

Hobby Lobby's Green family postpones launch of public school Bible curriculum

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(RNS) Fresh off their victory in the Supreme Court, the Green family, owners of the Hobby Lobby craft chain, appear to have hit a stumbling block in one of their other projects—a potentially controversial public school elective on the Bible.

On Wednesday (July 16), the nonprofit led by Steve Green announced it was postponing the August introduction of the curriculum adopted by the Mustang, Okla., school district.

“We have operated on an aggressive timeline to deliver the curriculum for the upcoming school year,” wrote Jerry Pattengale, editor for the projected four-year high school syllabus, in a prepared statement. But “unforeseen delays” necessitated postponing the debut until January.

Pattengale, who has previously said he hoped to see the full curriculum introduced in thousands of schools by 2016, wrote: “We will continue to work with Mustang and other school districts that have shown interest” in the program.

The nonprofit Museum of the Bible, has already poured millions of dollars into developing the courses and hoped to introduce the first textbook, *The Book: The Bible's History, Narrative and Impact* in Mustang, just a few miles from Hobby Lobby headquarters, when classes begin later this summer. In April, the school board voted to adopt the course.

Pattengale has portrayed the curriculum as a conceptually elegant, technologically spectacular primer with 550 web links; proprietary videos; and connections to the Greens' vast collection of biblical artifacts, which they also expect to feature in a museum to be built a few blocks from the Capitol in Washington, D.C.

But when the Mustang school board made 220 pages of the book public, church-state experts suggested that its claims and assumptions amounted to teaching the Bible from a particular religious perspective, which the Supreme Court has banned in public schools.

“In its current form, sectarian bias, including the principle that the Bible is inerrant, is built into the structure,” said Mark Chancey, a religion professor at Southern Methodist University in Dallas.

The book had already undergone significant revision. But Pattengale, who sits on the board governing Religion News Service, told Time magazine last month that he intended to make more changes to correct “overreaching.” It was unclear from his comments on Wednesday whether the current glitches are technical or editorial.

In any case, commented Chancey, “it will give them the opportunity to develop a curriculum that treats the material in a more even-handed manner.”