

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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August 11, 2026

SENT VIA EMAIL & U.S. MAIL: jarod.mendenhall@roughers.net

Superintendent Jarod Mendenhall
Muskogee Public Schools
202 W. Broadway St.
Muskogee, OK 74401

Re: Unconstitutional August 12th prayer walk event

Dear Superintendent Mendenhall:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation scheduled to occur in Muskogee Public Schools (“the District”). As the District may recall from past letters, FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with nearly 41,000 members across the country, including members in Oklahoma. 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 parent reports that on August 12th, Muskogee 6th and 7th Grade Academy is hosting a school-sponsored prayer walk. The Academy distributed a flyer to parents promoting the event and inviting the community to gather at the school at 11am on the 12th for the prayer walk. An Academy employee, D’Amber Desmuke-Brunch, also sent parents an official message inviting them to:

Join us as we pray for our students, staff and families for what we know will be an amazing school year!

Please see the enclosed screenshots of the flyer and message.

We write to request that the District immediately investigate and ensure that the Academy’s prayer walk is cancelled and that the school refrains from organizing and promoting religious events going forward. All future school-sponsored events must be entirely secular.

Public schools may not show favoritism toward or coerce belief or participation in religion. *See generally 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); *McCullum v. Bd. of Ed.*, 333 U.S. 203 (1948). Here, the Academy is displaying blatant favoritism toward religion over nonreligion by organizing, promoting, and encouraging student and family attendance at an on-campus prayer walk.

The District serves a diverse population that consists of not only religious students, families, and employees, but also those who are nonreligious as well as members of minority faiths. When Muskogee 6th and 7th Grade Academy organizes, promotes, and invites students and parents to “pray for our students and staff” at a school-sponsored prayer event, it sends an exclusionary message to students who are not religious as well as those who do not believe in the dominant religion. Thirty-eight percent of the

American population is non-Christian, including the almost 30 percent who are nonreligious.¹ More than half of Generation Z (those born after 1996) is non-Christian, including 43 percent who are nonreligious.²

To comply with the First Amendment and protect students' constitutional rights, Muskogee Public Schools must immediately investigate and ensure that Muskogee 6th and 7th Grade Academy cancels the prayer walk and refrains from organizing and promoting religious events going forward. All school-sponsored events must be secular. Please respond in writing with the steps being taken to address this constitutional violation so that we may inform the parent who contacted us.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Samantha" being the most prominent part.

Samantha F. Lawrence
Staff Attorney
Freedom From Religion Foundation

Enclosures

¹ Pew Research Center (2024), <http://bit.ly/3W6Cl3m>.

² Pew Research Center (2024), <http://bit.ly/48Drzce>.





Posts



Community Prayer Walk

6th & 7th Grade Academy



D'Amber Desmuke-Bunch

Aug 5 at 1:02 PM

Join us as we pray for our students, staff and families for what we know will be an amazing school year!



User-Preferred Notifications ▪ Staff and Parents