FREEDOM FROM RELIGION foundation

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

April 2, 2025

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: greggoryslate@davidson.k12.nc.us

Gregg Slate Superintendent Davidson County Schools 250 County School Rd Davidson, NC 27292

Re: Unconstitutional religious assembly

Dear Superintendent Slate:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) concerning a report that Hasty Elementary School permitted a Christian boy band to perform a religious concert for students. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with more than 42,000 members across the country, including over 900 members and a local chapter in North Carolina. 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 reports that on March 11, 2025, 3 Heath Brothers, a Christian boy band, performed for all K-5 students at Hasty Elementary School for a school-sponsored assembly. We understand that the performance included a performance of nine songs, such as "Dream Small," which makes numerous mentions of God and Jesus, including telling people to "let Jesus use you where you are," and "Good Good Life," which includes the explicitly religious lyrics, "Loving God and loving people, that's what it's all about." We are informed that parents received no notice of this religious assembly.

We are also informed that 3 Heath Brothers distributed a Keys for Kids devotional pamphlet at the assembly. Keys for Kids is a youth ministry organization that exists "to ignite a passion for Christ in kids, teens, and families worldwide." This pamphlet includes explicitly religious stories with references to bible verses. For example, the booklet instructs students not to take revenge because "that's not what Jesus wants you to do," and instead they must "give your burden to Jesus, and trust Him to help you respond to that person with His love." Please see the enclosed photos.

¹ https://www.shazam.com/en-us/song/1480435241/dream-small.

² https://www.shazam.com/en-us/song/1769031798/good-good-life.

³ https://www.keysforkids.org/About-Us/Statement-of-Faith.

We write to ask the District to investigate this situation and take immediate action to ensure that it will never again host religious performers to proselytize students. Additionally, we request that the District issue guidance reminding its schools that they must comply with the First Amendment and cease entangling the public school environment with religion.

It is unconstitutional to take away instructional time from students to expose them to religious proselytizing. Public schools may not show favoritism toward or coerce belief or participation in religion. Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe, 530 U.S. 290 (2000); 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); McCollum v Bd. of Ed., 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Here, Hasty Elementary School crossed the constitutional line and violated students' First Amendment rights by inviting a Christian band to perform for students and hand out devotional pamphlets during the school day. This religious assembly was particularly coercive given that students are a captive audience, and elementary students are particularly young. Elementary students cannot legally or practically be expected to dissent and leave what appeared to be a mandatory school assembly in order to resist their school violating their constitutional rights. Further, the school violated parents' First Amendment right to determine which faith, if any, they teach their children to believe.

The District cannot allow non-school persons to treat schools as a recruiting ground for their religious mission. Public schools are not an appropriate place for outside adults to convince students to convert to Christianity. This assembly constitutes "a utilization of the tax-established and tax-supported public school system to aid religious groups to spread their faith." *McCollum v Bd. of Ed.*, 333 U.S. 203, 210 (1948).

FFRF takes these kinds of violations seriously and we are willing to vigorously defend students' rights. We settled a lawsuit against a school district in West Virginia after it allowed a preacher to hold an assembly to proselytize students during the school day. *See Mays v. Cabell Cnty Bd. of Educ.*, No. 3:22-cv-00085 (S.D. W.Va., Filed Feb. 17, 2022). As part of that settlement, the district agreed to pay nearly \$175,000 in attorney fees.⁴

Elementary school students are vulnerable to peer pressure and feel an intense need to fit in with their classmates and be liked. The "[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*, 530 U.S. at 309-10 (quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984) (O'Connor, J., concurring)). Hosting a mandatory religious assembly during the school day excludes and marginalizes students who are a part of the 49 percent of Generation Z who are religiously unaffiliated.⁵

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⁴ ffrf.org/news/news-releases/item/42958-ffrf-victory-w-va-families-secure-policy-changes-in-religious-revival-lawsuit.

⁵ 2022 Cooperative Election Study of 60,000 respondents, analyzed by Ryan P. Burge, www.religioninpublic.blog/2023/04/03/gen-z-and-religion-in-2022/.

The District must investigate this situation and ensure its schools immediately refrain from inviting religious performers to proselytize students. The District should also consider reprimanding those staff members involved with allowing this school-sponsored religious worship concert to take place. At the very least, all District staff members must be reminded of their constitutional obligations as public school employees. Please notify us in writing of the steps the District is taking to remedy this serious constitutional violation and prevent a recurrence so we may inform our parent complainant. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

Madeline Ziegler

Staff Attorney

Freedom From Religion Foundation

Madeline Fiegler

MEZ:kjs

Enclosures





3 HEATH BROTHERS

MARCH · APRIL · MAY

rocks of hurt, sadness, and anger they can't seem to get rid of." everyone has luggage they carry in their lives? Even bullies? was thinking about something you said. Are you sure Dad nodded. "Bullies often have the heaviest life tuggage of all. It's filled with

by ourselves that we try to push our rocks onto others." you?" asked Dad. "Well, we can get so tired of dragging our life luggage around "Remember in the airport when you wanted someone to carry your luggage for "But then why is Dylan—I mean, bullies—so mean?"

"I try to be nice to Dylan, but when I do, he just gets meaner! Yesterday I asked

probably afraid of looking weak. He probably feels stronger when he acts mean. if he wanted some help, and he called me a—well, it wasn't very nice." James looked down. "Dad, sometimes when Dylan is mean, I just want to get "Some people haven't been shown how to be kind," said Dad. "Dylan is

happening with Dylan. In the meantime, you can give your anger and hurt to—" lames's shoulder. "I'll call the school when we get back and tell them what's how to love them better. Two bullies won't change anything." Dad squeezed Dad nodded. "I know a lot of adults who hurt others back instead of learning

back at him by making him feel bad too."

a high five. "You know, Dad," said James, "Dylan probably doesn't know that lesus wants to be his luggage carrier too. "I know!" James interrupted. "My luggage carrier!" Dad nodded and gave James "You might be right," Dad said as the plane took off. "He needs someone to

return. Maybe someday, with prayer and persistence, that will change. someone who will continue to show him kindness, even though he's mean in ell him—and to pray for him too. He also needs to see God's love in action-

THUD! A woman in the row behind them gasped. "What was that?" Just then, something in the compartment above their heads shifted with a loud

James tried to swallow his laugh. "Probably the rock from our backyard!" •

Do you ever want to hurt someone who is hurting you? It's natural to want Jesus, and trust Him to help you respond to that person with His love. situation. But don't let your hurt and anger take over—give your burden to hurt by someone, it's important to tell a trusted adult who can help with the revenge, but that's not what Jesus wants you to do. If you're being bullied or

for those who persecute you. Matthew 5:44 (NIV)

LOVE THOSE WHO HURT YOU | KEY VERSE: Love your enemies and pray

MARCH 8 READ: ROMANS 3:10-26

PICKING UP A MESS

Devton! Avery!" Dad called up the stairs. "Dinner is ready! Please pick up your toys and then come eat."

gave up and went to eat. shelf to put her dolls away or lift the heavy lid to the toy chest. She eventually and ran downstairs. Avery, who was five years younger, couldn't quite reach the peyton quickly put her dolls in a basket, then put the basket high on the shelf

peyton loved listening to Avery sing and would clap along, but today she just The next morning at breakfast, Avery began singing "Jesus Loves Me." Usually

"What's on your mind, kiddo?" Dad asked.

but I guess I don't really understand how that shows He loves me. Peyton frowned. "Well, I know that Jesus died on the cross to take away sins

Dad thought for a moment. "Yesterday I asked you and Avery to clean the

Peyton shrugged. "Yeah, but what does that have to do with anything?" "Well," Dad replied, "Avery can't put her toys away herself, so I want you to pick

"But that's not fair!" said Peyton. "She's the one who made the mess!"

ries, it's impossible for her to clean it up. She needs help." Dad paused. "Jesus "You're right, she is the one who made the mess, but no matter how hard she

shows us His love in the same way. Peyton furrowed her eyebrows. "By picking up our mess?"

and rose again to do what we couldn't—to take our sins away." also knew we could never get rid of it ourselves. So, because He loves us, He died it's fair for Jesus to clean it up? Jesus didn't sin. He didn't make our mess, but He Dad nodded. "We're the ones with a huge mess of sin in our lives. Do you think

because I can't do it myself? ^{can't} do it herself—just like Jesus shows me He loves me by taking away my sin "So you're saying I can show Avery I love her by picking up her toys because she

Bethany Den Boer As Avery continued to sing, Peyton smiled and began to clap along.

Romans 5:8 JESUS TAKES AWAY OUR SIN | KEY VERSE: But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

Have you ever made a mess you couldn't clean up? The Bible says our lives In Him. (See "Have You Heard the Good News?" on page 104.) the cross to take away our sin. You can only get out of sin's mess by trusting for us to get out of it ourselves. But Jesus loves us so much that He died on are like that—we've gotten ourselves into a mess of sin, and it's impossible

Kids on their field trip. Elijah listened attentively. He loved history and learn his giant oak tree is what gave Oak Park its name, the tour guide bold the - AN OAK TREE 11-3, 10-11: COLOSSIANS 19-10 GOD MADE THEM ALL The what I found in the woods!" Levi approached his sister carry look what I found in side

survived the Civil War, a flood, and six fires," he said Back home later that day. Elijah told his mom about the tour. "That ug oak to

against it. The oak is one of the slowest-growing trees in the world but it's also Eijah was surprised. "Me? I didn't survive a war or a flood or even one fire-le "Hmm." said Mom. "You know. Elijah, you're something like that tree." "It kept on growing," said Elijah, "even though the odds were a hundred to one

Mom laughed. "No, but I still think you're like that tree."

Elijah interrupted her. "You always say I'm growing up too fast" "Well," said Mom, "for one thing, the oak grows slowly, and you-

us grow spiritually. As Christians, it's often easy to wonder if we're making any Mom smiled. "That's true—physically. But I was thinking of the way most of

from Satan and struggles with temptation." steadily. And you survive worse things than war or floods. You survive attacks Elijah nodded as he recalled some trouble he'd gotten into recently "You may grow slowly in Christ," said Mom, "but like that oak, you do grow

"But I still do wrong things," Elijah pointed out.

to do it again—shows that you're continuing to grow." sometimes. But the fact that you feel bad when you sin—and that you don't want Mommodded. "I know—I do too. All Christians give in to temptation and sin

"Really?" Elijah smiled. "That's pretty cool

to help you change your habits—even when the growing gets tough!" . told him. "Keep working with Him by admitting when you sin and trusting Him "Have faith that God is working to make you grow to be more like Jesus," Mom



knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. 2 Peter 3:18 CHRISTIANS GROW IN JESUS | KEY VERSE: Grow in the grace and

Do you ever wonder if you're growing spiritually? If you're a Christian, God temptation, and trust Him to help you grow in Him ask God for forgiveness. Then look to Him for the strength you need to resist hard for you to detect. When you do something wrong, confess your sin and is always working in your heart to make you more like Jesus—even when it's

> Port turn to poisonous. We don't kill something for no good reason. Dad explained. "Porcupines have quills, skunks spray, and snakes have venom." pady. Former Dad put an arm around Rose. "What Levi says is true; garden to the attaid" Dad put an arm around Rose." meir bites can cause illness or even death. God gives most animals a built-in mechanism for protection from enemies." nd Rounden and got her and Adam to sin. These days we sometimes hear had been more snakes, the epidemic might not have been nearly as bad. And by infected fleas that lived on rats—killed a fourth of Europe's population. If the and rats that carry germs. Hundreds of years ago, the Bubonic Plague—caused miles of quit biting people, maybe we'd like them better," said Rose. aden values killing other animals. like chickens. And some snakes are poisonous The started long ago when Satan, in the form of a snake, tempted Eve in the today, scientists are learning how to use snake venom to make medicine!" No." Dad said. "Actually, they can be very helpful to people. Snakes eat mice But most snakes aren't poisonous, are they?" asked Levi-God promises to make it right again one day. When Jesus returns and makes and Eve disobeyed God and sin entered the world, it messed everything up, by Will describe they can look scary, or they remind us of bad things," replied uses because they can look scary, in the can be seen in the can be se everything new, there will be no more pain, sickness, or death, and we'll new Dad nodded. "God created everything—even snakes—to be good. When Ad "See, Rose," said Levi, "there are lots of good things about snakes: enieke." he said. "It can't hurt you. ghed "shed behind her father, her eyes filled with fear. "Kill it. Daddy!"

afraid of any creature ever again." neasure it," said Levi Levi and his sister studied their suthering captive in the cage. "Why don't Rose hesitated. "Okay," she finally said. "I'll get a tape measure. But I

hold its tail!" • Janet E. Rhine

EVERY CREATURE SERVES A PURPOSE | KEY VERSE: God saw all

had made, and it was very good. Genesis 1:31 (NIV)

Are there any animals or insects you're afraid of? Remember that created each creature for a purpose—even the ones that scare you day, when Jesus restores creation to the way it's supposed to be creature will ever cause us fear or harm again. Until then, we can ways all creatures—even scary ones—reveal God's goodness and Him for His creation.