



AB2377 (Luz Rivas): PE Religious Fasting Accommodations



CAIR-CA Position: SPONSOR

Summary

Students observing religious fasting often find themselves struggling to exercise during their physical education (PE) courses. The lack of liquids, coupled with no food, can result in dangerous health complications during exercise. Furthermore, physical activity can significantly strain students who practice fasting when PE is held later in the day. It is crucial that we support our students and their physical and mental wellbeing.

AB 2377 seeks to accommodate students practicing religious fasting by offering them a modified exercise regimen or providing them academic assignments related to PE.

Background & Problem

Fasting is a religious and cultural practice that has been used since at least 1,500 BCE. Fasting is the act of refraining, completely or partially, from consuming anything of sustenance. During Ramadan, Muslims fast every day for 30 days from sunrise to sunset as a spiritual discipline. People in the Jewish community who observe Yom Kippur, the holiest day of the year in Judaism, practice a day-long fast and intensive prayer. The Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur requires adherents of the faith to commit to fasting for 25 hours. This form of fasting requires the full abstention of food and liquids for an entire day. Additionally, several Christian denominations practice full or partial fasting on certain occasions, including Lent.

A 2022 Los Angeles Times article chronicled a teacher from Cupertino, California, found that many students at the school did not tell their non-Muslim teachers that they were observing Ramadan. The teacher further noted that students felt awkward seeking proper accommodations for their fasting. Additionally, students find it worrisome to ask for accommodations due to potential religious discrimination.

Other states have recognized the need to provide proper accommodations for students observing

religious fasting. In 2021, Illinois passed House Bill 160 to permit students to avoid rigorous physical activity during periods of religious fasting.

Currently, students from grades 1 through 8 are required to complete 200 minutes of PE every 10 school days, and students from grades 9 through 12 are required 400 minutes each 10 school days to fulfill their PE requirements.

California is home to many diverse faith-based communities that observe fasting. Currently, the school system has no guidelines that provide students accommodations during the PE portion of the school day.

The implications of fasting in the summer days are even more dangerous as factors like sweltering heat can create dangerous situations for students. Fasting can cause dizziness, fatigue, headaches, and dehydration, which may lead to weakness or fainting, especially during exercise.

Solution

AB 2377 recognizes the religions and cultural diversity in our state by accommodating students practicing religious fasting. Schools can offer supplemental instruction as a replacement for the required hours needed for PE.

Specifically, this bill requires written permission from parents for students under 18 to request PE accommodations.

Support

- CAIR-CA (Sponsor)
- Church-State Council (Co-Sponsor)
- Jakara Movement
- Santa Clara County Board of Education

Opposition

None.