

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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March 5, 2015

**SENT BY MAIL AND EMAIL:**  
**gilbertm@woisd.net**

Mr. Michael E. Gilbert  
Superintendent  
White Oaks ISD  
200 S. White Oak Rd.  
White Oak, Texas 75693

Re: Morning Announcement Bible Readings

Dear Superintendent Gilbert:

I am writing you again on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation. Thank you for your response, dated January 29, 2015, to our objection to coach-led prayers and prayers broadcast over the loudspeaker at White Oaks High School football games. We understand that your investigation into that matter led you to conclude that the alleged prayers did not take place.

We have received additional information that the high school is impermissibly endorsing Christianity. Our complainant informed us that Dan Noll, the school's principal, regularly reads bible verses during the morning announcements. We understand Mr. Noll's readings have included:

- Proverbs 28:10: "He who leads upright along an evil path will fall into his own trap, but the blameless will receive a good inheritance."
- Proverbs 15:8: "The Lord detests the sacrifice of the wicked, but the prayer of the upright pleases him."
- And the advice that "Surrendering is the best demonstration in obedience and trust," misattributed to Luke 1:38.

We are confident that an investigation will reveal that Mr. Noll's bible readings have in fact taken place. If confirmed, the practice is flatly unconstitutional and cannot continue.

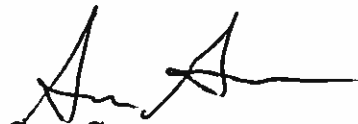
The Supreme Court settled exactly this issue over 50 years ago. *See Abington Twp. Sch. Dist. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203, 223 (1963) (holding that recitation of bible verses and the Lord's Prayer during school hours was a "religious ceremony" that violated the Establishment Clause). The Court held that it

was unconstitutional for schools to allow students to use the schools' intercommunications systems to conduct daily opening exercises "consisting primarily of the 'reading, without comment, of a chapter in the Holy Bible and/or the use of the Lord's Prayer.'" *Id.* at 211. The fact that the bible verses at White Oaks are read by the school principal, rather than by a student, makes the appearance of school endorsement of Christianity much more severe.

The Supreme Court has been abundantly clear about protecting the right of conscience of public school students against government-endorsed religious exercises during school and school-sponsored events. *See, e.g., Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962) (holding organized prayer in public schools unconstitutional); *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992) (declaring prayers at public high school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985) (overturning law that required daily "period of silence not to exceed one minute . . . for meditation or daily prayer"); *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290 (2000) (striking down student-led prayer at school football games). In all of these cases, the Supreme Court struck down religious exercises in public schools because they constitute government endorsement of religion, which violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Nothing in the law prevents students, teachers, or school employees from freely exercising their religion on their own time and in their own way. But Principal Noll, acting in his official capacity as a White Oaks ISD employee, must not broadcast a decidedly religious message to a captive student audience, thereby isolating and excluding those students who are non-Christian or nonreligious. Principal Noll must be instructed not to include bible passages or other religious endorsements in any future morning announcements. The school should apologize to its students and explain why it is inappropriate for the school to endorse Christianity, any other religion, or nonreligion. Please respond promptly, in writing, to inform us of the steps that the school and the District take to remedy this constitutional violation.

Sincerely,

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

Sam Grover  
Staff Attorney

SG:rdj