

EDUCATION DECEMBER 15, 2015

Bible passages cut from 'A Charlie Brown Christmas' at Eastern Kentucky school

HIGHLIGHTS

Johnson County Schools cut religious references after complaints

W.R. Castle Elementary School to present 'Charlie Brown' Thursday

Superintendent's decision protested at district offices





◀ 1 of 2 ▶

Protesters carrying signs and waving banners stood outside the Johnson County Board of Education office Monday to oppose removal of religious references from school plays and other programs. **Sarah Hill** - The Paintsville Herald

BY VALARIE HONEYCUTT SPEARS
vhoneycutt@herald-leader.com

When students perform the play “A Charlie Brown Christmas” at W.R. Castle Elementary School in Johnson County on Thursday, the scene in which the character Linus quotes from the Bible is set to be deleted.

Johnson County Schools Superintendent Thomas Salyer told the Herald-Leader Tuesday that Christmas programs across the district were being reviewed for possible modifications of religious references. That news had led people to protest outside school district offices for a second day Tuesday.

Principal Jeff Cochran said all references to the Bible were removed from the Christmas play after he and others in the district received a message from Salyer on Dec. 11 that said in part:

“As superintendent of Johnson County Schools,

I recognize the significance of Christmas and the traditions and beliefs associated with this holiday. Over the past few days, there have been several rumors indicating that there would be no Christmas plays this year at our elementary schools. I want to clarify that all programs will go on as scheduled. In accordance with federal laws, our programs will follow appropriate regulations. The U.S. Supreme Court and the 6th Circuit are very clear that public school staff may not endorse any religion when acting in their official capacities and during school activities. However, our district is fully committed to promote the spirit of giving and concern for our fellow citizens that help define the Christmas holiday. With core values such as service, integrity, leadership, and commitment, our staff and students will continue to proudly represent our district as recently demonstrated by our many student successes.”

Salyer said that district officials had received a complaint about religious references in Christmas programs at schools. But he said for “confidentiality reasons” he would not confirm media reports that the complaint originated at Castle Elementary.

In the Charlie Brown play, the character Linus recites passages from the Bible: “Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in the manger. And suddenly, there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, ‘glory to God in the highest, and on Earth peace, good will toward men.’ ”

Linus then says, "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown."

Paintsville Herald reporter Sarah Hill said that on Monday about 30 people, including members of the Light of Christ Church at Staffordsville, protested the removal of religious content from school Christmas programs. Hill said the number of protestors was fewer than 10 on Tuesday.

Protestors told WKYT-TV that they were upset about the decision to remove religious references from district Christmas programs.

CNN reported last month that Linus' recitation of the Bible passages was also at issue in the development of the 1965 animated television special "A Charlie Brown Christmas."

Peanuts creator Charles Schulz wanted to include the speech, CNN reported, but the producers were hesitant. After much back and forth, the passage was left in, the network said.

In making his decision, Salyer said he was "acting on the advice" of his attorney and officials from other agencies in the state.

"We are just trying to meet the letter of the law," he said.

Amber Duke, communications manager at the American Civil Liberties Union of Kentucky, responded to the Johnson County situation with this statement: "It appears the Johnson County School district is committed to honoring its constitutional obligation to protecting students' freedom of religion and belief. Religious liberty

requires protecting both the right of free exercise for individuals of every faith and the right to remain free from government coercion and promotion of religion. School involvement in the planning and promotion of a religious play after receiving a complaint from a concerned student or parent would show disregard for every student's right to remain free from government imposed religious viewpoints."

Valarie Honeycutt Spears: 859-231-3409, @vhspears



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**Annette Gee Ford** ·

Legislative Analyst at Florida State Legislature

Give every parent the right opt out their child watching the play, and stop infringing on other's rights. I was taught many years ago that, "the loss of freedom for one person is the loss of freedom for all".

Like · Reply ·  1 · 28 mins**Zenas Legisperitus**

Charlie Brown: "Isn't there anyone who knows what Christmas is all about?!"
Linus: "Nope."

Like · Reply ·  2 · 2 hrs**Rickey Russell**

Ah, even though as an adult I have to tolerate that scene, A Charlie Brown Christmas is still part of my holiday tradition. It is stupid to remove the scene from the play! Tolerance goes both ways, We pagans, and atheists can't say that you have to accept us then turn around and show intolerance toward Christian, Jews, and Muslims. Not that the ones removing the lines are atheists or pagan.

Like · Reply ·  2 · 3 hrs**Charles Edward Pogue** ·

Georgetown, Kentucky

I'm not a Christian and hold most religion generally in disdain and celebrate Christmas as a purely secular holiday of festive delight and good cheer against the doldrums of winter. But the school is wrong here. A fictional character expressing a thought or quoting a biblical passage in a play is not necessarily any kind of official endorsement of religion. And, if you're worried about that, maybe you don't do a play entitled A CHARLIE BROWN CHRISTMAS. But

