

School District Ends Discrimination Against Christian Clubs

A school district in northeast Ohio has ended discrimination against a high school student-led Bible study and a Christian encouragement club, both of which have now been allowed to resume meetings on campus. Liberty Counsel sent a letter to the district on behalf of the students, requesting equal access on the same terms as other noncurricular clubs.

The school board voted unanimously this month to recognize the Christian student-led clubs and to extend equal treatment in all respects, including permitting the students to invite guest speakers during noninstructional time.

When the two clubs were cancelled in fall 2017, the students were told they could no longer meet as “official school club[s]” and would be treated as “outside organization[s].” The Christian club could no longer have guest speakers, and neither it nor the Bible study was permitted to meet during noninstructional time or distribute flyers announcing their meetings. The clubs were told they would also be assessed a facilities fee.

However, the school district permitted other “student-led” clubs such as the Gay-Straight Alliance, an environmental club, a fashion club, a vegan club and others to meet. These clubs met at no charge, were allowed faculty advisers and had full access to all the information channels at school, including distribution and display of flyers, and announcements on the school PA system.

In addition to meeting for encouragement and discussion, student leaders of the Christian club had hoped to demonstrate love and acceptance toward their fellow students by doing acts

of kindness on various days. When they were first allowed to meet in 2017, this club met at school during noninstructional time. The students opened the meetings, and where they had a speaker, the students introduced the guest speaker. After the speaker, the students closed the meeting. No guest speaker spoke more than once. However, the Christian club was still told “no outside speakers” would be allowed unless the club moved off campus for such meetings.

After the clubs were cancelled, the students involved in both clubs prepared documentation referencing the Equal Access Act and met with administrators to appeal these decisions. They were told they could “meet informally during lunch to read the Bible and pray” with a faculty adviser, but they could not be given club privileges, including sharing announcements about the club or displaying club flyers.

Liberty Counsel then sent a letter demanding equal access. After receiving the letter, the school board voted to allow the Christian student-led clubs.

Liberty Counsel founder and Chairman Mat Staver said, “We are pleased that this Ohio school district has agreed to abide by the law in granting equal access to school facilities to the Bible study and the Christian club. The law is clear that public schools cannot discriminate against the Christian viewpoint of student-led clubs. Equal access means equal treatment in terms of use of the facilities, ability to meet and announcements about the clubs. Equal access is a simple concept. Public schools cannot discriminate against Christian viewpoints on otherwise permissible subject matters.”