

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 12, 2023

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL: 228-762-5414**

Jack C. Pickett  
Legal Counsel  
P.O. Drawer 1268  
Pascagoula, MS 39568

Re: Unconstitutional teacher proselytizing (Jackson County School District)

Dear Mr. Pickett:

I am writing on behalf of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) regarding a constitutional violation that occurred in the Jackson County School District (the District). We appreciate your detailed and helpful response to our November 2022 letter and understand that the current superintendent has directed that the District's athletics apartments receive training on the state/church separation issues we previously raised. We hope to work together to address this matter as well.

A concerned District community member reported that a East Central High School teacher, [REDACTED], recently placed cards with prayers written on them underneath all of her students' desks during the first week of school. Please see the enclosed screenshot of a Facebook post that mentions [REDACTED] prayer card plan.

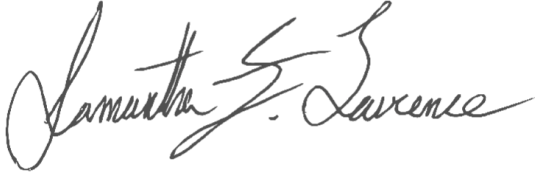
We write to request that the District investigate this matter and ensure that its teachers refrain from using their positions to proselytize and promote prayer going forward.

As the District is aware, students have the First Amendment right to be free from religious indoctrination in their public schools. *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). When teachers use their position to push their personal religious beliefs and encourage prayer, it communicates to students and parents “that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309 (2000).

The District has an obligation to ensure that its teachers are not using their positions to promote their personal religious beliefs. Certainly, “a school can direct a teacher to ‘refrain from expressions of religious viewpoints in the classroom and like settings.’” *Helland v. S. Bend Comm. Sch. Corp.*, 93 F.3d 327 (7th Cir. 1993) (quoting *Bishop v. Arnov*, 926 F.2d 1066, 1077 (11th Cir. 1991)). The Supreme Court has recognized that “[f]amilies entrust public schools with the education of their children, but condition their trust on the understanding that the classroom will not purposely be used to advance religious views that may conflict with the private beliefs of the student and his or her family.” *Edwards v. Aguillard*, 482 U.S. 578, 584 (1987).

In order to respect the First Amendment rights of students, we ask that the District investigate this situation and ensure that [REDACTED], and all other teachers, refrain from using their positions to proselytize or encourage prayer going forward. Please respond in writing with the steps the District is taking to address this matter so that we may inform our complainant. Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Samantha F. Lawrence". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Samantha F. Lawrence  
*Anne Nicol Gaylor Legal Fellow*  
*Freedom From Religion Foundation*


Enclosure

is with  
and **3 others**.

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School starts back this Thursday! And with that comes a lot of stress and anxiety !! Not just for parents , grandparents , teachers and administrators but for our children ! It's not like it was when I was growing up . The pressure is 100 times worse. There's peer pressure ,academic pressure , athletic pressure and school is now so competitive . Just being your best just doesn't seem to be good enough anymore.

I encourage you to start praying over your children!! If you don't have children then please help me pray over my grand children . Pray for their physical health , their spiritual health ,their mental health and for their safety !

And here's you another idea ! I'm going to write my prayer on a card and place it in their book bags. It'll be there any time they feel depressed,anxious or just need to know how much they are valued and loved. It will reassure them that they are wonderfully and fearfully made and to never lose hope for they are destined for great things . This idea was inspired by . She's placing prayer cards under each of her students desk . I've had the privilege of driving my grands to school every mornig and being able to pray over them and their future spouses . I've been a little sad that they now can drive to school and I no longer get to do this. When I read Alison's post I knew then what I was going to do .