

# California School District Sued Over "Religious" Yoga Program

[Excerpts]

An attorney representing a family bent out of shape over a public school yoga program in the beach city of Encinitas filed a lawsuit Wednesday to stop the district-wide classes.

In the lawsuit filed in San Diego Superior Court, attorney Dean Broyles argued that the twice weekly, 30-minute classes are inherently religious, in violation of the separation between church and state....

"EUSD's Ashtanga yoga program represents a serious breach of the public trust," Broyles said. "Compliance with the clear requirements of law is not optional or discretionary. This is frankly the clearest case of the state trampling on the religious freedom rights of citizens that I have personally witnessed in my 18 years of practice as a constitutional attorney."

Superintendent Timothy B. Baird said he had not seen the lawsuit and could not directly comment on it, but he defended the district's decision to integrate yoga into its curriculum this year.

The district is believed to be the first in the country to have full-time yoga teachers at every one of its schools. The lessons are funded by a \$533,000, three-year grant from the Jois Foundation, a nonprofit group that promotes Asthanga yoga. Since the district started the classes at its nine schools in January, Baird said teachers and parents have noticed students are calmer, using the breathing practices to release stress before tests.

"We're not teaching religion," he said. "We teach a very mainstream physical fitness program that happens to incorporate yoga into it. It's part of our overall wellness program. The vast majority of students and parents support it."

Baird said the lawsuit would not deter the district from offering the classes....

The lawsuit notes [that] studies professor Candy Gunther Brown found the district's program is pervasively religious, having its roots in Hindu, Buddhist, Taoist and metaphysical beliefs and practices.

While the lawsuit names only one family, dozens of parents feel the same way and oppose the program, Broyles said.

Children who have opted out of the program have been harassed and bullied, the plaintiffs allege. The children who opt out also are missing out on 60 of the 100 weekly minutes of physical activity required by the state, since they usually sit and read during the yoga lessons, the plaintiffs say....

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<http://www.foxnews.com/us/2013/02/21/california-school-district-sued-over-religious-yoga-program/>