



FAQ | Centerville Elementary School 5th Grade Play

How long had the fifth graders been doing the play? Was it voluntary or mandatory?

The fifth grade play goes back many years, 20 or more. Because it was done during instructional time, all fifth grade students were required to participate. The play was planned by the fifth grade teaching team and practiced by students during the school day.

Was it a complaint about the line "God bless us, every one!" that prompted reassessment of the play?

Absolutely not.

Was there a religious issue in the complaint?

There was no complaint. Questions were asked about play processes and procedures. The decision had nothing to do with a religious concern; rather, the decision was made due to the amount of instructional time that this non-curricular activity had grown to require.

Can you tell me how many and who they came from (parents, community members, etc.)?

It would be inappropriate and irresponsible of us as educational and community leaders to provide specific information that could cause any person or groups of people to potentially experience retribution.

In general, when questions are asked, it's essential that we delve deeper into the matter and then provide honest and transparent answers regarding any decisions that are made.

How many parents?

We believe it would be irresponsible of us to provide any information specific to students or families. As we have already shared, the decision was not influenced by parents.

Why was the play reassessed – a formal complaint vs. a parent asking their student to be excused?

Questions were asked about play processes and procedures. A formal complaint was not received.

Why did the play not occur this year?

The play did not occur this year due to the amount of instructional time this production had grown to consume. As Mr. Kramer worked with the 5th grade teaching team to understand what putting on the play entailed, it became clear that the teachers had concerns about committing roughly 20 hours of instructional time to something that is not part of the fifth grade curriculum. To provide some perspective about how this might impact instruction, committing 20 hours of instructional time to the play would be roughly equivalent to foregoing math instruction for students for one month, in that one hour of math is taught each day of the week for four weeks. Given the desire to ensure available instructional time is used to best meet the diverse educational needs of their students, and to not disadvantage students relative to their fifth grade peers across the district, the teachers and Mr. Kramer came to the decision not to conduct the play this year as it has been done in the past.



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Mr. Kramer did explore with the teaching team, and other members of the CES staff, possibilities for continuing the play with production time falling during non-core instructional time. This would have involved a different level of commitment and coordination across the building and there was not sufficient support for doing the play in this way. Mr. Kramer also offered to work with interested staff and/or parents after school in order for the play to continue. However, no one was either able or interested to assist with producing the play after school hours. Had the primary concern been with the content of the play, possibilities for continuing the play would not have been sought by Mr. Kramer.

Have there been complaints about the play in the past?

When questions or concerns are raised at the building level, they are addressed by the principal. If so, prior principals would have addressed any concerns as this is Mr. Kramer's first year with Hempfield School District.

What kind of response have you been getting since this was widely publicized over the weekend?

We have heard from students, parents, and families on both ends of the spectrum. We understand that some parents are upset that the play did not occur, but there are also those who expressed appreciation that the play, as it had traditionally been prepared and delivered, did not occur this year. Given the national media attention surrounding this story, we have now also heard from citizens across the country who wish to express their opinions. We are focused on responding to stakeholders within our community and helping them understand the facts of the decision before jumping to conclusions based on media reports.

How many people have you heard from since the story has been publicized nationally?

Since the story was publicized nationally, we've received at least 200 or so emails/phone calls either supporting the decision, asking questions to gather additional information, or objecting to the decision.

Religious and cultural issues aside, some people are dismayed to see the school get rid of an arts component they thought had significant value for the students. What is your response to that?

We are proud to say that the arts are alive and well at Hempfield School District – at the elementary, middle, and high schools. You can view the wide array of arts activities on our school calendars and on our school blogs, from art classes to artist-in-resident programs, school concerts and theatrical productions.

We are a district that prides itself on Academics, Athletics, Arts, and Altruism. This decision was not about standardized tests. It was about making sure students have access to the learning and experiences they need in order to be properly prepared to move on to the next grade level and not be placed at a learning disadvantage relative to their same-grade peers across the district. We continue to look for ways to integrate experiences into the written curriculum so students develop an understanding of, and appreciation for, the value the arts contribute to our lives.



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Why was this decision communicated so late?

It is important to note that this decision was first communicated with fifth grade families on Friday, November 11, before teachers had started planning the play, discussing it with their students, or engaging in any practice or rehearsals. The affected families received a letter from the school detailing this information. Then, a discussion about the decision not to do the play as it has been done in the past, along with possible alternatives, took place on Monday, December 5 at the CES PTO meeting.