

CAMBRIDGE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT ENLISTS FACILITATION EXPERTS IN MASCOT DISCUSSIONS

Private Interviews being Conducted, First Virtual Event Set for May 6.

The Cambridge Central School District Board of Education has retained the services of a facilitation firm, The Restorative Practices Team: Bridges, to help guide district officials and residents through discussions about the school's Native American mascot and nickname. In doing so, Bridges is conducting confidential individual interviews in preparation for a virtual community event scheduled for 7 p.m., Thursday, May 6.

“The district will host a community-wide Zoom meeting to introduce Bridges and their process for bringing to light all issues surrounding the request for the school board to retire the mascot,” said Cambridge Superintendent Dr. Doug Silvernell. “The process will result in a report to the Board prior to its June meeting that synthesizes all of the information collected by Bridges.”

The individual interviews by Bridges have started and involve a simple, casual and confidential dialogue with a trained and unbiased facilitator who will utilize that information to develop the next steps in the process, and to provide information to the Board. Anyone interested in this issue is encouraged to participate. To volunteer to be part of these interviews, please email Peter Arvo at Bridges directly at Peter.L.Arvo@gmail.com. Those who seek to remain anonymous will be.

The May 6 community event will be held virtually on Zoom in order to accommodate all who wish to participate. The Zoom link will be posted at <https://www.cambridgecsd.org/Page/2460>.

The event will be led by Duke Fisher of Bridges, who has been a trained mediator and conflict resolution trainer since 1989, and it will include other members of his team. Using the input from individual community member interviews, the team will design a tailored community circle process that is specific to the needs and issues of the district. The team will ask questions to the community, bring up a host of important topics and perspectives, and allow each community member the opportunity to share their perspective and experience. It will also be an opportunity to meet the team and become familiar with the process that will be used going forward.

The Bridges team specializes in providing facilitation, striving to build community-wide understanding while working to mend divisions. The Bridges team is an international group of restorative practice facilitators and trainers. Their goal is to assist the community in resolving the mascot issue by utilizing restorative practices that allow the community to co-create a foundation of trust and respect. This process will be open, inclusive, and voluntary. Bridges will create talking circles and seek to give each voice an opportunity to be heard, valued and respected.

“Bridges hopes that as many community members as possible will participate in this process, which we believe can leave the community of the Cambridge School District more connected and restore the sense of unity,” said team leader Duke Fisher.

This past fall, the school board was asked to retire the school’s Native American imagery, citing that many Native American tribal governments and organizations across the USA find the use of this imagery demeaning and offensive to their culture. In response, other community members have come forward to save the school’s mascot, including a local Native American family that resides in the district. For the past six months, the Board of Education has maintained an open door for communication surrounding the mascot, receiving hundreds of letters and emails. They have also completed an exhaustive review of available scientific literature and other objective information. The decision to bring in professional facilitators is to ensure all parties are heard and understood prior to the anticipated Board vote on the matter this school year.

“It is deeply saddening that differing opinions on this issue have resulted in extreme division” said Board President, Neil Gifford. “It is our hope that working with Bridges will ensure that all voices are heard and that we emerge from this conversation as a cohesive community once again; a community that takes the greatest pride in how we educate our children.”

More information on the facilitation process, the Bridges team and documents received by the board regarding this issue can be found at on the school’s webpage at <https://www.cambridgecsd.org/Page/2473> . The Zoom link for the May 6 event will be posted at <https://www.cambridgecsd.org/Page/2460> .

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