

September 16, 2020

Dear Sarasota High School Students, Parents, and Community Members:

In the past few days, some individuals have disseminated information stating that it is my practice to refuse to let our students participate in the National Anthem at Sarasota High School. Based on communications I have received, it appears that community members were led to believe that I am not patriotic, and/or I am motivated by a political agenda.

Having worked countless hours on behalf of students here in Sarasota County since 2005, it is truly disheartening to be so mischaracterized. Please allow me to explain the facts.

First, I absolutely consider myself a patriot. I love our Country, I love our flag, I love personally participating in our National Anthem, and I love all that it represents. Furthermore, I want my students to share in these beliefs and practices. Anyone who knows me will verify this readily. Among the many ways we seek to honor our veterans at Sarasota High School, we do the following:

- Daily, every SHS student stands for the Pledge of Allegiance, and most of the days, I have the privilege of leading it.
- We go to great lengths to make our school look amazing as we honor our veterans every November 11<sup>th</sup>.
- We have a special ceremony for our own staff members who have served at the beginning of the day on or about November 11<sup>th</sup>.
- We hold two back-to-back concerts on or about November 11<sup>th</sup> to honor all those who have served. Originally, we did one concert. The popularity grew such that we had to have the concert two nights in a row to accommodate the vast audiences. We go so far as to have our middle school choirs participate in these magnificent concerts.

Below are some photos of some of these events:





**Sarasota High School**  
 Published by Sailors AP Shs  
 November 11, 2019 at 8:01 PM · 🌐

Sarasota High School Singing Sailors presents their annual Veterans Salute Concert 🇺🇸



**Sarasota High School**  
 Published by Sailors AP Shs  
 November 11, 2019 at 2:17 PM · 🌐

Thank you to our Veterans!  
 And to our amazing staff that go above and beyond to honor our community, thank you.



**Sarasota High Athletics** November 11, 2019 at 11:31 AM · 🌐



Back to the National Anthem issue:

Please understand, the ONLY events where our athletes have not been on the field or the court for the playing of the National Anthem is varsity football when the marching band is on the field to play the Anthem. ALL our other athletic teams, including JV and freshman football, participate in the National Anthem at each and every game. Before I explain the reasoning behind this, I want you to know this has been the protocol for the majority of our varsity football teams in Sarasota County, and it has been taking place for years. In other words, the protocol didn't suddenly emerge or change because of a political perspective or climate, and it is not unique to Sarasota High School.

This has been done at our county schools primarily for logistics. If a marching band has taken the field, it is difficult to remove the band and bring out two full teams for a timely kickoff. It can certainly be done, but it entails the teams taking the field much earlier in the evening. The consensus among the coaches seems to be that they want their athletes remaining cool and off their feet prior to kickoff. Indeed, many of the athletes warm up in shorts and t-shirts to prevent overheating prior to the game, go into the locker room, change into their pads and uniforms, stay off their feet, and finally enter the field as the announcer calls each team.

The event that particularly precipitated the present controversy occurred on September 11<sup>th</sup> when a varsity football player wanted to be present for the National Anthem because we were honoring our first responders and veterans, of whom his father is one. My understanding was that the student asked one of his coaches while in the locker room, and the coach denied his request based on practices the team had previously followed. I am not denigrating our coach nor am I arguing this is how we should always do things; I'm simply trying to state what happened.

Please know this is not a closed matter. We will process, discuss, and analyze our protocols at Sarasota High School and with other district schools so that we can best meet the needs of our athletes AND show our great Country the honor it deserves! At NO POINT IN TIME was this EVER an intentional act to protest our National Anthem nor does it serve as some sort of commentary on our current political environment.

Thank you for taking the time to seek to understand this matter. I am sincerely appreciative.

David Jones  
Principal, Sarasota High School