

A MOMENT FOR QUIET REFLECTION

How to Comply with the Mandate

In each public school classroom, the teacher in charge shall, at the opening of school upon every school day, conduct a brief period of quiet reflection for not more than 60 seconds with the participation of all the pupils therein assembled.

O.C.G.A. 20-2-1050

Nothing more or less is needed to be said by a teacher in order to comply with the Act. Stating more than this, such as a discussion of whether a student may pray silently, invites criticism and possible legal challenge. If a teacher decides not to observe the moment at all, then the school district may be criticized or challenged legally for not complying with the law.

Some administrators who lead the pledge to the flag over the intercom may choose before or after the pledge to simply state: "Let us all remain silent for one moment to reflect on the anticipated activities of the day." The moment of silence may be for whatever length thought appropriate but not in excess of sixty seconds. (We always have thought that a teacher could require many moments of silence for reflection on a variety of activities, including an anticipated lesson or test, without having a law to authorize that activity.) Obviously, this simple sentence may be adopted by each classroom teacher, if the school administrator decides that the moment of silence should be observed by each teacher rather than by an administrator over the intercom.

The administrator perhaps should caution teachers not to get into a discussion with students as to whether students may pray silently during this moment. The danger is that a teacher may be perceived as recommending or endorsing prayer. Clearly, a student has a right to pray silently at any time during the day - the student need not ask for permission. If, however, a student truly is not clear as to this right, a teacher would be better served by discussing the issue privately with the student and not with the class.

The teacher herself or himself should not give to students the impression the teacher is engaged in prayer. This arguably could be considered as an endorsement of prayer or as encouraging students to pray and invite a legal challenge. For a teacher to assume a prayerful posture or to end the moment with an audible "amen" is to place oneself in a position where one could become the defendant in the test case surely to be filed sometime during the coming school year.

Obviously, common sense, a willingness to comply with the Act, but not to go beyond the Act, and an understanding of the legal issues in the cases in point prepare administrators and teachers to meet the requirement of the Act without becoming embroiled in litigation or too much controversy in the process.

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