

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P. O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

September 13, 2011

Dr. Eric Wright
Superintendent
Huntington Independent School District
PO Box 328
Huntington, TX 75949

Re: Religious Fliers

Dear Dr. Wright:

I am writing on behalf of a concerned parent, as well as other Texas members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), who object to the distribution of religious fliers at public schools. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization representing over 17,000 members across the country including 800 members in Texas. FFRF's purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

It is our information and understanding that Salem Missionary Baptist Church coordinated with school officials to send home fliers for a Christian "youth rally" on August 27th, 2011, which asked if children "want God to set a fire in [their] soul[s]?" This event was to include "Bible Study, Praise & Worship," noting that "Bible & change of clothes are only things needed!" (see attached flier). It is our understanding that these fliers were distributed by at least one teacher in Huntington Intermediate School, who apparently received the fliers and distribution instructions from Principal Ben Wilroy.

The practice of distributing religious fliers by public schools is objectionable on many different grounds. First, school-sponsored distributions of religious material carry the stamp of official endorsement. Certainly, small children are apt to confuse official school notices with religious propaganda. Second, even if the school disassociates itself from the religious activity through a disclaimer (which was not included in this instance), the distribution of literature for religious organizations and activities requires the time and resources of paid school personnel. Policies that allow these third parties to distribute their literature forces teachers of diverse views and beliefs to distribute religious promotional materials.

Public schools have a constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion. When a school distributes religious literature to its students, it has unconstitutionally entangled itself with a religious message – in this case, a Christian message. Such a practice

alienates those non-Christian students, teachers, and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being promoted by the school. It also alienates the 15% of the U.S. population who identify as non-religious (American Religious Identification Survey, 2008).

Clearly, this sort of entanglement between religion and government official is unseemly and inappropriate. Many enlightened school districts across the country have sought to avoid this entanglement by prohibiting third parties from using the take home fliers system altogether. We respectfully request that you amend your take-home flier policy to restrict this invaluable service to school-sponsored or co-sponsored events.

We ask that you inform us at your earliest convenience, in writing, of the steps you are taking to remedy these constitutional concerns so that we may notify our complainants.

Sincerely,



Stephanie A. Schmitt
Staff Attorney

DO YOU WANT GOD TO SET A FIRE
IN YOUR SOUL?

*Join us on Saturday
August 27th @ 10 am till 7 pm
Salem Missionary Baptist Church
Youth Rally
with "THEY SAY"
& Youth Minister Tyler Conner
from Clear Camps*

Day will include Bible Study, Praise & Worship,
games, lunch & dinner.

Bible & change of clothes are only things needed!

Salem Missionary Baptist
965 Ralph Nerren
More information needed contact
936-675-5629 or 936-366-6805

AWANAS & Youth group resumes
September 7th @ 6:30 pm