

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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December 20, 2024

**SENT VIA EMAIL: [kstumpf@isd186.org](mailto:kstumpf@isd186.org)**

Kurt Stumpf  
Superintendent  
Pequot Lakes Public Schools  
30805 Olson Street  
Pequot Lakes, MN 56472

Re: Unconstitutional adult-led religious club

Dear Mr. Stumpf:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation occurring in Pequot Lakes Public Schools. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 40,000 members across the country, including more than 900 members and two local chapters in Minnesota. 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 parent has informed us that an outside youth minister is leading the Pequot Lakes Middle School chapter of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes. We understand that this pastor preaches at each meeting of the organization and controls student participation by calling upon them to speak only when they raise their hands.

We write to ask that you take immediate action to ensure that the FCA chapter at Pequot Lakes Middle School is entirely student-led.

It is well settled that public schools may not show favoritism towards or coerce belief or participation in 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). A public school may not give outside religious representatives special access to students for the purpose of promoting religion and proselytizing students, including leading students in religious activities during school-sponsored meetings.

Further, the District may not allow outside adults or organizations to lead, organize, or regularly participate in “student” religious clubs. The Equal Access Act dictates the limited extent to which religious clubs may exist in secondary schools. The EAA requires that “**nonschool persons may not direct, conduct, control, or regularly attend activities of student groups.**” 20 U.S.C. § 4071(c)(5) (emphasis added). Any religious student clubs, such as FCA, must be bona fide student clubs that are student-led and student-organized. Outside adults cannot regularly attend FCA activities and any school staff in attendance may only participate in a

supervisory capacity. Here, it appears that the pastor is regularly participating in, attending, and leading PLMS FCA activities, all in violation of both the EAA and the First Amendment.

Schools cannot constitutionally allow religious organizations to treat schools as a recruiting ground for their religious mission. The District's practice of allowing outside religious representatives unique access to its students demonstrates unconstitutional favoritism not only for religion over non-religion, but in this case Christianity over all other faiths. The District's actions needlessly alienate and exclude those students who are a part of the 49 percent of Generation Z who are religiously unaffiliated.<sup>1</sup>

In order to comply with the Constitution, we ask that the District investigate and ensure that this pastor, or any other adult representative of a religious organization, is no longer allowed access to students in order to proselytize them and lead them in religious exercise. Additionally, the District must ensure that outside adults are not permitted to regularly lead, attend, or participate in student religious clubs, including FCA. Please respond in writing with the steps the District is taking to address this matter. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,



Kyle Steinberg  
*Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*

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<sup>1</sup> Ryan P. Burge, *2022 Cooperative Election Study of 60,000 respondents*, Apr. 3, 2023, [www.religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/](http://www.religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/).