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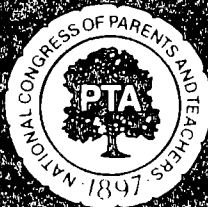
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'A Parent's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools,' Booklet, 12 pages

Resource Guide

For in-depth discussion of the religious liberty rights of students, the Equal Access Act, religion in the curriculum and other issues addressed in this pamphlet see *Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education*. This publication is available at cost (\$9.50 includes mailing) from the First Amendment Center, 1207 18th Ave. S., Nashville, TN 37212.



For more information and additional free copies of this pamphlet, please contact:



FIRST AMENDMENT CENTER

FOUNDED BY THE FREEDOM FORUM

1207 18th Avenue South
Nashville, TN 37212

(615) 321-9588

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www.freedomforum.org

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*Congress shall make
no law respecting an
establishment of religion
or prohibiting the free
exercise thereof, or
abridging the freedom
of speech, or of the press,
or the right of the people
peaceably to assemble,*

A Parent's

Guide to

Religion

in the

Public

Schools

and to petition the

National PTA

Government for a redress



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Booklet, 'How Faith Communities Support Children's Learning in Public Schools,' 15 pages

*How Faith
Communities
Support Children's
Learning in Public
Schools*



PARTNERSHIP
for Family
Involvement
in Education



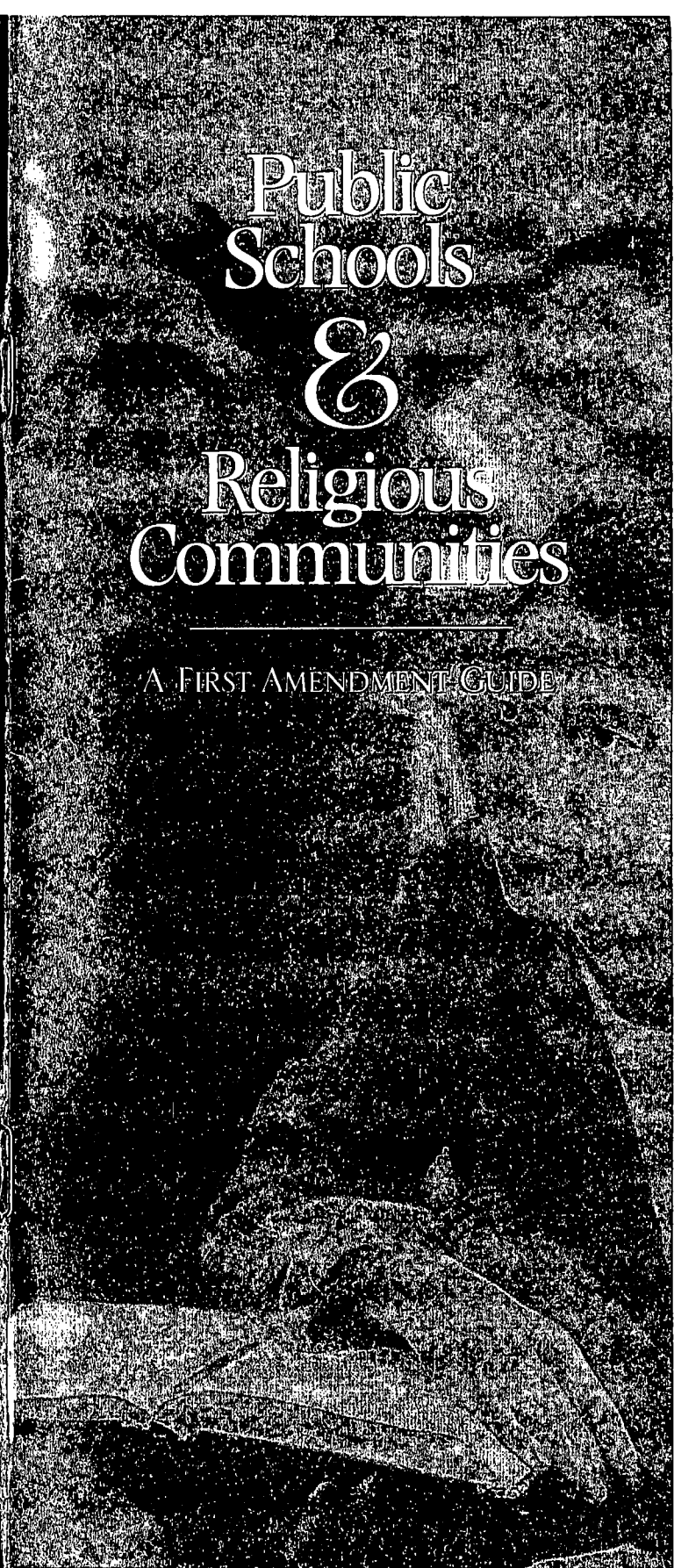
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Booklet, "Public Schools & Religious Communities," 12 pages



Public Schools & Religious Communities

A FIRST AMENDMENT GUIDE

For more information and additional copies of this guide, please contact:

American Jewish Congress

15 East 84th St.
New York, NY 10028
(212) 879-4500

Christian Legal Society

4208 Evergreen Lane, #222
Annandale, VA 22003-3264
(703) 642-1070

First Amendment Center

1207 18th Ave. S.
Nashville, TN 37212
(615) 321-9588
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Booklet, "Religious Expression in Public Schools," 14 pages



RELIGIOUS EXPRESSION IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS:

A STATEMENT OF PRINCIPLES

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Booklet, 'A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools,' 16 pages

A Teacher's Guide to Religion in the Public Schools

A high-contrast, black and white photograph. On the left, a person's profile is shown in silhouette, looking down towards the bottom right. In the bottom right corner, an open book is visible, with text on its pages. The word "amendment" is written in a large, elegant, cursive script across the lower half of the image, partially overlapping the book and the person's profile.

amendment



THE SECRETARY OF EDUCATION
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20202

"Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press; or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances."

*First Amendment to the
U.S. Constitution*

December 17, 1999

Dear Principal:

For many years one of the most sensitive and controversial matters that has divided Americans when it comes to public education has been the issue of religion in public schools.

Many Americans, unfortunately, came to believe that the 1962 Supreme Court decision disallowing state-sponsored school prayer meant no religious expression at all was permitted. They were mistaken, but little was done to fully inform concerned parents that the 1962 Supreme Court ruling did not preclude individual students, in their personal capacity, from expressing their religious faith. As a result, a great misunderstanding grew up over time and the issue of prayer and religious expression in public schools became increasingly divisive and polarizing.

In the last few years, new and promising efforts have been made to end this division about the proper place of religion in our nation's public schools. Educators, religious leaders of many faiths, and civil libertarians have worked together to review Supreme Court and other court decisions. In the process, these dedicated Americans have come to a new and deeper understanding of the proper place of religion in America's system of public education.

Leaders on both sides of this debate have lowered their voices, retreated from the polarizing language of the last three decades, and worked diligently together to find a new common ground. This effort is in the best tradition of our nation's Founding Fathers and reflects a wonderful respect for the basic idea that is America – that we are free people who protect our freedoms by respecting the freedoms of others who differ from us.

These educators, religious leaders, and civil libertarians see our nation's Bill of Rights as something more than a piece of dry, old parchment on display in our National Archives. They recognize that each generation must do its part to explain fully how the First Amendment protects the rights of students to express their religious faith and/or their freedom of conscience.

It is in that spirit that I am sending you a set of guidelines that you can use to inform students, parents, teachers, and other members of the community about the proper way to treat religion and religious topics in our nation's public schools. The guidelines cover a broad range of topics from how to teach about religion to how to properly develop partnerships with community-based groups, including faith-based organizations, as part of a broad effort to improve education in our public schools.

The guidelines clearly indicate that the religious rights of students and their right to freedom of conscience do not stop at the schoolhouse door. President Clinton may have said it best:

“For more than 200 years, the First Amendment has protected our religious freedoms and allowed many faiths to flourish in our homes, in our work place and in our schools. Clearly understood and sensibly applied, it works.”

The essence of all of these guidelines is the balanced nature of the First Amendment regarding religious expression that is rooted in two basic and equally important principles. First, schools must protect the right of individual students, in their personal capacity, to express their religious faith, or to speak about religious matters, to the same extent they are permitted to engage in nonreligious expression, or to speak about nonreligious topics.

Second, schools must refrain from government-sponsored religious activities, and from adopting or expressing any preference for or against religious expression by students speaking in their personal capacity.

Teachers, principals, and others in authority in a school must give students the same right in their personal capacity to engage in religious activity and discussion, as they have to engage in any other comparable activity. For example, students may read their Bible or other scriptures, say grace before meals, or pray before tests to the same extent they may engage in comparable, nondisruptive activities.

At the same time, school officials may not endorse or favor religious activity or doctrine, coerce participation in religious activity, or seek to impose their religious beliefs on impressionable children. Public schools may teach about religion – for example, in classes on history, music, the arts, or comparative religion, the Bible (or other scripture)-as-literature, the role of religion in history – but public schools may not provide religious instruction.

In protecting students from government-sponsored prayer, the First Amendment also shields students of all faiths from any effort by a majority faith to define how religion should be expressed in a public school. The right to engage in personal voluntary prayer or religious discussion free from discrimination does not include the right to have a captive audience listen, or to compel other students to participate. We are a nation of many religious faiths and we must be vigilant in protecting the right of all students to express their religious faith in their own way, in addition to expressing their freedom of conscience not to participate in religious activities.

Some have suggested that the federal government has been an enemy of religion. I believe otherwise. I know that President Clinton and Vice President Gore have gone out of their way to encourage the growing effort to find a new common ground regarding religious expression in our nation's public schools. I am pleased to be part of this effort as well.

After more than 30 years of division on this most sensitive of subjects, I believe we are finding a positive way to bring people together and that's good for education. I hope public officials, at all levels of government, will support this growing effort to find common ground and retreat from the

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polarizing language of the past. Our public schools should not be the public space for a war on values but the public space where we educate our children, help them to build good character, and teach them about the many freedoms, including the freedom of religion, that are embodied in our nation's Constitution.

All of the documents in this packet are freely available from either the U.S. Department of Education or the Freedom Forum First Amendment Center. The full text of all of these publications is available through the U.S. Department of Education's Web site (www.ed.gov). I encourage you to read these documents carefully and make them available to teachers, other staff, parents and students. Thank you for your cooperation.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dick Riley". The signature is stylized with a large, looped "D" and a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Richard W. Riley

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Guidelines for School Officials, Volunteers and Mentors Participating in Public School Community Partnerships

Children and schools gain a great deal when every part of a community comes together to support education. This is why we encourage the growing partnership efforts between our nation's public schools and families, community groups, faith-based communities and employers. In 1994, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley began the Partnership for Family Involvement in Education (PFIE) with 40 organizations. Today, close to 6,000 groups and organizations are part of this dynamic and growing effort.

Every part of the community can do its part to encourage adults to take time out of their busy schedules to support the work of our nation's schools. Faith communities can be important participants in these partnerships. For example, members of faith communities can act as tutors and mentors to help children learn to read and write. They can also work with other members of the community to ensure the safety of children in positive after-school activities.

However, it is not appropriate for members of faith communities to use their involvement in public schools as an occasion to endorse religious activity or doctrine or to encourage participation in a religious activity. Adults who choose to volunteer in public schools must respect both the rules established by the school and the strong constitutional protections that children have from becoming a captive audience.

In August 1995, U.S. Secretary of Education Richard Riley, in consultation with Attorney General Janet Reno and at the direction of President Clinton, released guidelines entitled *Religious Expression in Public Schools: A Statement of Principles*. These guidelines were released again in June 1998, and most recently in December 1999. In his original cover letter to these guidelines, Secretary Riley pointed out that the guidelines for religious expression in public schools reflect two basic and equally important obligations of the First Amendment.

"First, schools may not forbid students acting on their own from expressing their personal religious views or beliefs solely because they are of a religious nature. Schools may not discriminate against private religious expression by students, but must instead give students the same right to engage in religious activity and discussion as they have to engage in other comparable activity... At the same time, schools may not endorse religious activity or doctrine, nor may they coerce participation in religious activity...[t]he right of religious expression in school does not include the right to have a 'captive audience' listen, or to compel other students to participate."