

Petitioners-etc.¹

art. 17, revised version, Mon., Oct. 10, 2011

1. **Whereas:** Respect for human differences is a core value of Brookline's Schools and citizens;
2. **Whereas:** Some Brookline students and/or parents object to reciting the Pledge of Allegiance for religious or other reasons, or because they are foreign nationals temporarily residing here ;
3. **Whereas:** Some Brookline students and/or their parents believe that it is important that students be given the opportunity to express patriotic sentiments in the schools;
4. **Whereas:** Through its 2010 policy on "bullying" the School Committee recognized that we must work pro-actively to minimize it, and recent personal experience of some Brookline residents proves that dissenting from expressions of patriotism can trigger ostracism or other nasty recriminations. But, in any event we must go further than merely minimizing practices that highlight differences and can cause recriminations; we need practices that affirmatively encourage tolerance and respect for differences, in spirit as well as in actions;
5. **Whereas:** The Supreme Court requirement that Pledging Allegiance be "voluntary," is psychologically unrealistic – especially (a) for very young children, (b) in the "fishbowl" of the classroom, and (c) with the imprimatur of the principal, the chief authority figure; and ;
6. **Whereas:** Building-based leaders (principals and the BHS headmaster) have front-line responsibility for their schools, so should determine the effect on their school communities of different ways to express patriotism in various school settings; and
7. **Whereas:** M.G.L. c.71, §69, was long ago ruled unconstitutional because it compels teachers to lead a religiously-tinged Pledge, and the recently adopted School Committee policy may also be unconstitutional because it imposes a similar requirement on principals during their P.A. announcements – by either them or their designees;

Now, Therefore Be It Resolved: Town Meeting urges the School Committee to amend its Pledge of Allegiance policy by:

- (1) granting control over Pledge of Allegiance practices to building leaders; but also**
- (2) recognizing that: (a) Pledge of Allegiance recitation in larger, more anonymous, settings – such as assemblies – is noticeably more respectful of our cultural diversity than in close-knit ("fishbowl") classrooms, and (b) singing of the National Anthem is equally as patriotic as reciting the Pledge but is less troublesome for some in our community, so should be considered as an alternative, as Town Meeting voted in 1983; and (c) Pledge of Allegiance recitation, led by a principal/headmaster or her/his designee in the school's front lobby immediately prior to the school day, open to anyone choosing to attend, would be a truly "voluntary" expression of patriotism, but better honoring the diversity and/or dissent of those preferring not to recite the Pledge of Allegiance; and**
- (3) encouraging the staff to incorporate discussions and lessons where students and faculty lead discussions on the Pledge's overall concept and history, as well as its wording.**

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(Footnotes)

¹ by *inter alia*, Nancy Heller, Frank Smizik, Terry Kwan; Bill Schlesinger, Barbara Brown, Lisa Guisbond, MR, & other petitioners & fmr S/C members.