



Erin Schmeling (right) and LeStencia Vallejo (left) wear Muslim scarves to support classmate Sania Yagham (center). Photo: Milwaukee Journal Sentinel 2001

## Tolerance

*The Washington Post* recently reported these words from Sandra Feldman, president of the American Federation of Teachers (AFT):

"We should not [use] scarce public money [on private schools] that will balkanize us rather than [on] the public school system that unites us."

Separately, in a paid advertisement in *Education Week*, Bob Chase, president of the National Education Association, said:

"Public schools also stress [a] value that is especially urgent today: tolerance and respect for people of different colors, cultures, and faiths."

Such divisive and calculated remarks are intended to exploit the events of September 11. Their implication is repugnant. They also contradict a wide range of evidence (from Princeton's David Campbell, Georgetown's Patrick Wolf, and many others) about positive civic values among students at private schools.

As one example, consider a recent *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* column ("Students stare down threats to Muslim classmates") about St. Joan Antida High School, a private school in the Milwaukee Parental Choice Program. Here are excerpts from Jim Stingl's September 23 column:

*Most of us, thank God/Allah, have enough good sense to blame terrorism on terrorists and not on every Muslim or anyone who appears to be from the Middle East.*

*Erin Schmeling and LeStencia Vallejo have gone a step further. The juniors at St. Joan Antida High School [are] wearing head scarves*

*in a show of solidarity with...30 Muslim students who attend the all-girl Catholic school...*

*We've seen reports from around the country of verbal and physical assaults against people who have no connection with the terrorist attacks, people singled out for their religion and ethnicity...*

*Erin, 16, heard about [such] incidents...[in Milwaukee] involving her [Muslim] classmates and was shocked. "I couldn't believe people are like this. I cried actually, and I wanted to do something about it," she said.*

*[Erin] talked to her religion teacher...and to her family about...wearing a scarf....Erin talked to Muslim students [who] were touched by her concern...*

*"Following the terrorist attack...some Muslim [students at St. Joan's] started to discuss whether they should temporarily stop wearing the scarves for their own safety. That's right about the time that Erin came to them and said she wanted to begin covering her head...*

*With a hint of irony, Erin said it was the Christian thing to do...*

*[Muslim student] Sania Yagham brought in a black head scarf, formally known as a hijab, for Erin. When LeStencia...asked to join the effort, Sania lent one to her, too...*

*The message sent by these girls is embraced and taught by their school. After [Stingl] finished talking to the students, the mealtime prayer was recited by two students over the public address system. "May we always be grateful to you," it concluded.*

*The students reading the prayer were both Muslim.*

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