

Laurie Wolff - Nevada

Clark County Student Choice Amendment

When she was just a sixth grader, Laurie Wolff was asked to dissect an earthworm as part of her science class. Laurie felt uncomfortable with the task and asked her teacher if she could sit this one out. There was only one problem: Her school district required her to participate.

As a result, the normally straight-A student received a C in the class. Realizing that only more Cs loomed ahead as she made her way through secondary science classes, Laurie decided, at the urging of her grandmother, to take a stand against the Clark County, Nevada school board's policy on dissection.

As an eighth grader at Garrett Middle School in Boulder City, Laurie asked her classmates to sign a petition, which she then presented to the school board at a December 2001 meeting. She asked the school district—the sixth largest in the nation with 266 schools in the Las Vegas area—to provide students with an option to dissection.

Four months later, after reviewing Laurie's request and exploring alternatives to animal dissection, the Clark County school board drafted the student choice amendment, which would provide students with an alternative assignment if they held ethical or moral views against dissection. At the urging of animal-protection organizations, the board voted unanimously for the amendment at its April 11, 2002 meeting.

Because of Laurie's stand and the board's decision, the 244,000-plus students in the Clark County school district now have another option, which is important, experts say, as many children find animal dissection troubling but don't feel comfortable voicing their concerns. Speaking up, fortunately, was not a problem for Laurie.

"You don't learn anything about an animal by cutting it up," Laurie told the *Las Vegas Sun* after the April school board meeting. "It's a waste when there are so many other ways to learn about science without having to kill something first."

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