



New campaign offers public schools helpful lessons in religious liberty

Two organizations team up to launch nationwide effort to help schools understand how to handle religious expression of students

Lake Forest, Calif. – July 15, 2009 – Public school students, teachers, and parents will get a civics lesson on free speech this fall thanks to the [National Free to Speak Campaign](#). Gateways to Better Education and the Alliance Defense Fund are working together to promote greater awareness of the U.S. Department of Education’s guidelines on students’ freedom of religious expression in public schools.

“Students have the liberty to express their faith at school,” said Gateways to Better Education President Eric Buehrer. “One of the most important civics lessons all students should learn is that freedom of religious expression is a fundamental right of all Americans, and, as the U.S. Supreme Court has stated, this freedom does not end at the schoolhouse gate.”

The U.S. Department of Education issued guidelines on freedom of religious expression in public schools twice during the Clinton administration (1995 and 1998) and once under the Bush administration (2003). The National Free to Speak Campaign is designed to equip and inform more school districts, schools, teachers, parents, and students about religious liberty at school, as outlined in the department’s guidelines.

“The guidelines were sent to every school district, but they didn’t always make it into the hands of school administrators, teachers, parents, and students,” explained ADF Senior Legal Counsel David Cortman. “As a result, some schools have practices that are in direct violation of the guidelines and the U.S. Constitution. This campaign will help schools improve their practices.”

Surveys consistently indicate that religion is an important part of teens’ lives. For example, a 2008 Columbia University survey found that 53 percent of students ages 12-17 (84 percent from public schools) report attending religious services three or more times per month.

“Faith is an important part of millions of teens’ lives,” Buehrer said. “The classroom should be a safe place for students of all ages to express their faith in class discussions and homework assignments, just as the U.S. Department of Education has affirmed.”

To promote greater awareness of religious freedom, the campaign has produced a pocket-sized student pamphlet entitled, “Free to Speak: What the U.S. Department of Education says about public school students’ religious liberties.” The campaign encourages churches and campus clubs to purchase the pamphlets in sets of 100 and distribute them throughout their schools and communities.

Additionally, the churches and clubs can request that ADF send a letter clarifying religious liberties on campus to any school administrator. Together, their goal is to distribute 500,000 pamphlets and reach 5,000 schools by the end of the year. For more information, visit the [National Free to Speak Campaign Web page](#).

Gateways to Better Education is a nonprofit organization specializing in helping public schools understand how to create faith-friendly learning environments and lawfully teach students about Judeo-Christian history, thought, and values.

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