

Thomas Jefferson Classical Academy: CFA  
November 17, 2014  
Special Board Meeting

Location: Grammar School

Present: Andy Francis, Rhonda Alexander, Sally Harbin, Jeff Powell, Ted Bell, Jason Ruff, Jerald DeLaGarza, Philip Byers (via Phone), Paul Foley (via Phone), Paula Staley, Nick Longerbeam, Donna Trimble

The meeting began at 5:47 PM

Pledge

Moment of Silence

**POLICY ON RELIGION AND PRAYER:**

Ted Bell of the Legal Affairs committee presented the Policy on Religion and Prayer. Please see the attached policy. Mr. Bell stated that our primary purpose is to support the students and staff while following state and federal laws. The Legal Affairs Committee reviewed the current policy in conjunction with state and Federal laws and developed the attached policy. Sections of the policy were reviewed and explained to the board.

Section 4 of the policy states what is and is not permitted by students during instructional time and during non-instructional time. Student are free to pursue religious activity as long as they do not interfere with instructional time. Beliefs and non-beliefs may be expressed in the classroom as long as it does not interfere with instructional time. Students are free to pray together outside of instructional time as long as the process does not disrupt the school day and as long as their activity does not harass another individual.

The school must prevent such religious activities if the activity ties back to the school and presents the school as backing an official religious position. The school must not support a speech that backs a specific belief if the speech is given in connection with the school name. That might be how I phrased it when I was speaking so that might be the proper sentence for the minutes, but a more correct statement would be that "The school must not present a speech that backs a specific belief if the speech has been reviewed and approved by the school"

Holiday celebrations are permitted within the context of the history and tradition of the event. The school may not focus on the religious aspect of the event. Holiday decorations are accepted within tradition. No one may be forced to participate in holiday celebrations.

Teachers must teach world religions with fairness and without indoctrination.

A Moment of Silence may be observed at the first class at the beginning of each day. The moment must be totally and completely unstructured.

A student may pray silently and/or audibly during non-instruction time.

A school sanctioned prayer is prohibited and unconstitutional. Students may gather before during or after a game or performance. Prayer cannot be led, facilitated, condoned or encouraged by staff as per state and federal law.

Ted bell moved that the policy be accepted. Jason Ruff seconded the motion.

**PUBLIC COMMENT:**

**Rachel Mode** spoke to the board apologizing to the board stating that because TJ was a charter school she did not understand that prayer was not accepted. Mrs. Mode stated that she would abide by the policy and that she would not stop students from praying. Mrs. Mode believes strongly that you cannot separate God from inside and outside work if you are truly sold out to God. Just like you can't ask a fish to swim outside of water. Mrs. Mode asked that the Board write letters to the Governor, Senators and Representatives asking for a change in the law.

**Jenny Reagan** - Mrs. Reagan quoted scripture stating that we are believers. The settlers came here to protect their faith. Mrs. Reagan warned the parents to be careful how officials teach your child how to pray. You may not like how they are praying.

**Don Owens** – Speaking in support of the Word of God stating that it is the greatest piece of literature in the school library. When a child or adult prays they are crying out to the creator. Matthew 10:33 states, “But whosoever shall deny me before men, him will I also deny before my Father which is in heaven.” If you deny Jesus, change your heart. If you deny these children the ability to pray, you will stand before Jesus and he will deny you. How many children have prayed and experienced His answer because they believed in the power of prayer? How many have been denied the power of prayer and not received? How many will stand before Jesus and be told to depart from me I never knew you. Mr. Owens then prayed.

**Kevin Rohm** –Mr. Rohm quoted NC GS 115 c 47 29 b: “(29b) To Ensure Freedom of Religion. - No local board of education shall have a policy of denying, or that effectively prevents participation in, prayer in public schools by individuals on a voluntary basis, except when necessary to maintain order and discipline. No local board of education shall encourage or require any person to participate in prayer or influence the form or content of any prayer in public schools. This subdivision shall not be construed to direct any local board of education to take any action in violation of the Constitutions of North Carolina or the United States.” Mr. Rohm does not see a prohibition in this statute stating that teachers cannot pray. I hope my teachers would pray for the students. I hope Parents will teach the students to pray and encourage them to pray every day.

**Paul Lane** - Mr. stated that many are here as parents and because we care about our students. Our country was founded on Judeo Christian principals. Mr. Lane likes that students are taught character, moral values, and to care for the students. Senate bill 370 – states that students have a right to pray and read their Bible. Teachers are not to lead or coerce however they can join in. Parents are not trying to force Christianity. All men are endowed to life, liberty and the pursuit of righteousness. Parents are praying for the board. Mr. Lane challenge stated the teachers can't lead, but parents can teach students to pray. We can't teach them to bully but we can teach them to pray. If God is involved in your heart he can change everything else.

**Stephanie Beaumona** agrees with the document presented by the board. Mrs. Beaumona believes that there should not be indoctrination. There is no way to know that every teacher will teach the same values. The policy helps prevent the wrong values from being taught.

**Rit Vurriale** – Mr. Vurriale thanked the board for taking the policy seriously. He is very sorry that a teacher feels she must defend herself for praying. He stated that the government is for the people. The parent is invoking rights from the biggest bully in our Government – The Freedom from Religion Foundation. The money and complaints sent out prove this organization is a bully. We teach students to stand up to bullies. We need to stand up to the Freedom from religion Foundation. The establishment is supporting laws that are unconstitutional. These bullies are trying to coerce you to eliminate the very rights on which we were established. We need to worry less about losing our positions and more about our piety.

**Tammy Waters** – Mrs. Waters commended the board and Mr. Maimone on the school that is known in the community, the state and the nation for academic accomplishment. Our accomplishments are also due to the fact that Jesus can be mentioned and talked about in the classroom. Tammy cautioned us not to remove the value from the classroom. Tammy quoted George Washington and his beliefs could not have been fighting for what was read by Ted Bell this evening. Our forefathers established this country as a Christian nation. The nation was founded on Biblical Principals. Tammy will stand with the teacher and ask the board to take a stand on what the Supreme Court missed in 1962 and 1963. Tammy challenged the Christians by stating, “If we are fighting for prayer in school, it must be in taught in the home.”

**Mike Reagan** – Mr. Reagan commended the teacher for obeying the law but standing by her beliefs. The issue is not about whether or not we pray in school. We are fighting our religious rights. As a community, we need to give young boys and girls the ability to learn. Why is it when we have the opportunity to help protect a young child from being bullied that we choose to fight for our piety? Remember the rules we are chipping away at are there to help young people learn.

**Cynthia Luckadoo** – Mrs. Luckadoo stated that she was a Christian and that she believes that prayer should be in school. She also believes that we should live by the law of the land. Mrs. Luckadoo has been in her child’s classroom when another student (not her child) asked to pray. The teacher stated that they could pray and explained that others did not have to participate. The following day her son reported that the teacher got in trouble for that. The teachers are so awesome at TJ. The teacher should not be in trouble for this. Mrs. Luckadoo hopes that the children will get to pray.

Board Member discussion:

Ted Bell departed from board protocol and responded to public comment during the board discussion time of the policy. There is usually not rebuttal from the Board after Public Comment. Ted stated that our job is to protect the school and the teachers. We have awesome teachers. The law is not up for discussion. The law is settled on this issue. The courts have been working with this issue for over 50 years. There is no wiggle room in the law anymore. If we do not follow the law, we are at risk of expensive legal fees and at risk of losing our charter. To follow the law insures that we can continue teaching our kids. At least ten religions are represented at TJCA-CFA. We don’t have the ability to disagree with the law. The position of the board is to protect the resources, teachers, and students at TJCA-CFA. A lawsuit is horrendous, and traumatizing. The board’s job is to protect the school while allowing the teachers as much freedom as possible while remaining within the law. The board’s job is to follow the law the best that we can. Hours of discussions can take place as to whether or not the laws

are interpreted correctly. Our responsibility lies with following the current laws. Our job is to make sure the students continue to get a great education. The law states that the teachers may not take a position on one religion over another. We can't teach our kids to ignore laws that they do not agree with. He urged those who disagree with any laws to be involved in the political process and be sure to vote.

With no further discussion, Andy Francis called for the vote on Mr. Bell's motion to accept the new policy. The policy was accepted unanimously by the full board.

Jeff Powell made the motion to adjourn. Jason Ruff seconded the motion. The motion carried.

The meeting ended at 6:55 PM.