

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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

July 30, 2020

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: jeff.schuler@cusd200.org

Dr. Jeff Schuler
Superintendent
Community Unit School District 200
130 West Park Avenue
Wheaton, IL 60189

Re: Unconstitutional promotion of a religious event

Dear Dr. Schuler:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation that occurred in Community Unit School District 200. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 32,000 members across the country, including more than 1,000 members in Illinois, and a local FFRF Metropolitan Chicago Chapter. 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 district 200 parent contacted FFRF to report that the district promoted a religious worship event through a recent summer activity handout that was distributed to parents district-wide via an official district email. The district sent out a “Summer Choice Board” handout which provided various summer activities for students to participate in. One of these activities, “Summerfest Goes Wild,” was a Christian worship event presented by Highpoint Church. The event began with a woman explaining, “We are here for one reason, and that’s to get to know who God is and His great love for each of us.”¹ Please see a copy of the handout enclosed.

While we understand that the district wanted to provide a list of activities to “enrich summer learning,” the district cannot encourage students to attend a Christian worship event. We write to ensure that the district will not promote religious events or activities again in the future.

It is a well settled law that public schools may not advance or endorse 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); and *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962). School endorsement of a religious worship event is impermissible “because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not insiders, favored members of the political community.’” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309-10 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688)

¹ <https://bit.ly/2D6xs5r>

(1984) (O'Connor, J., concurring). It also conflicts with the personal religious and nonreligious views of many district students and families, as 35 percent of Americans are not Christians, which includes 26 percent of Americans that are not religiously affiliated.²

We request that the district take immediate action to ensure that religious events are not promoted by its schools in the future. Please respond in writing so that we may notify our complainant of the steps the district is taking to protect the constitutional rights of all district students and families. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter, and I hope this letter finds you in good health.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Chris Line". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Christopher Line
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

CAL:sfb

Enclosure

² *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/>.

<p>10 Go for a walk. Pick a starting point and an ending point. Count the number of steps it takes you to get there. Have the adult with you count their steps. Is the number of steps the same? Different? Think about it and try to explain what you discovered.</p>	<p>11 Plant a small summer garden. Don't have room? Plant some seeds in cups and place them by a window.</p> <p>Observe the plants as they grow. How often do you water the plants? When do the seeds germinate? When do the flowers bloom? How big does the plant get? How long does it take? What is the final result?</p> <p>Keep track of this in your science journal. Write dates, details, or draw what you see.</p>	<p>12 Do you have a favorite TV show? Try this to build some skills: turn off the volume and watch it with closed captioning on. You will really need to flex your reading muscles for this challenge.</p>
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<p>13 Create a book review for a book you finish reading. You can write about: -I liked the book/didn't like the book because _____. -My favorite character was _____ because _____. Share your book review with friends and family to encourage them to read with you. <u>Fun challenge:</u> After someone else finishes reading the book you suggest, host a book talk!</p>	<p>14 Sunsets can be very beautiful. If there are some clouds in the sky, they can create a sea of colors that paint the sky - blues, pinks, purples, oranges, yellows, and sometimes reds! Sit outside and watch a sunset with your family. Pay attention to the different colors. Which one is your favorite? Take the time you are sitting outside in between the sky watching to tell stories or laugh at jokes. <u>Fun challenge:</u> Try to color or paint your favorite sunset!</p>		
<p>15 The Morton Arboretum is reopening to members on June 1 and to the general public on June 15. More information about tickets and precautions can be found here.</p>	<p>16 All Illinois has partnered organizations to engage learning and inquiry for our students. Check out the variety of resources here: https://www.enjoyillinois.com/allinillinois</p>	<p>17 Check out Home Depot & Discovery Education for fun science and engineering projects: https://sciencefaircentral.com/</p>	
<p>18 <u>Wheaton Public Library</u> Join one of the many virtual clubs at the Wheaton Public Library. You can choose between Harry Potter, Book Tastings, Mad Libs, Spanish Conversation, and more. You can find a complete this at wheatonlibrary.org/calendar</p>	<p>19 <u>Warrenville Public Library</u> Check out the virtual events hosted by the Warrenville Public Library such as STEAM Team and Virtual Escape Rooms. You can learn more at https://warrenville.libnet.info/events</p>	<p>20 <u>Winfield Public Library</u> Here is the link to the packet Winfield Library created for kids and families. It is packed with all kinds of activities and games. http://www.winfield.lib.il.us/winfield/SummerFunKidsFamilies.pdf</p>	<p>21 <u>Carol Stream Public Library</u> Interested in learning to play chess? You can by joining the virtual chess club with the Carol Stream Public Library. You can learn more at https://carolstream.librarycalendar.com/events/chess-club-online-1</p>
<p>22 Highpoint will be doing Summerfest Goes Wild, July 20-24 for preschool - grade 5. There will be an online program and activities for kids to do at home. There will also be the option of purchasing Summerfest in a box which will include a t-shirt and all the materials needed to do the activities for \$25</p>	<p>23 <u>Choose</u> a no-bake recipe to make and enjoy with your family. (One delicious example is a chocolate eclair cake - yum!) Carefully follow the recipe, measure the ingredients, and divide it into pieces to share with your family. You will want to set aside half of it to have again later.</p> <p>Following directions, using measurement, and understanding fractions can lead to delicious treats!</p>	<p>24 Is it a clear night? Can you see the stars? Did you know clusters of stars make shapes called constellations?</p> <p>Look up some constellations online and see if you can find them in the night sky. If you want to learn more, check out NASA's website: https://spaceplace.nasa.gov/search/constellations/</p>	