

### **Muslim's Allowed Time For Prayer In School** **News On The Web**

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A high school near Washington DC has taken a rare step of accommodating Muslim prayer during class hours. Parkdale High School now allows a handful of its students to be excused to pray. The decision has made some Christian staffers "unhappy".



Prince George County High School Principal Cheryl J. Logan said the initiative is in response to the "needs of the growing Muslim community," the Washington Post reported. To be able to leave class each day all you need is a parental permission and high grades, Logan said.

Currently, about 10 Muslim students have earned the right to pray, and are reportedly allowed eight minutes each day for a joint prayer on campus. Another high school student is working hard to raise his grades to join the group, all of whom belong to Muslim Students' Association, Logan said.

It is hoped that allowing prayer will motivate Muslim students to improve their overall school performance.

The move has already upset several of the school's Christian staffers, many of whom remember when the school was a Christian institution. US public schools are secular by law, but are legally allowed to accommodate religious students' practices, Logan explained.

"I've been real happy with how we've been able to deal with it without it becoming an increasingly big issue," Logan said.

But Logan's initiative may not have a happy ending, said Charels Haynes, director of the Religious Freedom Education Project at the Newseum: "Once you start down that road then you really are in a bind." Now, any student who asks to be excused from class for religious reasons must be accommodated, Haynes told the Washington Post.

As Muslim prayer becomes increasingly visible in US schools, it will likely spark heated debate, as modern public schools are legally forbidden to conduct religious observances such as prayer. However, in the 18th, 19th and early 20th centuries, many American schools would open their day with a prayer or Bible reading.

In 1962, the US Supreme Court established the current prohibition on state-sponsored prayer in

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schools, bringing the right to freely practice one's religion into conflict with the right to not to be subjected to proselytizing.

Legally, anyone is allowed to pray in school in the US, as long as the prayers are not officially sponsored by the school and do not disrupt others. In reality, such decisions often spark heated and sometimes legal objections from opponents.

Followers of the Muslim faith are required to pray five times a day, and each prayer must be accompanied by a specific posture and movement. Only one of the prayer times will likely take place during school hours. Many US universities have already honored Muslims' requests for designated prayer time and venues; secondary education institutions rarely make such exceptions, however.

In early 2012, a school district in Green Bay, Wisconsin, came under criticism for its efforts to accommodate Muslim prayer after a large number of refugees from war-torn Somalia arrived in the area.