

RÉSUMÉ DIGEST

ACT 461 (SB 112)

2026 Regular Session

Hodges

New law authorizes each public school board (including each charter school board) to adopt a policy that allows students, subject to parental approval, to attend a released time course. New law defines a "release time course" as a course in religious instruction taught by a sponsoring entity in which a student is allowed to attend with parental approval.

New law provides that the legislature finds, as follows:

- (1) In 1952, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that public schools may release students during school hours for off-campus religious instruction, provided that there is parental consent and that the program is not publicly funded.
- (2) That the La. Children's Code declares that the people of La. recognize the family as the most fundamental unit of human society; that preserving families is essential to a free society; that the relationship between parent and child is preeminent in establishing and maintaining the well-being of the child; that parents should make the decisions regarding the educational, moral, ethical, and religious training of the child.
- (3) As interest in released time for religious instruction grows across our state, legislation is needed to show support for parents' rights to request released time.

New law defines a "sponsoring entity" as a church or other religious organization that is tax-exempt and that receives authorization from parents and a school board to operate a released time course program.

New law provides that the school is free from liability for any injury that occurs while the student is off-campus at a released time course or being transported to or from the course.

New law requires that any sponsoring entity of a released time course that provides transportation of students to or from the release time course to maintain certain automobile liability insurance coverage limits. Further requires that proof of such insurance be provided to the school board as a condition of providing transportation.

New law requires a criminal background check to be conducted for each instructor and any other person who may have direct contact with or may have supervisory responsibility over a student participating in a released time course. Provides an exception for other students in the course.

New law requires written consent of a parent to attend the released time course to be on a form that includes a notice that contains the following:

- (1) That the school and school board has no liability for any injury that occurs while the student is at an off-campus released time course.
- (2) That the school and school board have no liability for the transportation to or from the released time course.
- (3) That the sponsoring entity is responsible for any liability associated with the released time course.
- (4) That any liability for injuries that occur during the transportation to or from the released time course shall be solely the responsibility of the sponsoring entity or the person the parent authorized to transport the student.

New law requires the sponsoring entity to maintain attendance records and make them available to the school that the participating student attends.

New law requires a released time course to be between one and five hours per school week, and if a student is absent from the course or not at school, then the student is counted as absent for truancy purposes.

New law requires the state Dept. of Education to provide a course credit code that participating schools may use to award academic credit for the completion of a released time course.

New law prohibits a released time course from being held on school property unless permitted under a neutral policy of equal access that opens school property for use by community groups.

New law requires a school board that awards academic credit for a released time course to require the following of each instructor:

- (1) He satisfies the same qualification standards established by the school board for substitute teachers employed within the school system.
- (2) He agrees to report student grades, attendance, and any other information required by the school board to the school.

New law provides that nothing in new law is to be construed to supercede or limit the constitutional religious liberty rights granted under existing law.

New law shall be known and may be cited as the "School Released Time Education Act".

Effective May 29, 2026.

(Adds R.S. 17:288.1-288.5 and 3996(B)(92))