

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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January 28, 2016

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL & EMAIL  
sbird@trouplsd.org

Mr. Stuart Bird  
Superintendent  
Troup Independent School District  
P.O. Box 578  
Troup, TX 75789

Re: Religious endorsement on Troup ISD official website

Dear Superintendent Bird:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to a bible passage quoted on the Troup Independent School District (District) website home page. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 23,000 members across the country, including nearly 1,000 in Texas. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional separation of church and state.

We have been informed that the District's official website prominently features a bible quote on its home page. The quote is 1 Samuel 17:48, "As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him." A picture of the webpage is enclosed.

We write to ensure that the District not endorse the bible or religion on its webpage.

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). No public school may urge religious viewpoints on students by granting special status to a religious text like the bible.

The story of David and Goliath as told in the bible is not just understood as a story of an underdog triumphing over great odds,<sup>1</sup> it's a story about the power of the Judeo-Christian god. Before David strikes down Goliath, he states, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied." 1 Samuel 17:45. Indeed, David explicitly states, "All those

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<sup>1</sup> For a compelling alternative interpretation, listen to Malcolm Gladwell's TED Talk, *The unheard story of David and Goliath*, available at [www.ted.com/talks/malcolm\\_gladwell\\_the\\_unheard\\_story\\_of\\_david\\_and\\_goliath](http://www.ted.com/talks/malcolm_gladwell_the_unheard_story_of_david_and_goliath). Gladwell points out that historically David's sling is "an incredibly devastating weapon" with stopping power "roughly equal to the stopping power of a [.45 caliber] handgun." Gladwell speculates that the character of Goliath would have been at a profound disadvantage, especially since "throughout history, many of the most famous giants have all had acromegaly," a form of gigantism "caused by a benign tumor on your pituitary gland that causes an overproduction of human growth hormone" and causes "either double vision or [profound nearsightedness]."

gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands." 1 Samuel 17:47. This is a story meant to convert readers to Judeo-Christianity.

Quoting a bible story about the power of the Judeo-Christian god on the District's website suggests that it prefers the Judeo-Christianity over all minority religions and over nonreligion. Students and parents will reasonably interpret the District's message to mean that Christian families have a special status within the school community while non-Christian students and families are outsiders. As the Supreme Court has long recognized, "[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, 309-10 (2000) (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O'Connor, J., concurring)).

By quoting the bible on its website, the District unconstitutionally lends its power and prestige to Christianity, thereby excluding the nearly 30% of adult Americans who are non-Christian and the over 43% of younger Americans, those born after 1981, who practice a minority religion or no religion at all.<sup>2</sup>

We ask that the District remove the bible quote from its website. Surely there is a religiously neutral story about overcoming great odds that could be referenced in place of this religiously-loaded one. Please inform us in writing of the steps the District takes to remedy this violation so that we can notify our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention to this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sam Grover', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Sam Grover  
Staff Attorney

Enclosure

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<sup>2</sup> *America's Changing Religious Landscape*, PEW RESEARCH CENTER (May 12, 2015), available at [www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/](http://www.pewforum.org/2015/05/12/americas-changing-religious-landscape/).

# Troup ISD

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## Welcome to Troup ISD

1 Samuel 17:48 says, "As Goliath moved closer to attack, David quickly ran out to meet him." In Troup ISD we work to engender the spirit of attacking the problems that present themselves day in and day out. Teaching the students to run to meet the giants in their lives is a goal we fully embrace. Welcome to the Troup ISD web site. We trust that you will be able to find everything you are looking for and remember, you are always welcome at Troup ISD.

