



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on December 28, 2011

Gideon New Testaments at N.C. School Raise Ire of “Pagan” Mom

A mother in North Carolina complained to her local school district after her son came home with a New Testament, telling her that he got it for free at his school. According to the Asheville, North Carolina, Citizen-Times newspaper, Ginger Strivelli, whom the paper identified as a “pagan,” was upset when she learned that her son’s school, North Windy Ridge in Weaverville (left), appeared to be distributing New Testaments. What made her even more upset was that school officials “were not apologetic” about the apparent New Testament handout, the paper reported. “It’s totally inappropriate they think they can get away with this,” Strivelli told the Citizen-Times. “It’s absolutely unbelievable and their attitude is ridiculous.”



The school’s principal, Jackie Byerly, insisted that there was nothing amiss in making copies of Scripture available to students, explaining that a local group from [Gideons International](#) — an organization that has been providing free Bibles to hospitals, hotels, and individuals for over 100 years — had dropped off a box of New Testaments at the main office, with a request that students be allowed to pick up copies if they wished. After getting a thumbs-up from the school district’s superintendent, Byerly left the box outside the school office for students to access during their break time.

Jan Blunt, a spokeswoman for the school, said that no announcement was made over the school’s loudspeaker, and no Gideon representatives were allowed to interact with students. “They don’t talk with students,” Blunt told the *Citizen-Times*. “They’re not allowed to make a presentation. They quite literally drop off a box and leave them there. They are not handed out at all.”

According to the newspaper, “Strivelli said her son was in class when the teacher said students could leave and pick up a Bible from the school’s main office. She says her son did so because everyone else left, and it was an opportunity to get out of class. He told her a teacher handed him the Bible.”

Byerly insisted that she was not promoting Christianity or the Bible. “If another group wishes to do the same, I plan on handling that the same way as I have handled this,” she said. But Strivelli was skeptical of the principal’s assertion, telling the paper, “You couldn’t even fathom them doing it with the Koran or a Pagan spell book.”

Katy Parker, legal director for the [ACLU’s North Carolina franchise](#), was quick to sound off on the school’s supposed violation, telling the [Associated Press](#) that while the passive distribution strategy would work at the high school level, a 1998 federal court decision, *Peck vs. Upshur County Board of Education*, determined that religious literature could not be left in an elementary school for students to



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take by choice.

“In the high schools they can come in as long as they’re not actively distributing Bibles,” Parker said of the Gideon group. But, she warned, “in the elementary schools, nobody’s allowed in.” She added that she planned to visit the district to set school officials right on the ACLU’s Bible handout “rules.”

While the incident seemed to elicit little more than a minor mention by most North Carolina media outlets, one newspaper, the [Hendersonville Times-News](#), reflected that it is “incredible ... that we have reached an apex of political correctness where a school agreeing to leave some free Bibles for kids is treated as if it is handing out drugs, condoms or Marilyn Manson CDs. Since when does freedom of religion infer a right to never encounter a Bible or other holy text?”



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