftentimes this is not captured in our textbooks or taught in the curriculum. The Amistad Commission does important work towards ensuring that all of our students have a well-rounded understanding of the cultural, economic and societal impact that African-Americans have had on our nation and our state,” **said Senator Teresa Ruiz**. “Every opportunity we get to applaud the efforts of teachers is meaningful. We have to take every measure possible to make sure that all of our classrooms, both in policy and in practice, are educating our students on the true story of America.”

“Black history is American history. However, for too long, teaching this history and the history of slavery in this country was either rushed through or completely glossed over; this is why the Amistad Commission was created,” **said Senator Ron Rice**. “The Amistad curriculum teaches young folks about some of the darkest periods in our country’s history, and yet, also imparts on them the historical, cultural and social influence Black Americans have had on the United States. By rewarding and recognizing the efforts of some teachers who effectively educate this part of our history, we are incentivizing all educators to do the same.”

"The development of the Amistad curriculum was a pivotal moment in New Jersey education. It is a significant tool, guiding a more well-rounded lesson in American history for students and teachers," **said Assemblymembers Mila Jasey, Shavonda Sumter, Pamela Lampitt, and Annette Quijano, in a joint statement.** "The history of African-Americans, the hardships overcome and the critical contributions they have made to society is an important part of providing a full understanding of American history. Honoring educators who have effectively and imaginatively used the Amistad curriculum in the classroom will inspire more teachers across the state in how to teach lessons on the rich history of African Americans."

"The journey toward justice is a long one, and every step we take along the way matters," **said NJEA President-elect Sean M. Spiller.** "Our president, Marie Blistan, was a tireless advocate for the Amistad Curriculum and for this award, so it is fitting that the bill was signed today, on her final day in office. We salute the Legislature and Gov. Murphy for making it law and honor Marie for her commitment to racial justice and truth. Teaching hard truths is important, and this law helps ensure our students will know enough about the past to help build a better future."

Governor Phil Murphy

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[Economy & Jobs \(/governor/initiatives/#Economy\)](#)

[Education \(/governor/initiatives/#Education\)](#)

[Environment \(/governor/initiatives/#Environment\)](#)

[Health \(/governor/initiatives/#Health\)](#)

[Law & Justice \(/governor/initiatives/#Justice\)](#)

[Transportation \(/governor/initiatives/#Transportation\)](#)

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[Administrative Orders \(/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/ao/approved/ao_archive.shtml)

[Direct Appointments \(/governor/news/appointments\)](/governor/news/appointments)

[Advice and Consent Appointments \(/governor/news/acappointments\)](/governor/news/acappointments)

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[Transition Reports \(/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml\)](/governor/news/reports/approved/reports_archive.shtml)

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