

Satanists Target Christian Kids Programs

The founder of a Christian organization that provides kids with religious instruction during the public school day is responding to Satanists' attempts to offer an alternative program to children.

Joel Penton, founder and CEO of LifeWise Academy and author of the book, "During School Hours: WHY and HOW LifeWise Academy is Reinstalling Religious Education into the Public School Day," told CBN News he believes The Satanic Temple's "Hellion Academy of Independent Learning" being offered to children at an Ohio elementary school is a direct "response" to his LifeWise academy programming.

"The messages that we're getting from those who are launching the program are somewhat mixed," Penton said. "At times, they will say this is explicitly an attempt to scare the school board and communities into shutting down all religious programs like ours ... Other times, they'll say, 'Oh, but you shouldn't be scared of this because it is going to teach kindness, and values, and that type of thing.'"

From Penton's perspective, it's "not super clear exactly what the program is about," though, like LifeWise, it enables children to leave the premises to take part in The Satanic Temple's alternative effort.

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As CBN News previously reported, HAIL will be offered to children at Edgewood Elementary School in the Marysville School District and is offered at one other location in Pennsylvania.

A representative for The Satanic Temple told CBN News there are programs either pending or launching in Ohio, Tennessee and Michigan.

Penton said it appears HAIL is not only a response to LifeWise and other similar programs but that it could also be a “last-minute attempt to stop or delay” Ohio legislation that would “give the right of religious instruction to all families.”

That legislation, House Bill 8, was recently signed into law and includes a provision that would require public schools in Ohio to have policies that allow for release-time programs. The new policy changes the “may” in current law to “shall,” thus making such guidelines a mandate. Penton, who spoke with CBN News before the law passed, has been a major proponent of its tenets.

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Release time—which has been ruled constitutional by the Supreme Court—allows kids to get religious instruction during the school day.

“Kids can receive Bible education during school hours if the program’s off school property, privately funded and students have parental permission,” he said. “Sadly, this opportunity has been somewhat under the radar for decades.”

Penton said LifeWise Academy provides the tools and resources for communities to be able to launch local release-time programs, offering bussing and resources to kids once those programs launch.

“[It’s usually] one time per week, usually during ... a lunch, recess or library time, or a special time,” he said. “Students can typically jump on the big, red LifeWise bus and head down the street to the church down the road and receive ... a Gospel-

centered Bible education class right during their public school day.”

Of course, not everyone is enthusiastic about LifeWise’s success.

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