



# Teacher not preacher

words & layout | Andrew Maresca

WHEN MOVING TO THE DISTRICT IN SIXTH GRADE, ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS I NOTICED WAS HOW MANY PEOPLE WERE CHRISTIANS. I went from a school district that did not focus on religion much to suddenly being surrounded by it everyday. Besides being “recruited” to join churches, I felt a societal pressure to believe in something.

This pressure is still something evident in the school system today. With Christian groups advertising themselves in the school and policies accommodating to church nights, it is hard to avoid. The district is creating an environment in which students may prioritize religion over school.

Rock Around The Clock (RATC) was postponed from Sept. 25 to Oct. 16, due to unsafe weather. Many students were angered that they had to wait three weeks, when the Wednesday of homecoming week had no other events scheduled. The school district has a policy in place prohibiting school events on Wednesday in order to “keep good community relations.”

Last year RATC was on a Wednesday, but student council advisor Kari Gray was informed that moving RATC to a Wednesday was a one-time thing.

“When I asked to do it this year they did say they needed to stick with policy, and that’s why we can’t do it on Wednesday,” Gray said. “The best day that there were no other activities going on was Oct. 16.”

The fact that church and youth group are reasons that events are not held on certain days of the week is in complete opposition to public school. Part of growing up is figuring out where priorities lie, and the school is not responsible for accommodating to peoples’ religious services. It should be students’ discretion if they are willing to miss church for a school event and vice versa.

This event brought up some other areas of concern regarding religion interfering with school. Fellowship of Christian Athletics (FCA) and Catalyst are two examples of religious groups that meet or advertise events in the school. The school does not sponsor or organize the two groups.

“Catalyst is a student-run organization, which means that the school district is not running or endorsing the organization,” teacher sponsor Matt Jaschen said. “We are providing a safe space for students to gather if they are interested in Jesus.”

These groups gain quite a bit of support from the district and the community, while other belief systems are not accommodated for and looked at as an oddity. When Carly Campbell ‘16 created an atheist club she received a lot of backlash.

As long as a club has a teacher sponsor, the club can meet. Campbell had trouble finding a teacher to support a club with such a negative connotation from the community. That was not the only trouble she had with the creation of atheist club.

“When I went in to get my club approved

by the principal, who was Mr. (Brent) Riesen at the time, he made a comment when asking me questions about the club, ‘I’m just playing devil’s advocate, no pun intended,’” Campbell said. “Which made it clear how little people in Johnston knew about religions other than their own.”

Campbell said the worst part of creating the club was the community. Both she and her parents received backlash from parents and students, some of whom did not know her personally.

“I was basically known as that atheist girl until I graduated,” Campbell said. “I know parents in the community who still refer to me using atheist as my identifier.”

Johnston has been so Christianized that it is hard for individuals in the community to accept others and their choice to believe something else or anything at all.

“There were some issues where some kids were harassing someone on social media,” Marianne Aldrich ‘19 said. “Harassing because of their religion and calling them a bunch of horrible names and suggesting threats to them.”

It’s evident that Christianity is the religion that the majority of community members follow. However, the school has made the divide between church and state fuzzier due to school policies and the treatment of religious clubs. A public school is supported by tax dollars and should create an environment that parents feel comfortable sending their student, regardless of religion.