

ALABAMA LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

WILL  **AINSWORTH**

Dear Superintendent:

Among the many tasks assigned to educators is assisting in the character development of students, and the nonprofit LifeWise Academy has proven to be a national leader in this area. Currently, LifeWise provides Bible-based, character-focused education for public school students in more than 340 schools in 15 states. Communities across Alabama are showing an interest in embracing LifeWise programs, and I believe it presents your school district with a valuable chance for collaboration to positively impact our next generation.

LifeWise is what's known as a "released time" program that allows students to voluntarily participate in religious instruction during school hours at an off-campus location with their parents' permission. The program is funded entirely by private donations, so there is absolutely no cost to the school or parents.

LifeWise courses are coordinated with school schedules so students do not miss class time in core subjects. In schools with a LifeWise Academy, the majority of students often participate, and satisfaction surveys indicate that 76% of educators believe the school and students benefit from the service, and 96% of parents would recommend other parents enroll their child. Parents and educators have touted the mental health improvements and academic performance enhancements that many student participants experience. A recent independent study shows that schools with a LifeWise Academy also see an increase in attendance and a decrease in disciplinary issues and benefit from renewed family and community involvement.

Each weekly lesson reviews a passage from the Bible and focuses on a character trait such as respect, responsibility, or courage, and students learn how to apply that trait in practical ways in school, at home, and in the community. This structure encourages students to analyze text by reading the Bible passage themselves and challenges them to reflect on their own mistakes and shortcomings, which results in true character transformation that can only come from a changed heart.

The U.S. Supreme Court confirmed the validity of released time programs in 1952 in *Zorach v. Clauson* stating, "When the state encourages religious instruction or cooperates with religious authorities by adjusting the schedule of public events to sectarian needs, it follows the best of our traditions." Alabama law also specifically addresses released time programs through the Alabama Released Time Credit Act (Act 2019-281), and the Alabama State Department of Education developed a model policy for local education authorities to use when crafting their own.

Every single student has God-given abilities and passions, and building their character helps discover and develop those talents. The lasting lessons that LifeWise teaches allows students to grow into meaningful contributors to their community during adulthood. LifeWise is a proven, reputable partner that will help you provide students with a solid education foundation and strong moral character. I invite you to consider participating in conversations with community leaders and parents as they explore the possibility of offering LifeWise programs in your district.

Sincerely,



Will Ainsworth
Lieutenant Governor