

**NATIONAL
COALITION
AGAINST
CENSORSHIP** **YOUTH
FREE
EXPRESSION**

May 11, 2021

Superintendent Kim Holland
Ardmore City Schools
611 Veterans Blvd
Ardmore, OK 73401

Re: Black Lives Matter shirts at District schools

Dear Superintendent Holland:

The National Coalition Against Censorship is a coalition of national nonprofit groups dedicated to protecting the First Amendment rights of K-12 students, teachers, and staff. We are writing in regard to recent press reports stating that your district's students have been forbidden to wear "Black Lives Matter" apparel in school.

According to those press reports, you told the parent of one student that "politics will not be allowed at school." If that is true, you are violating your students' well established First Amendment rights. More than fifty years ago, in *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent Community School District*, 393 U.S. 503 (1969), the Supreme Court declared that students have the right to make political statements on school grounds as long as they do not *substantially* disrupt the activities of the school. Mere disagreement with the students' speech is obviously not enough, as Judge Samuel Alito noted, ruling in a case before he joined the Supreme Court, "*Tinker* requires a specific and significant fear of disruption, not just some remote apprehension of disturbance."

It is undoubtedly true, as you observed to local media, that political statements — whether they be "Black Lives Matter," "Make America Great Again," or anything else — can engender disputes between students. But shouldn't the district want use this as an opportunity to teach them how to engage in respectful conversations with those with whom they disagree? Such lessons would be consistent with Oklahoma state education standards, which, among other things, call for students to become effective listeners and communicators; to demonstrate an understanding of the virtues that citizens should use when interacting with each other; and, more generally, to exhibit traits of good citizenship.

We urge you to clarify for your students that they have the right to speak in a manner that does not substantially disrupt school, and that students who disagree with the speech of others can either ignore them or engage respectfully with them. They cannot try to silence them.

Thank you for your attention to this important issue.

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Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chris Finan". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Christopher Finan
Executive Director
National Coalition Against Censorship

CC: Board of Education, Ardmore City Schools