

NJ School District Wages War on Christmas, Bans Carols

Alliance Defending Freedom sent a letter Monday to the Bordentown Regional School District in Bordentown, N.J., after administrators decided to ban religious Christmas music during winter concert performances at elementary schools within the district. The letter explains the ban is both unnecessary and unconstitutional.

“Schools should not have to think twice about whether they can allow students to perform Christmas carols,” says legal counsel Matthew Sharp. “Courts have unanimously upheld their inclusion in school productions—even when songs deal with Christian themes that are naturally a part of the holiday.”

Recently, the superintendent at Bordentown Regional School District made a public statement that “religious music should not be part of the elementary program[s]” and decided to ban any and all religious music in the December concerts the district’s elementary schools normally hold.

The Alliance Defending Freedom letter explains that “every federal court to examine the issue has determined that including Christmas carols and other religious music in school choir programs fully complies with the First Amendment.” As a result, the First Amendment requires that the district “remains neutral towards religion and refrains from demonstrating an unconstitutional hostility toward songs with religious origins.”

The letter also explains that “the cultural and educational merits of Christmas carols and other religious songs are well established.” One federal appellate court, for example, “recognized over thirty years ago that there is no

constitutional objection to students in public schools learning and performing religious songs 'presented objectively as part of a secular program of education.' Music educators, not administrative officials, should choose which choral pieces—secular or sacred—are best-suited to the occasion."

"Misinformation about the First Amendment is frequently what leads to censorship of constitutionally permissible and culturally significant songs performed during Christmas concerts," adds senior legal counsel Jeremy Tedesco. "We urge the Bordentown Regional School District to rescind this new policy and permit religious music to be included among the many nonreligious songs performed at school concerts."

A December 2011 Rasmussen poll found that 79 percent of American adults believe public schools should celebrate religious holidays.