

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

May 6, 2019

SENT VIA EMAIL AND U.S. MAIL:
thompson@dodgeland.k12.wi.us

Annette Thompson
Superintendent
Dodgeland School District
401 South Western Avenue
Juneau, WI 53039

Re: Religious statement in field trip rules

Dear Superintendent Thompson:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation regarding an unconstitutional religious statement in written rules for a field trip earlier this school year. FFRF is a Wisconsin-based national nonprofit organization with more than 31,000 members across the country, including more than 1,400 members in Wisconsin. FFRF's purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church, and to educate the public on matters related to nontheism.

A concerned District community member contacted us to report that students and parents were asked to sign a religious statement in a list of rules related to Dodgeland Middle School's field trip to Washington D.C. from April 8–April 12 of this year. The only rule written in bold and italicized text stated, "***REMEMBER AT ALL TIMES, AND IN ALL PLACES THAT YOU ARE REPRESENTING OUR GOD AND SAVIOR . . .***" A copy of this statement is enclosed for your review. We understand that the District required students and parents to sign this document.

It is unconstitutional for a public school to require students to affirm that they represent a "god and savior" while on a school-sponsored field trip. We request that you commence an immediate investigation into these concerns and provide a written response detailing the steps the District takes to address this issue.

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 Twp.*

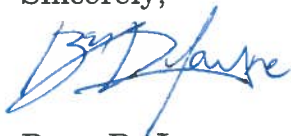
v. Schempp, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). The Supreme Court has held that “the preservation and transmission of religious beliefs and worship is a responsibility and a choice committed to the private sphere.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 310 (2000) (quoting *Lee*, 505 U.S. at 589). In *Lee* the Supreme Court extended the prohibition of school-sponsored religious activities beyond classrooms to all school functions, holding prayers delivered by non-school personnel at public high school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion. Similarly, requiring students and parents to sign a religious statement as part of a school field trip violates the Establishment Clause.

We understand that this trip, and the statement of rules, involved both public schools and private parochial schools, and we presume that the parochial schools were responsible for the religious language in the rules. Failing to identify and correct this emphasized religious statement is an alarming oversight and raises concerns that the District may not have taken sufficient action to ensure that the trip itself was free from religious exercises or statements of religious endorsement.

If the District partners with parochial schools, the District must take appropriate steps to ensure that the parochial schools’ religious practices and statements of religious endorsement do not include any District students. If parochial schools are not willing to forego religious exercises when District students are present, or to omit religious language from documents sent to District students, then the District must not partner with those schools in the future.

Please investigate this mistake and provide a written response detailing the steps taken to ensure that all future District events and rules will be entirely secular so that we may notify our complainant that this issue has been resolved. Thank you for your attention to these concerns.

Sincerely,



Ryan D. Jayne
Staff Attorney

Enclosure

Dodgeland Middle School – St. John’s Juneau – Hustisford Middle School – St. Stephen’s
Horicon – St. Stephen’s Beaver Dam - Holy Cross Lutheran Madison
WASHINGTON, D.C. Trip
APRIL 8 - APRIL 12, 2019

TO: WASHINGTON D.C. STUDENTS AND PARENTS/GUARDIANS

RE: GENERAL RULES FOR WASHINGTON D.C. TRIP
CONSEQUENCES: (IF STUDENTS CHOOSE NOT TO FOLLOW RULES)

FROM: Bill Otte & Rick Cody

FOLLOWING IS A LISTING OF GENERAL RULES AND CONSEQUENCES FOR
OUR WASHINGTON D.C. TRIP. THEY HAVE BEEN DISCUSSED AND
APPROVED BY THE CHAPERONES.

GENERAL RULES

1. LISTEN TO, AND FOLLOW DIRECTIONS THE FIRST TIME THEY ARE GIVEN.
THIS INCLUDES CHAPERONES, TOUR GUIDES, AND BUS DRIVERS.
2. BE PROMPT AND ON TIME FOR ALL SCHEDULED MEETINGS DURING THE
TRIP. IT IS IMPORTANT THAT WE STAY ON TIME, WE HAVE MUCH TO SEE.
3. STAY IN CONTACT WITH YOUR ASSIGNED GROUP AND CHAPERONE. FOR
YOUR SAFETY, YOU MUST BE WITH YOUR CHAPERONE AT ALL TIMES.
4. RESPECT THE RIGHTS AND PROPERTY OF PERSONS TRAVELING IN OUR
GROUP. BE COURTEOUS AND RESPECT THE RIGHTS AND PROPERTY OF
PEOPLE WE HAVE CONTACT WITH THROUGHOUT OUR TRIP. **REMEMBER
AT ALL TIMES, AND IN ALL PLACES THAT YOU ARE REPRESENTING OUR
GOD AND SAVIOR, YOUR SCHOOL, YOUR PARENTS, YOUR TRIP LEADERS
AND CHAPERONES!!!**
5. PLEASE REMEMBER THAT YOU ARE REPRESENTING YOUR SCHOOL AND
COMMUNITY AND AS SUCH WE ARE ENCOURAGING STUDENTS TO
REFLECT PRIDE IN YOUR PERSONAL APPEARANCE. BASIC GUIDELINES
ARE AS FOLLOWS:
 1. FOOTWEAR MUST BE WORN AT ALL TIMES.
 2. NO RIPPED OR TORN CLOTHING.