

Chair Manning, Vice Chair Fowler Arthur, Ranking Member Robinson, and Members of the Committee

My name is Danielle Wirick and I live in Defiance City School District. My district was one of LifeWise earliest adopters. It was adopted during covid, when everybody else was worried about just surviving and the community had no say in its introduction into our school. Many of us were lied to about what it was and how it was being implemented. LifeWise hired Phil Nofzinger, the superintendent at the second school the program was presented to. Phil utilized his connections by trying to establish a program at every school system he had worked in. in recent history and he is currently the director at our school district's chapter. To this day, as roughly 80% of the elementary school body in my child's district is enrolled in Lifewise, there is no alternative instruction for those children that opt out of the program. Requests to observe what our children do or to see the curriculum they're being taught have been obfuscated and denied. If The majority Catholic and Lutheran Community knew that Life-wise considered their faith to be "watered down Christianity", as Life-wise's buddy Workman calls it, and that they were converting the children of the community to Southern Baptism using the children themselves as missionaries within the captive audience of the school under the guise of being a non-denominational program, there would be major public outcry. LifeWise is now large enough that it has begun steamrolling and edging out home grown local RTRI programs that it deems too small or that it considers to be not true Christianity. Lifewise throws its weight around using donations from the community as well as deep pocketed political organizations and grants that local churches don't stand a chance against unless they become a host church but only if their teachings are compatible. I have been working to inform the community but progress has been slow but I have the right to inform the public so that we can demand change through the local school board. Bullying and marginalization of non participating students especially those students that are or perceived to be lgbtqia of other faith traditions has happened because of the intolerance they teach. This program creates a hostile environment for those that don't believe as they do, even other christians. The children parrot the harsh things they are being taught at school. Parents that have tried to bring our issues to my school have been told to just enroll our students in Lifewise or have been met with retaliation against us or our children. The children being left behind, especially the smallest of them, are often distressed because they are left behind to do nothing in near isolation.

Public records requests have turned up instances of egregious enmeshment between the school and LifeWise. These range from Lifewise employees being brought on to the schools planning committee to implement LifeWise in the school which resulted in the school cutting a specials section to make room for LifeWise, to efforts to scramble and cover for the fact that no alternative to Lifewise had been implemented even though it was in its second year, leading to a parent being banned from the premises and specifically from school board meetings on false pretenses after we ask the ACLU to investigate the school's records for violations and any evidence of what our kids were actually doing. Our kids were telling us they were not being taught or were given extra work sheets the others didn't have to do and we were denied the ability to observe what our kids did during their "Lifewise" period as it stated on their folders. As it turns out we discovered that Lifewise's own documents would hold the answer that this was intentional. LifeWise calls this a "no new instruction period". In my child's case, a study hall for a kindergartener, which is still the case in their 2nd grade year.

In addition to this we found that children were being disciplined at school for things that happened at LifeWise and that behavioral issues were being handled so badly by Lifewise including a child being put in a physical restraint hold by an untrained Lifewise employee, with the school's response being to LifeWise that they did the right thing and that the child needed Jesus. Another instance involved children choking each other without receiving medical attention after, and the school not even being notified until after Christmas break the record by the way does not indicate if any parents were notified. Lifewise does not employ nurses or aides for students with disabilities or health issues, instead it leans on the school to supply these resources to the

detriment and risk of the students at the school. One instance at my school involved ALL the aides being at Lifewise and the school struggling to figure out what to do with a child at the school that needed an aide. When a program seeks to be as large as being able to handle 800 plus kids a week it should have its own aides or medical personnel. Based on their profits they can certainly afford it, while the school cannot afford and legally should not be giving their resources to the program. This program is dangerous, it hurts education outcomes contrary to LifeWise claims and it's disruptive to the school day. Students are a captive audience and get no say in their school day other than through the parents and the community. Making RTRI compulsory removes the right of the community and the parents to advocate for their children and for the community's unique educational needs. 910 hours of instruction are supposed to be given in the school day in a given year. Schools that implement LifeWise do not track whether the children are actually getting those hours. In the case of schools like mine where even the kids that opt out get nothing, I have a serious concerns as to whether my school is giving the kids the required number of hours and what impact if any that should have on tax dollars received by the school when they abdicate the responsibility to teach each student for nearly an hour each week.

RTRI has existed for roughly 50 years and even in the capacity that it's been used previously it's been prone to abuse and separation of state issues where it's been utilized by a majority of the school, leading to marginalization and disenfranchisement of the students in one way shape or form. This bill seems to have been put forth to serve the interests of Lifewise Academy, not religious children in general. Lifewise has previously stated that they don't want to force their way into schools when they promoted their program to the state school board in February of 2022. As soon as they started to receive a little push back, however, this organization began to show its true colors. When Fort Wayne schools told LifeWise no, Lifewise found legislators in Indiana to do their bidding and passed a law forcing the schools in Indiana to work with them to adopt their program. LifeWise has since created jobs within their organization for lobbyists to "identify low hanging fruit states" in which to force itself upon the school systems thereby changing the laws before any push back can take place. In Indiana's law, even core subjects are not safe from being skipped to make room for RTRI programs. Indiana law identifies "entities" as being able to pull children from schools while Zorach v Clauson identifies "duly constituted religious bodies" as being eligible to participate in RTRI. LW does not meet this definition. The existing Ohio law is already too vague and permissive to make RTRI compulsorily open to any entity claiming to be religious. Up until very recently LifeWise wasn't even compliant with the portion of the law requiring them to assume liability for the children to be eligible. This only changed at the demands of community members in a few school districts who would have had no say if HB445 became law.

This also opens up the door for cults and extremists that hide behind religious beliefs, such as the KKK to bring programs into our schools. Allowing the community to have control of this decision can help to keep hate groups and cults out of the schools. HB445 also opens up the school day to disruption by any organization seeking to exploit students for profit as long as they claim to be religious in nature. You need only to look at lifewise's rapidly increasing revenue vs expenditures despite the organization's explosive growth over the last couple of years to see that this is true. HB 445 would take away local control which is a necessary check for the school system to manage its day in the best interest of its needs. Local school districts should be allowed to use their discretion to evaluate and even reject a program for secular reasons including encouraging a culture of intolerance incompatible with the school, disruption that puts a burden on the schools ability to educate students to the standards expected by the state, and the ability of the organization to safely manage students themselves without utilizing school resources and losing class time and focus. While Dewine is decrying a minute of phone distraction causing significant loss of focus, you've got to wonder just how long it takes students to be able to regain their focus after being sugared up and given trinkets at Lifewise. Zorach protects the local school systems right to exercise "the wisdom of the system, it's efficiency from a local point of view, and the political considerations which have motivated its adoption or rejection in some communities." There is good reason that this decision should be left to the wisdom of the school system.

**From:** Schaffer, Melanie MSchaffer@defianceschools.net  
**Subject:** 9:15  
**Date:** August 20, 2021 at 8:53 AM  
**To:** Teresa Pfeiffer tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net

MS

ok...so after talking further to Julie and Chris .. are among the kids staying back at DES so Julie is going to stay here with them. My aide (Imthurn) and both of Matheny's aides will be going to Lifewise. I think that this should work. Fingers crossed. It's Friday! hahah  
Mel

<DES Staff>

**From:** Pfeiffer, Teresa tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net  
**Subject:** Fwd: LifeWise Academy Character Traits  
**Date:** August 19, 2021 at 1:48 PM  
**To:** Reggie Beck rbeck@defianceschools.net, Grades3-5 grades3-5@defianceschools.net

TP

----- Forwarded message -----  
**From:** Emily Wallace <emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.com>  
**Date:** Thu, Aug 19, 2021 at 1:38 PM  
**Subject:** Fwd: LifeWise Academy Character Traits  
**To:** <TPfeiffer@defianceschools.net>

Good afternoon!

I am sharing a word document of the Semester 1 LifeWise traits with you both to forward off to your teachers. I pray your first and second (so far) days of school have gone well.

Thank you,  
Emily Wallace



LifeWise,  
Semes...ts.docx

## Renee Wank shared a document

Renee Wank (rwank@defianceschools.net) has invited you to **edit** the following document:

Ladies

This is the list I am using this school year. I did work with the lifeWise list of words for this school year.

Next year I can coordinate with Jennifer to create the list.

Character Words 22-23

Good afternoon!

I wanted to reach out about some ongoing issues we've been having at LifeWise, with some specific examples from today. It's not every student, as I'm sure you know, but the ones who act out generally dictate the atmosphere of the full class.

I've noticed the boys REALLY struggle with being unkind to one another. Just genuinely nasty to their peers. Today, [redacted] was trying to ask a question, and was struggling a bit to find the right words, which lead to another boy calling out, "You say, 'like' so much!" This exploded them into immediate chaos, some defending [redacted], some mocking him more. They're quick to be so nasty, calling each other stupid, gay, and today, "deformed," which is hurtful on a pretty deep level.

Any opportunity they can find to tear each other down they snatch and explode. I know there was some altercation with a girl from Mr. Yoder's class on the bus. She evidently elbowed [redacted] who then hit her and called her fat. Other examples include when [redacted] got his hair cut before Christmas break, boys yelling that he looks like a cancer patient and his head is shaped weird, calling each other, "fags," or saying they look gay to each other, and some pretty defiant talking back with me. As an example (that repeats in pretty similar ways most weeks), [redacted] ran out of line in the Y lobby and hurdled a couch. I corrected him, told him that furniture isn't ours, he could have been hurt, and that my expectation is that we walk in line like in the hallways through the lobby. I had already planned to pass out candy to good listeners (I feel so bad for kiddos who listen well like [redacted], etc.), and so [redacted] clearly wasn't going to get candy no matter how he acted in class that day. [redacted] BLEW UP at this, arguing with me, "That's it?! He isn't in trouble? OF COURSE he isn't, because he's [redacted] and he's NEVER in trouble!" Then, of course, they're all yelling at each other. I can tell [redacted] really gets to [redacted] that's fair...), and today on their way out, they were shoulder checking each other and [redacted] said, "Ughhh! Can I just punch him! I just want to beat him up!" Which of course, [redacted] fuels by laughing and tell him to go ahead. That's a general norm for how classes have been going. A lot of those things.

To help them, we've started making sure a teacher is always present alongside our volunteers on the bus. I ride with them on their way to the Y, and my co-teacher on their rides back, so there are 3-4 adults at all times. I have a class reward system of earning 5 magnets a class (or losing them). If they can get all 5, they earn a sticker. Every 5 stickers, I give the class candy (so around every 5 weeks, if they earn a sticker each week). Today I added in a "strike board" for individuals, where if they get 3 strikes, I will contact the school about them specifically... and so far nothing has worked. I'm eager to partner with you all back at school to implement whatever you utilize in your classrooms, send weekly updates, play a part in your rewards/consequence systems, or whatever else. I have another 5th grade class that has started sending a behavior clipboard to document issues, but whatever your bunch is used to/already doing, I'd love to join.

They are truly such smart and likeable kids, and my heart is for them. I WANT to help them grow and mature, but I think I've reached a point of needing some extra guidance... as my ideas don't seem to work for the majority of them. I'm praying for you all back at school who are with them day in and day out!

Emily Wallace



emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.com has invited you to view the following document:

Here are the 2nd Semester lessons. Sorry they're a little late. Last week we did Semester 1 reviews and introductions, and this week we are on Lesson 1 with all the classes over Compassion. Next week (with the Friday/Monday off) we'll start breaking certain lessons in half/doing some review activities to help our Monday and Friday classes not fall too immediately behind. Thank you!



LifeWise, Semester 2: Character Traits

From: Swartz, Greg gswartz@defianceschools.net  
 Subject: Re: Invitation: G. Swartz OB @ Tue Feb 22, 2022 10:45am - 11:15am (EST) (gswartz@defianceschools.net)  
 Date: January 21, 2022 at 11:54 AM  
 To: Teresa Pfeiffer tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net

GS

Hey, we have lifewise leftover kids on Tuesdays so I think we'll want to pick a different day for the observation. Thanks.

On Wed, Dec 29, 2021 at 3:13 PM Teresa Pfeiffer <tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net> wrote:

From: Pfeiffer, Teresa tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net  
 Subject: LifeWise  
 Date: February 17, 2022 at 1:35 PM  
 To: Renee Long rlong@defianceschools.net  
 Bcc: Emily Wallace emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.com

TP

If your students' parents have signed their children up for LifeWise, then they NEED to be at LifeWise---not given the choice of going or staying for a Study Hall to do their work. It is a Special just like Art, Music, P.E., Library, and Tech.

If a student no longer wishes to attend, his/her parents can send in a letter to have him/her withdrawn. Until then, he/she will go to LifeWise.

Yeah, a study hall...even though they claim the kids who stay don't have study hall

Mrs. Pfeiffer,

I am sorry to add to the situation brought to you but I found out something else happened on the bus before LW started. I would prefer to tell you in person but I have family that Robin and I were with all weekend.

Our female volunteer, Barbara Leatherman called me this evening and told me that she is the last to exit the bus when the 3rd graders exit to go into the YMCA. This morning she was waiting for the last 3 boys to get off the bus as they were arguing who would be the last one off. Our volunteer stopped the boys and said that they shouldn't be concerned about that because she would be the last off. To this actually got in her face and said, "go, go, go". Our bus driver, Bob Kroeger, must have got off the bus to use the restroom (he usually never gets off the bus). In order not to escalate the situation, she got off the bus and waited for the 3 boys to exit. She said, who was last, sat in the driver's seat and had to act like he was driving. was one of the other boys and she said who the third one was but I didn't catch who he was.

Emily knows that I believe that we should handle most inappropriate behavior issues that happen while the students are under our authority but certain situations school officials need to be notified. After hearing Barbara tell me what happened before LW, along with the punching incident that no adults witnessed, I agree with Emily that needs to be held back from LW for a minimum of two weeks.

We want this type of student to be involved in LW as we all know he needs it, but I will not tolerate blatant disrespect and failure to obey an adult in authority. Barbara admitted that she felt intimidated and wondered what she should have done. I assured her she had done the right thing.

Knowing that had issues earlier in the year I asked her if behavior had been getting worse. She said his behavior hadn't been too bad lately, it was just the incidents today.

Sorry for adding to your plate but I knew you would want to know this before you met with him.  
Phil

On Wed, Apr 27, 2022 at 3:09 PM Pfeiffer, Teresa <[tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net](mailto:tpfeiffer@defianceschools.net)> wrote:  
Thanks for letting us know. I will do the write up and send it home. Thanks!

Nikki, I'll call down tomorrow morning to talk to him.

On Wed, Apr 27, 2022 at 1:44 PM Emily Wallace <[emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.org](mailto:emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.org)> wrote:  
Good afternoon!

Sorry for the delay in getting this email out and to you. I just wanted to extend as much information as I have on what exchange happened on the bus between and

My volunteer returned from the bus ride to take the 3rd graders back to school and told me that although she didn't see it, had punched in the face. She told me the students had exited the bus, but was hiding in the seats. When she went back to him, she saw he was crying, and he told her had punched him in the face. She touched base with who said that had called him a name, so he punched him. By the time she made it up to the door with the boys, the teachers weren't there anymore (I'm sure you guys were just leading the way back to classrooms, the teachers are always gone in that way when students are coming back into the building, not a problem!), so she wasn't able to tell anyone.

I called the school as soon as I was able to give a heads up as to why may have come back crying, but wanted to offer this information as well to add to what may have already been gathered from the boys.

It is my request that be held back from attending LifeWise for at least one week (on May 4th) as a consequence for his behavior on the bus and intentionally harming another student. If you feel his behavior warrants a longer LW suspension, please let me know. We would really like to see him again this school year, but also need to know all the other students are safe and able to learn effectively, especially given we are transporting them off school property.

Thank you!



**From:** Emily Wallace emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.org

**Subject:** 1/3 LifeWise:

**Date:** January 3, 2022 at 4:18 PM

**To:** Reiman, Jaide JReiman@defianceschools.net, ECikity@defianceschools.net

**Cc:** DHeld@defianceschools.net

EW

Welcome back!

I hope you each had a great, restful Christmas break. So sorry to be reaching out so immediately our first day back, but could use some assistance with

has displayed some behaviors leading up to this point. The first day he had issues at LifeWise, I wasn't there. When I got back, I spent a couple weeks observing his behaviors, and I spent Christmas break coming up with ideas to help him in the classroom.

Today, my co-worker rode the bus over to pick up the kiddos. She got off the bus and told me was refusing to come off. She took the rest of the class inside, and I went on to talk to (our bus driver stayed on with us for accountability). He was curled in a ball in the seat, against the window. Anytime I'd talk to him, he'd start screaming. I tried encouraging him that he and I could be a team, that I wanted to help him, etc., but at that point he started punching in the air and kicking the walls of the bus. I informed him he wasn't allowed to kick things that weren't his, to which he responded by screaming and kicking the plexiglass pretty hard. I placed his feet on the ground, held my leg over his to keep him from kicking, and reminded him he wasn't allowed to kick the bus. He screamed, crawled under the bus seat, and in a jumbled way shared that his frustration was from school and wanting to be second in line, but not being able to. I told him at that point I had suckers and tootsie rolls in my classroom, and IF he could come inside and show me he could obey, then he could have a reward. It took awhile, but eventually he decided he wanted that.

The entire walk inside he was ranting that he hated life and wanted to be dead, repeating phrases similar to that, threw peers' coats off chairs as he passed them, and ran to the back of the classroom (where I let him stay) curled up in a ball. I told him once he was in his assigned spot, he could choose his reward, and after about 10-15 minutes, he got himself there. After he had his sucker he brightened up, and he was excited to share that since their class had earned a reward today of 1 sucker each, he was going to give his 2nd sucker to his brother.

I share so much detail just to give insight as to what happened and wanting to understand if this is normal behavior for , if there was something I could have done differently/can do differently in the future, if this is unusual for him, or anything else you can pass along to help me help to be successful. If you have any further questions, I'd also be able to share more from today, a typical class's structure, how I do reward systems, or anything else!

I hope you all have a great week,  
Emily Wallace

**From:** Cikity, Emily ecikity@defianceschools.net

**Subject:** Re: 1/3 LifeWise:

**Date:** January 4, 2022 at 8:20 AM

**To:** Emily Wallace emilywallace@lifewiseacademy.org, Wank, Renee rwank@defianceschools.net, Lewis, Beth blewis@defianceschools.net, Jenifer Kitchenmaster jkitchenmaster@defianceschools.net

**Cc:** DHeld@defianceschools.net, Reiman, Jaide jreiman@defianceschools.net

EC

That's very common behavior in the classroom lately as well! You did exactly what we would have done thank you for helping him through it! He can be such a good kid but is struggling more than not in the last month or so! Like Deanne said he needs Jesus and some extra prayers sent his way! Together we will get him back to the we know he can be!

We can send some tools we have been using after an episode like that to get him talking about it but honestly we haven't figured out the root of the problem and don't have a solution that works 100 percent of the time.

We will keep you in the loop if we find a better solution!

Thank you  
Emily, Jaide

I have more records to share at the committee's request.