

Chicago Public School Students Awarded \$2.6 Million in Damages for Forced Transcendental Meditation

The Chicago Board of Education and the New York-based David Lynch Foundation will pay out \$2.6 million to former Chicago Public Schools high school students over forced Transcendental Meditation indoctrination. On May 7, 2025, Judge Matthew Kennelly of the United States District Court for the Northern District of Illinois approved the class action settlement.

The funds will be distributed among 773 individuals who, while students at Chicago public high schools, were either required to participate in Transcendental Meditation as part of their in-school curriculum or were deprived daily of a half-hour of academic instruction and required to maintain silence while their classmates focused their minds on secret mantras.

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The Chicago Board of Education partnered with the David Lynch Foundation for Consciousness-Based Education and World Peace, which was founded by filmmaker David Lynch to fund Transcendental Meditation instruction in schools. Though presented as a nonreligious exercise, Transcendental Meditation is rooted in Hinduism. The Hindu American Foundation describes the practice as “wholly and unequivocally Hindu.”

The schools’ compulsory participation violated students’ rights and even included nondisclosure agreements. At least one student shared how she and a classmate were instructed not to tell anyone—including their parents—about the program. A

representative from the David Lynch Foundation allegedly warned them specifically not to inform religious parents.

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Attorney John Mauck of Mauck & Baker represented the student class, along with court-appointed lead plaintiff Kaya Hudgins.

“This settlement vindicates the concerns of former students and parents that the initiation ceremony and daily meditation regime were effectively demonic invocation and thus violated the Establishment Clause of the Constitution,” stated Mauck. “We hope this settlement will deter those who exploit young people and that it will encourage the Chicago Board of Education to be wary of harming students by allowing wolves to prey on the sheep they are obligated to protect.”

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Hudgins, now 22 years old, was the lead plaintiff in the class action lawsuit. She recounted that, at age 16, she was forced to take part in the program called “Quiet Time.” Her participation was mandatory, despite any personal objections. She described how, despite its innocuous title, the program included a private one-on-one Hindu “Puja” worship ceremony in a darkened room, chanting, religious paraphernalia, and secret mantras that were actually the names of Hindu gods.

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“I was just a teenager when I was pressured into a program I didn’t understand and wasn’t allowed to question,” said Kaya Hudgins. “No student should ever be forced into a religious practice against their will—especially not in a public school. This settlement is a step toward accountability and a reminder that our constitutional rights don’t stop at the classroom

door.”

Hudgins’ attorneys petitioned the court for class action status, which was granted on Apr. 19, 2024, for all students who participated in the Quiet Time program in Chicago Public Schools during the academic years from Fall 2015 through Spring 2019 and who reached age 18 on or after Jan. 13, 2021.

Prepared by Charisma Media staff.