

## EFWMA Approved Senate Bill 11 - SB 11 – Period of Prayer or Reading of Religious Text

In 2026, Texas Senate Bill 11 (SB 11) is a law that establishes a framework for public school districts and open-enrollment charter schools to provide a daily period for voluntary prayer and reading of the Bible or other religious texts.

Signed into law by Governor Greg Abbott in June 2025, the act went into effect on September 1, 2025, and applies to the 2025–2026 school year.

### **Key Requirements of SB 11**

- **Mandatory Board Vote:** Every school board in Texas is required to take a recorded vote no later than March 1, 2026 (six months after the law's effective date) on whether to adopt a policy allowing these religious periods.
- **Strict Consent Forms:** Students and employees may only participate if a parent or employee submits a signed consent form. This form must include:
  - An acknowledgment that participation is a choice.
  - A statement of no objection to hearing the prayers or readings.
  - A waiver of the right to sue the district or its employees for claims related to the policy, including First Amendment Establishment Clause violations.
- **Protection for Non-Participants:** The law requires that these religious activities be conducted in a way that ensures those who have not consented are not in the physical presence or hearing of the prayers (e.g., held before school hours or only in specific classrooms).
- **Instructional Safeguards:** Prayer and readings may not replace instructional time and are strictly prohibited from being broadcast over a public address system.
- **State-Backed Legal Defense:** The Texas Attorney General is authorized to provide model consent forms and must defend any school district that faces legal challenges due to adopting this policy, with the state bearing all associated costs.

### **Constitutional Context**

Before SB 11, students already held a constitutional right to engage in individual, voluntary, and silent prayer that did not disrupt school activities. SB 11 modified existing law by removing the prohibition on school personnel "encouraging" students to engage in such prayer, though it still prohibits "requiring" or "coercing" participation