

# FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

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September 29, 2011

SENT VIA MAIL & FAX  
(970) 454-5193

Ms. Susan Rosell  
Principal  
Riverside Leadership Magnet Elementary School  
1001 Porter  
Wichita, KS 67203

Re: Christian Books at Elementary Book Fair

Dear Ms. Rosell:

I am writing on behalf of a concerned parent and Kansas members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF) to object to the promotion of Christian books at school. We urge you to more carefully consider appropriate books for the book fair in coming years. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization, which works to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church. We represent over 17,000 members across the country, including many in Kansas.

It is our information and understanding that on or around September 15, 2011, Riverside Leadership Magnet Elementary School held a book fair where children could purchase books before, during, or after school hours, both with or without parental accompaniment. According to a concerned parent, aside from the normal selection of children's books available, the book fair offered a significant amount of Christian-themed material as well, including titles such as *My Pretty Pink Bible Purse*, *Heaven: God's Promise for Me*, and *The Lord's Prayer for Little Ones* (please see the attached photograph). Because Scholastic, the company that provides book fairs to schools, apparently does not carry religious titles in their catalogue, it is assumed that a faculty member in charge of organizing the book fair went out of his or her way to specifically obtain this Christian material and offer it for sale to the children. It is our further understanding that no material from any other non-Christian religion was offered for sale to the children, nor was any freethought or atheist material made available.

It is a fundamental principle of Establishment Clause jurisprudence that a public school may not advance, prefer or promote religion. *See generally, Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985); *Epperson v. Ark.*, 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). Public schools must remain neutral with regard to religion. This applies to the types of religious texts offered for sale to children at book fairs.

Section P1501 of the USD 259 Board of Education Policy specifically states that the school “may not endorse religious activity or doctrine.” Furthermore, section P1502 of the same policy state that “[a]dministrators and teachers must be aware of, and sensitive to, the diversity of customs and beliefs represented by children in their schools and communities.” The policy says “Distributions of religious materials for promotional purposes including books, posters, brochures, buttons, etc., shall not be made to pupils on school premises.”

Because Wichita Public Schools is the largest school district in the state, and the enrollment demographics display a diverse student population, offering only Christian-themed material for sale at the exclusion of all other religious books will only ostracize and isolate those students who do not adhere to Christian beliefs. In addition, it also alienates the 15% of the U.S. population who identify as non-religious (American Religious Identification Survey, 2008). This type of favoritism seems a far cry from showing sensitivity to the diversity of beliefs represented by Riverside Elementary students. It is inappropriate to plant sectarian literature in a book sale targeting a captive audience of young public school students.

Please make organizers of the book fair aware of the Board of Education Policies on diversity of beliefs, so they understand that providing Christian books at the exclusion of all other religions violates the constitutional protections of the First Amendment.

Please notify us in writing, at your earliest convenience, of the steps the District takes to maintain a secular learning environment.

Very Truly,



Annie Laurie Gaylor

Enc.