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# I'm a Teacher and I Stopped Saying the Pledge of Allegiance a Long Time Ago



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by Shawnta S. Barnes



*Good morning students. Please stand for the Pledge of Allegiance. I pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America, and to the republic for which it stands, one nation under God, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.* This happens every day across schools in America, but should it? [pullquote position="right"]Should students be forced to memorize these 31 words?[/pullquote] Should they be asked to say them every day? Recently, I asked my twin sons if they stand and say the pledge every day. They said they did. Then I asked, "Why do you have to do this?" One responded, "Because we are told to do it on the announcements." Then I asked them if they knew what the word pledge meant and what it means to pledge to do something. They didn't know. I explained the term and why they were asked to recite it daily. Then I told them that some people don't stand for the pledge or say it. I told them I don't say it anymore. Both of my sons' eyes got big.

## I've Always Been a Stickler For Rules, But Not With This

My sons know I'm a teacher and they know I'm a stickler for following rules. Of course, they were a little shocked to hear that I was choosing not to do something they knew happened at the beginning of the school day in schools across America. I told them the words, "liberty and justice for all" is the reason I stopped saying the pledge. This is my 13th year as an educator and about halfway through my career I stopped saying the pledge. The more I heard about the injustice in the world happening to people who looked like me, the harder it became for me to want to say the pledge and say those words. When I stopped saying the pledge, I had a homeroom class that met each morning. I told the students when the announcement came on they should stand for the pledge of allegiance or take a moment of silence. If a student chose not to stand, I didn't say anything but I did expect students to be quiet for the students who chose to say the pledge. Other students stood with their hand to their sides like me and remained silent. My students knew why I didn't say the pledge. One student said he didn't think it was right for me not to say it, but he also said he respected my decision. A few years later, I didn't have a class in the morning but instead had prep. I listened to the announcements from my desk and worked through the pledge. Then when I became a literacy coach, one year, I had to lead professional learning communities (PLCs) during the announcements. I would stop PLCs but I wouldn't stand nor say the pledge even though most of my colleagues did. Some may read this and believe I'm not patriotic or that I don't love this country. [pullquote]I love living in America, but living in America can be difficult for people of color.[/pullquote] The American dream is not obtained by many of us. Some of us are born into poverty and die in poverty. All of us, regardless of class, could be the next trending hashtag. We could be gunned down in the streets or we could be stopped by some random

White person who fears our presence or assumes we are doing something wrong. Excuse me, if I can't smile, boast with pride and belt out the pledge every day. I believe this why author Amber Leventry [called the pledge BS](#). After K-12, when do people really ever say the pledge? Does saying the pledge make you patriotic? I believe there are better ways to show patriotism, love for the country and love for the citizens living in America than rote memorization and daily repetition of 31 words. Maybe the pledge should just be included in the history textbooks and teachers engage students in a critical inquiry about the words and the reality of America. That would be a better use of school time.

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Shawnta (Shawn-tay) S. Barnes, also known as Educator Barnes, is a married mother of identical twin boys. She navigates education from not only the educator's perspective but also the parent's perspective. She has been an educator for nearly two decades. Shawnta works with K-12 schools, universities, & education adjacent organizations through her education consulting business Blazing Brilliance. She is an adjunct college professor, supervises student teachers, Indy Kids Winning Editor-in-Chief, Brave Brothers Books Co-founder, & CEO, and Brazen Education Podcast host. She holds five education licenses: English/language arts 5-12, English to speakers of other

languages P-12, library/media P-12, reading P-12, and school administration P-12, and she has held a job in every licensed area. Previously, she has served as a school administrator, English teacher, English learners teacher, literacy coach, and librarian. She won the 2019 Indiana Black Expo Excellence in Education Journalism Award. In 2023, she completed her doctorate in Literacy, Culture, and Language Education with a minor in Learning Sciences. She is an urban gardener in her spare time and writes about her harvest-to-table journey at [gardenershicole.com](https://www.gardenershicole.com). To learn more about Shawnta, visit [educatorbarnes.com](https://www.educatorbarnes.com).

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