Madison school board to allow pledge

Decision comes after 8 hours of emotional testimony

In Journal Sentinel

Associated Press

The Madison School Board voted early Tuesday to permit schools to offer the Pledge of Allegiance to comply with a state law that requires a daily display of patriotism.

The board voted 6-1 for the proposal after eight hours of testimony from emotional residents about its decision last week to only allow an instrumental version of the national anthem in the Madison Metropolitan School District.

Board members had decided to eliminate the pledge as an option after some parents complained about the "one nation, under God" line. But the board reversed its position Tuesday in voting in favor of schools being permitted to offer the pledge.

"I don't think the pledge is about religion. I think it is a commitment to our democracy," board member Ray Allen said Tuesday.

The 800-seat auditorium at Madison Memorial High School was overflowing Monday evening and into Tuesday with citizens wanting to express their opinion. The board last week ruled out the pledge as a way for schools to comply with a new student patriotism law.

That law, included in the state budget passed this summer, requires public schools to give students a daily opportunity to say the pledge or hear the national anthem.

The school district initially allowed schools to decide how they wanted to comply, but the board passed a motion last week directing schools to only use an instrumental version of the anthem, ruling out the pledge and the words of the anthem.

Under the new policy the board approved early Tuesday, schools can offer either the pledge or anthem. The recitation or singing of either must be introduced with the following statement: "We live in a nation of freedom. Participation in the pledge is voluntary. Whoever wishes to participate may stand, those who do not may sit."

Board member Bill Keys, who authored the original motion limiting daily displays of patriotism to the instrumental anthem, was the only member of the board to vote against reconsidering that decision and the new policy on the pledge.

Keys said his primary concern was making certain that students of all religions and backgrounds were comfortable in the classroom, something he believed would have been accomplished by playing an instrumental version of the national anthem.

Before the meeting started, the crowd spontaneously began reciting the pledge, with the majority standing as some scattered boos were heard. After finishing the oath, supporters broke into applause, waving American flags.
Keys said the behavior of some adults in the auditorium - including those who shouted at speakers they disagreed with - demonstrated that some children would cave in to pressure from classmates or teachers to say the pledge, even if it conflicted with their beliefs.

"You saw it done in this hall tonight, with litmus tests and artificial displays of patriotism," Keys said.

Outside the board meeting, several parents led by former U.S. Rep. Scott Klug, R-Wis., said they intend to seek the recall of some or all of the board members.

"If they didn't know what they were doing last week," Klug told reporters, "then what other decisions are they making where they don't have a clue?"

Public testimony started about 5:30 p.m. Monday and ended about 1:30 a.m. Tuesday. District spokesman Ken Syke said 233 people signed up to speak before the board, but 165 actually did. Each had three minutes.

The board also allowed about two dozen students to testify first so that they could get home and do their homework.

"Do I feel a pressure to participate (in reciting the pledge)?" asked Liana Prescott, a senior at Memorial. "Absolutely. Are there others who bow to this pressure? I cannot doubt it."

Laura Brown, a Madison resident, said it was unfair to divide students with different beliefs on the issue of the pledge.

"It's bad enough Osama bin Laden has declared a holy war on us," she said. "It's a heck of a lot worse if we declare war on each other in the name of God."

Dave Dean and Harold Klubertanz, members of the Wisconsin Society of Sons of the American Revolution, came to the hearing wearing replica Revolutionary War uniforms.

"The policy is silly and knee-jerk," said Klubertanz. "The pledge does not ask anyone to subscribe to any religion."

Dan Neviaser of Madison, who said he volunteered to serve in World War II, contended the board allowed a vocal minority to overrule rights of the majority of people who want the pledge said in schools.

"In this time of stress and fear, we need our "Star-Spangled Banner,' we need our Pledge of Allegiance," he said. "You know what we don't need? Our school board."

But Kim Thornton said he hoped the board would have the courage to stick by its original decision.

"We do not instill respect for our country when we prescribe how and when people should express their patriotism," he said.

David Long, who has a grade-school daughter in a Madison school, also said he favored the policy of using only an instrumental version of the national anthem.

"We liked that it didn't involve any religious component, and it seemed like a subtler form of nationalism," Long said. "We want our daughter to be thinking more globally."
Board President Calvin Williams, Keys and Carol Carstensen had voted last week in favor of the pledge policy, while Ruth Robarts and Shjaw Vang voted against it. Members Juan Jose Lopez and Allen were absent from that vote.

The district has received more than 20,000 phone calls and e-mails over the last week, many from out of state. Almost all of them have denounced the decision.

Vang, who is originally from Laos, said he and his family received threatening calls and e-mails last week following his initial vote in favor of eliminating the pledge as an option.

"I've never been so scared for my wife or my kids in all the years I've been here since 1978," he said.

Dennis Chaptman of the Journal Sentinel staff contributed to this report.

‘Stand Up! It’s the Law!’
An elementary teacher asks her students what the Pledge of Allegiance means to them, and strives to protect the rights of those who choose to sit out the Pledge.

BY KATE LYMAN

In Rethinking Schools:
www.rethinkingschools.org/sept11/16_02/stan162.htm

Winter 2001 / 2002

My seven-year-old grandson is the only one who remains seated while his classmates recite the Pledge of Allegiance. Ever since he could talk, Caetano has been proud of his Brazilian heritage. When people would stumble over the pronunciation of his name, he’d say, “It’s Caetano, Cae-ta-no. After a famous Brazilian singer.”

Sitting out the Pledge was a difficult decision for Caetano, one he lost sleep over. Despite peer pressure (“You have to stand up. It’s the law!” other children told him) he has stuck with his decision.

But what of other children who - whether for family, religious or political beliefs - do not equate being a good citizen with saying the Pledge? Will they also be allowed to stand by their beliefs?

Under a new Wisconsin law, all public schools are to offer the Pledge or the national anthem every day. Although students are not to be “compelled” to do so, reality is far more complicated.

In my school, on Friday, Sept. 28, teachers were told to send a note home about the new state law. The daily routine was to begin the following Monday.

That Monday, a fourth-grader recited the Pledge over the school intercom. I watched the reactions of my students, who are in a combined second- and third-grade classroom. About half my students mumbled some of the words. Several had their hands on their hearts. Two Hmong girls merely smiled. One boy, Jeremy, was sitting cross-legged, head down, with the hood of his sweatshirt over his face. Ceci was the only one standing up. She was also saluting and after the pledge was over, she broke into a vibrato rendition of “God Bless America.”

WHAT DOES THE PLEDGE MEAN?
Watching my students, I wondered what the Pledge meant to them. Did they understand the words (even the fourth-grader had said, “one nation, invisible”)? Could they understand why some might choose not to say the Pledge? How could I protect the rights of those who don’t want to take part, while at the same time not let my beliefs interfere with students who want to participate?

I decided to approach these questions by holding a class discussion. I first asked my students what they thought the Pledge meant. Most echoed the thoughts of adults. They said it was a way to remember the people who had died in the Sept. 11 attack. They said it was about “respecting other people, respecting the world, world peace, and not fighting.” It was clear that the meaning they interpreted had little to do with the actual words.

I decided to move on to the next part of my lesson plan: defining the words used in the Pledge Ceci said that “Pledge” means “that I stand up for the flag” and “for the Army.” She added that it means to “be proud of yourself.” Jeremy said it meant “you gave loyalty to the flag.”

Ceci, meanwhile, defined “liberty” as, “All the people in the world are very special and should get the same things and be treated the same.” Justice was similarly defined as, “We’re going to give liberty to everyone in the whole entire world.”

None of the students understood the word “indivisible.” They thought they were supposed to say “invisible,” or “invincible.” I tried to clear up the confusion, but I couldn’t shake the feeling that overall, my students had little idea of what they were saying when they recited the Pledge.

Then I asked the class why they thought some people might choose to not participate in the Pledge. The answers that followed were insightful, I thought, for seven- and eight-year-olds. Some of their comments:

“They might not like the U.S.” said Keema.

“They don’t think it’s true that one nation is under God,” offered Jeremy. “There’s more nations under God.”

“Maybe they don’t believe in God,” said Tyesha.

“They might be from a different country,” suggested Kelly, ”And be forced to move here.”

“Or maybe the countries they’re from don’t do this. They’re not used to it,” added Emily.

I asked if people might disagree with the “liberty and justice for all” part.

“It’s not true that people are treated the same,” Ceci said.

“It’s not true that we have justice for all,” Jeremy noted. “How can we say that when we’re bombing right now? The people in Afghanistan aren’t getting liberty or justice. They’re just getting bombed!”

“Now, my friend, Stephen, across the hall, he don’t believe in saying it. He says it’s white people’s crap,” Ceci said. “Now I’m not saying I agree or nothing,” she added quickly, “That’s what he says. My family says the Pledge.”

I asked the class to think about what Stephen might have meant, even if he used words deemed inappropriate in school.
Ceci responded, “Some people can’t afford the money. They say your family can’t get a job.”

“Some people don’t want Black people to do what they want to do,” Tamarra said. “They treated them like slaves. That’s not equal when white people treat Black people different.”

I told the students there would be a school board meeting that night to discuss different opinions about the Pledge (I teach in Madison where for a brief while the school board required only an instrumental version of the Star Spangled Banner; after public protest, it reverted to a policy that instructs each principal how to implement the state law through a daily recital of the Pledge of Allegiance or the singing of the National Anthem.)

One of the more insightful comments came from Ashle, who said: “We should just take a minute of silence to think about that crash stuff.”

Ceci reflected what many in the Madison community seemed to be thinking and said, “People who don’t like it can go out of the room. They can go in the closet and shut the door.”

Overall, I felt that our meeting was successful. Above all, students had been able to express their opinions about what the Pledge meant to them, and had analyzed why the Pledge might not mean the same thing to everyone.

Now, a full month after the daily Pledge was required, more children feel the peer pressure and join in. Jeremy, however, remains adamant in not saying the Pledge, and I have told him I support his right to do as he believes.

As I write, the sunlight streams through my classroom “flag,” a stained-glass rainbow sign. In the hallway, students’ peace posters decorate the lockers and doorways. I find such symbols of acceptance of diversity and world peace far more appealing than those of national pride. But these are strange times.

I feel for Jeremy and Caetano and all the other students who choose to not join in the Pledge. I hope the cheers and jeers of patriotic fervor will not silence their rights.

Kate Lyman teaches a combined second- and third-grade classroom in Madison, WI. The names of the students have been changed.

Winter 2001 / 2002

NEWS. American Civil Liberties Union

In ACLU:  www.aclu.org/news/2001/w101801a.html

October 18, 2001 -- Pledge to Be Recited at New York City Public Schools

NEW YORK -- The New York City Board of Education unanimously adopted a resolution last night to require all public schools to lead students in the Pledge of Allegiance at the beginning of every school day and at all schoolwide assemblies and events, The New York Times reported.

According to the Times, the resolution, which also states that students and staff members will neither be compelled to participate nor disciplined if they choose not to recite the pledge, is essentially a copy of a state education law already on the books.
But the requirement to recite the pledge has been all but ignored at most New York City schools for much of the last 30 years, since the waning days of the Vietnam War, education officials say.

Ninfa Segarra, the president of the Board of Education and the sponsor of the resolution, said, "It's a small way to thank the heroes of Sept. 11 and let them know they won't be forgotten in our public schools."

Schools Chancellor Harold O. Levy said yesterday afternoon that he also supported the resolution, but he cautioned that citizens have a greater responsibility to guard against discrimination and to tolerate dissenting views.

But the New York Civil Liberties Union objected strongly to the proposal, noting that the New York City school system has many students who are not American citizens. Those students are likely "to be scapegoated or targeted for harassment" if they do not participate, said Donna Lieberman, interim director of the NYCLU.

In 1943, the United States Supreme Court ruled in West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette that public school students could not be compelled to recite the Pledge of Allegiance. In that landmark decision, Justice Robert H. Jackson wrote, "To believe that patriotism will not flourish if patriotic ceremonies are voluntary and spontaneous instead of a compulsory routine is to make an unflattering estimate of the appeal of our institutions to free minds."

The resolution comes as school districts around the country grapple with the issue of what displays of patriotism are appropriate at a time of both national pride and mourning.

When Segarra announced at an afternoon session of the board that the resolution was likely to be adopted later that evening, a crowd of nearly 100 students, teachers and others attending the meeting burst into applause.

Levy, who will be responsible for making sure the resolution is put into effect, was cautious in his support.

"At every opportunity," he said, "we should make sure that tolerance is something that we teach, both by example and by reminding people what's important."

Teachers and children should also be reminded "to be protective of particularly the Muslim children and children who wear traditional garb," Levy said. "This is what it is to be an American, as well as saluting the flag."

The resolution also sets a goal for schools to display the American flag outside the building and in as many classrooms as is practical, and it encourages schools to form color guards to present the flags of the city, state and nation at assemblies.

State education law already has similar requirements, going so far as to set out the sizes of flags and the materials of which they should be made.

But both the state and the new city regulation make implicit note of the Supreme Court's ruling in saying that neither teachers nor students can be compelled to participate in the pledge. The state regulation specifically notes a lower court's ruling that those refusing to salute the flag may not be required to stand or to leave the room.
Vets want teens to recite U.S. pledge
Dearborn considers it, but principal predicts opposition

In Detroit News:  www.detnews.com/2001/schools/0111/09/d01-339638.htm

By Craig Garrett / The Detroit News

DEARBORN HEIGHTS -- Crestwood High School students likely will recognize former classmates serving in the armed forces but not recite the pledge of allegiance, as requested by Dearborn Heights military veterans, a school official said Thursday.

Impassioned letters from veteran groups had implored high school administrators to mandate that Crestwood students stand before classes and recite the pledge, as younger children do in districts across the country.

However, Crestwood Principal Linda Sell-Farver said talks with teachers at the high school suggest that many youngsters, rebellious in their teen-age years, would bristle at a mandatory function like reciting the pledge.

"Freedom of choice is something the pledge itself -- and the country -- stand for. Kids are smart enough to know that," she said.

"Besides, they already do a number of civic functions."

Taking a vow of allegiance to the American flag has been part of classroom decorum for decades. It was supposed to instill respect and build a sense of duty to the country. The pledge itself was penned in 1892 and became a tradition in the classroom starting in the 1950s.

But the issue has taken significantly more meaning since the events of Sept. 11, Crestwood Supt. Oscar Brown said. Members of a veteran group at a recent school board meeting asked the district to consider having high schoolers recite the pledge, a notion that Brown passed along to Sell-Farver for further study.

Sell-Farver will present several options to the school board. On her list is asking Crestwood teen-agers to rally monthly at the school flag, add patriotic adages to the school's daily public address announcements and honor former students serving in the military.

The school board meets Monday at the high school library.

A spokesman for the Dearborn Heights veteran group couldn't be reached Thursday.

Vince Berna, director of the nonprofit Veterans Haven in Wayne, said high school students should recite the pledge, if they wish.

"But the district should explain the meaning behind the pledge. Kids have to realize how lucky they really are to live in America," he said.

Brown said the final call is up to the school board.

FEAR MONGERS
Raise the Flag and See Who Salutes

In Fear Mongers:  www.fearmongers.com/article.php?sid=40

On 2001-12-24 12:03:53
Topic: Idolatry

alienated wrote:
The United States is becoming more and more nasty and totalitarian with every passing day.

Check this out: a high school just outside of Boston is being sued for $20,300 by two local residents for not having enough American flags in it.

"We want them to abide by the law and we want a school policy on where the flags will be hung," said Jackie Morrissey, one of two city residents who filed the lawsuit.
"We are not saying that everybody has to salute the flag, but ... it represents everything that this country is about the freedom. That's why this is important."

Morrissey, who hosts a cable television talk show in the city of 84,000 just west of Boston, said he sued after years of hearing from veterans and students who complained that there were only a handful of flags in the schools and no real policy on reciting the Pledge of Allegiance.

The law requires that a flag be displayed in each classroom and assembly hall or "other room ... where the opening exercises on each school day are held."

It also says, "Each teacher at the commencement of the first class of each day in all grades in all public schools shall lead the class in a group recitation of the 'Pledge of Allegiance to the Flag.'"

### The Intolerance of Tolerance

**In Inalienable Rights:**

**www.inalienable-rights.org/the%20Intolerance%20of%20Tolerance.htm**

Reciting the Pledge of Allegiance has now become Intolerance? In the wake of the September 11th terrorism attacks, the New York City Public schools were instructed to reinstate the recital of the Pledge of Allegiance to the flag of the U.S. before class. Predictably, there were howls of protest from those who felt that some students would not want to participate and might be offended when other students ostracized them. Even the ACLU leaped in with concerns that the students might be harassed. Ann Curry on NBC’s Today show of Oct 19, 2001 suggested that in addition to “renewing…a symbol of patriotism,” that “perhaps the school systems across the country really should be thinking about renewing a lesson about tolerance.”

We have been fed such a steady diet of this illogic that most people accept it as the way it ought to be. But we forget that this is America, a country where the citizens practice Ordered Liberty. It is ordered because we have agreed to certain rules of conduct. And we enjoy liberty because within these rules we are free to do what we want. Part of the way we maintain that Order is to instill in our youth respect for the Flag and the Institutions and Ideals that it represents. It is a matter of self-preservation as a nation.

Since the recent attack we are pulling together. But many are afraid of offending those who want to enjoy the benefits of living here, but refuse to honor our basic Ideals. Those who would rescind the requirement to salute the flag and recite the pledge claim it is not Tolerant to require it.

The new doctrine of Tolerance is very hostile to the idea of Majority Rule. In fact, it exalts the individual to the very epitome of sovereignty. No one can dictate to a sovereign person. Therefore, if one doesn’t want to salute the flag, not one can make him. But the advocates of Tolerance take it to new heights: No one should be able to make me feel bad by saluting the flag in my presence. If prayer offends me, no one should be able to make me feel bad by praying in my presence. However, no one in the majority may be offended by any actions or ideas of the anointed minority.

Of course we recognize it’s not fair to require people to submit to things that are repugnant to their conscience. No one should be forced to salute or pray. But we have lost our way when we force the majority to submit to the minority.

But we have actually arrived at this point in the minds of many in our media and cultural elites. They actually believe that if one is offended, none may practice.
But what is Tolerance? The protesting minority is Intolerant to tell the majority they are wrong if they want to salute the flag. The majority is Tolerant to permit the minority to not participate. In a free country, the majority makes the rules, not the minority.

A few students refuse to salute the flag and recite the Pledge. Should they have to? No, but they should not be exalted to a position of moral superiority, where the rest are scolded for saluting the flag or reciting the Pledge in their presence.

Suppose some of those who refuse get criticized? Shouldn’t they have to explain themselves? Whose hospitality are they enjoying when they attend free public school in the U.S.?

If they are not citizens, or don’t want to participate on principle, then so be it. But let’s not let any muddle-headed commentator criticize us for pulling together around Flag or Country. For all its faults, it is still the most blessed nation on Earth. Thank God for America. I am proud to salute its flag. We all should be proud to do so.

John F. Schmidt
10/25/01
http://www.inalienable-rights.org