Parents should feel comfortable sending their children to public schools and not fear that they will be preached to or forced to pray according to someone else’s faith tradition.

Students may engage in truly voluntary prayer, may read the Bible in a non-disruptive way and may form religious clubs that meet after school—but it has to be their choice. They can also talk to fellow students about religion, so long as it isn’t harassing. But public schools may not pressure students to engage in prayer or other religious activities.

Americans United fights to protect the religious freedom of public school students and their parents by ensuring that our public schools do not favor—or disfavor—any religious beliefs.
Public schools can teach, but not preach, about religion. Public schools may instruct students about religion in an even-handed, objective manner, such as discussing the impact of religion on history, art, music and literature, or teaching a course on comparative religion. But they may not teach religiously based curriculum.

Sound science and history is taught in public schools. Public schools may not teach religious doctrine, like creationism and intelligent design, in science class, nor may they disparage proven scientific theories like evolution because some believe it conflicts with their religion. Further, public schools may not teach inaccurate versions of American history that are based on religious teachings.

Students feel like part of their school community. They aren’t singled out or excluded because they have different religious beliefs—or none. School assemblies with religious content and coaches who lead prayers in the locker room, for example, alienate students who belong to minority religions or are nontheists, and discourage many students from fully participating in school life. School officials may not punish students for refusing to participate in these religious activities.

Your taxpayer dollars fund secular education, not religious education. No one should be forced to fund religious education whether they disagree—or even agree—with what is taught. That is why public schools should not promote religion, and why taxpayer dollars should never pay for tuition at private religious schools.

Learn more about our work to promote church/state separation in our public schools and what you can do to help at www.au.org.

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