

FREEDOM FROM RELIGION *foundation*

P. O. BOX 750 · MADISON, WI 53701 · (608) 256-8900 · WWW.FFRF.ORG

April 20, 2011

**SENT VIA FAX & U.S. MAIL
(865) 988-6732**

Wayne Miller
Superintendent
Lenoir City Schools
2145 Harrison Ave
Lenoir City TN 37771

Re: Prayer in Algebra Classroom

Dear Mr. Miller:

I am writing on behalf of a concerned student, and other members of the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF), to alert you to a potential constitutional violation occurring at Lenoir City High School. FFRF is a national nonprofit organization with over 16,000 members, including over 200 members in Tennessee. Our purpose is to protect the constitutional principle of separation between state and church.

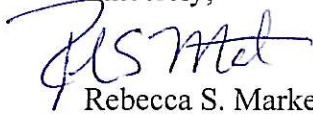
It is our information and understanding that algebra teacher, Mrs. Christine Haire at Lenoir City High School has led students in a group prayer prior to final examinations. Our complainant informs us that she asks her students if anyone objects prior to the prayer being given. If a student does object, the prayer is not delivered. However, it is our information that students have not objected in recent semesters. We understand that final examinations will be held in two weeks. We have serious concerns she may attempt to lead her students in prayer during upcoming finals.

If these allegations are true, it raises grave constitutional concerns. As you know, it is well settled that a public school teacher may not lead, direct or ask her students to engage in prayer. The Supreme Court has continually struck down formal and teacher or school-led prayer in public schools. *See, e.g., Engel v. Vitale*, 370 U.S. 421 (1962)(declared prayers in public schools unconstitutional); *Abington Township Sch. Dist. v. Schempp*, 374 U.S. 203 (1963)(declared unconstitutional devotional Bible reading and recitation of the Lord's Prayer in public schools); *See also Lee v. Weisman*, 505 U.S. 577 (1992)(ruled prayers at public high school graduations an impermissible establishment of religion); *Wallace v. Jaffree*, 472 U.S. 38 (1985)(overturned law requiring daily "period of silence not to exceed one minute ... for meditation or daily prayer."); *Jager v. Douglas County Sch. Dist.*, 862 F.2d 825 (11th Cir. 1989), cert. den., 490 U.S. 1090 (1989)(holding unconstitutional pre-game invocations at high school football games). Even when student-initiated, the Supreme Court have found these prayers unconstitutional. *See generally, Sante Fe Indep. Sch. Dist. v. Doe*, 530 U.S. 290, 308 (2000)(struck down a

school policy that authorized students to vote on whether to hold a prayer at high school football games). In all of the aforementioned cases, the federal courts have struck down prayer in public schools because it constitutes a government-endorsement of religion, which violates the Establishment Clause of the First Amendment.

We ask that you immediately commence an investigation into this matter. Lenoir City Schools must take appropriate action to stop its teachers from imposing their religious beliefs and practices on their students. Teachers in your district must be directed to adhere to current law. Please promptly inform us in writing of the steps you are taking to protect the rights of conscience of your students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RS Markert', written over a horizontal line.

Rebecca S. Markert
Staff Attorney

cc: Steven Millsaps, Principal Lenoir City High School