



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 18, 2014

## School Districts Challenged for Expelling First Amendment

A high school in Amsterdam, New York, has relented on its attempts to block a student-led Bible study at the school following the intervention of the conservative legal advocacy group [American Center for Law and Justice](#). According to ACLJ, the principal of the school had originally given a student organizer of the Bible study the go ahead for the group to meet after school just like any other on-campus club.



But on the day the students were to meet for their first Bible study, the school superintendent informed the student, a senior at the school, that the club would have to secure an insurance policy to use the school facility after hours — even though no other student clubs were required to have such a policy.

Concerned parents of the students contacted ACLJ about the discrepancy, and the legal group responded with information about the relevant legal guidelines a district must follow when religious based, student-led clubs desire to use school facilities. The bottom line, noted the ACLJ in a statement, is that “the Bible club must be given the same privileges as any other student-led club. If other student-led clubs are not required to obtain insurance policies, this senior should not be required to obtain one for the Bible club.”

Upon being served with the information, the school district abandoned its attempt to stop the Bible study.

The case is the second in just over a week in which a school district has been challenged for attacking the religious liberties of a student. [Fox News](#) reported that [Alliance Defending Freedom](#) (ADF), another conservative legal advocacy group, has filed suit against the school district of Nazareth, Pennsylvania, on behalf of a couple whose son was prohibited by his teacher and principal from giving fellow classmates Valentine’s Day cards because his cards included the Christian history of the holiday, along with a well-know Bible verse.

Fox News reported that in early February the household of Donald and Ellen Abramo received a letter from their son’s teacher at the Floyd R. Shafer Elementary School in Nazareth with instructions for the distribution of “Friendship Day” (i.e., Valentine’s Day) cards, stipulating that only approved edible snacks were to be attached to the card. So instead of a snack, the child and his siblings decided to attach a personal message to the cards they gave to classmates, which included the history of Valentine’s Day.

“St. Valentine was imprisoned and martyred for presiding over marriages and for spreading the news of God’s love,” the message read. “In honor of St. Valentine’s Day, I want you to know that God loves you!!!” At the bottom of the message was the scripture verse John 3:16: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish, but have eternal life.”

The message on the card prompted the boy’s teacher to shift into full politically correct mode, and run



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the cards down to the principal, who determined that the young boy was guilty of “proselytizing” his Christian faith. The principal directed that the boy’s message be removed from the cards. Later as the boys and girls in the class distributed their cards, some included images such as skulls and guns, according to Fox News, “but the card that included a message about Jesus was deemed to be offensive. Later that afternoon Mrs. Abramo called the school searching for answers. The principal reiterated that the cards could not be distributed because of their religious message.”

When the Abramos sought clarification on just why the school would discriminate against a student’s right to personal religious expression, they were referred to the district’s attorney, Gary Brienza, who, according to the ADF lawsuit filed on behalf of the family, “proceeded to tell the Abramos that under the U.S. Constitution there is both a ‘freedom of religion’ and a ‘freedom from religion.’” Additionally, states the suit, Brienza “claimed that the Constitution prohibits a person from imposing their religious beliefs on someone else; therefore, the school district can restrict a student from distributing religious materials.”

ADF attorney Jeremy Tedesco countered that singling out “a faith-based message for censorship is exactly the type of hostility to religion that the First Amendment forbids.”

In 2011 the ADF was victorious in a similar lawsuit against Pennsylvania’s Pocono Mountain School District in Monroe County after the district barred a fifth-grade girl from handing out invitations to her church’s Christmas party. Following that suit ADF evaluated the policies of every Pennsylvania school district, contacting those districts with policies the ADF believed violated the First Amendment, encouraging them to revise the policies.

ADF attorney Matt Sharp said that it is the hope of the legal group that the Nazareth district “will do the right thing and revoke the policy. This is a policy that applies from kindergarten to a senior in high school. That is all we are asking.”



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