

Policy Code DB001 School Symbols: mascots, names, nicknames, images and other symbols

If an *elective* Republic is to endure for any great length of time, *every* elector must have sufficient information, not only to accumulate wealth and take care of his pecuniary concerns, but to direct wisely the Legislatures, the ambassadors and the Executive of the Nation – for some part of all these things falls to every man, *some* agency in approving or disapproving of them, falls to every freeman. If then, the permanency of our Government depends on such knowledge, it is the duty of the Government to see that the means of information be diffused to every citizen. This is a sufficient answer to those who deem education a private and not a public duty – who argue that they are willing to educate their *own* children, but not their *neighbor's* children¹

Thaddeus Stevens (b. Danville 1792)
Speech on the School Law, Legislature of Pennsylvania
April 11, 1835

MISSION

The Danville School Board recognizes that Danville School, as a public school, is charged with a special and important mission. That mission was articulated by Thaddeus Stevens, a native son, 186 years ago for public schools in a democracy and endures at our School. Our mission² promotes a dynamic, fair and equitable educational process empowering students and graduates with the fundamental characteristics of kindness, awareness, empathy, and competence as tools to be deployed in shaping an adaptive society -- one able to conserve in itself what works well, to jettison what works not at all, and to reshape what might work better -- seeking a more perfect union for all. This Board fully embraces this civic mission.

COLLECTIVE VOICE

This policy has resulted largely from an emergent, home-grown, collective Voice.³ This has been a recurrent, but often marginalized, Voice. It was most recently precipitated by a Danville School student⁴ moved to address in her Senior Project the inequities and injustices consequent from the historic and current use of the name “Indians”, explicitly or implicitly, as officially representative of the School and to install a mascot usable for all future students. Subsequently, her actions were enjoined and supported by classmates, schoolmates, and especially alumni (Indigenous/Native Americans included) and buttressed by the School and Town community and concerned citizens. This Voice is civic competence at work. This Voice is aspirational, learned, broad in its communal embrace of humanity, aware, socially responsible, and focused on justice and truth, and it confidently asserts “we can do better.” This Voice is clarion: “Indians” as a mascot/nickname needs to be retired and stay so.

In some part, this call for retirement emanates from the awareness that the “Indians” mascot/nickname has lost its ability to function as an effective, community-wide unifier of energy and pride. Instead, it divides and stifles the yearning for a common identity.

And in a much larger part, the retirement is compelled by the fact that the “Indians” mascot/nickname generates incalculable human harm. The harm is generated by stereotyping, misrepresentation, cultural appropriation, discrimination and racism. The harm spatially metastasizes from individuals to schools to communities to the nation. The harm is psychological, physiological and social, especially among the developmentally young, producing persistent trauma and silent sufferers. This harm is well-documented in the Voice

and in studies by major professional medical, scientific, civil rights and governmental organizations.⁵ “Misrepresentation does not honor.”⁶

But most fundamental to this Board’s consideration is that an “Indians” mascot/nickname is antithetical to the educational mission of this and any (except maybe a Native American) School, which is centered on a strong commitment to diversity, inclusiveness, respect and equity for all persons. Local educational professionals and their colleagues across the nation see in its use a professional malpractice: “No individual or school has a cognizable interest in retaining a racially derogatory or discriminatory school or athletic team name, mascot, or nickname.”⁷

THE POLICY⁸

Based on the foregoing, compelling considerations and its duty to “soundly administer”⁹ the School and its mission, this Board hereby adopts the policy that

All mascots, names, nicknames, images and descriptors – including symbols, banners, flags, pennants, or similar identifiers – used by sports teams, extracurricular clubs, curricular clubs, or organizations representing the School shall respect cultural differences and values and shall be neither derogatory nor discriminatory. The Board explicitly prohibits the representation of the School by the use of any race or ethnic group and its traditions or customs as a mascot, name or nickname. This policy shall go into effect on the date of its adoption.

Notwithstanding the above, with the consent of the Board, after this policy is adopted, the School may continue to use any currently used uniforms, and replace lost or damaged ones, and other items prohibited by this policy for a period not to exceed the normal school lifetime of the uniforms or items.

SELECTION OF NEW MASCOTS, NAMES, NICKNAMES AND OTHER SYMBOLS REPRESENTING THE SCHOOL

Only the Board shall initiate a process for securing a new or replacement official representation of the School. Upon written notification from the Board, the principal(s) shall form and chair a committee including at least one Middle- or High-School student, a school counselor, one faculty member, one parent/caretaker chosen from the pool of resident and tuition parents/caretakers and a member of the Town Select Board (if one consents) for the purpose of selecting a new or replacement representation.

Any person in the School community (understood to include all alumni) or in the Town can propose a mascot/name/nickname/image or symbol to officially represent the School. This proposal shall be in writing and include a brief statement as to why the proposed representation is well fit for the School.

The committee shall design a fair, stakeholder-representative selection process. The result of this process shall be communicated to the Superintendent for approval and, if approved, communicated to the Board.

The Board’s role is solely to approve of the selection if the requirements of this policy have been met.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Speech of Thaddeus Stevens on the School Law delivered in the Legislature of Pennsylvania, April 1835. <https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss41442.00506/?sp=3&r=-0.03,-0.061,1.111,0.918,0> Accessed 8 March 2021

² “Our mission is to prepare students to be kind, aware and competent friends, leaders, co-workers and citizens, by creating a safe environment where each individual can grow intellectually, socially, and emotionally. Our vision is to create a community of learners by emphasizing rigorous learning, empathy towards others, self-advocacy, and individual excellence.” Danville School Website Home Page (<https://danville.ccsuvt.net/>), accessed 8 March 2021.

³ Voice in this document is derived from the incoming correspondence to the Danville School Board on the mascot/nickname issue between October 6, 2020 and 11 March 2021 (at present) and a Public Forum (c. 120 Zoom participants) on the same topic held on 3 March 2021. All of this correspondence and testimony, which heretofore has been available on the Danville School Board’s website, is being compiled in a single document called “Public contributions to the “Indians” mascot/nickname issue at Danville School, October 2020 –March 2021.” This public document is an unfiltered, complete compendium. The Voice is an interpretation of this document from the perspective of supporting and justifying the proposed policy.

The “Public contributions ...” documents includes 96 letters/emails from c. 100 persons, a group letter from the Danville School Equity, Diversity, & Inclusion Committee signed by 31 faculty, and video testimony from a Senior Project (32 min), 3 third-grade students (7 minutes), 1 high school student (5 minutes) and public comments from 9 persons covering about one hour.

⁴ This Senior Project by Autumn Larocque was initiated months before the public distribution of the Vermont Principal Association’s letter in August of 2020 requesting Vermont schools to assess the mascot/nickname issue.

⁵ As examples: American Psychological Association, American Sociological Association, National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, Faith in Action, National Congress of American Indians, National Indian Education Association, Little League International, National Education Association, National Urban League, Vermont Principals Association, Vermont Commission on Native American Affairs, Vermont Racial Equality Task Force, Vermont Superintendents Association, Vermont School Boards Association, US Civil Rights Commission

⁶ Melody Walker Brook, correspondence to the School Board received 23 February 2021

⁷ California Racial Mascots Act of 2015, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB30, accessed 8 March 2021

⁸ This policy is based largely on

- “An Act To Ban Native American Mascots in All Public Schools”, Maine LD 944 , Title 20-A, MRSA §12 (2019); <https://legislature.maine.gov/LawMakerWeb/summary.asp?ID=280072004>; accessed 8 March 2021.

- California Racial Mascot Act of 2015, https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/billNavClient.xhtml?bill_id=201520160AB30, accessed 8 March 2021;

- Houston Independent School District (Lamar High School), Policy HISD CW(local), Naming Facilities: School Symbols. [https://pol.tasb.org/Policy/Download/592?filename=CW\(LOCAL\).pdf](https://pol.tasb.org/Policy/Download/592?filename=CW(LOCAL).pdf), accessed 8 March 2021;

⁹ 16 Vermont Statutes Annotated §563(2)