

Senate Bill 331

By: Senators Hill of the 4th, Mullis of the 53rd and Thomas of the 54th

A BILL TO BE ENTITLED
AN ACT

To amend Article 21 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to a moment of quiet reflection in public school classrooms, so as to provide for legislative findings; to change a provision relating to student initiated voluntary prayer; to allow local boards of education to authorize a period of education regarding the personal religious beliefs and experiences of students; to provide for a maximum length of time and a chance for each student to speak or choose silence; to provide for related matters; to repeal conflicting laws; and for other purposes.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF GEORGIA:

SECTION 1.

The General Assembly finds that education regarding the religious beliefs and experiences of others is an important element of developing tolerance and understanding in our diverse society. The General Assembly further finds that such education should begin at an early age, and should provide a chance for each student to explain personal religious beliefs and experiences to other students, but should not require any student to speak about personal beliefs and experiences.

SECTION 2.

Article 21 of Chapter 2 of Title 20 of the Official Code of Georgia Annotated, relating to a moment of quiet reflection in public school classrooms, is amended by striking Code Section 20-2-1050, relating to the brief moment of quiet reflection, and Code Section 20-2-1051, relating to participation in silent prayer or meditation, and inserting in lieu thereof the following:

"20-2-1050.

(a) 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.

(b) The moment of quiet reflection authorized by subsection (a) of this Code section is not intended to be and shall not be conducted as a religious service or exercise but shall be considered as an opportunity for a moment of silent reflection on the anticipated activities of the day.

(c) The provisions of subsections (a) and (b) of this Code section shall not prevent student initiated voluntary school prayers at schools or school related events which are ~~nonsectarian and~~ nonproselytizing in nature.

20-2-1051.

~~No teacher, principal, school board, or any other person may require or prescribe any particular method or manner in which a child shall participate in any period of silent prayer or meditation, but each child shall be absolutely free to participate therein or not, in such manner or way as such child shall personally desire, consistent with his or her beliefs. In addition to the brief period of quiet reflection required by Code Section 20-2-1050, a local board of education may authorize a daily educational period not to exceed three minutes during which a student may speak about his or her personal religious beliefs or experiences. The educational period, if authorized, shall be conducted prior to the brief moment of quiet reflection. Each student shall have a chance to speak for at least one educational period, and any student may choose silence as an alternative to speaking; in such event, the period of quiet reflection will be extended to include the educational period."~~

SECTION 3.

All laws and parts of laws in conflict with this Act are repealed.