

April 2, 2025

Dear [School Board Members],

I am deeply concerned about the increasing pressure our children face today from:

- the growing divide in politics
- the influence of media
- the lack of a meaningful sense of purpose in many students' lives
- the lack of understanding people in society have for people of different beliefs
- being marginalize as a "less intelligent" people if they believe in a higher power

This environment is contributing to rising rates of mental health issues, violence, suicide, and feelings of hopelessness.

I believe that reintroducing the concept of the possibility of a higher power (whatever that might be) in the school system could help provide students with a sense of hope, connection, and meaning.

Many of history's greatest scientists, such as Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, believed in a form of God and saw no conflict between faith and science. Faith provides many people with the strength to cope with life's challenges, and it's important that students are given the opportunity to explore these values.

After all, there is a reason it's called the "theory" of evolution, and not just "evolution." For centuries, belief in a Creator has been the predominant view. It is time to give equal attention to the perspective that offers clear hope, meaning, and purpose in life? Faith in a higher power is often wrongly viewed as inconsistent with science when, in fact, it can be more consistent with science depending on one's perspective.

I encourage the school board to explore the possibility of offering a class on world religions a core class, inviting local religious leaders to present and share the teachings and principles of their faiths with students. This would give students a broader understanding of life and provide them with the grounding they need to face the pressures of today's world. The goal of the class would be to develop the skills students need to work effectively with people from different backgrounds in the future.

Students are taught in a bubble of not understanding others. They go off to college and find that there are large groups of people that do not believe the things they believe. Then they are placed into a job where they interact with all sorts of people. A "us and them" mentality sets in along with judgements of why they can't get along. This is a source of conflict and results in generation after generation not understanding each other.

Please review the attached discussion. We can fix this! Thank you for your consideration.

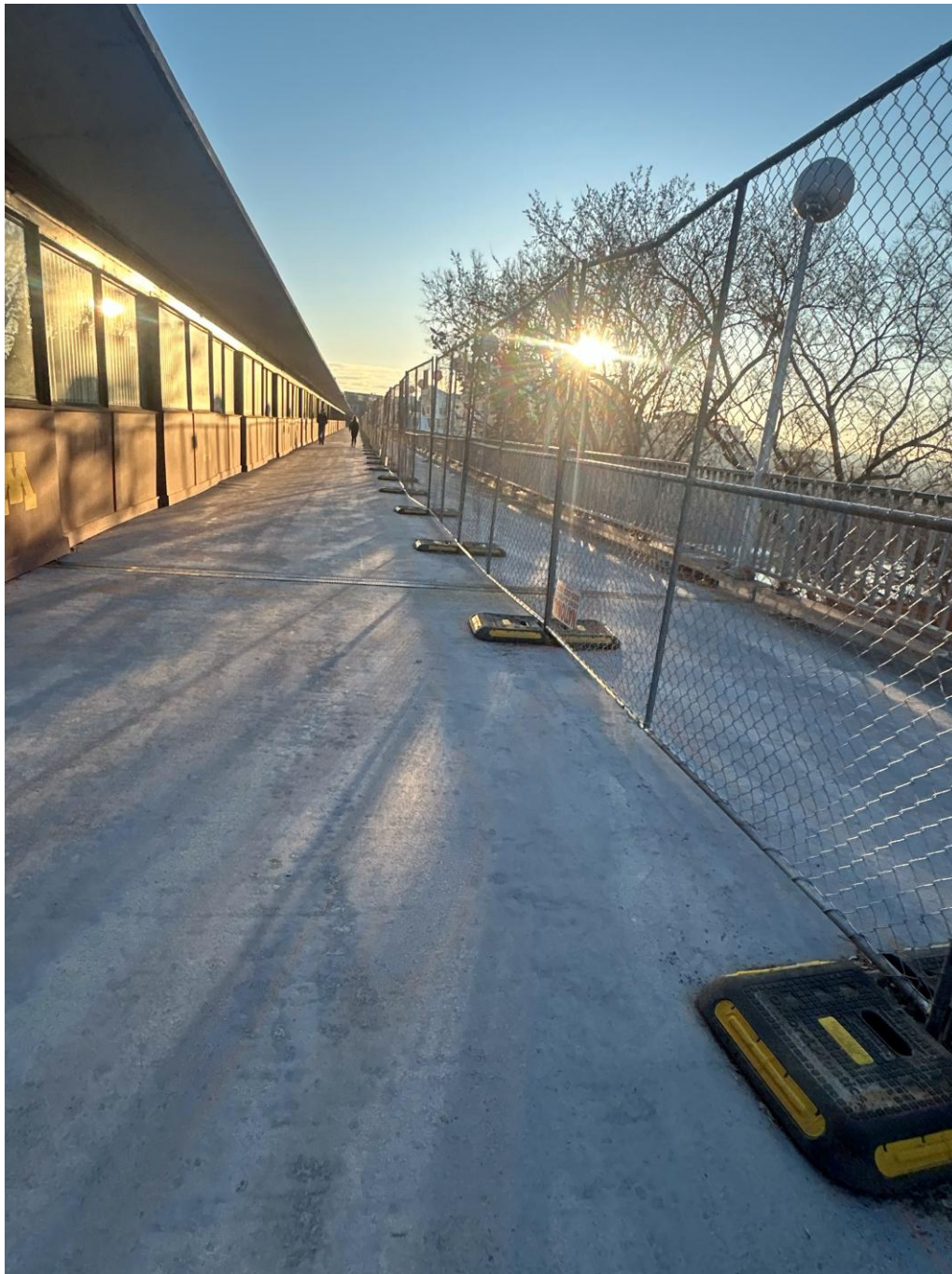
Sincerely,

Richard T. Abbott

Observation 1: Our society does not have suicide and mental health under control. The photo below was taken at the U of MN bridge that separates the east and west campuses.

Comment: The photo shows the stark difference between trying to stop an action by getting to the root cause or adding a Band-Aid that ultimately only draws more attention to the disturbing problem.

Conclusion: We need to pull together and start making immediate advancements in protecting of our children from feelings of not having value, being alone, isolation, confused, overwhelmed with despair, depression, and hopelessness. Our society (including high schools) is not making advancements in this area. The CDC has data that shows we are heading in the wrong direction in the area of suicide prevention.



Observation 2: The separation of church and state is misunderstood in public schools

Comment 1: The separation that was desired at the start of this nation was that there would be no state religion, and that people would be able to practice their faith as long as it was not harmful to the wellbeing of others.

Comment 2: This is a core freedom to protect.

Comment 3: The phrase "separation of church and state" does not appear in the U.S. Constitution. However, the principle is derived from the First Amendment.

Conclusion: We need to encourage people to be free to have and own their own spiritual beliefs without being marginalized.

The first amendment:

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

Observation 3: Our political environment is dysfunctional because of the inability to be tolerant.

Comment 1: Opposing sides can barely converse without using negative disrespectful tactics.

Comment 2: It was embarrassing to watch different ones over and over lose their composure and resort to name calling during this last election. It was on both sides; let's be honest and not fool ourselves.

Conclusion 3: Politicians need to be a better example to our youth. There needs to be a better understanding of what it means to live in a melting pot of free people. There are things to be tolerated and things to not be tolerated. We, society, have lost our ability to dialog with others that hold opposing views. Tolerance is a good word. It means we can disagree, but respect others. It does not mean that we need to find only grounds of agreement in order to act civilly to each other.

Tolerance:

Definition: Tolerance, in the context of belief systems, refers to the acceptance and respect for the rights of others to hold different beliefs, even if those beliefs are different from one's own belief. It involves recognizing the perspectives of others and allowing individuals to practice and express their religious views without interference, prejudice, or discrimination. Tolerance does not necessarily require agreement with or approval of others' beliefs, but it does require an attitude of openness, understanding, and respect.

Example: Tolerating a colleague who practices a different religion or has different spiritual beliefs, even if you don't share or fully understand their views, and supporting their right to hold those beliefs. This would include refraining from **any** condescending attitude, sarcasm, belittling, or name calling.

Intolerance:

Definition: Intolerance, in the context of belief systems, refers to the refusal or inability to accept and respect the beliefs, practices, or opinions of others. It often manifests as prejudice, discrimination, or hostility toward people who have different religious views. Intolerance involves actively dismissing or denying the legitimacy of other belief systems, often leading to conflict, marginalization, or even persecution of those who hold differing beliefs.

Example: Being openly hostile toward someone because they follow a different religion, refusing to acknowledge their right to practice their faith, or trying to impose your beliefs on them.

In essence, **tolerance** promotes peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among individuals with differing belief systems, while **intolerance** creates division, misunderstanding, and harm due to a lack of respect.

Do we need any more bad examples of intolerance in our world?

Observation 4: The music departments at Higher Education have not thrown out music that has had a religious background.

Comment 1: Higher Education music departments at leading Universities incorporate the wide breath of music that includes classical music that was predominately made for religious purposes.

Comment 2: They are a good example to follow.

Comment 3: Excluding religious music would severely limit the study of music. So, they do not ignore them. They embrace them.

Conclusion: Other subjects should do the same. We can't only accept theories that have a bent toward Atheism. Atheism is but one of many belief systems that should be respected as a view, but on the only view. We should not conclude that science and faith are separate when many believe them to be significantly intertwined.

Observation 5: The media incorrectly states that the “scientific community” unanimously supports the Big Bang and Evolution as scientific fact and infers that not believing in these Theories shows you’re not scientific.

Comment: The vast majority of inventors that developed significant advancements in our understanding of the physical world around us had some form of belief in a higher power.

Conclusion: We should not ignore this fact. We would not call these people unscientific.

1. **Pythagoras** (c. 570–495 BCE)
 - Famous for the Pythagorean theorem in mathematics, relating to right-angled triangles.
 - Believed in a divine, harmonious order governed by numbers.
2. **Hippocrates** (c. 460–370 BCE)
 - Known as the "Father of Medicine," he revolutionized medical practice with his ethical standards and the Hippocratic Oath.
 - Likely viewed healing as both natural and divine.
3. **Archimedes** (c. 287–212 BCE)
 - A mathematician and inventor, famous for his work in geometry, calculus, and the principle of buoyancy.
 - Followed the polytheistic beliefs of ancient Greece.
4. **Galileo Galilei** (1564–1642)
 - An astronomer and physicist, known for pioneering modern science, his improvements to the telescope, and supporting the heliocentric model.
 - A devout Catholic, seeing science as a way to understand God's creation.
5. **Leonardo da Vinci** (1452–1519)
 - A polymath who excelled in art, engineering, anatomy, and scientific observation, famous for works like Mona Lisa and The Last Supper.
 - Raised Catholic
6. **Isaac Newton** (1642–1727)
 - Mathematician and physicist who formulated the laws of motion and universal gravitation, laying the foundation for classical mechanics.
 - Believed in a God who created and sustained the universe.
7. **James Watt** (1736–1819)
 - Known for his improvements to the steam engine, which were crucial to the industrial revolution.
 - A devout Christian
8. **Benjamin Franklin** (1706–1790)
 - A key figure in the American Enlightenment, known for his inventions, diplomacy, and scientific work in electricity.
 - A deist, believing in a Creator.
9. **Thomas Edison** (1847–1931)
 - Inventor and entrepreneur, best known for the development of the electric light bulb, phonograph, and the motion picture camera.
 - A general belief in a higher power.
10. **Alexander Graham Bell** (1847–1922)
 - Inventor of the telephone and a significant contributor to the development of communication technology.
 - A devout Christian, believing his work was guided by God.
11. **Henry Ford** (1863–1947)
 - Revolutionized manufacturing with the assembly line, making automobiles more affordable and accessible to the masses.
 - A devout Christian, integrating faith into his business practices.
12. **Wilbur and Orville Wright** (Wilbur: 1867–1912, Orville: 1871–1948)
 - Pioneers of aviation who are credited with inventing and flying the first successful airplane.
 - Raised Christian, acknowledging divine providence in their achievements.

Observation 6: The theory of evolution does not explain the origin of life

Comment 1: The theory is not complete.

Comment 2: It is still just a theory.

Comment 3: There is an equal and traditionally well accepted previous theory called creationism.

Discussion: There is a bias that seems to be pushed the idea that evolution is science and that believing in a creator is not. In reality, both are a form of faith: believing in something that cannot be proven is faith, by definition.

There is a word that is used quietly in science that is not science.

The word is abiogenesis. From AI:

“Abiogenesis is the scientific term for the process by which life originates from non-living matter. It refers to the natural development of living organisms from simple organic compounds, without the involvement of preexisting life. This concept is central to understanding the origins of life on Earth and contrasts with biogenesis, which is the creation of life from existing life forms.”

Abiogenesis is quietly included in the Theory of Evolution as an assumed, unproven, soon to be discovered truth.

Without Abiogenesis, the Theory of Evolution is incomplete.

That is not science.

Science is repeatable and observable findings often found by making a “leap of faith” a best guess, a hypothesis, then the hypothesis is tested by making tests or making observations. That is the scientific method.

Life from non-life (Abiogenesis) has not been seen or reproduced; however, the Theory of Evolution and the Big Bang don't seem to clearly tell people this is left out.

It doesn't mean the Theory of Evolution and the Big Bang should not be taught. It means the full truth of the teaching should be included and not left out so that students do not incorrectly assume the Big Bang and Evolution Theory explains the origin of life.

Conclusion: Therefore, the theory of evolution should be taught as an incomplete theory of science or better categorized as a subset theology of Atheism. There is faith in each. Faith being defined as a belief in something that can not be proven.

Observation 7: The top scientist known for the development of the Theory of Evolution and the Big Bang do not seem to have contributed a significant amount of other discoveries of the universe that are used in technology today or are instrumental in commerce.

Charles Darwin would be considered the Father of Evolution Theory. He also apparently had good information to be learned about coral reefs, plant movement, and earth worms.

Georges Lemaître was the apparent father of the Big Bang Theory. I am unfamiliar with his work.

Comment 1: What other work did Darwin produce that made him a renowned scientist?

Comment 2: What other work did Lemaitre produce?

Comment 3: As an engineer that has used science to design and analyze buildings and the forces that are placed on them, I am familiar with an extraordinarily large amount of laws (or principles) of physics.

I just don't see these two scientist's work as instrumental in anything I use or was taught for my profession.

That does not mean others have used their work to make a living and produce things. I am just unaware of their accomplishment beyond their main study.

To be honest, I am not sure how valuable the rest of their work was in other fields of study. I just don't know. Their work doesn't affect how I design or analyze buildings.

Conclusion 1: We should study this more.

Observation 8: The vast majority of the population of the world have believed (and still do believe) in a Higher Power

Comment 1: We should certainly consider this as evidence that there may be a higher power. Surely, they are not all poor thinkers, and likely had good reasons to believe in the supernatural.

Comment 2: We should allow students to believe what they want to believe, within limits. A belief system should not harm someone. Right?

Comment 3: We shouldn't paint Atheist as the only intelligent faith that fully embraces science when people of other faiths not only embrace science but have been instrumental in the discoveries.

Comment 4: We should prepare students to be able to talk with other human beings, with respect, seeing others and themselves as having value.

Comment 5: The only way to do that would be to first understand others. The following is a list of world religions listed with an approximate % of the population.

| | |
|----------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. Christianity | (31%) |
| o Catholicism | 50% |
| o Protestantism | 37% |
| o Baptists | 13% |
| o Eastern Orthodoxy | 12% |
| o Pentecostals | 7% |
| o Anglicanism / Episcopalians | 3% |
| o Methodism | 2% |
| o Presbyterianism | 2% |
| o Reformed / Calvinism | 2% |
| o Mormonism | 1-2% |
| o Seventh-Day Adventism | 1-2% |
| o Jehovah's Witnesses | less than 1% of Christians): |
| o Unitarian Universalism | less than 1% of Christians): |
| 2. Islam | (25%) |
| 3. Hinduism | (15%) |
| 4. Atheist | (7%) |
| 5. Buddhism | (7%) |
| 6. Agnosticism | (6%) |
| 7. Chinese Traditional Religions | (5%) |
| 8. Sikhism | (0.3%) |
| 9. Judaism | (0.2%) |
| 10. Indigenous Religions | (0.1%) |
| 11. Baha'i Faith | (0.1%) |

Comment 6: It is not nice to call approximately 93% of the world unscientific.

What Would Not Be Tolerated from Students:

1. Disrespectful or Hostile Comments: Any form of mocking, belittling, or ridiculing another person's beliefs would be unacceptable. This includes making jokes, sarcastic remarks, or dismissive comments about another religion or belief system. Example: "That's just a silly belief" or "Your religion is completely wrong and goes against science."
2. Interrupting or Disrupting the Speaker: Disrupting the guest speaker while they are presenting or trying to dominate the conversation in a disrespectful manner is not allowed. Everyone should have an equal opportunity to listen and learn. Example: Constantly interrupting the speaker with confrontational or aggressive questions.
3. Shouting or Aggressive Behavior: Aggressive behavior, including shouting, yelling, or any attempt to intimidate or overpower another person in the discussion, would be unacceptable. Example: Raising your voice in anger when someone presents an idea or belief you disagree with.
4. Attempting to Proselytize or Convert: Proselytizing, or attempting to convert others to one's own religion, is not appropriate in this context. The purpose of the class is to foster mutual understanding and respect, not to try to convince others to change their beliefs. Example: "You should really consider becoming a Christian" or "Your religion is wrong; let me tell you the 'right' way."
5. Refusal to Listen or Learn: Actively refusing to listen to others or being closed-minded to learning about other beliefs would not be tolerated. The class is meant to be a space for curiosity and education, and students must engage respectfully with the material presented. Example: "I don't care about what the speaker has to say because I already know it's wrong."

What Would Not Be Tolerated from the Guest Religious Leader:

1. Imposing Personal Beliefs on Students: The guest speaker must not attempt to convert or impose their personal religious views on the students. They should present their religion's teachings in a neutral, educational manner without pressure or persuasion. Example: "I believe this is the only true religion, and you should too."
2. Disrespecting Other Religions or Beliefs: Guest speakers should avoid making negative or derogatory comments about other religions, belief systems, or cultures. They should present their own beliefs respectfully without denigrating others. Example: "People from other religions are misguided" or "Everyone else is wrong."
3. Avoiding Generalizations and Stereotyping about other faiths. The presentation should be focused on what the faith teaches followers to believe not what others faiths believe. A guest speaker should not make blanket generalizations or stereotypes about people of other faiths. They should avoid statements that could reinforce harmful stereotypes or misconceptions. Example: "People of that religion are all the same" or "Followers of that belief are all extremists."
4. Using Inappropriate Language or Tone: The guest speaker should avoid using offensive, inflammatory, or overly emotional language. They should maintain a calm, respectful, and neutral tone, especially when discussing potentially sensitive topics. Example: "Anyone who doesn't believe in this is wrong" or "You'll regret not following my faith."

Additional Class Guidelines for Maintaining Respect:

1. Focus on Education, (This is not a Debate Class): Encourage an environment where the goal is learning, not arguing. While differences in belief are natural, the objective is to understand rather than convince others of one's viewpoint.
2. Encourage Questions, Not Confrontation: Students should be encouraged to ask questions for clarification and understanding, not as a way to challenge or debate the speaker's beliefs.
3. Mutual Respect and Empathy: Both students and guest speakers should engage with empathy and an open heart, understanding that each person's beliefs are deeply personal and shaped by their own experiences. Understanding that they likely have loved one how held to this faith but are no longer alive.