

Information for Parents: The EUSD/JOIS Foundation Yoga Program

The JOIS Foundation has given EUSD a \$533K grant to implement a religious form of yoga at all its 9 schools.

- The JOIS Foundation is a religious institution that trains people in a very religious form of yoga, known as “Ashtanga” yoga.
- JOIS Foundation classes include physical practice of yoga along with religious instruction called “Yoga Sutras of Patanjali” – literally, a class in the eight spiritual limbs of yoga, systematized in 150 A.D.
- The grant explicitly states that Ashtanga yoga training will be taught to students and provided to staff and families. Many people have been told that the yoga being taught is not religious, but Ashtanga yoga is inherently religious.
- The founder of Jois Yoga, Sri K Pattabhi Jois, the guru of JOIS yoga (a guru is a Hindu religious leader or enlightened master) said, **“It is very important to understand yoga philosophy -- without philosophy, yoga practice is not good, and yoga practice is the starting place for yoga philosophy.** Mixing both is actually best.”
- Jois, also known as “guruji” said that Ashtanga yoga IS Patanjali yoga, directly designating what he taught, and his institute continues to teach, as religious practice. In fact, in the biography page on the JOIS Foundation site, they state, “Guruji lives on through his teachings {...} and every time we practice as he has taught us.”
- Ashtanga literally means “Eight Limbed” and the eight limbs of this religious yoga are based in Hindu spirituality (which is also ancient yoga “philosophy”).
- The ultimate (eighth) goal of Ashtanga Yoga practice (which includes *moral* codes, self purification and study, postures, breath control, sense control, concentration, and meditation) is **absorption in the Universal** (Samadhi).
- All steps of the path along the eight limbs, including physical practice, are designed and intended to lead followers to that eighth goal. As Jois said, “Do your practice. All [the Universal] is coming.”
- The physical poses of yoga (Asanas) were developed to tell the stories of Hindu gods and events. In a widely acknowledged book called *Myths of the Asanas*, the authors write to yoga teachers and practitioners, “Asana practice’s... *philosophical principles encourage spiritual growth...*[that] Asanas can be viewed as a kind of prayer.”
- Even according to expert yoga teachers and practitioners, **yoga poses are not ever merely exercise, they are different from other forms of systemized practices because they are inherently religious.**
- All of the teachers hired by the school district to teach yoga at the school sites must be certified by the JOIS Foundation and should have established Ashtanga practices.

- This literally means that a religious organization is paying the school district to bring teachers with their specific certification into our schools to teach children a religious practice in place of PE, for a grade, and with no alternative program for children whose beliefs conflict with those of yoga philosophies and practice.

This religiously based yoga program is called a "mind/body" program which includes more than stretching and exercise, though to many parents it has been presented as mere exercise.

- The grant stipulates the development of a "life skills curriculum" which is, in part, based on "key yoga life concepts," and requires the curricular model to include "life skills built around key themes of yoga instruction."
- As stated above, yoga life skills include yoga philosophy, which is **inherently religious** and conflicts with the beliefs of Christians, Muslims, Mormons, Jews and others.
- Students at one school site have already been instructed regarding how to channel energy through a yoga pose to calm anxiety.

Students are required to take these courses and are being graded in participation.

- Parents will not be asked permission to opt their children into this program. It is a compulsory program and all children are participating unless their parents opt them out.
- If you have not already opted your child out of the program, he or she has likely already begun to participate in Ashtanga yoga instruction.
- Students whose religious beliefs conflict with the beliefs taught in Ashtanga yoga are not being offered an alternative course of physical education.
- Other course work is being cut to make room for this curriculum. At one school site, math time has been cut in order to include this curriculum.

The Ashtanga yoga program violates the U.S. Constitution's First Amendment (the "separation of church and state") and California law.

- The EUSD Ashtanga yoga program involves Hindu religious worship and practices and illegally promotes the religion of Hinduism (See above).
- The U.S. Constitution's First Amendment states that government "shall make no law respecting **the establishment of religion** . . ." The EUSD yoga program unconstitutionally establishes the Hindu religion as the preferred and favored religion in the district.

- The U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment also states that government shall not prohibit the **“free exercise” of religion**. The EUSD yoga program is not religiously neutral and undermines the religious free exercise rights of and discriminates against Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Mormon and other children and parents by offering only participation in religious activities that violate their religious beliefs and practices.
- The federal courts have already ruled that the promotion and practice of **Transcendental Meditation** in New Jersey public schools, which like yoga is also a Hindu religious practice, is a violation of the First Amendment’s prohibition of governmental establishment of religion (*See Malnak v. Yogi, 1979*).
- The California Constitution states that the government may not **“prefer” one religion** over another (Art. I, sec. 4). The EUSD yoga program illegally prefers Hinduism over Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Mormonism and other religions.
- The California Constitution also states that the government may not **engage in religious “discrimination”** (Art. I, sec. 4). The EUSD yoga program is not religiously neutral because it illegally discriminates against and excludes from the physical education program objecting Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Mormon parents and children as well as those of other religions.
- State law and curriculum guidelines states that “materials on religious subject matters [must] remain **neutral**; do not **advocate one religion over another**; do not include **simulation or role playing** of religious ceremonies or beliefs” The EUSD yoga program violates these guidelines because it is not religiously neutral, it advocates Hinduism over other religions, and includes simulation and role playing of Hindu religious practices.
- The California Code of Regulations forbids the **separation** of students in public schools **on the basis of religion** as well as other factor (5 CCR Sec. 4940). The EUSD Yoga program is **divisive** and **discriminatory** and violates the law by separating parents and students of other non-Hindu religious beliefs from the parents and students who do not object to Hindu religious beliefs and practices.
- Parents and students who object to the program are left without any P.E. program for their children. This violates California Education Code 5120.1(a)(2) which requires that “[A]ll pupils have access to a high quality, comprehensive, and developmentally appropriate physical education instruction on a regular basis.”

The physical education program should not be structured to exclude and harm children.

- P.E. in our public schools should be inclusive, bringing kids from different backgrounds together to engage in unifying *physical* activity, not divisive *religious* activity.
- Students should not be put in a position where they are singled out and treated differently for not being able to participate in a school program which discriminates against their religious beliefs and practices in favor of another system of religious beliefs and practices.

You have rights as a parent or guardian.

- To become fully informed about the Ashtanga yoga program in the district.
- You may ask to observe a yoga class at school and ask to review any texts that are being used to instruct children in this practice.
- You may demand that EUSD board of education suspend this unconstitutional and divisive promotion of the Hindu religion to young and impressionable children.
- You may talk to the principal and teachers at your child's school and explain to them why you object to the yoga program, and your child's participation.
- You may respectfully request that your child be removed from this instruction.
- You may ask for an explanation of where your child will be placed during that time and what instruction he or she will receive instead.
- You may consider taking legal action on behalf of your child to end this unlawful religious practice.

You should be concerned not only for your children participating in this program, but for the precedent that is being set by the agreement between EUSD and JOIS Foundation.

- By allowing EUSD to move forward with this program, our community is implicitly approving a public school district choosing and teaching a religious practice of its preference.
- This approval opens the door for the district to bring in any other religious practice of its choosing based, not on the legality of the decision, but the perceived benefits of the religious practice.
- Allowing EUSD to carry on with this agreement implicitly approves of the District making illegal decisions regarding curriculum development for financial gain from a religious institution.
- Pulling your children from the program without speaking out against the program protects only your children and does not change the inappropriate precedent being set which could embolden the District to make choices like this in the future.