

With while it is illegal  
for public schools



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With over 4, 000 different religions in the world, religious issues often create tension and discomfort in political situations. One of the most controversial topics in today's society is whether or not religion should be included in the curriculum for United States public schools. While it is illegal for public schools to teach religion, “ teaching about religion is not only permissible, but is gaining traction as a way to promote greater understanding in a world of conflicting dogmas” (Goral, 2017, pg. 39). Public schools should encourage students to become educated on the beliefs and values that different religions hold, but should avoid influencing students' choice of religion.

Since our government is dedicated to the separation of church and state, it is restricted from endorsing any specific religion. Public schools should follow the same regulations, because they fall under the government's umbrella of responsibility. There are already so many critical topics that children need to be taught, researchers often wonder if religious curriculum is helpful or distracting. In other words, teaching religion in public schools may distract children from other pertinent information they might be learning in other core classes.? First and foremost, public school curriculum should include a brief history of each religion to help establish a better understanding of religious differences. Not only will students be more open to cultural differences, but adding religious history to the curriculum will also provide a safe and open environment for them to learn about and discuss religion. Moreover, “ the key to teaching about religion is having a strong foundation of not just the various faiths, but of how they are perceived in the country and around the world today” (Goral, pg. 40).

With over 7 billion inhabitants on the planet, and over 300 million in the United States, it is highly unlikely that people will ever be able to agree on one single religion. However, it is important that we teach children to have an open mind and be conscious of other religions and their beliefs. Instilling a sense of religious consciousness in young children could potentially prevent bullying, hate and wars in the future. There are a lot more similarities between different religions that most people are completely unaware of. For example, people who practice Christianity and Islam unknowingly worship the same God, and there is "sufficient similarity between Muslims and Christian conceptions of God" (Baxter, 2017). Americans, however, are particularly illiterate when it comes to religious beliefs that do not pertain to them in specific.

Stephen Prothero, in his periodical *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know - and Doesn't*, explains that "Americans are both deeply religious and profoundly ignorant about religion . . . here faith is almost entirely devoid of content" (2009). Furthermore, Prothero calls religious illiteracy dangerous "because religion is one of the greatest forces for good -as well as evil-in the world (2009). To improve religious literacy rates in the United States, courses that improve students' understanding of religious values should be added to public school curriculum. By adding these courses to curriculum, the government can expect an increase in religious literacy around the country.

Religious literacy is important because religious beliefs matter, "for better and or worse, religious convictions help shape events and public policies in the U. S. and throughout the world" (Mercury, 2010).

? While nearly half of the U. S. population agrees with teaching children about religion in public schools, the other half thinks that religion should be kept completely separate from schools. While keeping the church and state separate is in consistent with the United States constitution, it is important to keep children informed about different religions and beliefs. There is definitely a fine line between teaching and preaching, and many parents think that if religion is going to be taught to their children, they should be the ones doing it. However, if these same parents wouldn't trust themselves to teach their children subjects like science, math, and art, what qualifications do they have to be teaching religion? It is important that children be taught by well-qualified individuals who can present different religious beliefs in a non-bias way. For this very reason, courses that describe the core beliefs and values of different religions should be added to public school curriculum around the United States. By creating a standardized religion curriculum, the United States can ensure that children are simply taught about religious beliefs, instead of being forced into religious beliefs they may not necessarily agree with.

? To sum it all up, the United States should implement a standardized public school curriculum that includes the history and background information on multiple religions. Even though the United States government endorses a distinct separation of church and state, public schools should increase awareness about the different beliefs they will encounter in life. Not only does teaching children about religion make them more accepting and understanding of other cultures, but it can also help prevent international disagreements. Furthermore, it is important for children in public schools to

be taught religious literacy. In the absence of religious literacy, ignorance prevails and creates unnecessary conflicts and disagreements. Most importantly, children should be taught that religious beliefs do not define a person - something that is often forgotten in the extremely political environment we live in.

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