

Release Time Religious Instruction-History and Status

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Christian conservatives have imposed their will on public education on many fronts in recent years, such as bleeding taxpayers to fund private religious school tuition and imposing draconian book bans and curriculum restrictions. A new line of attack is abusing laws that guide **Release Time for Religious Instruction (RTRI)**, which removes kids from school for Christian-based moral guidance.

Most RTRI regulations are based on two Supreme Court cases. In **McCorm v Board of Education (1948)**, the court struck down an RTRI program in Illinois wherein kids were solicited in school buildings and given registration cards by the school. In **Zorach v. Clauson (1952)**, the court ruled that a **specific** RTRI program in the state of New York **was** constitutional, allowing parents to remove their kids from school on specific days for religious observation.

The Zorach decision was **not** a blanket allowance for all RTRI courses to run uncontested, and it clearly stated that each RTRI program must be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Schools were to do no more than release students upon their parents' request and keep records of those absences. Schools were forbidden to promote specific programs or make in-school announcements on their behalf. Importantly, the ruling acknowledged that:

"This program may be unwise and improvident from an educational or a community viewpoint."

The McCorm and Zorach decisions were clear. Parents have the right to remove kids on specific days for specific religious reasons. Neither ruling imagined religious groups interrupting the school day by taking large numbers of kids off school property on a regular basis.

In recent years, no organization has abused RTRI laws more than LifeWise Academy, founded in 2018 and now based in Hilliard, Ohio. Since then, LifeWise has infiltrated hundreds of schools in Ohio and many other states. With parental consent, kids are ostensibly picked up at school during non-graded periods such as art, music or recess, and transported by LifeWise employees to off-site locations, then returned for the next class period. Excluding travel time, this leaves very little time for religious instruction.

Critics of the program maintain that if parents value religion-based moral guidance for their kids, they should handle it at home or church or enroll their kids in private religious schools. Removing then returning groups of kids from school disrupts the education

process. Nonetheless, LifeWise and many participating schools violate RTRI laws on many fronts.

LifeWise often uses public records requests to get the names, addresses and ages of students at schools, then markets to them directly for the sole purpose of reaching "unchurched" kids with moral guidance. They frequently send kids back to school with 'Invite a Friend' flyers and offer treats and rewards for bringing a friend. In many cases, they get promotional help from schools that host LifeWise events on and off school property and advertise the organization on district websites and social media pages. Zachary Parrish, founder of Parents Against LifeWise, has meticulously documented a growing list of violations. All summaries include related hyperlinks.

RTRI Violations

Butler Elementary - DeKalb County Eastern Community School District - Butler, IN

Principal sent a school-wide [email](#) to all parents with attachments that included a "[BE \[Butler Elementary\] Lifewise Parent Letter](#)" on school letterhead, a [permission form](#), and a "[Lifewise Informational](#)" PDF.

Both the informational PDF and the letter from the principal state LifeWise classes will be taking place in conference/board room of [Color Master Inc.](#), an industrial manufacturing plant. Of most concern is this factory, where Lifewise is taking 4th grade students, currently employs a registered "[sexually violent predator](#)" with charges related to a minor.

Defiance City Schools - Defiance, OH

School listed LifeWise as part of the weekly class [schedule](#), sent non-attending 2nd graders to a [study hall](#), and [continued](#) to do so after being [warned](#) by the Freedom From Religion Foundation (FFRF). Additionally, teachers called kids that do not attend "LifeWise [leftovers](#)", shared private information, [punished](#) students for their behavior at LifeWise, and sent school [aides](#) to the program. LifeWise employees at this location have also left students [unsupervised](#) and even [restrained](#) them, likely without proper certification to do so.

Avery Elementary - Hilliard City Schools - Hilliard, OH

The school accommodated and scheduled a LifeWise [presentation](#) during a teacher professional development day which caused FFRF to send a [letter](#) about teachers being required to attend training session led by LifeWise and published this follow-up [article](#).

Columbus Grove Local Schools - Columbus Grove, OH

[Superintendent Report](#) discussing the local LifeWise program's expansion and soliciting participation.

Ashland City School District - Ashland, OH

FFRF sent a [letter](#) to their Superintendent about promoting LifeWise in his official capacity during proponent [testimony](#) for Ohio's HB 445. Ashland's mayor also spent federal American Rescue Plan Act [funds](#) on LifeWise.

Culver Community School Corporation - Culver, IN

FFRF sent them a [letter](#) about students being forced to attend an assembly about LifeWise.

Fredericktown Local School District - Fredericktown, Ohio

FFRF [reports](#) in May of 2024 after the school allowed representatives of LifeWise to come into Fredericktown schools to promote LifeWise and recruit students.

FFRF sent a [second letter](#) in November of 2024 stating that “schools within the District have again been promoting and encouraging students to attend LifeWise Academy’s release time bible study classes. It is our understanding that representatives of LifeWise have been allowed to come into the district’s schools and recruit children to attend their religious program. We are further informed that [Redacted], a substitute teacher with Fredericktown Schools, also teaches for LifeWise under [an alias] and pressures Fredericktown students to attend LifeWise programming.”

Paulding Exempted Village Schools - Paulding, OH

School [website](#) posted LifeWise information and promoted it under parent links. There are also vetted reports of students being [sent](#) to LifeWise without parental consent forms, as well as LifeWise being permitted to take students directly from the [classroom](#) and pass out [Bibles](#) in the school.

Cloverleaf Local Schools - Seville, OH

Posted LifeWise [flier](#) and solicited participation on the district website.

Fairview Elementary - Central Local Schools - Sherwood, Ohio

School listed LifeWise on the elementary [schedule](#) and referred to LifeWise employees as “[staff](#)”.

Continental Elementary School, Continental, OH

Official school Facebook page included a LifeWise promotion [video](#).

Elmwood Local Schools - Bloomdale, OH

District violations include:

- [Renting](#) school buildings and providing security badges to LifeWise.
- Giving [wifi](#) access and tech support to LifeWise.
- Providing LifeWise a classroom [phone](#) tied into their system as well as a school number and extension.
- [Soliciting](#) participation for LifeWise.
- Principal uses his position and school email to [endorse](#) LifeWise to other districts.
- Principal uses his position and school email to [endorse](#) LifeWise to churches.
- Principal received LifeWise's promotional [marketing](#) materials in his school email.
- Teachers bought LifeWise [shirts](#) through school email.
- Not meeting required [IEP](#) minutes because of LifeWise.

Many additional violations can be found in this [records](#) request.

The superintendent [admits](#) they are “crossing the line” and hopes they can continue to do so once the school is “not under the radar”.

River View Intermediate Schools - Warsaw, OH

District [solicited](#) participation and promoting [fundraising](#) for LifeWise on the school's official Facebook page. Additionally concerning, although not a violation by the school, this local LifeWise program is hosting students in a garage ([1](#); [2](#)), raising concerns about sanitation, safety measures, fire code as well as zoning and building regulations.

Greenville City Schools - Greenville, OH

School listed LifeWise as part of students' weekly [schedule](#).

Liberty Center Local Schools - Liberty Center, OH

LifeWise claimed a teacher had to discuss the [Bible](#) with students in class.

Wynford Local Schools - Bucyrus, OH

District was [renting](#) buses to LifeWise and using school resources and employees for coordination.

Shawnee Local School District - Lima, OH

School sent home enrollment [advertisements](#) in kids bookbags, unsolicited.

Miamisburg City School District - Miamisburg, OH

District posted a LifeWise information [flyer](#) on their website.

Wadsworth City Schools - Wadsworth, OH

Posted a LifeWise information [flyer](#) on the district website.

Mechanicsburg Exempted Village Schools - Mechanicsburg, OH

District established an online form ([1](#); [2](#); [3](#)) and implemented a cafeteria ordering system specifically to accommodate LifeWise employees picking up school meals ordered by parents.

Marysville Exempted Village Schools District - Marysville, OH

District Board of Education member praising and [promoting](#) LifeWise while using his official title and position.

Southwest Licking School District - Pataskala, OH

The district took it upon itself to dictate which students were “eligible” for LifeWise and which students were not, based on the child’s homeroom class schedule rotation. Additionally they solicited participation and polled interest by creating forms and sending unsolicited official school emails to student’s parents about their children’s [eligibility](#) for LifeWise. The district also makes its cafeteria staff and teachers coordinate the students [lunches](#) being ordered and provides lunches for LifeWise staff.

Perrysburg Schools - Perrysburg, OH

District [promotes](#) LifeWise in mass school flyers [emails](#).

North Union Local School District - Richwood, OH

Elementary school posts [advertising](#) on their website that LifeWise is the only outside organization present at their open house.

Franklin Monroe Local School District - Arcanum, OH

District allowed LifeWise to [fundraise](#) on school property.

Bellaire Local Schools - Bellaire, OH

Elementary school promoted and solicited participation for LifeWise by [advertising](#) the program on their official Facebook page.

League Elementary - Norwalk City Schools - Norwalk, OH

Emails obtained in a records request paint quite the picture in this district.

When the board was given the LifeWise [presentation](#) they were told that students would not be missing class time. This condition was officially stated by the school in the [acknowledgment letter](#) provided to LifeWise. This rule was reiterated at the next [board meeting](#) during the [superintendent's discussion](#) in which he gave an explanation of how the LifeWise program will run, explained why he supports it and encouraged people to call Defiance City Schools to ask them about their support and experience.

When LifeWise expanded, this rule was ignored. Students are not just missing art and music classes but are also being taken from science and social studies classes, and missing Title 1 time to attend Lifewise. All of this was unknown to the school board and acknowledged by the superintendent, and can be witnessed in these [emails](#) which also show the administration distributing LifeWise name badges to teachers and instructing them to wear them.

LifeWise admits their program causes "[extra work and inconvenience](#)" for teachers in this district. Additionally concerning is the superintendent arranging funding from his mother for LifeWise after text messages from the local director and [discussing](#) this via his school email.

Buckeye Central Local Schools

District allows LifeWise to remove students during [Math, Science, and Social Studies](#).

Elida Local Schools - Elida, OH

District allowed LifeWise to host an informational [meeting](#) on school property in the Middle School Commons during a teacher work day.

Fairbanks Local School District - Milford Center, OH

Morning announcements about LifeWise were made to students in both the [High School](#) (promoting a fundraiser) and [Middle School](#) (soliciting enrollment) buildings, then also sent to parents as an email.

Lucas Local School District - Lucas, OH

District included a full page spread about LifeWise on page 15 of the district [newsletter](#).

Buckeye Valley Local School District - Delaware, OH

FFRF sent a [letter](#) regarding "unconstitutional accommodation of religious instruction" which included the middle school hosting "study halls for LifeWise Academy students on school property, supervised not by school staff members but by LifeWise volunteers". As well as allowing LifeWise "special access during [...] open house, where LifeWise representatives handed material out to parents, including those not near the cafeteria [while] no other outside organizations had such access."

Borden-Henryville School Corporation - Borden, IN

District's official Facebook account directly [shared](#) a LifeWise post with information about enrollment and permission forms.

Vetting

Our schools **must** know who is transporting our kids to and from these off-site locations and supervising them while they are there. Whereas public school employees are required to pass stringent criminal background checks, LifeWise only makes half-hearted attempts to vet their employees, seeming to care only about an individual's commitment to the LifeWise mission. Here are five egregious examples:

Renee Beck is a former Language Arts teacher in the Loudonville-Perrysburg school district. After multiple allegations of inappropriate conduct with students, including 'abuse of a minor' that involved sexting, Beck was fired from her position and faced disciplinary proceedings from the state board of education. She voluntarily surrendered her teaching license in 2019. LifeWise hired her anyway. (See news links below).

Jillian Jaunzemis runs a day care from her Sandusky home and pleaded not guilty to a misdemeanor charge after police responded to reports of a boy riding a plastic scooter in the middle of the street. The boy was not wearing a jacket or shoes in 35-degree weather. Officers determined the boy had come from Jaunzemis' home, where she was taking care of six other children at the time. This was the fourth time in less than five years that police were called to Jaunzemis' home about incidents involving children she watches. LifeWise hired her anyway. (See news link below).

Robin Frey served as the bookkeeper at Grace Brethren Church in Delaware, Ohio. She participated in a coverup scheme to protect Brian Williams, senior pastor at Sunbury Brethren Church, who was later convicted of two counts of sexual battery. Williams was a youth pastor at the time. The victim was a minor. LifeWise hired Ms. Frey anyway. (See legal case summary below)

Buddy Gene Workman violated a protective order resulting from domestic violence complaints. LifeWise hired him anyway and he currently holds a leadership position with the LifeWise organization in Knox County, Ohio. (See the enclosed screenshot summarizing his case).

Matthew Ray Epperson was labeled a 'violent sexual predator' by the DeKalb County Sheriff's office in Butler, Indiana after being convicted of attempted child molestation. LifeWise hired him anyway. (See the enclosed screenshots summarizing his case).

These are the most egregious examples of LifeWise' feeble vetting process. There is little doubt that many other adults work for the program that would **never** qualify for public school employment.

Transportation, Safety and Liability

All passenger vehicles, including buses, must be registered with the Department of Transportation. LifeWise has done that, but the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration website shows no information about the insurance they carry. It may be that LifeWise asks or requires participating churches or other site-owners to put LifeWise busses on their [insurance](#). Vagaries in this area unacceptable.

LifeWise Academy LLC

* US DOT#: 4116996

* Number of Vehicles: 19

* Number of Drivers: 50

* Number of [Inspections](#): 127

There are two accidents to [report](#). Both buses were full. A third accident occurred in Lewis Center, OH on Friday, December 20, 2024. Police reports are pending. When a public-school bus driver gets into an accident, they are immediately tested for drugs and alcohol, even if there were no injuries or kids involved. Buses must also be inspected by the State Highway Patrol, who must file a report within 48 hours. What are the rules for these private religious groups coddled by the anti-public education zealots at the Statehouse?

There have been 127 [inspections](#) of LifeWise buses in the past two years, with 30 resulting in documented [violations](#). Here are a few examples:

- Inadequate brakes for safe stopping - Brake Lining condition
- No or inadequate bus emergency exit marking
- Cab/body improperly secured to frame
- Brake connections with leaks under vehicle
- No or defective bus emergency exits
- Seats not secured in conformance with FMVSS
- Inadequate floor condition
- Defective brake(s) are equal to or greater than 20 percent of the service brakes on the vehicle/combination.

We **must** know if LifeWise drivers have Commercial Driver's Licenses and are enrolled in [Rapback](#). We **must** know that our kids are safe and that our schools and taxpayers are protected.

Non-graded ≠ Non-essential

Any suggestion that music, art and recess are non-essential class periods is misinformed. Rudimentary forms of written language emerged just 6,000 years ago, before which all cultures used music, art, dance, stories and other forms of pretend play to preserve life-sustaining knowledge. New research suggests that human acquisition of language was preceded by improvements in effortful imagination before the development of speech apparatus. All these communication and memory tools are deeply embedded in our DNA and should be nurtured. The cognitive and developmental benefits of music, art and 'free play' should never be minimized. I include many sources below. There are hundreds more.

Concluding Thoughts

If parents genuinely feel that religion-based moral guidance is important for their kids, it makes no sense for them to farm this out to poorly vetted adults their kids have never met. They should take the reins themselves at home and at church and/or enroll their kids in religion-based private schools.

We **must** know what liability risks hang over our schools and taxpayers if something nefarious or unfortunate occurs during these excursions. We are asked to believe that LifeWise assumes **all** responsibility for the welfare of our kids traveling to and from these off-site facilities. Parents have granted permission and signed waivers that absolve our schools of liability, but do we have **ironclad** proof that there are **no** loopholes that put our schools and taxpayers at risk?

As should be clear, the LifeWise organization will push boundaries and flaunt RTRI laws any chance it gets. In the opinion of many, organizations such as LifeWise have no place in public schools. We should trust our professional, fully vetted teachers, librarians, administrators and coaches with the education and welfare of our kids **every minute** until they return home each day.

There is **no** logical reason for LifeWise or any religious organization to operate **during** the school day, so why is this happening? The answer is clear to all but the willfully blind. Along with universal vouchers, draconian book bans, curriculum restrictions and other oppressive legislation, LifeWise is part of a multi-pronged attack intended to weaken and destroy public education.

Now that anti-public education zealots at the Statehouse are **forcing** public schools to let religious organizations infiltrate our schools, local school boards must do **everything** in their power to craft RTRI policies that protect their kids, schools and local taxpayers.

Sources:

Summaries of Zorach v. Clauston and McCollum v Board of Education:

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1MIBWf7tqC3omaP6XPaj6DEe4bINLz1M-/view>

Documented Violations:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/e/2PACX-1vTJFEuIIAingWDt4QlakyBjM9tshLTR7T2uktsPqcXkOks4E_ZoZZEf7ACEsQ9u_XSoi46V50Xvc1/pub

Renee Beck vetting issue (news link): [Ohio LifeWise worker fired over past student sexting accusations](#)

Renee Beck vetting issue (news link): [LifeWise fires director after past alleged sexting scandal with minors](#)

Jillian Jaunzemis vetting issue (news link): [Woman charged after boy in her care found wandering streets | AP News](#)

Robin Frey vetting issue: Simpson v Grace Brethren Church of Delaware (2014): [SIMPKINS v. GRACE BRETHERN CHURCH OF DELAWARE \(2014\) | FindLaw](#)

Buddy Workman vetting issue: See screenshot below.

Matthew Ray Epperson vetting issue: See screenshot below.

The importance of music, art and pretend play:

Kelly, L. (2017). The Memory Code: The Secrets of Stonehenge, Easter Island and Other Ancient Monuments, Pegasus Books.

Leslie, A. (1987). "Pretense and Representation: The Origins of 'Theory of Mind.'" Psych. Review. 94: 412-426.

Johnson, S. (2016). Wonderland: How Play Shaped the Modern World. Penguin Random House.

Steen, F. and S. Owens (in prep.). "Evolution's Pedagogy: An Adaptationist Model of Pretense and Entertainment."

Scalise Sugiyama, M. (1996). "On the Origins of Narrative: Storyteller Bias as a Fitness-Enhancing Strategy." Human Nature. 7: 403-425.

Singer, J. L. (1995). Imaginative play in childhood: Precursor of subjunctive thoughts, daydreaming and adult pretending games. In A.D. Pellegrini (Ed.), The future of play theory (pp.187-221). Albany, NY: SUNY Press.

Tooby, J., & Cosmides, L. (2001). Does Beauty Build the Adapted Mind? SubStance # 94/95, 2001.

Vyshedskiy A. (2019a) Language evolution to revolution: the leap from rich-vocabulary non-recursive communication system to recursive language 70,000 years ago was associated with acquisition of a novel component of imagination, called Prefrontal Synthesis, enabled by a mutation that slowed down the prefrontal cortex maturation simultaneously in two or more children – the Romulus and Remus hypothesis. Research Ideas and Outcomes 5.

Buddy Gene Workman case summary:

CourtVIEW Home Search Results eFile Calendar Log on

99OT10-0299 WORKMAN, TAMSIN vs. WORKMAN, BUDDY G OE

Case Status: CASE CLOSED Action: OTHER CIVIL
 File Date: 10/26/1999 Case Judge: EYSTER, OTHO
 Next Event:

All Information Party Docket Disposition

Party Information

WORKMAN, TAMSIN - PLAINTIFF

Disposition: Party Attorney
 Disp Date:

WORKMAN, BUDDY GENE - DEFENDANT

Disposition: Party Attorney
 Disp Date:

Docket Information

Date	Docket Text
01/01/1900	E86872 10.00 20051019 0 CF COSTS/RELEASE CJ
01/01/1900	E86872 92.00 20051019 0 CL COSTS/RELEASE CJ
01/01/1900	E86872 9.10 20051019 0 SH COSTS/RELEASE CJ
01/01/1900	E86872 25.00 20051019 0 CR COSTS/RELEASE CJ
01/01/1900	E86872 10.00 20051019 0 CF COSTS/RELEASE CJ
01/01/1900	E86872 20.00 20051019 0 CL COSTS/RELEASE CJ
10/26/1999	CONVERSION FREE FORM ATTORNEY The Following Attorneys were entered free form in Writs and were not associated to a Courtview Attorney. Free Form Attorneys for TAMSIN WORKMAN J ELAINE NAILING ATTORNEY AT LAW 12 WEST LOCUST STREET NEWARK, OHIO 43055 ROSE M FOX SOUTHEASTERN OHIO LEGAL SERVICES 12 W. LOCUST STREET NEWARK, OH 43055 Free Form Attorneys for BUDDY WORKMAN CHARLES E FEBUS WALKER & FEBUS, L.L.P. 120 1/2 E. HIGH ST MOUNT VERNON, OH 43050
10/26/1999	PETITION FOR EX PARTE PROTECTION ORDER CONCERNING DOMESTIC VIOLENCE WITH AFFIDAVIT(S) AND ORDER TO BE SIGNED BY COURT MAGISTRATE. FILED BY ATTY.: ROSE M. FOX
10/26/1999	INFORMATION FOR PARENTING PROCEEDING AFFIDAVIT
10/26/1999	HEARING ASSIGNMENT SCHEDULED FOR 11/04/99 AT 10:00 AM - FULL HEARING ON CIVIL P
10/26/1999	DOMESTIC VIOLENCE EX PARTE CIVIL PROTECTION ORDER WITH WARNING AND INSTRUCTIONS STARTING JUDGE 18 ENDING JUDGE 21
10/26/1999	NOTICE TO SERVE ISSUED TO THE SHERIFF OF KNOX COUNTY FOR PERSONAL SERVICE ON: BUDDY GENE WORKMAN (COPY TO SHERIFF AND ALSO POLICE DEPT.)
10/29/1999	PERSONAL SERVICE OF NOTICE TO SERVE ON: EXTRA DATE : 10/27/99 DEFENDANT(S) : D001 WORKMAN, BUDDY G.
11/02/1999	NOTICE OF APPEARANCE FIBY ATTY FEBUS
11/04/1999	NOTICE OF APPEARANCE AS CO-COUNSEL FOR PETITIONER.
11/05/1999	CERTIFICATE FOR COURT STENOGRAPHER'S FEES KARINA S HULL
11/12/1999	FOR VISITATION FILED BY R. FOX WITH MEMORANDUM (W/ENTRY TO COURT)

Matthew Ray Epperson case summary:



SHERIFF BRADY N. THOMAS

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[Details](#) | [Other Known Addresses](#) | [Warrants](#)

Name: MATTHEW RAY EPPERSON Registration #: 2232924

Level: Sexually Violent Predator

Status: Active

Registration Start Date: 04/20/2009

Registration End Date:

Lifetime Registration: Yes

Physical Description

Age: 39	Height: 5'10"
Sex: M	Weight: 220lbs
Race: White	Eyes: Brown
Hair: Brown	
Scars/Tattoos: Tattoo on Chest (SKULL), Tattoo on Stomach (SKULL), Tattoo on Neck (SCAR), Tattoo on Upper_back_center (RIGHT), Tattoo on Upper_R_Arm (DEMON), Tattoo on R_forearm (CROSS, HEBREW, STAR OF DAVID), Tattoo on abdomen ("Get Fuzzy")	

Address

513 N BEECH ST BUTLER, IN 46721, DeKalb County

[View Map](#)

[Other Known Addresses](#)

Offenses

- Description:** 18-3-405 - Sexual assault on a child (attempted)
- Date Convicted:** 07/16/2008
- Conviction State:** Colorado
- Release Date:**
- Details:**
- State Equivalent:** 35-42-4-3 - Child Molesting
- County of Conviction:** Pueblo
- Case Number:** 2008CR627
- Sentence:** 2 YRS DOC
- Description:** 18-3-404 - Unlawful sexual contact (attempted)
- Date Convicted:** 01/18/2013
- Conviction State:** Colorado
- Release Date:**
- Details:**
- County of Conviction:** Pueblo
- Case Number:** 2012M1860
- Sentence:** 1 YR DOC

Comments

Sexually Violent Predator Lifetime Registration



MATTHEW RAY EPPERSON

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[Register to track this offender](#)

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