



District Office
407 Fremont Road
East Syracuse, NY 13057
Fax: 315-434-3020
www.esmschools.org

Dr. Donna J. DeSiato
Superintendent
Phone: 315-434-3012
E-mail: ddesiato@esmschools.org

29 October 2015

Via Email

Monica Miller, Esq.
Appignani Humanist Legal Center
1777 T Street NW
Washington DC 20009-7125

Re: Your Letter of October 25, 2015

Dear Ms. Miller,

We are in receipt of your letter concerning the missed opportunity in one of our high school classrooms for a significant learning experience when a question was raised regarding participation in the Pledge of Allegiance. Your letter referenced the complaint made by one of our high school students regarding the teacher's response to the student's exercise of the Constitutional right not to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance. The well-being of our students is our first priority and students properly have a fundamental expectation to be accorded their rights and treated with respect. We deeply regret that the student was not responded to in a professional manner and the teacher has acknowledged this behavior and apologized to the student and class.

It is important to note that immediate action was taken in response to the seriousness of this matter. The student first made the complaint to the School Counselor. It was immediately addressed by the High School and District administration. While personnel matters cannot be discussed, please be assured that action was taken prior to receiving your letter.

In addition, we have taken meaningful steps to engage students in their understanding of our Constitutional rights and we will continue to do so. On September 30, 2015, Mary Beth Tinker, one of the plaintiffs in the very famous and oft-cited U.S. Supreme Court case of *Tinker v. Des Moines Indep. Cmty. Sch. Dist. (1969)* (cited in your letter) presented her case and its extension of First Amendment rights to students in schools to over 600 students and staff at our High School.

We have engaged with our legal counsel to formally remind and instruct our staff of the rights accorded to students who do and do not choose to participate in the Pledge of Allegiance and the meaningful learning opportunities for dialogue. We have no policy, written or unwritten, to deny students their Constitutional rights. The District affirms the Constitutional rights of its students, embraces the respectful ways in which they express their values and beliefs, and will continue to educate staff and students regarding their rights and responsibilities.

We thank you for sharing your concerns with us.

Sincerely,

Dr. Donna J. DeSiato
Superintendent of Schools