

Should students stand for the pledge?

Yes, it is a unifying factor for the country

The Pledge of Allegiance is said at every school across Virginia, according to state law. It's a symbol of patriotism and respect while summarizing the points of what the U.S. stands for, in theory.

Many do not understand the importance of the pledge and the meaning behind it, so they question why they should stand. As an American, I believe it shouldn't even be a debate whether or not we stand.

We stand for the flag in order to honor those who fight, who have fought and who have died to protect our freedom and safety. We stand for the pledge to focus on what unites us as Americans not divides us. We stand for the flag not to pledge allegiance to a president, but to honor the reality that we have an elected president and not a lifetime king.

When I look at America and the pledge, I also look at other countries such as Iran and North Korea. Oppressive countries like those that don't allow anyone to publicly disrespect national symbols.

People that take these freedoms for granted are foolishly disrespecting what binds us together as Americans. Sitting during the pledge and kneeling for the anthem is not the correct time to protest racial injustice. The flag, pledge, and anthem stand for more than that, and some people fail to realize that.

Some of these people are like blind sheep following each other. There are reasons why some students don't stand, but those are only a few intelligent students that think with reasoning. Most students are lazy and when asked why they don't stand they reply with "I don't know, I just don't feel like it."

Several Supreme Court decisions have codified that no one has to recite the pledge, let alone stand when it is recited. That is your right as a citizen. I agree with it being voluntary because a forced recital would be like something done in a Nazi society.

The act of sitting during a national unifying pledge to the country that grants you individual freedoms is not only stupid but it is also self-defeating and misdirected.

Then again, in most places, sitting and not standing is more of a statement about yourself than about America. You don't come off as too smart, instead you come off as ignorant and ungrateful to the rights you are given.

No, students have freedom of speech

The United States of America is a free and democratic nation. There are no laws requiring students to stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. Therefore, students should not feel compelled to do something they do not want to do. Under the rules of a democracy, it is wrong to force someone to speak or do what they don't want to do.

It's important to note that students who don't participate in the pledge aren't doing so just because they are lazy or because they don't care about the country. There are a multitude of reasons.

Many students see an issue with blindly professing an allegiance to a country. You should not have to pledge allegiance to a country that is doing things you do not agree with. For that reason, many students have chosen to not stand for the pledge because they disagree with the policies of the current president, Donald Trump.

Another reason students choose not to stand for the pledge is the phrase "One nation, under God." One important element of freedom in the U.S. is freedom of religion. The U.S. may have a majority of people who are monotheistic, but that doesn't mean that everyone believes we are united under one god. In fact, the phrase "under God" was added to the Pledge of Allegiance in 1954 by President Eisenhower. At the time, the Cold War was gaining steam, and Eisenhower was fighting communism across the globe. Back then, atheism was associated with communism, so he added "under God" to further separate the U.S. from the ideas of communism. But, this phrase just simply isn't as relevant nowadays, and is the reason many students choose not to stand for the pledge.

Many students also find issue with the phrase "with liberty and justice for all." Many feel America discriminates against race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, ethnicity, nationality, so on and so forth. The idea of pledging allegiance to a country that doesn't support them is ridiculous to them.

Whatever the reason, students should not feel obligated to stand for the pledge. Even if a teacher claims it's mandatory, the reality is, students can choose whether or not they want to stand for the pledge.

Timeline of the Pledge of Allegiance

1887

George T. Balch, former Lieutenant Colonel in the US Army,

writes the handbook *Methods of Teaching Patriotism in the Public Schools*. His campaign includes the placing of US flags in all public schools.

1892

Francis Bellamy writes the first Pledge of Allegiance with the words "I Pledge allegiance to my Flag and the Republic for which it stands; one Nation indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for All."

1898

The custom of rising for the flag begins during the Spanish-American war as patriotism increases.

1923

The National Flag Code is adopted at the National Flag Conference and it includes the Pledge of Allegiance.

1940

The Supreme Court rules 8-1 in the case of *Minersville School District v. Gobitis* that students can be expelled for refusing to recite the pledge.

1943

The Supreme Court reverses their ruling in *West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette* deciding that students cannot be forced to recite the pledge.

1954

President Eisenhower signs a law adding the words 'under God' during the Cold War saying "we are reaffirming the transcendence of religious faith in America's heritage and future."

1992

Seventh Circuit Court rules that students may opt out of reciting the Pledge in the case of *Sherman v. Community Consolidated School District 21*.

Sit down to stand up

Junior Ammy Valdivia stared intently ahead as she linked arms with her fellow varsity cheerleading sisters. The crowd grew quiet as the choir began singing the national anthem during the Homecoming game. Looking at each other, the girls began kneeling. One by one. Valdivia took in a deep breath as she stepped down, bracing herself for some sort of backlash. She, along with the others, remained kneeling for the entire anthem.

The varsity cheerleaders kneeling during the anthem as part of a movement of student athletes who protest racial and social injustices in America.

“With everything going on in America it didn’t feel right to stand for the anthem. A lot of people on the team have been faced with some type of discrimination, even a few days leading up to the football game,” junior Isatu Kargbo said. “We asked ourselves ‘why should we stand for a country that doesn’t respect people of different races?’”

These conversations started long before the Homecoming game: in the locker room, car rides home, walks to practice and back again. The girls on the team each cite their own personal reasons for kneeling, but the cheer team, like many other high school sports teams, were inspired to take a knee during the national anthem by professional athletes.

“I was inspired by hearing about football players kneeling

during the anthem," Valdivia said. "It actually takes a lot for me to kneel, because I always have the people who fight for our country in mind, who I give all respect to."

An increased number of professional athletes of all sports have joined former San Francisco quarterback [Colin Kaepernick's](#) protest against police brutality especially after President Donald Trump's heated comments against athletes who knelt during the anthem.

Kaepernick's protest began over a year ago when he sat on the bench during protests, but he later transitioned to kneeling, saying that he was doing so to show more respect for military veterans, which later turned out to be a much more iconic pose. He cited his reasons for doing so because he was not going to "stand up to show pride in a flag or country that oppresses people of color," Kaepernick said in a press conference after first sitting out during an anthem.

Kaepernick, like several other athletes who have sat out during the anthem, has received a lot of backlash for not standing during the national anthem. Many people believe sitting out during the anthem as disrespectful, especially to veterans and those who serve.

"If you want to protest Trump that is fine, but I think kneeling for the anthem is not the way to go about it," said senior Hunter Swedish. "I just think there are too many people risking their lives for us. Standing for the anthem is our way to respect them."

The girls on the varsity cheerleading team do not take kneeling lightly, rather, many of them are very aware of how their actions could be perceived, but they believe that kneeling holds a greater purpose.

"I don't mean to disrespect those who have fought for our country. I respect those people so much, but I take a knee because it's my freedom to do so, and I just feel like this

country has showed a lot of disrespect towards me, towards my family and towards other races," Valdivia said.

More athletes, both professional and high school, joined Kaepernick's peaceful demonstration during the anthem when President Trump called any player who took a knee a ["Son of a bitch."](#) He further told NFL owners to fire players who refused to stand for "The Star-Spangled Banner."

Although more athletes began to sit after Trump's inflamed comments, those who are protesting claim that they are sitting not because of Trump, but what Trump's comments represent: a reality where minorities' voices are suppressed and are attacked for protesting.

The movement to take a knee during the national anthem or to stand with arms locked in silent protest follows a long tradition of sports stars standing up for what they believe in. Some have accused this movement of being unpatriotic and that politics should be kept out of sports.

"It is about respect for our flag and respect for our soldiers, our first line like our fire fighters, police officers as well," Swedish said.

However, protests against national symbols has not been isolated to just kneeling during the anthem, but students have also acted out by not participating in the pledge of allegiance.

Senior Cecelia Joseph has not stood for the anthem all year, which she cites as her way to protest racial injustice in the U.S.

"I think people perceive people who sit as disrespectful and think that everyone who sits hates America, but that's not why we sit," Joseph said. "I sit because I know America can do better and that I feel like we need to bring awareness to the racial issues that we face."

The professional athletes who have knelt have faced tremendous backlash by sitting down. Kaepernick, who was the quarterback for the San Francisco 49ers, was unsigned in 2017, and now has

focused his career on his organization, which works to fight oppression of all kinds through education and social activism. One of his major initiatives is his [\\$1 million pledge](#), which he has split amongst several organizations that work with “oppressed communities.”

Joseph and other students who choose to sit during the pledge are protected by the county’s [Students Rights and Responsibilities](#).

Under the Supreme Court [case](#) West Virginia State Board of Education v. Barnette (1943), the Supreme Court upheld the Free Speech Clause of the First Amendment, which protects students from being forced to salute the American flag during the Pledge of Allegiance.

The VHSL guidelines do not force students to stand as well. However, several private schools across the country have forced athletes to stand during the anthem.

Despite the legality of their dissent, students still deal with backlash.

“I’ve been told that my actions are ‘disgraceful’ and cheerleaders have been screamed at,” Valdivia said. “But personally, I don’t feel uncomfortable for kneeling. There was one time where I had one person come to the gate and tell me I’m ‘disrespectful,’ and ask my coaches if this is even allowed. We had a short conflict. But that person does have their right to show their opinion.”

Despite the opposition against sitting and kneeling during the anthem and pledge, the students involved in the protest still have strong feelings for America, and are protesting the discrimination they see prevalent.

“I’m sitting because I’m tired of racial oppression. It’s become too diminishing and it’s embarrassing to our country because of our history. I will not tolerate disrespect of minorities and stay silent,” Joseph said. “I sit because if I stand, I feel like I’m being ignorant and supporting a flag that doesn’t support me and wants to see me fail. I sit

because I can and because it's my right. I sit to save the voices of those who've been silenced, and because I truly love America."