

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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January 29, 2019

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: David.Quattrochi@carrolltonschools.org

David Quattrochi
Superintendent
Carrollton Exempted Village Schools
252 Third St. NE
Carrollton, OH 44615

Re: Unconstitutional Religious Displays

Dear Superintendent Quattrochi:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring in Carrollton Exempted Village Schools (CEVS). We appreciated your swift response to our August 30, 2018 letter, and I hope that we can resolve this matter quickly as well.

A concerned parent has reported that there are bible quotes posted in the cafeteria of their child's school. It is our understanding that there are two bible verses posted in the Bell-Heron Middle School cafeteria. The first says, "The Helmet of Salvation – The Lord is my light and my salvation-whom shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life of whom shall I be afraid. *Psalm 27:1*." The second says, "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it. *Mark 8:4-35*." Please see the enclosed photo.

We write to ask that the District remove these religious endorsements from its property immediately.

As you are aware, the District violates the Constitution when it allows its schools to display religious symbols or messages. Public schools may not advance, prefer, or promote religion. *See 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 Twp. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). This display violates this basic constitutional prohibition by creating the appearance that the District prefers religion over nonreligion and Christianity over all other faiths.

Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools. *See, e.g., Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980) (ruling that the Ten Commandments may not be displayed on classroom walls); *Lee v. York County*, 484 F.3d 689 (4th Cir. 2007) (ruling that a teacher may be barred from displaying religious messages on classroom bulletin boards); *Washegesic v. Bloomingdale Pub. Schs.*, 33 F.3d 679 (6th Cir. 1994) (ruling that a picture of Jesus may not be displayed in a public school).

Religion is a divisive force in public schools. The Supreme Court has repeatedly noted that “[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 an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O’Connor, J., concurring)). This message is particularly impermissible when it is presented to such young and impressionable students.

This religious display is particularly inappropriate given that about 38% of Americans born after 1987 are not religious.¹ The display alienates those nonreligious students, families, teachers, and members of the public whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being promoted by the school.

In recognition of the District’s constitutional obligation to remain neutral toward religion, please remove these Bible verses immediately. Please reply in writing with the steps you are taking to remedy this constitutional violation.

Sincerely,



Christopher Line
Patrick O’Reiley Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosure

¹ Robert P. Jones & Daniel Cox, *America’s Changing Religious Identity*, PUBLIC RELIGION RESEARCH INSTITUTE (Sept. 6, 2017), available at www.prii.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/PRRI-Religion-Report.pdf.

THE HELMET OF SALVATION

The Lord is my light
and my salvation -
whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the
stronghold of my life
of whom shall
I be afraid?
- Psalm 27:1



Whoever wishes to come after
Me must deny himself, take
up his cross, and follow Me. For
whoever wishes to save his life
will lose it. But whoever loses
himself for My sake and that of the
gospel will save it.

- Mark 8:34-35