



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on October 30, 2013

## Student Gets Perfect Score on Rejected “God Is My Idol” Essay

Following a public uproar and the intervention of a conservative legal group, a Tennessee elementary school reversed its decision that disallowed a 10-year-old student from submitting an essay describing God as her idol, giving her a 100-percent score on the assignment instead.

In September, fifth-grade students at Lucy Elementary School in Shelby County, Tennessee, were assigned an essay to describe their idol. But when Erin Shead asked to write her paper on her idol, God, the teacher refused, requiring her to choose a more earthly hero. Erin ended up submitting her essay on Michael Jackson, but the incident so troubled her that her mother contacted Shelby County school district officials to complain, and took her daughter’s story to local and national media outlets.



The media blitz began when mother Erica Shead spoke to local news sources like WREG-TV in Memphis, insisting that the teacher had no right to dictate who her daughter wrote about or to hamper her religious expression in school.

Shead told reporters that she challenged the principal on the refusal, saying, “Would it be better if she wrote about Ellen Degeneres?” She added that “of course, there was no comment.”

In her essay, Erin Shead wrote that “God will always make me do the right thing. He will make me be the best that I can be. I will never ever not believe in Him.... I will never hate Him. He will always be the #1 person I look up to.”

Erica Shead told the the media that she brought the incident to the attention of the public to help ensure that her daughter’s constitutional liberties would be protected, and to draw attention to such legal assaults. “I just wanted every Christian to know that we have a right to be able to express ourselves,” Erica told reporters. “We understand that they’ve taken prayer out of schools, but they cannot take God out of our children.”

Before it was over, the Texas-based [Liberty Institute](#) stepped in to have a word with school district authorities, convincing them to reverse the decision of the teacher. “Of course students can talk and write about God in school,” said Liberty Institute attorney Jeremy Dys. He noted that many young and inexperienced teachers like Erin’s “have been barraged with so much false information for so long that they are afraid that a 10-year-old student’s coloring assignment might violate the First Amendment. That kind of intimidation by the ACLU and the Freedom from Religion Foundation is wrong.”



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After discussions with the conservative legal advocacy group, the school district allowed Erin Shead to submit her original assignment on God, for which the ten-year-old received a perfect score.

Following the incident, the Shelby County school district released a statement insisting that it is committed to protecting the rights of students to express their religious views, and attempting to clarify its policy on the First Amendment's supposed separation of church and state.

"Shelby County Schools respects the moral and religious beliefs of all students and families," the statement read. "While teachers and staff are not permitted to promote religion in the classroom, no laws or district policies allow teachers to limit students' expression of religious beliefs in their personal classwork."

The district said that the incident with Erin Shead "was a regrettable misunderstanding, and we as educators must learn from it. The principal and teacher have had a positive and productive conversation with the family, and we are pleased this matter is being addressed at the school level."



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