

Jim G. Helton
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November 15, 2016

SENT VIA U.S. MAIL AND E-MAIL

(ron.livingood@grant.kyschools.us)

Dr. Ronald Gene Livingood
Superintendent, Grant County School District
820 Arnie Risen Blvd.
Williamstown, KY

RE: Multiple Constitutional Violations in Grant County School District

Dr. Livingood:

I am writing on behalf of the Tri-State Freethinkers (TSF) regarding a multitude of complaints brought to our attention by concerned parents and students of Grant County School District (the District). TSF is a local non-profit organization with more than 1,600 members across the tri-state area, including many in Kentucky, and promotes the constitutional principle of separation between religion and government.

Concerned members of the District community have contacted us to report multiple issues with District schools and employees overtly promoting religion. We write to ask that the District address each of these issues in order to ensure that its schools remain neutral toward religion as requested by the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

Athletic Director - Brother Brian Smallwood

A complainant reports that a minister from Dry Ridge Baptist Church, not only serves as Grant County Schools' Campus Minister (Exhibit A), and Fellowship of Christian Athletes leader, but also as a paid faculty position. Brother Smallwood is listed as head of Student Ministry for Dry Ridge Baptist Church, whose mission statement reads:

"The Student Ministry of Dry Ridge Baptist strives to REACH non-Christian students, to help them SHARE in God's Word, to OFFER themselves in SERVICE to Christ, and to

CARE for one another, while enabling students to understand and recognize who Jesus Christ is, and what it is to live for Him only.” (Exhibit B)

The Supreme Court has repeatedly noted, “School sponsorship of a religious message is impermissible because it sends the ancillary message to members of the audience who are nonadherents ‘that they are outsiders, not full members of the political community, and an accompanying message to adherents that they are insiders, favored members of the political community.” *Santa Fe Indep. Sch. Dis. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 309 (2000)(quoting *Lynch v. Donnelly*, 465 U.S. 668, 688 (1984)(O’Connor, J., concurring)). The employment of a student minister as an athletic director, whose stated mission is to “reach” and indoctrinate non-Christian public school children is a direct endorsement by the District of Christianity. This action alienates those non-Christian members of your community whose religious beliefs are inconsistent with the message being promoted by the school.

Furthermore, the handbook for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes states: “*Since teachers and coaches are employees of the school, there is concern that what they say may be considered speech endorsed by the school. This could violate the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States.*” The District has two faculty members leading their Fellowship of Christian Athletes. One being the athletic director who is listed as “campus minister” on the District webpage for the Fellowship of Christian Athletes, the other his wife, Tamela Smallwood, is Secretary at Grant County High School. Ms. Smallwood is listed as the Fellowship of Christian Athletes “Huddle Coach”. The Fellowship of Christian Athletes website defines a “huddle” as “a certified small group bible study/devotion for coaches and athletes”. The message that the District is sending to its community is clear: we endorse Christianity with your tax dollars.

Religious Icons/Signage in High School and Middle School Offices

A complainant reported that in 2015 a sign depicting a freestanding cut-out photo of a student with a speech bubble was displayed outside of the Grant County High School office along with a display of Bibles. (Exhibits C & D) The speech bubble read “ ‘As a follower of Christ, I serve as a role model to many.’ -Mattison Bingham”. The complainant wrote to the school on multiple occasions regarding Bible displays in both an elementary school and high school from 2013 to 2015. One of the complaints received a response from the County’s legal counsel, who remarked that the student cut-out was part of a student-lead campaign against heroin and alcohol abuse in Kentucky. Upon reviewing literature from this organization, it is clear that the group is lead by community and faith leaders, not students. The attorney did concede that a Bible in the main office was inappropriate and directed its removal.

Courts have continually held that school districts may not display religious messages or iconography in public schools. See generally, *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980); *Washegesic v. Bloomington Pub. Schs.*, 813 F. Supp. 559 (W.D. Mi. 1993), *aff’d* 33 F. 3d 679

(6th Cir. 1994); *Ahlquist v. City of Cranston ex rel. Strom*, 840 F. Supp. 2d 507 (D.R.I. 2012). The Bible is one of the most quintessential icons of the Christian faith. For the District to display it so prominently alongside a literal portrait of a student professing Christianity sends a message of clear endorsement to any and all who enter the elementary and high school buildings.

Distribution of Church Propaganda via Grant County Public School Online Newsletter

A complainant provided a copy of a school newsletter, sent on March 13th, 2015, from Lori Poe (GCMS Secretary/Attendance Clerk) which contained an attachment named "Dry Ridge Baptist Church.pdf". This attachment contained a flyer for an event sponsored by Athletic Director Brother Brian Smallwood's Church. It was an advertisement for "Hoop It Up - 1st Annual Dry Ridge Baptist Church 3 on 3 Basketball Tournament". The flyer directed inquiries to Brother Brian Smallwood, stated that proceeds would benefit his church's mission trip to Guatemala, and ended with a Bible quote (Romans 9:17 "...I raised you up for this purpose, that I might display My power in you and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." (Exhibits E & F)

An additional flyer was sent home with students for program called "Homework Hotline" which describes itself as a tutoring service for Grant County residents that may be in need of additional help with various school subjects to be held at the Methodist church. (Exhibits G, H) The founder of the program, former Grant County High School Principal Monty Joe Lovell, was interviewed about the program in 2011 by Grant County News. He stated:

"We're doing it as a witness for our church, and to bring a lot of kids into the church, which most of these are the member's children or grandchildren, but sometimes you reach people who couldn't be reached otherwise," he said. "And that's the other interest in the program, that we involve kids in the community that may not be involved in church. It's just a witness and we're witnessing with education. We would encourage other churches to do the same thing."

Public schools have a duty to ensure that "teachers do not inculcate religion" or use their positions of authority to promote a particular religious viewpoint. *Lemon v. Kurtzman*, 403 U.S. 602, 619 (1971). 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). When a school district uses a newsletter regularly sent to staff, students, and parents to promote organizations that make it their mission to proselytize to students, they have not only unconstitutionally entangled the school with a religious message, specifically a Christian message, they have endangered the right of conscience of their students.

Prayer at the Pole

More recently, Grant County found it appropriate to include on the front page of their Grant County High School newsletter, a photograph endorsing prayer at the pole, including the words “A generation seeking Him.” and the Bible verse “Psalms 24: 3-6. (Exhibit I) It is well settled that a public school employee may not lead, direct, or encourage students to engage in prayer. The Supreme Court has continually struck down formal and teacher or school-led prayer in public schools. See, e.g., *Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962); *Abington Twp. Sch. Dist. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963); *Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985). By placing this photo prominently on the front page of a school newsletter, Grant County is sending the message to all students, parents, and staff that those who pray to a god are favored members of the community and that prayer at the pole is school endorsed and encouraged.

As you are certainly aware, the display of religious messages in the school setting violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment. The Supreme Court has continually held that public schools may not display religious messages or iconography. See generally *Stone v. Graham*, 449 U.S. 39 (1980) (ruling that the Ten Commandments may not be displayed on school walls). Other courts agree. See, e.g., *Washegesic v. Bloomington Pub. Sch.*, 813 F. Supp. 559, 559 (W.D. Mich. 1993) *aff'd*, 33 F.3d 679 (6th Cir. 1994); *Ahlquist v. City of Cranston ex rel. Strom*, 840 F. Supp. 2d 507 (D.R.I. 2012) (ruling that prayer mural in a school auditorium violated the Establishment Clause).

A History of School Endorsement of Religion

The District has shown to have a history of excessive entanglement of religion within a public school. TSF has received information indicating that a history teacher created a lesson plan that excluded the vast majority of the textbook only including lessons on Christianity and a chemistry teacher who, as part of a snow-day learning packet asked students to reference the story of Sodom and Gomorrah in a paper about Genetically Modified Organisms. Another report from a concerned parent and student explained how a student brought a book on evolution to read and had it taken away because it was “inappropriate for school”. Another reported baptisms being done on the Grant High School property and a flyer for Vacation Bible School stapled to their child’s homework.

One parent wrote to a letter to a previous superintendent calling into question the school’s relationship with area churches. The school responded that “There is no specific church or religion being taught or promoted, nor is there any real or implied obligation for any student or their family to participate.” It is clear from the violations above that there are in fact specific churches being promoted and one religion being endorsed by the school: Christianity.

Recommendation

Given the variety and pervasiveness of the violations reported to us, we recommend that the District not only address the specific violations reported here, but also provide training to educate all District employees about their obligation to remain neutral toward religion under the Establishment Clause. Please reply in writing outlining the steps that the District is taking to protect the right of conscience of its students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Jim G. Helton", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Jim G. Helton
President, Tri-State Freethinkers



▪ PROMISE ▪ PASSION ▪ PURPOSE ▪ PROGRESS ▪ PRIDE

HOME ABOUT ▾ SCHOOLS ▾ ADMIN ▾ CALENDAR ▾ NEWS ▾ ALUMNI FOR STAFF DOWNLOADS/LINKS ▾

District Information

- IC for Staff
- Staff Webmail
- Staff Directory
- Infinite Campus
- Parents
- Employment
- In Our Community

FCA

Fellowship of Christian Athletes



Circle of Prayer with GCHS Football Players and their opponents after a game

ABOUT FCA

President: Luke Adkins
Vice President: Brianna Smallwood

FCA meets the 4th Friday of every month during Enrichment

CLUBS / ORGANIZATIONS

FCA

FFA

NHS

Pep Club

Grant County High School

715 Warsaw Rd
Dry Ridge, KY 41035
859-824-9739: Phone:
859-824-9756: Fax:

Tamela Smallwood
Huddle Coach
tamela.smallwood@grant.kyschools.us

Brian Smallwood
Campus Minister
b.jsmallwood@yahoo.com

"The heart and soul in Sports"

The FCA website www.fca.org



Grant County Schools

820 Arnie Risen Blvd. | Williamstown, KY 41097
P: 859-824-3323 F: 859-824-3508 | [Map Our Location](#)

- HOME
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- OUR SCHOOLS
- ADMINISTRATION

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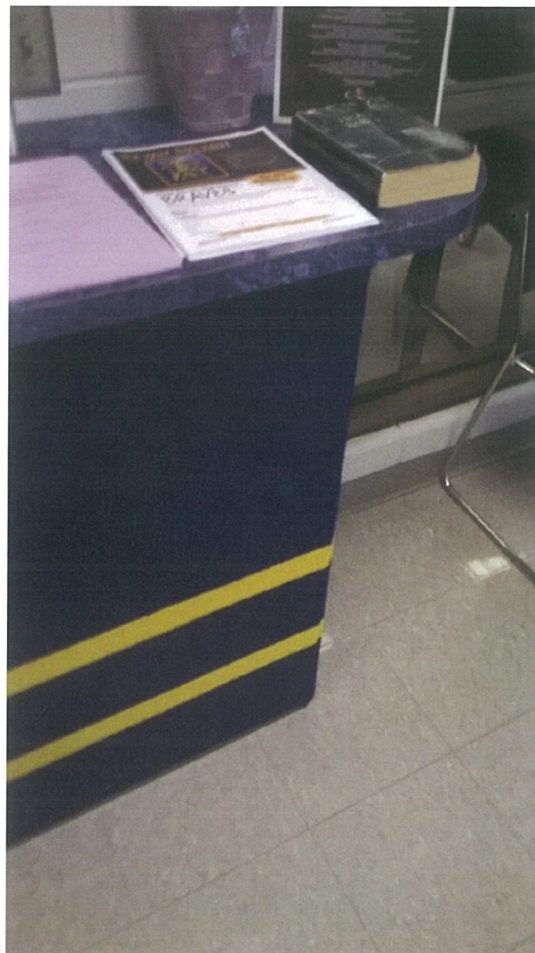
Dry Ridge Baptist Church

The Student Ministry of Dry Ridge Baptist strives to REACH non-Christian students, to help them SHARE in God's Word, to OFFER themselves in SERVICE to Christ, and to CARE for one another, while enabling students to understand and recognize who Jesus Christ is, and what it is to live for Him only.

/









1st Annual Dry Ridge Baptist Church
3 on 3 Basketball Tournament

Cost:

\$15 per person

NO Later than 4/15/15

When:

Saturday, April 18, 2015

Games will begin at 9:00am

Questions:

Contact Brian Smallwood

859-391-3443

b.smallwood@yahoo.com

Who Can Participate:

JV Division— grades 6-8

Varsity Division— grades 9-12

Where:

Grant County High School

715 Warsaw Road

Benefiting:

All proceeds raised will go toward

toward DRBC Student Ministry

Mission Trip to Guatemala

"...I raised you up for this purpose, that I might display My power in you
and that My name might be proclaimed in all the earth." Romans 9:17

REGISTRATION FORM



Team Name: _____

IDENTIFICATION

Player's Name: _____

Street Address: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Home Phone: _____ Cell Phone: _____

Email: _____

Date of Birth: _____ Grade: _____

Male or Female (circle one)

MEDICAL INFORMATION

Physician: _____ Phone Number: _____

Allergies: _____

Preexisting Medical Conditions: _____

Medications: _____

Any Restrictions: _____

PARENTAL CONSENT

I understand that in the case of an emergency, every effort will be made to contact me (the legal guardian of the student). If contact is not possible, I hereby give my permission to the physician selected by the tournament staff to hospitalize and properly treat my child (as named above). I also affirm that the medical information on this form is correct and complete to the best of my knowledge.

Parent or Guardian Name: _____

Parent or Guardian Signature: _____

Date: _____

1ST ANNUAL DRBC 3 ON 3 BASKETBALL TOURNAMENT

COST:

\$15 per person

Entries **MUST** be submitted by
4/15/15 to create brackets

WHO:

JV: Grades 6-8

Varsity: Grades 9-12

WHEN/WHERE:

Saturday, April 18, 2015

**Grant County High School
Games will begin at 9:00am**

QUESTIONS:

Contact Brian

Phone:

859-391-3443

Email:

b.jsmallwood@yahoo.com

BENEFITING

**All proceeds raised will go
toward DRBC Student
Ministry Mission Trip to
Guatemala**

Homework Hotline




Williamstown United Methodist Church
will be starting a *Homework Hotline* Wednesday, 8/18/10
for Grant County residents that may be in need of
additional help with various school subjects.

Tutoring services will be held every
Wednesday from 3:30-5:30 at the church.

If you are interested in signing your child up
for this *free* service,

Contact Belinda Lovell for additional information
(859) 824-5747 or (859) 242-0140
or visit our website at www.williamstownumc.com

Snacks provided!

 *Sponsored by:*
Williamstown United Methodist Church
206 Paris Street, Williamstown, KY 41097

**This is not a school affiliated program.*

www.grantky.com

Serving Crittenden, Corinth, Dry Ridge,
Mason, Williamstown and Jonesville

Grant County News

HOMEWORK HOTLINE

By Camille McClanahan

Wednesday, January 19, 2011 at 11:00 am (Updated: January 19, 11:53 am)

When things get tough, some Grant County students don't even bother going home after school, they head for the Williamstown United Methodist Church and the Homework Hotline.



Retired principal Monty Lovell coaches as Michael Brown, a sixth grader at Grant County Middle School, works on math problems.

There, they are greeted warmly, given an after school snack and get help with their hardest subjects, absolutely free.

Monty Joe Lovell, a former principal at Grant County High School and his wife, Belinda, also a former teacher and principal, had a vision for the program.

As retired educators, they are still tuned-in to what is happening in Grant County schools and knowing their church had many retired teachers and other capable adults, the Lovells, brought the idea to the administrative council of the church.

"ESS is the program that allowed for tutoring during after school hours, and teachers did that," Lovell said. "It was something that was being funded by the government and now, there's been so many cut-backs that there is no money at all for that. So we're just doing it to try to help until hopefully we can get our funding straightened out over the next few years, and get that back in the schools because they need it pretty bad."

The Kentucky Education Reform Act (KERA) has a provision that requires instructional time be provided outside of the regular classroom schedule. That extra instructional time is known as Extended School Services (ESS).

However, Kentucky's ESS programs have been subject to substantial financial cuts resulting in the elimination of some after school tutoring programs.

According to the Lovells, most students who come for help are struggling with the fundamentals.

"Math and English," Lovell said. "If you look at it: reading, writing and arithmetic are your three basic areas and they have not changed. You have to be knowledgeable in those areas to be able to express yourself. You've got computers, but nonetheless, a computer is only as smart as the person putting the data in the computer. So, if you put it in right, it will come out right."

He said that they are seeing the students in the program gain ground in understanding; however, because the program is new, its effectiveness is hard to quantify.

"It helps me with my math and how to figure my problems," Michael Brown, a sixth grader at Grant County Middle School, said. "He (Lovell) helped me learn the value of fractions."

Alan Bell, who has a degree in industrial technology, wasn't sure if he would be qualified to help the children, but found his background in physics was more than ample to help them, who usually come with basic math problems.

"Today, I'm working on common denominators, Bell said. "They just need to get down to the ground rules of how to do it. It's a slow process sometimes, but that's why they're here, they need help."

Currently, there are eight members who volunteer their time, as well as others in the community.

"We have Alice Hartman, she is working with one of our students," Lovell said. "She works upstairs, because she needs the quietness and she does a really good job for us, and she is not from our church, but she is willing to come in and help. We have several other people who have come in periodically. We have Kay Collins, she's a retired teacher. Just people who have been in education or students who are in high school who can help the elementary kids."

According to Lovell the program is a win-win outreach for the children, the church and the schools.

"We're doing it as a witness for our church, and to bring a lot of kids into the church, which most of these are the member's children or grandchildren, but sometimes you reach people who couldn't be reached otherwise," he said. "And that's the other interest in the program, that we involve kids in the community that may not be involved in church. It's just a witness and we're witnessing with education. We would encourage other churches to do the same thing. I'm sure they've got some retired teachers or have some people who have been around education. It's a form of witness, but it can also help the schools to get help that they can't afford to pay for."

For more information or to register for the Homework Hotline, call Belinda Lovell at 859-824-5747 or 859-242-0140.

WUMC OFFERS FREE SERVICE

Wednesdays
3:30 - 5:30 p.m.

GRANT COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL

Weekly newsletter informing parents of important facts, events and achievements!



BRAVES HS BEACON!

SEPTEMBER NEWS!

September 30, 2016

GRANT COUNTY HIGH SCHOOL



**GCHS & GC CTC
ADMINISTRATION**

GC High School

Linda Foxx,
Principal

GC Career & Tech Center

John Sanders,
Associate Principal

Scott Draud,
Assistant Principal

Cody Ryan,
Assistant Principal

Jason Frilling,
ECAP Director

Questions or comments?
E-mail us at

[carolyn.horn@
grant.kyschools.us](mailto:carolyn.horn@grant.kyschools.us)

**2016-2017
"NO SCHOOL" DAYS!**

- FALL BREAK**
October 12-14
- ELECTION DAY**
November 8
- THANKSGIVING BREK**
Nov 23-25
- CHRISTMAS BREAK**
Dec 21-Jan 3
- MLK, Jr DAY**
January 16
- PRESIDENTS DAY**
February 20
- SPRING BREAK**
April 10-14
- MEMORIAL DAY**
May 29

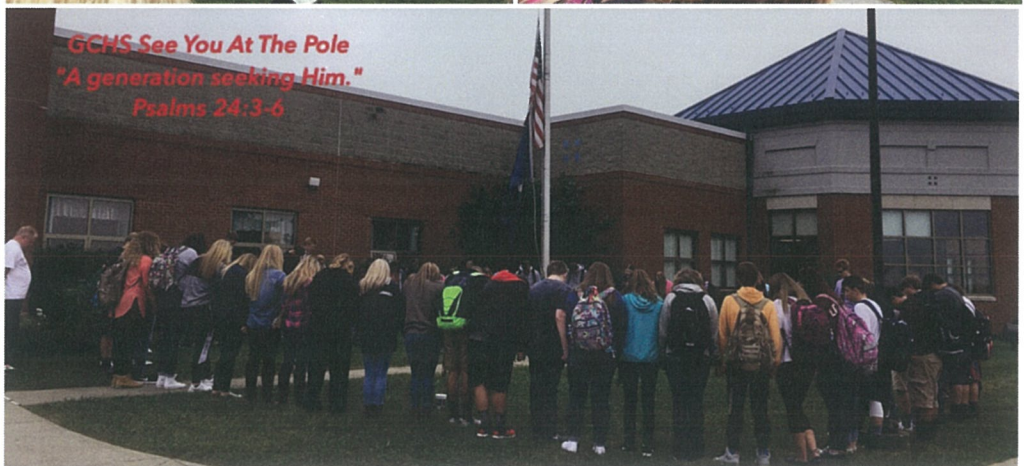
GCHS Yearbook Production!

Submitted by: Ms. Mendy Lail,
Library Media Specialist/Teacher

2016 Yearbooks have arrived!



If you purchased a yearbook for the 2016 school year, they are now available. See Mrs. Lail in the library during your lunch block or in between classes. Seniors who graduated last year may come in and pick theirs up any time, or can call/email instructions for sending the book home with a sibling or trusted person. There will be a limited number of yearbooks available for purchase (\$65) after all other yearbooks have been distributed.



Check out our [GCHS Website](#) by clicking here!