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Vets: MHS students should recite pledge

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Malcolm Kenney of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5744 was one of many veterans who showed up at a School Administrative District 35 board meeting to try to persuade officials to have the Pledge of Allegiance recited at Marshwood High School.

Deb Cram/dcram@seacoastonline.com

By David Ramsay news@seacoastonline.com December 17, 2010 2:00 AM

SOUTH BERWICK, Maine — The Pledge of Allegiance should be reinstated at Marshwood High School as a daily practice as soon as possible. That was the clear message given by Malcolm Kenney of Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 5744 of South Berwick and more than 40 other veterans and supporters at the School Administrative District 35 board meeting this week.

Veterans said the pledge is recited in all the other schools, but not in the high school, where it had been discontinued.

"A most disturbing issue has come to our attention. Marshwood High School no longer requires students or staff to recite the Pledge of Allegiance as a daily practice," he said to the school board.

"Our recommendation is that, at the beginning of first period, the pledge is read over the PA system, with a request that all students and staff stand in place with their right hand over their heart and recite the pledge," he said.

"We fight for that flag and we will continue to fight for it," said Kenny, who told the board that, of the 163 active members in VFW Post 5744, 20 are on active duty, and some are serving in Afghanistan.

Other veterans echoed Kenney's concerns.

"We are unaware of any written or verbal policy in this school district concerning this matter. If, in fact, a policy exists, does it exclude the high school?" asked Tony Cincotta, also with Post 5744.

"For those of us who have worn the uniform and consider service to our country the rent we pay for the privilege to live here, the pledge is a traditional respect and honor," he said.

American Legion Post 188 Commander Thomas "Doc" Clayton said the Eliot post gives its full support to veterans in South Berwick in the initiative to reinstate the pledge.

Said veteran Ralph Stevens, "These students need to be fully aware of what this country is and what it stands for."

"My concern is that, with the politically correct attitude throughout this country, we're starting to lose what we were founded on, and that is God and country — and I would wish and hope that you would reinstate the Pledge of Allegiance," said VFW 5744 South Berwick Post Commander Nick Tsakiris.

"We do not have a policy in this district, but we do have a policy committee and we will refer this request and all of the heartfelt interest to our policy committee for the development of a policy on what you requested of us tonight," said board Chairwoman Ellen Breed. "I am greatly touched by what you've brought to us tonight."

MHS Principal Paul Melhorn said it's true that MHS students do not recite the pledge, and he believes the practice may simply have disappeared after the new high school opened 12 years ago.

Maine is one of seven states in the nation that does not have a law requiring the recitation of the Pledge of Allegiance in schools, according to the Web site www.procon.org.

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