



Written by [Jack Kenny](#) on May 21, 2010

Student Suspended for Wearing Rosary in School

"Beads are beads," Superintendent of Schools Eric Ely said about a student suspended from a Schenectady New York middle school for visibly wearing a rosary around his neck. "Many, many students wear beads every day," he told WTEN, News 10 in Albany. "They just don't display them."



Raymond Hosier, Jr., a seventh-grade student at Oneida Middle School was sent home from school on Monday for wearing a string of purple rosary beads attached to a white cross around his neck. He returned to school wearing the beads the following day without incident but was suspended on Thursday for refusing to keep the beads concealed. Wearing beads outwardly violates the school district code of conduct, which forbids the wearing outwardly of anything that would "denote represent or be deemed to be gang-related, including, but not limited to bandanas, colors, flags or beads." The school says students are allowed to wear beads but must keep them underneath their clothing.

"They told me that if I didn't tuck them in my shirt then I would have to go home and I told them I wasn't going to tuck them in," Raymond told WTEN.

The rosary is a form of prayer, said mainly by Catholics, with each bead representing a prayer said while meditating on the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus. They are usually carried in pocket or purse, though some like to wear the beads around the neck as a symbol of devotion. Raymond, who turned 13 on Thursday, said he wears his beads in memory of an older brother who died in 2005 in a car crash and an uncle who died two weeks ago of brain cancer. "I'm not a gang member. I don't do those types of things," he told the *Times Union* of Albany. The boy's mother, Chantelle Hosier, said the rosary Raymond wears was wrapped around his brother's hand as the older boy lay dying in the intensive care unit.

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"Raymond's wearing it because they are a religious symbol, not because he's in a gang," she told the paper. "He is not an angel, but he is a very good kid."

But Karen Carona, a spokesman for the school district said beads could be used to symbolize allegiance to a gang of lawless youths. "It's a safety issue," she said. Ely said amending the code is a long and involved process and the school board is not likely to do that, given the problems the district has had with gangs.



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The incident has drawn national attention, with Raymond and his mother scheduled for a limo ride into New York City this morning to appear on Fox News. They met with Bill Roberts, the school district's assistant superintendent of operations on Thursday. School Board President Maxine Brisport said Raymond had been suspended for two days for insubordination. He would be in compliance with the code, Corona said, if he removed the beads and just wore the chain. But Raymond claimed the school is following a double standard. Students wearing do-rags on their heads or hanging out of their pockets have not been suspended, he said. A do-rag (sometimes spelled du-rag) is a scarf or bandana worn over the head. It is sometimes worn by gang members to display their gang's colors.

In February, a ninth-grader was suspended for an outward display of his rosary beads at Fieldstone Secondary School in Haverstraw, New York. Jason Laguna, 14, sometimes wears the beads under his shirt, but pulled them out one day on his way out just before dismissal, WABC in New York reported. His mother said she was told the action violated an unwritten school policy concerning beads because they could be used to show gang affiliation. The school principal called the student's display of the rosary beads insubordination, saying it "endangered the safety, health, morals or welfare of himself or others."

The rights of students in public schools have long been matters of contention and litigation. In a landmark Supreme Court case, *Tinker v. Des Moines*, (1969) the Supreme Court ruled that the suspension of students for wearing black armbands in protest of the Vietnam war was a violation of their First Amendment rights. Overturning a lower court ruling upholding the school district, the court said: "It can hardly be argued that either students or teachers shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate." Writing for the court, Justice Abe Fortas noted that there was no evidence of "interference, actual or nascent with the school's work or of collision with the rights of other students to be secure and left alone." While school officials expressed concern of a potential disturbance from the wearing of the armbands, Fortas wrote, "an undifferentiated fear or apprehension of disturbance is not enough to overcome the right to freedom of expression."

Whether the Hosier case ends up in court remains to be seen. But Raymond's mother said she has been told by school authorities that if he returns to school on Monday wearing the beads he will be suspended again. And Raymond said they're not coming off. Chantelle Hosier has discussed the matter with her husband, Raymond, Sr., and they plan to stand by their son's decision. "Me and his dad are on the same page when it comes to what Ray is doing," she told the *Times Union*.



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