



Released-Time Education Summary of Benefits

Released-Time Education (“RTE”) is beneficial to schools, students, and communities. It is constitutionally legal, class credit-worthy, elective in nature, and – significant in this day of severe budgetary constraints – *free* to public schools. Released-Time programs in other states have a proven record of enhancing student academic performance, improving classroom discipline, and developing moral character in students. Alabama legislation will provide greater opportunity for Alabama public school students to achieve, succeed, and thrive.

1. Released-Time Education is good for schools.

- Reduces attrition. Parents who want public education PLUS moral training for their students have reason to keep their students in public school (instead of opting for private or home schooling) when RTE instruction is offered.
- Builds trust within communities wanting this option available, and their school district personnel who listen and respond affirmatively.¹
- Improves test scores of at-risk students with no adverse effect on other students’ test scores.²
- Affirms public school goals to provide protective and supportive environments. The Alabama Department of Education initiated Plan 2020 as strategy to prepare all Alabama students to be successful in college and/or career upon graduation from high school. A Released Time Education program supports that state-wide strategy on a local level.³
- Meets public school needs for character education of a type proven to encourage students to develop *internal controls* of honesty, self-discipline, and respect.⁴
- Free to public schools through established Released Time U.S. Supreme Court case law.^{5,6}

2. Released-Time Education is good for students.

- Enhances student academics, behavior, and character development, according to a growing body of quantitative and qualitative evidence documenting positive effects of released time participation.^{7,8}
- Meets student needs for character education of a type proven to encourage students to develop *internal controls* of honesty, self-discipline, and respect. Released time is the only moral (religious) training some students may ever receive. Studies have long shown that religion is a critical factor in the development of children.⁹

3. Released-Time Education is good for Alabama citizens, communities and future.

- Released Time religious education is an expression of the 1st Amendment free exercise of religion which also honors the Establishment Clause. Americans and Alabama citizens are for religious freedom, yet remain cautious to ensure that any such exercise is legal.
- Alabama will be in the vanguard of providing students with every option available for success. South Carolina¹⁰, Ohio¹¹, and Tennessee¹² are the only three states with statutory endorsement of RTE. Alabama can establish a leading role by joining the vanguard in support of options for the success of Alabama students.¹³

Sources

1. “[A]s superintendent... I can honestly say that the concept of using released time for religious classes has worked well for our community. ... Wall Street did not crumble in mid-October 2008 due to lack of academic intelligence. Wall Street crumbled ... because of a lack of ethics and moral discernment. Certainly, therefore, there is value in spending some time addressing character development and topics which develop and nurture appropriate ethical responses. ... Doseck, Ken. Superintendent, Upper Sandusky E.V. Schools (retired July 2011). Open letter to School Administrators & Boards of Education. 5 May 2011.

2. “[T]he more often students attended [released time] class, the better their academic outcomes. ... Release[d] time may help instill values that enable students to achieve academically. It is also possible that participation functions as a protective factor, inhibiting potentially detrimental behaviors that may interfere with students’ academic progress, such as substance use, delinquency, and early sexual activity... the findings reported here suggest that little grounds exist for believing that release[d] time participation will negatively affect students’ academic achievement.” Hodge, David R. “Releasing Students from Class for Spiritual Instruction: Does it Hinder Academic Performance?” Journal of the National Association of Social Workers (July 2007): 161-172.

3. <http://www.alsde.edu/Pages/home.aspx>

4. “Character education is more important today than ever before. We live in a society where it appears that many people have not been taught basic moral values. The values of respect and honesty seem to be lost....” Lee, Kendall A. “Character Education Transforms Districts.” OSBA [Ohio State Boards Association] School Management News. Jul. 2011: 5.

5. *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952).

6. <http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/madison/wp-content/uploads/2011/03/publicschools.pdf>

7. A recent study of 350 students randomly selected from a student body of 2,434 suburban students grades 10-12, identified Released Time participation as one of three factors (including also the number of core and non-core courses taken) likely to positively influence academic performance, stating, “After examining the possible effect of enrollment in released-time religious education (RTRE) courses on the academic achievement of students, we found that RTRE students’ mean grade point averages were significantly higher than those of non- RTRE students. These findings are supported by Hodge’s (2007) and Ashcroft’s (2011) findings that enrollment in RTRE is not associated with lower academic achievement, and promotes positive academic achievement of students.” The study calls for further quantitative and qualitative research to identify other variables affecting student performance. Hansen, Trace W., “The Effect of Daily Released-time Religious Education on Academic Achievement” (2013). Graduate Thesis and Dissertation. Paper 1454. <http://digitalcommons.usu.edu/etd/1454>

8. After a year of once-weekly instruction, released time students outperformed classmates academically in almost every category of testing. The released time students studied experienced positive moral and character development antithetical to engaging in criminal or delinquent behavior. The National Council on Crime and Delinquency. Released Time Bible Education: A program that improves academic performance in public schools and builds a foundation for positive character development- A program evaluation of the Oakland, California Released Time Bible Education Program. 25 July 2003. http://nccdglobal.org/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/bible-education.pdf

9. “Religion plays an important role in the lives of many children and teens,[1] as well as being positively associated with many other aspects of child well-being. Teens who attend religious services once a week or more (as well as teens who feel religion is very important to them) are less likely to take risks and to enjoy danger, fight with another student, or get in trouble with the police.[2] These teens are also less likely to be suspended or expelled, or to be sent to detention or to the principal’s office.[3] Teens who attend any religious services, or feel religion is at least a little important, are less likely to hit a teacher or to skip school, and more likely to volunteer, participate in student government, and participate in sports or other exercise.[4] These teens are also less likely than those who do not attend religious services to drink alcohol and use illicit drugs.[5] In addition, teens who attend religious services tend to hold more conservative attitudes toward sex and to have less sexual experience.[6] Religious service attendance is positively correlated with education measures such as academic expectations among high school students, and verbal test scores among girls.[7] One study found that the academic benefit of religious service attendance for youth living in low-income neighborhoods increased as negative factors such as poverty and unemployment increased.[8]” For citations and further information, see Child Trends Data Bank: www.childtrends.org/?indicators=religious-service-attendance#_edn1

10. South Carolina Code. § 59-1-460. Excused school attendance for religious instruction. (2006)

11. Ohio Revised Code. § 3313.6022. Released time courses in religious instruction. (2014)

12. Tennessee Code Annotated. § 49-2-NEW. Released time courses. (2015)

13. “...Conferring credit for this type of education is essential to making released time classes truly available to high school students. High school students are at a critical stage in their development as they consider key life choices: how to properly conduct themselves, the career pathway they would like to pursue, and the person they would like to become. If offered for credit, these voluntary elective classes can provide one more viable option to enable Ohio’s high school students to make prudent decisions.” Petro, Jim, former Chancellor of the Ohio Board of Regents. Letter as Chancellor to Hon. Jeff McClain. 15 Nov 2011.