



# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION FOUNDATION

P.O. Box 750 • Madison WI 53701 • (608) 256-8900 • [www.ffrf.org](http://www.ffrf.org)

August 26, 2009

**SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & FAX  
(330) 877-4754**

Jeff Wendorf  
Superintendent  
Lake Local School District  
11936 King Church Ave NW  
Uniontown OH 44685

Ken Brott  
School Board President  
Lake Local Schools  
11936 King Church Ave NW  
Uniontown OH 44685

Re: Lake Local Schools' Mission Statement

Dear Mr. Wendorf and Mr. Brott:

I am writing on behalf of concerned district residents and taxpayers and other members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) who object to specific wording in the District's mission statement. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 13,700 members across the country including nearly 350 members in Ohio. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to represent the rights of non-believers.

It is our information and understanding that the mission statement for Lake Local Schools includes references to religion. Specifically, the statement reads in relevant part:

**"WE VALUE: Responsibility, honesty, respect, integrity, commitment, *belief in God* and religious freedom, our community, our partnerships, and every person as a unique individual with the ability to acquire and apply knowledge." (emphasis added)**

This wording was included in the August 2009 issue of the Lake Local Board of Education newsletter, *Blue Streak News*, which is an official public school publication. Please find enclosed a copy of the front page of the newsletter.

COPY

FAXED  
8/26/09

It is our further understanding and information that another mailer sent to all postal customers in the Lake Local School District (hereinafter "District") in either 2007 or 2008 included this language as well. Please find enclosed a copy of that mailer which lists "Our Values.... The belief in God and religious freedom is important."

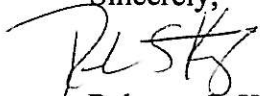
Moreover, our complainants inform us that this language used to be on the homepage of the Lake Local School District's website, but has been removed recently. However, upon further research, we discovered that the value for "belief in God" language still exists on the website. Please find enclosed a copy of the relevant webpage.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance or promote religion. *See generally, Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Arkansas*, 393 U.S. 97 (1967); *Sch. Dist. of Abington Twshp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). No public school employee may urge religious points of view on students including stressing the importance of belief in a god.

Listing "belief in God" as an important value violates the First Amendment because it imposes religious sentiments upon students and their parents within the school district. Students and their parents cannot possibly conclude that "belief in God" on the list is merely a "suggestion." This value clearly demonstrates that the school not only prefers religion over non-religion but also religious students over non-religious students. This character trait also offends the fifteen percent of the U.S. population that is non-religious. This "[s]chool sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents "that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community and accompanying message to adherents [sic] that they are insiders, favored members of the political community." *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-10 (2001)(quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. at 668)(O'Connor, J., concurring). The School District's promotion of religion over non-religion impermissibly turns any non-believing Lake Local School student, parent, teacher, or staff member into an outsider.

We ask that you take immediate action and remove this language from the mission statement. "Belief in God" cannot and should not be used in any official District or School Board publication, whether printed or posted on the Internet. We further ask that you notify us immediately in writing of the steps the school district takes to remedy this violation so that we may notify our complainant. This is a particularly egregious and flagrant violation and we do need your assurances that your District will take immediate action to end the violation.

Sincerely,



Rebecca S. Kratz  
Staff Attorney

Enclosures