



Written by [Raven Clabough](#) on June 12, 2012

NYC Principal Bans Patriotic Song from Graduation

A New York City principal caused quite a stir when she [banned](#) a patriotic song from being performed at a kindergarten graduation ceremony, and opted instead for a pop-culture hit, asserting she did not want to offend other cultures. Though her decision angered local residents and parents, the New York City Board of Education has now come to her defense, prompting a great deal of debate over political correctness in the school system.



Greta Hawkins, principal at P.S. Edna Cohen School in the Coney Island section of Brooklyn, found herself in some hot water with parents after she asked teachers to remove the song “God Bless the USA” by Lee Greenwood from the program for the kindergarten graduation ceremony. According to school staff, Hawkins said she was afraid that such a song might “offend other cultures.” Instead, she opted to have Justin Bieber’s hit song “Baby” played during the ceremony.

The Department of Education (DOE) defended Hawkins’ decision, releasing this statement: “The principal felt the lyrics were not age appropriate for a kindergarten moving up ceremony.”

That statement has done little to settle the issue, seeming to indicate that though a patriotic song is not age-appropriate for the little ones, a Justin Bieber song about teenage romance is.

A spokesperson for the DOE added that students at the Edna Cohen School recite the Pledge of Allegiance and sing “America the Beautiful” at the start of each day.

But that is not enough to assuage the fury of some parents. Some have gone as far as launching a Facebook page demanding that Hawkins be removed as the principal. One angry parent told the *New York Post*, “A lot of people fought to move to America to live freely, so that song should be sung with a whole lot of pride.”

Likewise, New York Representative Michael Grimm [condemned](#) the actions of the school principal:

I am outraged that NYC’s Department of Education is standing by the decision of PS 90’s principal to pull the song “Proud to be an American” from the upcoming kindergarten ceremony, for fear of offending other cultures. The fact that the principal nixed the performance of this patriotic, G-rated song while permitting an inane and age-inappropriate Justin Bieber song about teenage romance only underscores my concern about the skewed views being forced on these students. When a Justin Bieber song is deemed an appropriate substitute for a song about patriotism and love of country, what message are we sending our youth?

I have just one question for this principal — who exactly are we offending? The only thing offensive about any of this is the anti-American message being engrained in our youth. We all should be proud to be American and we should never ever apologize for it.

It’s time we stop letting our political correctness destroy our values and American traditions, and start embracing the exceptional people and cultures that make our country great.



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Even Lee Greenwood has come out against the principal's actions, stating that he was troubled by what's taken place. "I take exception that she said the lyrics are not age appropriate," he said. "If my lyrics aren't appropriate, then what is?"

Despite the outcry, New York City school chancellor Dennis Walcott defended Hawkins and took jabs at the song "God Bless the USA." "It's her judgment to make that decision," said Walcott. "You have to really wonder about some of the lyrics in the song, so I have to rely on the principal's judgment along that line."

Likewise, Barry Lynn, of the organization Americans United for Separation of Church and State, believes Hawkins is unfairly being targeted for her actions. "The song, which isn't even very good, talks about not forgetting those who died preserving freedom for Americans," Lynn wrote in a statement. "I like that sentiment personally, but the concept might be a little over the head of your average elementary schooler."

Lynn then took issue with the very notion that the United States has indeed been blessed by God. "It's right there in the title, and it's constitutionally problematic because public schools aren't supposed to be in the business of promoting religion, even if it's not a specific religion," he wrote. "Honestly, the idea that God favors one country is fraught with all kinds of theological subtexts that are best left to parents and clergy to discuss with children if they believe it necessary."

Lynn declares that it would be understandable for other cultures to take offense at a song that refers to the United States being blessed.

"Asking God to bless America could certainly be offensive or alienating to humanists, atheists, Buddhists, Hindus or anyone who values church-state separation," he wrote. "It was absolutely the correct decision."

Americans witnessed similar examples of political correctness run amok during last year's graduation season.

ACLU's Nebraska franchise [demanded](#) last year that a school district in the state stop performing prayer at its graduation ceremonies, arguing that it violates the notion of "separation of church and state."

Similarly, conflicts over prayer at a Medina Valley, Texas, graduation ceremony led all the way to a [federal appeals court](#) last June after a U.S. District Judge handed down a controversial ruling that the school district could not include prayer in its commencement ceremonies, or any language perceived to be religious in nature.

And in Louisiana, another ACLU-led attack on prayer forced Bastrop High School to [cancel](#) prayer at its high school graduation ceremony. During the ceremony, however, one student took matters into her own hands. Graduating senior Laci Rae Mattice stood at the podium to lead a "moment of silence" which was put in place of prayer, but decided instead to lead the group in saying the Lord's Prayer, "if they want to." Her small act of defiance was wildly applauded by the crowd.



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