

## Bible compromise probably is best

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Yes 26% No 74%

The best possible scenario for all concerned would be a fast resolution to the federal lawsuit over the Bible curriculum in the Ector County Independent School District. And the mediation ordered by a judge offers the best hope for a quick end.

The fuss intensified after the suit was filed on behalf of eight parents who say the curriculum violates individual religious liberties. The American Civil Liberties Union, the ACLU of Texas, People for the American Way Foundation and national law firm Jenner & Block LLP filed the lawsuit against the district in May and the Liberty Legal Institute has been representing ECISD.

After a mediation session in Dallas, the plaintiffs sent a formal settlement proposal to ECISD trustees, asking that the current National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools curriculum be replaced with another program.

And there seems to be at least a chance that something might result from that suggestion as some school board members say they'd be willing to change curriculum.

To be quite honest, this controversy really hasn't accomplished much other than creating a distraction to the district's primary goal, offering a solid education to the 26,000 ECISD students.

And the suit very likely could have been headed off if some school officials had taken a less dictatorial approach toward the issue.

In 2005, the Bible Curriculum Committee was formed and charged with recommending one of two curriculums. Before they could choose one, the instructions changed and they were told to present two options.

On Dec. 6, 2005, the committee recommended both the Bible Literacy Project's textbook and one by the National Council on Bible Curriculum in Public Schools. On Dec. 20, 2005, trustees



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Do you think the federal lawsuit over ECISD's Bible curriculum can be resolved through mediation?

adopted the National Council's curriculum.

There were indications that many of the committee members favored the Bible Literacy Project and even some of the people who filed suit had expressed that as their preference if a Bible course was to be offered. But their input was ignored.

After the lawsuit was filed, the rhetoric escalated. ECISD trustee L.V. "Butch" Foreman III said he didn't understand how the parents could have an argument in the case if none had children taking the classes.

"If they don't have children in the class, they can kiss my butt," Foreman said. "They're just looking to impose their beliefs and their views on everybody, and we don't put up with that crap out here."

But now that initial animosity over the suit has subsided and leadership in the administration and on the board has changed, a compromise might be the best outcome.

It also should be pointed out that this battle is being waged over a course that has drawn a total of 38 students at both of the district's high schools this semester.

Let's get this issue resolved. It's time to shift the focus from the eight parents and those students (16 at Odessa High and 22 at Permian) who actually are taking the course to the 26,000-plus kids who just need to be taught in the most efficient and effective fashion.

>>It is my belief that mediation will not succeed because ECISD has established, over time, its concretized attitude about the class, which is still not open to public review. I do not believe they are open-minded about the negotiation, nor do I believe they have any interest in offering any alterations which might make the class more acceptable to the significant number of ECISD taxpayers who do NOT support the class as it has been implemented. A Bible class, taught by any person who, by his or her practice, represents a rather narrow view and interpretation of the document, at a minimum presents the appearance of being fatally biased. And since neutral taxpayer observers are not allowed to visit the class, ECISD has closed the only available door to dispel the belief that the class can only present a fairly fundamentalist view of the Bible.

>> My children went to St. Johns and my grandson goes to Midland Christian. It was and will always be my responsibility to teach my family about religion. Private schools cost too much? Try reading the Bible at home and discussing it with your children. Better yet, try going to church and attending Sunday school. Form discussion groups and hear other people's point of views on Christ. Teach your children by example and live a Christian life. There are so many better ways to learn about Jesus than in a public school. This class is dividing our district, leaving us open to lawsuits and yes, while it is an elective, it is using money that could be used in educating our children. God belongs in our homes, churches, private schools and in our hearts, not in our public schools.

>> The answer to mediation is no! Mediation should not be an option. The choice of ECISD to have a Bible curriculum is the choice of this state and school district. It is not the worry of the rest of the country. The whole reason behind the separation of church and state is to protect the church from the state. The state has no guaranteed protection from the church. The only reason the state might think it needs protection from the church is if the state is planning on infringing on the church (Hmmmmm). All the mess about Bible and God in the school being offensive to someone or a deceleration of religion by the government is nothing more than a ploy by those who wish to change the nature of this country to suit their desires. Ask the people what they think. In the next federal census, ask the people of this nation what they think about God in the schools and go from there. I am willing to bet the overwhelming majority of this nation will side with God. The problem is those that want to make everything P.C. The P.C. crowd will eventually pass into oblivion. Let's not let them take the rest of the country with them.

>> When has the right-wing Christian moral majority ever cared what was fair or just to people of other faiths?

>> There is nothing wrong with a course in comparative religions, and, in fact, the Bible, Koran and other religious texts are all discussed in 10th-grade world history and even in ninth-grade world geography courses, which are REQUIRED classes. However, there is also nothing wrong with an elective course that specifically looks at the Judeo-Christian Bible and texts and their influences, so long as you don't turn it into a theology course for one particular viewpoint, which is where this class went awry. The curriculum that was railroaded through by the board is very one-sided and proselytizes for one view of Christian teaching, which has NO place in a public school.

>> I believe in God, but I also believe that the Bible should be taught in your own church, not at public schools. This has been a complete waste of time and money.