

SB248 ENGROSSED



1 SB248
2 5VBS5MM-2
3 By Senator Shelnuttt
4 RFD: Education Policy
5 First Read: 03-Feb-26



SB248 Engrossed

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28

A BILL
TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

Relating to public K-12 education; to amend Section 16-1-20.6, Code of Alabama 1975; to further provide for the provision of released time for religious instruction during the school day.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE LEGISLATURE OF ALABAMA:

Section 1. Section 16-1-20.6, Code of Alabama 1975, is amended to read as follows:

"§16-1-20.6

(a) This section shall be known and may be cited as the Alabama Released Time Credit Act.

(b) The Legislature finds and declares all of the following:

(1) That the United States Supreme Court, in its decision in *Zorach v. Clauson*, 343 U.S. 306 (1952), upheld the constitutionality of released time programs for religious instruction for public school students during the school day.

(2) That the United States Constitution and state law allows local school districts to offer religious released time education for the benefit of public school students.

(3) That the purpose of this section is to incorporate



SB248 Engrossed

29 a constitutionally acceptable method of allowing school
30 districts to ~~offer~~ accommodate religious released time classes
31 and, in grades where credit is earned, to award students
32 elective credit for classes taken during the school day in
33 released time programs.

34 (c) ~~For the purposes of this~~ As used in this section,
35 the following terms have the following meanings ~~term released~~
36 ~~time means a:~~

37 (1) RELEASED TIME. A period of time during the school
38 day when a student is allowed to participate in religious
39 released time instruction that is an elective course in
40 religious instruction, conducted off school district property,
41 by a private and conducted by a sponsoring entity.

42 (2) SPONSORING ENTITY. A church or other local
43 community-based religious organization.

44 (d) (1) The State Board of Education and each local
45 board of education shall allow a parent or guardian to choose
46 for his or her student to attend a religious released time
47 program conducted by a sponsoring entity.

48 (2) Subdivision (1) shall not apply if a local board of
49 education or the local superintendent or designee of the local
50 board of education has a reasonable belief based on objective
51 evidence that permitting a student to attend a released time
52 program would pose a substantial risk of physical harm to the
53 student or that the sponsoring entity is in violation of state
54 law in a manner that poses a substantial risk of physical harm
55 to a student.

56 (e) The State Board of Education shall adopt and each



SB248 Engrossed

57 local board of education may ~~implement~~ adopt a policy for a
58 student to attend released time which may require that any of
59 the following as an elective course if all of the following
60 are be satisfied by the sponsoring entity:

61 (1) The parent or guardian of the student gives written
62 consent for the student to participate in religious released
63 time and completes the local board of education's standard
64 checkout authorization form for the released time program. A
65 single completed authorization form shall apply for the full
66 duration of the school year and may not be required for each
67 individual released time session.

68 (2) Released time instruction and activities are not
69 sponsored by the local board of education and do not fall
70 under the supervision, control, or authority of the local
71 board of education or its employees.

72 (3) The sponsoring entity maintains attendance records
73 and makes them available to the public school the student
74 attends.

75 (4) ~~(3)~~ The sponsoring entity makes provisions for and
76 assumes liability for the student who is excused for released
77 time.

78 (5) ~~(4)~~ No public funds are expended other than de
79 minimis administrative costs.

80 (6) ~~(5)~~ No public school personnel are involved in
81 providing the religious instruction.

82 (7) The sponsoring entity conducts a criminal history
83 background check for all employees or contractors of the
84 entity who are likely to have direct, ongoing contact with a



SB248 Engrossed

85 student who is excused for released time.

86 (8) The student assumes responsibility for any missed
87 school work.

88 (f)-(e) In grades where credit is earned, a student who
89 participates in released time may earn elective course credit
90 for participation, as provided by rules adopted by the State
91 Board of Education for elective courses. Credit awarded may
92 not exceed normal credit given for an elective course in the
93 particular school system. The State Board of Education shall
94 also adopt minimum standards for class attendance necessary to
95 qualify for credit.

96 (g)-(f) A student who participates in religious
97 instruction for elective credit during released time shall be
98 credited with time spent as if the student attended school,
99 and the time shall be calculated as part of the actual school
100 day.

101 (h)-(g) Transportation to and from the place of released
102 time, including transportation for any student with
103 disabilities, is the complete responsibility of the sponsoring
104 private entity, parent, guardian, or student and may not be
105 arranged, coordinated, or provided for by public school
106 personnel.

107 (i) No student may be excused from the minimum
108 instructional time for any course or subject as prescribed by
109 the State Board of Education, nor from any student
110 intervention required under state or federal law, for purposes
111 of participating in religious released time.

112 (j) Nothing in this section shall be construed to:



SB248 Engrossed

113 (1) Endorse of any religious belief, practice, or
114 instruction by the State Board of Education or any local board
115 of education;

116 (2) Limit the authority of local boards of education
117 over the development of school schedules; or

118 (3) Limit the authority of local boards of education to
119 tailor the policies addressed in this section to meet their
120 specific needs, provided that the policy reflects the
121 requirements of this section and complies with applicable law,
122 rules, and regulations.~~(h) No student may be released from a~~
123 ~~required core curriculum class to attend released time."~~

124 Section 2. This act shall become effective on July 1,
125 2026.



SB248 Engrossed

126
127
128 Senate

129 Read for the first time and referred03-Feb-26
130 to the Senate committee on Education
131 Policy
132
133 Read for the second time and placed12-Feb-26
134 on the calendar:
135 1 amendment
136
137 Read for the third time and passed19-Feb-26
138 as amended
139 Yeas 29
140 Nays 0
141 Abstains 0
142
143

Patrick Harris,
Secretary.

144
145
146