

CAN FAITH & PUBLIC SCHOOLS COEXIST?

Seven Liberties You Need to Know

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The Psalmist felt free to express his faith openly, regardless of the context: *"I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. Oh, magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt his name together!"* (Psalm 34:1-3 ESV). Believers should be free to do so in America's public schools. Yet that freedom is often questioned.

Censoring of religious expression in schools often comes from teachers and school administrators being unaware of students' freedoms. However, the U.S. Department of Education has already clarified that students are free to speak about their faith at school.

Our friends at Gateways to Better Education (www.GoGateways.org) remind us that students (and teachers) do not need to leave their faith at home.



Since 1995, the U.S. Department of Education has issued guidelines clarifying students' freedom to express their faith. There are seven key liberties every student and educator needs to know.

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7 LIBERTIES YOU NEED TO KNOW



Public Schools & Religious Freedom

1. Students can pray, read their Bibles or other religious materials, and talk about their faith at school.
2. Students can express their faith in their class work and homework.
3. Students can organize prayer groups and religious clubs, and can announce their meetings like any other club.
4. Students can express their faith at a school event.
5. Students may be able to go off campus to have religious studies during school hours (depending on the state).
6. Students can express their faith at graduation ceremonies.
7. Teachers can organize prayer groups with other teachers.

For more information about these guidelines, religious liberties, and influencing your public schools to allow for these freedoms, visit www.GoGateways.org or call (800) 929-1663.

An Example of U.S. Department of Education Guidelines:

“Students may express their beliefs about religion in homework, artwork, and other written and oral assignments free from discrimination based on the religious content of their submissions. Such home and classroom work should be judged by ordinary academic standards of substance and relevance and against other legitimate pedagogical concerns identified by the school.

Thus, if a teacher’s assignment involves writing a poem, the work of a student who submits a poem in the form of a prayer (for example, a psalm) should be judged on the basis of academic standards (such as literary quality) and neither penalized nor rewarded on account of its religious content.”

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