

BOE Mascot Discussion

As many of you are aware, we live in very tumultuous times. We are dealing with a global pandemic, and a great deal of social unrest in our country. People have been isolated by the pandemic, and by the winter weather. This provides us with unenviable conditions to make a decision of this magnitude.

I would like to take the time to unequivocally state that I believe as a district we stand for equitable treatment for all people, regardless of whether we agree with their opinions or not. As an institution of education, we are charged with making decisions based on what is best for our children here in Cambridge. To that end you have been given lots of advice by lots of citizens from both inside and outside Cambridge. There has been a wide range of advice. Everything from “you must do away with the mascot,” to “you must keep the mascot.” Often times the advice comes as an either-or option. Having said that, I always like to presuppose that their advice comes from a place of good intent. I don’t believe there is anyone out there sending their advice from a place simply designed to cause upheaval for the sake of chaos.

I also know that we stand for democratic principals and the belief that civil discourse is important. Unfortunately, we have seen little evidence of that civil discourse on display in the recent past at any level.

I do not want to bore you with a lecture about change and the research around the change process, but I do want to make a couple of points that I learned through experience with the change process.

First, it is important to develop a sense of urgency around the need for the change. No human likes change very much, and very few people like change for the sake of change.

Second, in order to make lasting meaningful change we have to help everyone see their place in a changed state. This helps produce acceptance and lasting change.

I have heard from some people that it would erase the history of Cambridge CSD. I have heard that it would dishonor our local Native American Families. I have heard that it would dishonor all Native Americans if we were

to keep the name and mascot. It is important to understand that all of these things can be true at the same time. This comes from a place of not knowing what the future state looks like. When people don't know what is happening they often fill in the gaps.

Additionally, there have been offers of a compromise. All of the actions associated with that compromise make sense. We should do more to actively honor and study the original inhabitants of this area. We should have a deeper curriculum. However, we can not allow those actions to influence the decision. Some people have approached us asking if they were a bribe? Again, I believe in positive presuppositions and that those things were put forward with good intent. Regardless of any decision, our attorney suggests we use those actions as a starting point for discussion moving forward as we plan to implement anything as a district, but we can not accept them as conditions for a decision.

As this situation unfolded my primary concern was for the unity of Cambridge, and the example we would be setting for our children as they watch this unfold. I am saddened to see that the issue has devolved in some instances to personal attacks. I am not blaming anyone, nor am I pointing a finger at any one group. However, my greatest fear at the start of this has come true. I don't believe that this has to continue, we can be better than that.

People want to know above all else that they are being heard. Listening is different than hearing, and hearing does not mean agreement. Hearing means understanding even when you don't agree.

I think we can all see that there is no clear-cut consensus in this community when it comes to the mascot. However, I have come to realize that regardless of consensus, everyone needs to be heard and understood.

I have spent a great deal of time since our last meeting reflecting on where we are now, why we are here, and where we can go from here. In that time, I have spoken to the Chief Counsel of the New York State School Boards Association, two superintendents who have lived through this process, a district superintendent at BOCES, our legal counsel, and a professional mediation service. I have also read through countless articles, researched other

districts that have faced this same dilemma, and read several historical accounts of the indigenous people who lived in this area.

Initially I kept my emotions out of it, but being human they crept in. Whether they clouded my judgement or not really doesn't matter. It was not until I stepped out of that emotional state that I was able to see a bit more clearly.

There is damage done here. Damage to trust and relationships. Damage to reputations. Damage to our focus on other areas important to our children. This does not have to continue. This does not have to be the state of this community moving forward.

While the issue of equity is a vital interest to our children and to all of us, I am not sure the mascot and nickname are the main issue any longer. Let me say that differently. That issue is not the only major issue here.

I am going to present to you our options at this point. As I see it there are two main options, and I will explain that momentarily.

Before I do, and before any possible motives are ascribed to what I am about to present, I will clearly and explicitly state my motives. They are much the same as when we started this as far back as last July. I think it is important that we make a decision based on the input we have received. There is no denying that. This particular issue is unlikely to go away. However, there is no timeline that requires a finite decision at a finite time. I think it is more important to make a good decision that will last, and will stand up to the test of time. I think we may want to consider ways to make sure everyone is heard and understood. Both of those elements are important to make any lasting change. I think we need to help people see their place in any change that is made based on any decision so that they understand that they were heard, and that their concerns were addressed.

So, as I see it at this point we really have two options for your consideration tonight.

EXPLAIN the options using the chart below.

Option 1	Vote Tonight	No Vote	Create Committee to discuss active honoring	Keeps everything the same
		Vote to Change Imagery – Study Name	Create Committee to change imagery and study the name	First Step to Review
		Vote to Retire both Name and mascot	Create Committee to lay out the plan for moving forward	Changes Everything
Option 2	Reevaluate Timeline and present that timeline to the BOE in a special session on March 25 th (or date to be determined)	Hold series of community conversations and synthesize the input	Later Create Committee to develop plan moving forward	Construct Community Conversations

Based on your conversations, and your decision this evening I have drafted Possible Resolutions for action this evening.

I think it is vitally important that regardless of the direction, we need to show that we are taking immediate action moving forward.

Option 1b

Be it resolved that the Cambridge CSD BOE hereby retires the use of Native American Imagery for all official uses moving forward from this date.

Furthermore, the Cambridge CSD BOE hereby directs the superintendent to develop a process to facilitate community conversations to provide the BOE with an understanding of all stakeholder beliefs around the use of the term “Indian” to inform the board’s decision by the close of the 2020-2021 school year.

Option 1c

Be it resolved that the Cambridge CSD BOE hereby retires the term “Indians,” and the use of Native American Imagery for all official uses moving forward from this date.

Furthermore, the Cambridge CSD BOE directs the superintendent to create a process for replacing the nickname and imagery at the Cambridge CSD.

Option 2

Be it resolved that the Cambridge CSD BOE hereby directs the superintendent to develop a process to engage outside facilitation to facilitate community conversations to provide the BOE with an understanding of all stakeholder beliefs around the use of the term “Indian” and the use of Native American imagery to inform the board’s decision to retire or not retire our current mascot and nickname by the close of the 2020-2021 school year.