

Parents Appeal Judge's Ruling Allowing Yoga in Public Schools

Parents who say **yoga** is inherently **religious** have appealed a judge's ruling that allowed yoga in a public school system near San Diego, saying it violates the constitutional separation of church and state.

"Our children are not **religious** guinea pigs and should never be subjected to such misguided religious experimentation," said Dean Broyles, president of the National Center for Law and Policy, a nonprofit based in Escondido, Calif., dedicated to defending religious freedom, traditional marriage and the sanctity of life.

Broyles filed a notice of appeal Oct. 30 in San Diego Superior Court on behalf of parents who oppose the **yoga** curriculum in the Encinitas Union School District.

Broyles first filed a lawsuit regarding the district's yoga program last February on behalf of Stephen and Jennifer Sedlock, whose child attended El Camino Creek Elementary School in Carlsbad.

In July, San Diego Superior Court Judge John Meyer ruled against the Sedlocks, saying that the teaching of yoga in public schools does not establish a government interest in religion.

Meyer explained that although **yoga** is rooted in **religion**, it has a legitimate secular purpose as part of the district's physical education program.

Since then, according to El Camino Creek principal Carrie Brown, the Sedlocks pulled their daughter from the school and

placed her in a different school in the same district.

According to Brown, the controversy over the **yoga** practiced in the school district of approximately 5,000 elementary school students has died down. It is “a completely different climate,” she said, noting that only about a dozen parents still object to the program at her school of about 700 students.

“Parents have moved on,” she said.

The Encinitas yoga curriculum that runs in all nine of the district’s schools began with a \$533,720 grant from the K.P. Jois Foundation, an organization launched in 2011 with a goal of helping children around the country attain better health through the discipline.

The organization, which recently changed its name to the Sonima Foundation, has given the school district a new grant of \$1.4 million for the 2013-14 academic year, which has enabled the hiring of nine additional teachers, according to Elizabeth Wallace, executive assistant to the district’s superintendent.

Each student in the Encinitas School District is now taking 30-minute yoga sessions twice a week, though there is still the option for some students to opt out.

The Sonima Foundation is also working to introduce yoga into a few charter schools in Manhattan, and has worked with charter schools in Florida for several years.

For her part, Brown, the principal at El Camino Creek, says she’s happy the yoga program has continued at her school.

“Having seen this program in action for a year, I feel that it is definitely beneficial for the kids,” Brown said. “The proof is in the pudding, and the kids are doing well. That’s kinda how I feel.”