

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND EMAIL:

david.raleigh@larue.kyschools.us

David Raleigh
Superintendent
LaRue County Public Schools
208 College St.
Hodgenville, KY 42748

Re: Religious messages displayed on school property for students

Dear Superintendent Raleigh:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding prayer events that occur at LaRue County Public Schools (LCPS).

FFRF understands that for the past several years the LaRue County Ministerial Association has rented LCPS facilities in order to host an annual prayer event each August, just before the start of the school year. We understand that during these events participants were asked to write and post “prayer notes” around the school for students to find when the school year begins.

We write to ask that, if the LaRue County Ministerial Association rents LCPS facilities for a community prayer event this year, they be prohibited from leaving religious notes or materials for students, and that any religious notes and materials they leave on district property be removed before students return from summer break.

LCPS violates the Constitution when it allows its schools to display religious 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). The prayer notes left by the LaRue

County Ministerial Association violate 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 painting of Jesus may not be displayed in a public school). Like the schools in *Washegesic* and *Lee* the District must remove religious iconography from its schools.

Public schools are not an appropriate place for outside adults to try to spread their faith to children. The prayer notes left for students attending public school constitute “a utilization of the tax-established and tax-supported public school system to aid religious groups to spread their faith.” *McCullum*, 333 U.S. at 210.

LCPS must immediately discontinue allowing private individuals to leave religious messages for students on public school grounds. Please inform us promptly in writing of the steps the LCPS takes to remedy this constitutional violation.

Sincerely,



Dante CH Harootunian
Patrick O'Reiley Legal Fellow
Freedom From Religion Foundation