

# 14

CHAPTER 14

## First Amendment Schools: Educating for Freedom and Responsibility

*Congress shall make  
no law respecting an  
establishment of religion  
or prohibiting the free  
exercise thereof; or  
abridging the freedom  
of speech, or of the press;  
or the right of the people  
peaceably to assemble,  
and to petition the  
Government for a redress  
of grievances.*

FIRST AMENDMENT TO THE  
UNITED STATES CONSTITUTION



*Congress shall make  
no law respecting an  
establishment of religion  
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## FIRST AMENDMENT SCHOOLS: EDUCATING FOR FREEDOM AND RESPONSIBILITY

### What is the First Amendment Schools Project?

First Amendment Schools: Educating for Freedom and Responsibility, co-sponsored by the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) and the First Amendment Center, is a nationwide initiative designed to help schools model and teach the rights and responsibilities that flow from the First Amendment to the U.S. Constitution. The project has four goals:

1. Provide guidelines for applying the First Amendment principles in schools.
2. Establish project schools in every region of the nation.
3. Promote curriculum reforms that deepen teaching about the First Amendment.
4. Educate school leaders, teachers, parents, students, community members and school board members about the meaning and significance of First Amendment principles and ideals.

The First Amendment Schools project serves as a national resource for all schools—K-12, public and private—interested in affirming First Amendment principles and putting them into action in their school communities.

The project offers schools the following resources:

- Grants to schools selected as project schools.
- Answers to frequently asked questions about First Amendment issues in schools.
- Lesson plans for teaching the First Amendment in classrooms.
- Model policies for creating schools that value First Amendment principles.
- News and commentaries on First Amendment issues.
- First Amendment publications.

To find out more about these and the other project resources, visit [www.firstamendmentschools.org](http://www.firstamendmentschools.org), or contact ASCD's Mike Wildasin (703-575-5475, [mwildasi@ascd.org](mailto:mwildasi@ascd.org)) or the First Amendment Center's Sam Chaltain (703-284-2808, [schaltain@freedomforum.org](mailto:schaltain@freedomforum.org)).



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## *VISION STATEMENT*

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### THE CHALLENGE

First Amendment Schools are built on the conviction that the five freedoms protected by the First Amendment are a cornerstone of American democracy and essential for citizenship in a diverse society.

For more than 200 years, the First Amendment has been at the heart of history's boldest and most successful experiment in liberty. We readily acknowledge that the United States failed to live up to its founding principles in 1791, and that the nation still has a distance to go in the 21st century. But the history of our nation is the story of the ongoing struggle to extend the promise of freedom more fully and fairly to each and every citizen.

Today the need to sustain and expand our experiment in liberty is made more urgent by the challenge of living with our deepest differences in a diverse and complex society. The need to commit ourselves as a people to the rights and responsibilities that flow from the First Amendment has never been more vital—or more difficult. At a time in our history when we most need to reaffirm what we share as citizens across our differences, the ignorance and contention now surrounding the First Amendment threaten to divide the nation and undermine our freedom.



The key place to address this challenge is in our schools, the institutions most responsible for transmitting civic principles and virtues to each succeeding generation. Schools must not only teach the First Amendment; they must also find ways to model and apply the democratic first principles that they are charged with teaching. The rights and responsibilities of the First Amendment provide a much-needed civic framework for reaffirming and renewing the civic aims of education.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES

We envision First Amendment Schools as places where all members of the school community practice the civic habits of the heart necessary to sustain a free people that would remain free. Schools may carry out this mission in ways that vary greatly, depending on the age of the students, the size of the school, the needs of the local community and whether the school is public or private. What unites First Amendment Schools is not one view of democratic education or the First Amendment, but rather an abiding commitment to teach and model the rights and responsibilities that undergird the First Amendment.

We propose the following four principles as foundational for creating and sustaining a First Amendment School:

### I. Create Laboratories of Democratic Freedom

*The future of the American Republic depends upon instilling in young citizens an abiding commitment to the democratic first principles that sustain our experiment in liberty.*



First Amendment Schools educate for freedom by providing students and all members of the school community with substantial opportunities to practice democracy. Knowledge of our framing documents and the structure and functions of government is important, but preparation for citizenship also requires virtues and skills acquired through participation in decision-making. By practicing democracy, students confront the challenges of self-government, including the difficult task of balancing a commitment to individual rights with a concern for the common good.

First Amendment Schools create organizational structures, allocate time and resources, and develop policies and curricula designed to support and promote democratic learning communities. Pedagogical decisions, including instructional and assessment practices, extend opportunities for authentic learning that inform a citizen's understanding of the world beyond the classroom.

First Amendment Schools include administrators, teachers, staff, students, parents and community members when making decisions about organization, governance and curricula. When everyone is given a meaningful voice in shaping the life of the school, all have a real stake in creating and sustaining safe and caring learning communities. All members of the school community should have opportunities to exercise leadership, negotiate differences, propose solutions to shared problems, and practice other skills essential to thoughtful and effective participation in civic life.



## **II. Commit to Inalienable Rights and Civic Responsibility**

*Freedom of religion, speech, press, assembly, and petition are fundamental and inalienable rights. All Americans have a civic responsibility to guard these rights for every citizen.*

First Amendment Schools are dedicated to educating for citizenship by teaching and modeling the democratic principles of the Constitution of the United States. Schools take this mission seriously by providing all members of the school community with daily opportunities to exercise their constitutional rights with responsibility.

First Amendment Schools uphold the principles of freedom and democracy when they protect religious liberty rights, encourage freedom of expression, promote academic freedom, ensure a free student press and support broad-based involvement in school governance. Acting responsibly, students, teachers, administrators, staff, parents and community members can do much to uphold the rights of every citizen.

### III. Include all Stakeholders

*The First Amendment provides the civic framework of rights and responsibilities that enables Americans to work together for the common good in schools and communities.*

First Amendment Schools affirm the importance of modeling the democratic process and upholding individual rights in the development of policies and curricula. Decisions are made after appropriate involvement of those affected by the decision and with due consideration for the rights of those holding dissenting views.

First Amendment Schools recognize that parents have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and education of their children. All Americans, however, share an important stake in educating students for responsible citizenship in a free society. Students and schools benefit greatly when parents, students, educators and community members work closely together to promote a shared vision of the First Amendment throughout the school culture and across the community.



### IV. Translate Civic Education into Community Engagement

*A society committed to freedom and justice for all requires citizens with the knowledge, virtues, and skills needed for active engagement in public life.*

First Amendment Schools encourage active citizenship by giving students opportunities to translate civic education into community engagement. Active citizens are willing to participate in public life by addressing problems and issues in their communities, our nation, and the world.



First Amendment Schools provide opportunities for students to learn civic virtue and moral character throughout the school culture and across the curriculum. Students are encouraged to demonstrate an active concern for the welfare of others through service learning and civic problem-solving. First Amendment rights are best guarded and civic responsibilities best exercised when citizens are actively engaged in building a more just and free society.

## A SHARED VISION

These guiding principles are offered as a shared vision for schools seeking to fulfill the promise of freedom under the First Amendment.

Learning about freedom and justice, however important, can never be enough; educating for democratic citizenship must be more than an academic exercise. If we are to sustain and expand the American experiment in liberty, young citizens must acquire the civic skills and virtues needed to exercise their freedom *with* responsibility.

We invite all schools and every citizen to join us in affirming these principles and putting them into action. The time has come for all Americans to work together to renew our shared commitment to the civic principles and virtues vital to democracy, freedom, and the common good.