

Hobby Lobby president's Bible curriculum shelved by Oklahoma school district

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(RNS) An Oklahoma school district has shelved a Bible curriculum that Hobby Lobby President Steve Green had hoped would be used by students in January.

Two legal groups that opposed the elective said November 25 that the Mustang Public Schools decided not to feature the curriculum, which was approved in April by the school board.

"In summary, the topic of a Bible course in the Mustang School District is no longer a discussion item nor is there a plan to provide such a course in the foreseeable future," Superintendent Sean McDaniel wrote in an email to the Freedom from Religion Foundation and Americans United for Separation of Church and State.

The two groups, working with the American Civil Liberties Union, said they received the email in response to a freedom-of-information request they filed about documents concerning the school board's role with the curriculum.

Jerry Pattengale, senior editor for the high school curriculum, said he looks forward to working with other school districts.

"We understand Mustang's decision to withdraw the new, elective Bible course from consideration," said Pattengale, who also is executive director of education of the billionaire Green family's Museum of the Bible, scheduled to open in Washington in 2017.

"Museum of the Bible remains committed to providing an elective high school Bible curriculum and continues work on an innovative, high-tech course that will provide students and teachers with a scholarly overview of the Bible's history, narrative and impact."

Pattengale, who sits on the Board of Managers for Religion News Service, had said in July that the introduction of the curriculum's first textbook was postponed until January due to "unforeseen delays."

Opponents, who say the curriculum is biased and supports the conservative Christian belief that the Bible is inerrant, or without error, welcomed the Mustang district's decision.

"Education officials in Mustang did the wise thing," said the Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United. "Objective study about religion in public schools is permissible, but this curriculum was essentially an extended Sunday school lesson."

The superintendent wrote that the district was not able to review the final curriculum, nor did it receive a "commitment to provide legal coverage to the district" if faced with a lawsuit—both of which he termed "non-negotiables" that were not met.

"This development is a victory not only for reason and the law, but the sacrosanct right of a captive audience of students to be free from indoctrination in a public school setting," said Annie Laurie Gaylor, FFRF co-president.

In June, Green's company won a closely watched Supreme Court decision that granted corporations such as Hobby Lobby religious exemptions from covering women's contraception in company health insurance plans. Green is the funder of Museum of the Bible, which will feature his family's vast collection of biblical artifacts.