

Most believers, secularists OK with faith expression in U.S. public schools

by [Adelle M. Banks](#) in the [October 19, 2010](#) issue

A majority of Americans—including those who do not practice a particular faith—think that students should be able to express their religion in public schools, a new poll by the Washington-based First Amendment Center finds.

Three-quarters of Americans support student religious speech at public school events. A slight majority (52 percent) of those who don't practice religion think such expression is appropriate.

In addition, 80 percent of U.S. adults said students should be permitted to pray at events at public schools.

"Clearly most Americans want to keep government out of religion, but they don't see an expression of faith by a student at a public school event as a violation of the separation of church and state," said Ken Paulson, president of the Freedom Forum's First Amendment Center in a September 15 announcement of the findings.

The telephone survey of 1,003 adults also found a majority— 53 percent—of Americans continue to think that the U.S. Constitution establishes a "Christian nation," sliding slightly from the 55 percent in 2008.

Charles Haynes, a senior scholar at the First Amendment Center, said he found that belief "discouraging" even as he welcomed agreement by two of three Americans that the First Amendment requires clear church-state separation.

"When the framers wrote the First Amendment, 'no establishment' meant no religion—Christian or otherwise—could be established under our Constitution," Haynes said.

The poll also found:

- 76 percent of Americans support the proclamation of the National Day of Prayer by the president or Congress.
- 61 percent said freedom to worship applies to all religious groups no matter how extreme their views may be.
- 48 percent said the religious affiliation of a candidate for office is important in their voting decisions. —*RNS*