

What is “Released Time” Religious Education?

Released Time (“RT”) is the only legal means by which public school students may study their faith academically and devotionally *during* the school day. Schools may enter into a cooperative arrangement with the community group offering the classes. School personnel are required to remain neutral, neither encouraging nor discouraging students’ participation. While RT is equally available for any faith, School Ministries Ohio helps Christians offer Bible classes for the public school students of their communities.

Who is School Ministries Ohio?

School Ministries Ohio educates, equips and encourages Christians to offer Bible classes for their public school students (K-12). We are blessed to offer counsel and support as a part of the nation’s most experienced association of Released Time Bible Education programs, serving since 1991.

Is Released Time legal?

Yes! RT has been around for more than a century, and was declared constitutional for all 50 states by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1952. What’s more, Released Time is the subject of statutes either requiring or permitting RT under specified circumstances in more than half of all U.S. states. See schoolministries.org/get-involved.

However, while Released Time is constitutional, it is *not* a constitutional right. Ohio’s law is permissive: a community cannot force a school district to release students for a Released Time program. When schools cooperate, we educate about the three requirements of Released Time Religious Education (RT):

1. Parent permission must be given.
2. Instruction should take place off school grounds.
3. No state resources may be used.

Do these classes violate the principle of the “separation of church and state?”

No. Released time classes honor the judicial doctrine of “separation of church and state” by following constitutional requirements established by the U.S. Supreme Court and affirmed by federal and state courts. The constitutionality of released time was recognized by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1952 and upheld since, as an expression of our right to the “free exercise of religion” protected by the 1st Amendment. Prominent voices across America’s ideological and theological spectrum agree on the constitutionality of Released Time.

How does Released Time help students?

It can help students find meaning and know they matter in a dark and hurting culture. It is proven to help students academically, behaviorally and in character development. Teachers and volunteers provide much needed adult mentorship. Studies consistently show that students who take it, thrive.

Is academic credit available for Released Time students?

Yes. Ohio Revised Code 3313.6022 provides that students may earn up to 2 hours of academic credit for high-school level classes which meet the law's requirements.

How can I learn more about Released Time?

Visit releasedtime.org to understand the history and legality of Released Time, as well as state laws and administrative requirements around the nation. See schoolministriesohio.org to learn how Christian leaders in your community can be educated, equipped and encouraged to begin RT Bible classes for your public school students.

Who determines the curriculum?

The organization offering the Released Time classes has the responsibility and right to choose the curriculum. Christian organizations may teach Bible classes and are not required to teach all religions.

Do Released Time Bible education classes interfere with required classes?

No. Released time classes do not interfere with your child's mandatory school courses or after-school activities. The class schedule is set by school personnel in consultation with Released Time staff. Often, the Released Time classes are scheduled at times when other electives are offered.

What must I do for my child to attend a Released Time program?

Parents or guardians are required to sign permission forms provided by the local Released Time program. By law, the program must be FREE to schools!

Are Released Time Bible classes already approved in my area?

Very likely. Ohio has more released time programs than any other state in the nation. Seventy percent of Ohio's school districts already have a policy in place permitting Released Time. Even if your school district does not currently have a RT policy, we can help you request one.

I've heard of LifeWise. Is that the same as School Ministries Ohio?

No. Same goal - but very different approach.

School Ministries Ohio is committed to help local leaders who want to serve as led and customize their program to meet the unique needs of their community's students. Our fifteen-plus years of experience have shown that as communities own their own programs - with local control of costs and decision making - they are able to exercise good stewardship, keep local funds local and develop strong relationships with area churches to serve students and schools.

