

## PUBLIC SCHOOLS ARE NOT GOD-FREE ZONES

### It's OK for Students to Pray

U.S. Department of Education's Guidance on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Schools  
plus information from:  
First Liberty Institute

Complied and distributed by  
**Americans for Freedom of Religion**  
www.affor.org  
affor1776@gmail.com  
and **Catholics for Freedom of Religion**  
www.cffor.org  
info@catholicsforfreedomofreligion.org



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## Learn the truth about Students' Rights to Live their Faith in Public Schools

### Know it when you hear it! HUGE Lie #1

"Huge Lie #1" insists the phrase "wall of separation between church and state" is part of the Constitution and banishes prayer, God and faith from public forums including schools.

In fact, the phrase is not in the Constitution but from a letter Thomas Jefferson wrote in support of individual freedom of conscience and the open practice of faith without government interference, as intended in the First Amendment.

### Know it when you hear it! HUGE Lie #2

Americans are deceived and bullied with "Huge Lie #2": that public schools are God-Free Zones.

This misleads teachers, students, parents and administrators. However, the Department of Education's Guidelines, summarized here, protect students' religious expression.

This short video demonstrates that Public Schools are not God-Free Zones  
<https://bit.ly/2iZMjkP>

### It's OK for Students to Pray

Among other things, students may read their Bibles or other scriptures, say grace before meals, and pray or study religious materials with fellow students during recess, the lunch hour, or other noninstructional time to the same extent that they may engage in nonreligious activities."

"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."

"Student speakers at student assemblies and extracurricular activities such as sporting events may not be selected on a basis that either favors or disfavors religious speech." "Where student speakers are selected on the basis of genuinely neutral, evenhanded criteria and retain primary control over the content of their expression, that expression is not attributable to the school and therefore may not be restricted on the basis of its religious (or anti-religious) content."

"Students may organize prayer groups, religious clubs and "see you at the pole" gatherings before school to the same extent that students are permitted to organize other non-curricular student activity groups. Such groups must be given the same access to school facilities for assembling as is given to other non-curricular groups, without discrimination because of the religious content of their expression."

"It has long been established that schools have the discretion to dismiss students to off-premises religious instruction, provided that schools do not encourage or discourage participation in such instruction or penalize students for attending or not attending. Similarly, schools may excuse students from class to remove a significant burden on their religious exercise, where doing so would not impose material burdens on other students."

"School officials may not mandate or organize prayer at graduation or select speakers for such events in a manner that favors religious speech such as prayer. Where students or other private graduation speakers are selected on the basis of genuinely neutral, evenhanded criteria and retain primary control over the content of their expression, however, that expression is not attributable to the school and therefore may not be restricted because of its religious (or anti-religious) content."

## Christmas in Public Schools

"Religious Liberty Protection Kit for Students and Teachers"

First Liberty Institute [www.firstliberty.org](http://www.firstliberty.org)

**Christmas Parties:** "A federal court held that a public school is allowed to celebrate Christmas (and other holidays with both religious and secular aspects) because doing so serves the educational goal of advancing students' knowledge and appreciation of the role that America's religious heritage has played in the social, cultural and historical development of civilization." P. 13

**Christmas Music, Art or Drama:** "...so long as the religious music, art or drama is presented in an objective manner as a traditional part of the culture and religious heritage of Christmas. In fact a federal court has held that to allow students only to study and not to participate in religious art, literature and music, when such works have developed an independent secular and artistic significance, would give students a truncated view of our culture." P. 14

Get pro bono legal advice regarding matters of religious freedom at [FirstLiberty.org](http://FirstLiberty.org)

## Guidance from U.S. Dept. of Education on Constitutionally Protected Prayer in Public Elementary and Secondary Schools

"The Supreme Court has repeatedly held that the First Amendment requires public school officials to be neutral in their treatment of religion, showing neither favoritism toward nor hostility against religious expression such as prayer."

"Although the Constitution forbids public school officials from directing or favoring prayer, students do not "shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate."

Find the entire document at [www.Ed.gov](http://www.Ed.gov)