

Christian Club Escapes Hostile Merger Plan

In what could have been yet another violation of **religious liberty** on campus, a Connecticut high school has relented to allow Christian students to start an on-campus club.

The students had been denied approval because the principal insisted that the club should merge with all other faith groups to form an “interfaith” or “theology” club.

“Christian students should be encouraged to form clubs where they can develop leadership skills, discuss their faith and provide support to their fellow students,” says Matt Sharp, Alliance Defense Fund (ADF) litigation staff counsel.

“America’s public schools should also recognize the constitutionally protected rights of religious student groups on the same basis as non-religious student groups,” he continues. “The principal’s actions show that he did not understand this basic principle or tolerate diversity.”

When students at Newington High School asked to start an after-school **Christian club**, the principal told them they would only be allowed to form a “theology” club that discussed different religions.

ADF attorneys sent a letter to the principal and the Newington Public Schools superintendent stating that the principal’s denial violated the students’ constitutionally protected rights and the Equal Access Act, a federal law that requires schools to provide Christian clubs with the exact same rights, benefits and privileges that all other non-curricular student groups receive. The school had already approved other student groups with a focused area of interest.

The school district initially responded that the principal had

acted appropriately. ADF attorneys then sent another letter clarifying that while students of other faiths would be welcome to attend the meetings, the principal could not force the students to alter the nature, identity nor beliefs of the Christian club. Three days later, the school district replied that the club would be approved.

“Instead of encouraging students to celebrate their differences, the principal was asking students to fit into a particular group with government-approved beliefs,” says Sharp. “That’s a frightening thing.”