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WHAT IS LIFEWISE ACADEMY?

LifeWise is an evangelical Christian organization that partners with public schools to provide Bible education to students during the school day. LifeWise takes the students off campus during the school hours under the guise of SEL (Social Emotional Learning) and Character Education.

Headquartered in Hilliard, Ohio, Lifewise Academy programs are staffed by a director, teachers and volunteers, who help transport students and assist in classrooms as needed. These volunteers are typically made up of community and local church members, but they have not been thoroughly vetted like our public schools require of those same positions.

As of 2023, the organization anticipates operating in over 300 schools across 20 states including Arkansas, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Pennsylvania, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia. As of 2024 more than 30,000 public school students are enrolled in the program all over the country.

TEACHER REQUIREMENTS & CERTIFICATION

LifeWise uses the word "certified" to describe their teachers, when the fact is that their "teachers" require no actual teaching experience or education. Simply leading a church group is enough to move forward in the application process and the "certification" that LifeWise provides is a sham compared to the education and degrees required of public school teachers. For reference, the entire training program can be found on our website's documentation page.

Teachers and bus drivers are LifeWise hired employees and volunteers. Once the students leave the school, they are only in the hands of those hired and vetted by LifeWise

BACKGROUND CHECKS

At LifeWise Academy, the background checks they purport to undertake are an extremely concerning part of their entire organization. The checks that they conduct are handled by a third party organization called "Protect My Ministry", the title of which really illustrates where the primary concern lies. These checks are simply CONSUMER REPORTS and are not remotely comparable to those required of public school teachers or even other volunteer groups. There are no thorough criminal record searches, no fingerprinting, no rap back system, and no option to have a copy of the report sent back to you after it is complete. All of which is standard, in addition to a state BCI and FBI background check, for all public schools in our country.

DISCRIMINATING & OSTRACIZING LGBTQ+ ISSUES

SCHEDULING & CLASS DESIGNATION

We have received many reports detailing several different issues arising from schools trying to accommodate the scheduling of LifeWise. In many districts, children as young as first grade who are opted out are being sent to uninstructed study halls. In other districts, children whose parents have opted them out are getting a "non-core" or "specials" class twice a week, while their peers leave the classroom and go offsite for LifeWise. The glaring problem with this model is that there is no new instruction during these second classes each week that the LifeWise children miss. It creates so much extra work for our teachers, who are forced to come up with busy work for the students who stay, and to ensure the children leaving are not having to "make up" work (as state laws typically require) because they are attending RTRI.

Evangelical Christianity historically discriminates against a multitude of people, including those that identify as part of the LGBTQIA+ community and those that do not adhere to purity culture. LifeWise abides by this and also includes a transphobic rhetoric as well as condemnation of gender affirming care and the use of preferred pronouns. LifeWise considers divorce a sin and having sexual intercourse outside the confines of marriage is strictly prohibited. This rhetoric is especially harmful to those in domestic abuse situations as they are explicitly told that leaving that marriage is a sin against God. Teachers and volunteers as LifeWise are given a document that guides them on how to respond to "Difficult Questions from Students" that affirms this hateful stance and echoes it to a child who is reaching out to an adult for guidance.

This is more than just concerns of blurring the lines of separation of church and state and the 1st Amendment

RTRI POLICY: Release Time for Religious Instruction = during school hours
LifeWise no longer offers programs before or after school.
They want to reach kids during the school day ONLY.

We are a country with many different types of spirituality, religions, denominations, and places of worship, which contribute to our diversity.

WE ARE PROTESTANT, CATHOLIC, ATHEIST, HINDU, ORTHODOX, JEWISH, JEHOVAH'S WITNESS, BUDDHIST, AGNOSTIC, EVANGELICAL, SIKH, AND MORE.

All are respected for their own diverse beliefs and rituals.

We do NOT want the children of our communities subjected to any kind of religious indoctrination, peer pressure, shaming, or proselytization during our precious public school hours.

LIFEWISE ACADEMY

LifeWise Academy claims to be "non-denominational, character-based Bible education", but is using a curriculum based on "The Gospel Project", a Bible study program produced by LifeWay Christian Resources, the publishing house for the Southern Baptist Convention. Evangelical Christianity is what they are teaching; purity culture, anti-LGBTQIA+, transphobic, and discriminatory doctrine is followed in accordance to their rigid beliefs.

The children are encouraged to recruit their friends to the program with promises of candy, treats, parties, and prizes. They are encouraged to read their Bible during the school day and speak the "gospel" as often as possible.

RTRI programs are traditionally and locally run and managed, but LifeWise Academy is using a "Plug 'n Play" model - designed to work like a multi-level marketing scheme, dependent on recruitment and donations to sustain itself.

LifeWise Academy works with a local steering committee to lobby for the program in a school district, including those running for school board in those places.

CLASSES MISSED

Art, Library, STEM, Music, Gym, Recess, Lunch, Study Hall, Band, Orchestra, etc.
Work must be made up, depending on the policy.

EVANGELICAL FAITH

Although LifeWise claims to be non-denominational, their curriculum is produced and published by the Southern Baptist Convention. Historically, the SCB has supported slavery, segregation, traditional gender roles, while forbidding interracial marriage, women pastors, and abortions. They have been embroiled in sexual abuse scandals and political corruption and consider same-sex marriage an "abomination". Make no mistake, this program is based solely on Evangelical beliefs and doctrine, and their documents and curriculum make that very clear.

CONVERSION MISSION

It is our view that LifeWise is blatantly abusing the RTRI case law to use our public school system as a "MISSION FIELD" - to proselytize to children and encourage them to do the same. That is the largest distinction when compared to other RTRI programs. We believe this program should be litigated by the federal courts based on this huge difference between LifeWise and every other RTRI program that has previously been upheld. We believe that the law that allows this to happen needs to be reexamined with a modern lens and updated in accordance to what is best for our children.

We DO respect the beliefs and rituals of others, but we do NOT agree with proselytization and religious indoctrination of young children during the school day.