

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

August 10, 2020

**SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL:**

blackr@alamoschool.org

Reecha Black  
Director of Schools  
Alamo City School District  
265 East Park St.  
Alamo, TN 38001

Re: Promotion of prayer on social media

Dear Ms. Black:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation on the Alamo City School District Facebook page. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 32,000 members across the country, including more than 400 members in Tennessee. Our purposes are to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church and to educate the public on matters relating to nontheism.

A concerned complainant contacted us to report that on July 26, 2020 the Alamo City School District posted a graphic on its official Facebook account encouraging students and parents to “Park & Pray Everyday.”<sup>1</sup> The graphic reads:

Driving past a school? Pull in, park, and pray for our children, teachers, and staff!  
Driving past an administration building? Pull in, park and pray for our leaders!  
Driving past a bus lot? Pull in, park and pray for our bus drivers!<sup>2</sup>

I write to request that all District schools cease posting religious content on their official social media pages and to request that the above-referenced post and any like it be taken down immediately. When a government entity like a public school urges citizens to pray, it endorses religion in violation of the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

It is well settled that public schools may not advance, prefer or promote religion.

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<sup>1</sup> See Enclosure.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/AlamoCitySchool/photos/a.640216056110675/2130395127092753/?type=3&theater>.

*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). Advancing, preferring, and promoting religion is exactly what a school district does when it posts religious messages on official public social media pages.

These religious messages give the appearance of District endorsement of religion over nonreligion and exert an exclusionary influence on many families. As the Supreme Court has noted, “[s]chool sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to . . .

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, 309–310 (2000) (internal quotations omitted). This includes the 26 percent of Americans who are nonreligious.<sup>3</sup>

To avoid further Establishment Clause concerns, the District must refrain from posting religious messages on its official social media pages. Please inform us in writing of the steps the District is taking to ensure that the rights of conscience of its students and families are protected. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and I hope that this letter finds you well.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "B. Johnson", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brendan Johnson  
*Robert G. Ingersoll Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

BCJ:sfb

Enclosure

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<sup>3</sup> *In U.S., Decline of Christianity Continues at Rapid Pace*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (Oct. 17, 2019), available at <https://www.pewforum.org/2019/10/17/in-u-s-decline-of-christianity-continues-at-rapid-pace/>.



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July 26

# School Begins Soon!

Let's provide our  
**CHILDREN, TEACHERS,  
STAFF, and  
ADMINISTRATORS**  
with all the  
**PPE they need!**



## P-ark & P-ray E-very day!

Driving past a school? Pull in, park and pray  
for our children, teachers, and staff!

Driving past an administration building?  
Pull in, park and pray for our leaders!

Driving past a bus lot? Pull in,  
park and pray for our bus drivers!



**DO YOUR PART, PARK AND PRAY EVERY DAY!**