

Board Statement on Arkansas LEARNS Educational Freedom Accounts

Jonesboro, AR: As many of you are already aware, Arkansas has opened participation for schools and families in the Educational Freedom Account (EFA) program established by the LEARNS Act legislation passed earlier in the year. The EFA program means that Arkansas families can have 90% of the state's per-student funding follow their child to the public, private, or charter school of their choice.

To receive these funds, schools must apply to participate in the program. It is not automatic. **As the governing authority for Ridgefield Christian School, we, the school board, have decided NOT TO PARTICIPATE in the Arkansas Educational Freedom Accounts program this year.**

We began the EFA application process but encountered a non-negotiable issue: the application requires us to affirm that we abide fully by the nondiscrimination language of the 1964 Civil Rights Act. The problem is that buried in the wording is a Presidential Order first implemented by the Obama administration, and expanded upon last year by the Biden administration, that equated (wrongly, we believe) gender identity and sexual orientation with race-based civil rights. To affirm this language, as required by the EFA application, would require that we affirm transgenderism and same-sex marriage; this would be in direct violation of our school's core beliefs and statement of faith.

Our commitment to providing a high-quality, Christ-centered education remains unwavering. We and the administration are keenly aware of the challenges in paying for private school tuition and we acknowledge the financial benefits of the EFA program for our families. Yet, we firmly believe that upholding our religious freedom is absolutely essential to our mission and calling as a Christian school.

Dr. Easley, along with other private school leaders, has been in conversation with the AR Department of Education. They tell us the intent of the bill was to not require private schools to compromise on their religious principles. Unfortunately, the current wording of the EFA application is at odds with our core beliefs and stated policies. Legal counsel has advised us that without further clarification, Christian schools like RCS potentially risk legal exposure in the courts regardless of the intent of the bill's authors and supporters.

Some Christian schools have chosen to move ahead and participate in the EFA program this year. However, our position is to wait and give the state time to revise the application language in a way that provides us with the necessary legal protections (while upholding Biblical principles). We are actively tracking developments and will continue to evaluate things as we head into next year.