

Mother's allegiance to English pledge

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IJAMSVILLE -- Controversy over The Pledge of Allegiance in public school usually stems from the term "under God," but one local mother has launched a new debate over the 31-word vow.

Noelle Tepper said problems began two months ago when her daughter, a seventh-grader at Windsor Knolls Middle School, complained the pledge was being recited in Spanish.

"My daughter came home and said they did it once, and she didn't know why," Ms. Tepper said. "To my knowledge, there was no announcement or explanation. She was very confused."

The middle school regularly televises morning announcements, including the pledge, by a student audio/video crew. Different classes are highlighted reciting the pledge, and one Spanish class offered to translate it.

The translation, broadcast to the entire school, was "offensive and disrespectful," according to Ms. Tepper.

The upset mother let it go the first time, but called Principal Mita Badshah after her daughter repeatedly complained that it was being re-aired week after week.

"She was not receptive," Ms. Tepper said. "She did not see anything wrong with this at all."

Calling it a way to "highlight the excellent achievement" of students in language classes, Ms. Badshah said there was never any intent to show disrespect to anyone.

In fact, the school planned to do the same thing with other language classes.

"I was astounded," said the principal. "I said, 'I'm sorry. I do not mean to offend anybody.'"

When no resolution was offered, Ms. Tepper talked with other parents and eventually went up the chain of command, e-mailing county commissioners and board of education members.

"I know for a fact that other parents called the school," Ms. Tepper said. "Our concerns, I felt, were not being taken seriously, so I went to the board and the commissioners."

In her e-mail sent Wednesday, Ms. Tepper called on both boards and school superintendent Linda Burgee to take action.

"I do not believe that this pledge should be up for interpretation," she wrote. "This is a SACRED oath. It is written in English ... I am offended to hear it any other way ... I

urge you to put a stop to this. I'm afraid of what is next."

Almost immediately, she received support from Commissioner Mike Cady and school board president Bonnie Borsa.

Mr. Cady called for the "immediate halt" to pledging allegiance in Spanish or any other foreign language. Ms. Borsa also responded by saying it was a "good decision" to put a stop to the practice.

But in an interview Friday afternoon, school board member Daryl Boffman, who champions multicultural issues, said he didn't understand what the big deal was.

"It's not like they're saying the pledge to another country's flag," he said, noting that he knew little of the situation. "I don't see where that could be wrong."

Ms. Badshah eventually did step down from her initial stance and has agreed to have her school recite the pledge in English from now on.

"We're going to discontinue that," she said in an interview Friday. "There's no rancor here. I think (Ms. Tepper) had a strong opinion ... It's a learning curve for everyone."

While the practice of pledging allegiance in Spanish no longer exists at Windsor Knolls, Ms. Tepper said she's not opposed to other cultural exercises using the language.

"I offered ideas," she said. "I didn't just call and say, 'You need to stop this,' boom! I offered some solutions."

One solution, she said, is to read the morning announcements in both English and Spanish. But the Pledge must be left alone.

"We are at war right now," Ms. Tepper said. "It's not even the right time to do something like this ... I never thought it would be resolved this quickly."