

Cambridge Community Reflections

Presented to the Cambridge Board of Education by Team Bridges

Overview

Throughout the course of the last six weeks, beginning April 29, 2021 up to June 7, 2021 Team Bridges has engaged with members of the Cambridge community to better understand what impact the mascot issue has had on individuals as well as the community at large. To assess the community we have conducted individual confidential interviews and community circles. Bridges has focused on two major areas of impact; the harms caused by the mascot issue and the needs associated with those harms. A final question asked to each participant was what action they recommend the Board of Education take when determining how to resolve the mascot issue as well as the impacts it has caused.

Bridges has synthesized the language used by participants but has not included their own recommendations or thoughts on the issue. This document is merely a reflection of what the various members of the Cambridge community have shared with the team. The document is broken into four categories: 1) Harms, 2) Needs, 3) Student Reflections, and 4) Recommendations to the Board of Education.

A brief breakdown of our work is below, followed by our findings.

Breakdown of Numbers

- Individual Interviews: **93**
- Zoom Circles: 16
- Live circles: 9
- Total Circles: 25
- Total Circle Participants: **151**

Community Members' Harms and Needs

Below is a list of the Harms and Needs that were shared during confidential interviews and in community circles. They are shared in no particular order.

HARMS	NEEDS
Lack of awareness of local genocide	To begin healing with right steps towards education
Apathetic response to expressed concerns	To come together via listening, open dialogue
Fear of position on mascot being found out	To be accepted
Loss of relationships	To mend along lines of shared concerns
Unsafe and Intolerant community environment	To be included and respected
Inordinate amount of stress on school kids	More information around the decision making, historical context
Feeling unprepared professionally to handle the sensitivity around this issue	More professional training for staff in schools
Young students feeling something is wrong with their school	To feel school restored with interconnectedness
Loss of value for homes and businesses Difficult to hire	To generate positive image for the town, community and school
To be first in area to face this, feeling the stress of being the vanguard or guinea pigs regarding decisions on mascot	To have more resources to help the community through this process

Feeling the economic engine(school) of community threatened by intensity of community turmoil	To feel more cohesion around shared common interest
Saying nasty things to one another via social media	To communicate with civility towards one another regardless of forum
Erasure of both Indigenous and School history	To be seen, find way to maintain historical continuity of school and also reveal more clearly the history of local indigenous presence
Awful tension among students, staff and community members in general	To feel peace in these environments
Questioned validity of school board election process	To feel trust and confidence in local processes
Loss of the prestige of CCS as an educational institution	Greater respect for research-based solutions
A change in the mascot vilifies my history of proud support of the mascot	Validation of the value the mascot has provided in the past
Fissures in the community feel like a new and permanent thing	A solution that invites and respect all voices
Lack of feeling heard or understood by those who disagree	For listening and being able to have civil discourse with those who disagree with us
Feeling attacked for beliefs	Being able to speak out without feeling harassed, no matter what
Feeling alone	For community
Feeling not being able to be neutral	Ability to authentically express oneself
Loss of trust	Transparent decision-making

Feeling like decision is being too drawn out	For closure
Feeling like decision is happening too fast	To slow down decision-making process
New-comers might not feel welcomed	For inclusiveness
Change will represent a cost to an overburdened taxpayer	For the BOE to demonstrate fiscal responsibility
Overly localized approach	Education to situate the mascot conversation in a larger, national, conversation
Prolonging the discussion gives false hope	Closure
Loss of connection to a proud past	Respectful commemoration of school history
People are saddened by the divisiveness	Give people voice
Focus and resources diverted from academic priorities	Pivot to support of struggling students
History is being distorted	Education for teachers and community as well as students
Concern for Mental Health issues	For Mental Health healing
Loss of trust in BOE	Information to the public on the role of board members

Student Reflections

Needs, Harms, and Recommendations

Below is feedback shared with us by the students during the student circles held on May 19th, 2021. The circles were very insightful and we feel the feedback should be looked at closely by the BOE when discussing how to factor the students into the equation, going forward.

HARMS	NEEDS
Lack of education on Native American history	Make an entire class devoted to native american (local and non-local) history and culture. Make it mandatory.
People who are outside of the community having influence on issues that impact the students.	Not be influenced by voices that are not part of the community.
Students not participating in school sports because the athletic attire displays the school mascot.	Take the mascot/logo image off of the uniforms so students can feel comfortable wearing them and participating in sports.
Parents have become distracted by the issues of the mascot.	Give parents more support by asking them what they need to help their kids succeed.
School administration not supporting students.	Once the school board has decided--either way--the community should support the decision and move on.
Failure rate has increased; no additional support offered.	Education of race and equity.
Lack of attention paid to the students and their feelings on the mascot issue.	Vote on the issue so that the issue is finished and more attention can turn to the students.
Students recognize that the mascot is offensive and harmful to the community.	Voices/opinions should have an equal say regardless of whether they are native, white, young, old, etc.
No communication about the mascot issue (elephant in the room).	To be informed on what is going on. To be included and considered.
No forum to have a conversation or dialogue about mascot issue.	Some kind of platform to hear what's going on and engage with community leaders so that their voices can be heard.
Much more attention paid to the mascot issue that should have been focused on the struggles of the students during Covid.	Focus the level of mascot energy on the students in helping them to navigate the pandemic.
Increased tension and stress.	Create public events that allow the community to come together and spend time together.
Graduation rate is low.	Help give students a place to go where they have

	good access to the internet.
Feeling the tension and division.	
This conflict has divided the whole town.	Let the town vote on the issue instead of the school board.
Students not feeling heard in regards to the mascot issues.	
Students feeling uncomfortable.	
Lack of student involvement in the mascot discussion.	
Lack of attention and celebration for graduation	

Feeling uncomfortable and unsafe within the school	
Inaccurate assumptions on students feeling safe in school	
Students experiencing racism in school	To acknowledge student lived experiences; To have a process that deals with students who experience racism; To have a specific place to have conversations on student experience.
	To listen to both sides
	To exist in a community that communicates well

Student Recommendations

Below are the recommendations made by students to the Board of Education, for how best to resolve the mascot issue and the ways it has impacted the students and children of Cambridge. Team Bridges has synthesized the information but has not altered the ideas or included their own.

Recommendations:

- Have school issues shared in the community newspaper.

- Only allow people living in the Cambridge district to vote.
- Create a wellness committee to focus on topics such as equity.
- Put a front page ad in the newspaper to spread awareness on how the mascot issue has directed attention away from the struggles of the students.
- Acknowledge changes and embrace.
- Select a symbol or image that is still connected to Native Americans.
- Host a student debate.
- Take a student poll on the mascot.
- Let students vote in the selection of the next mascot.
- Host a competition for students to submit their ideas for the new mascot.
- More education on Native American history.
- Bring both sides together to come to a compromise.
- Engage in more civil discourse
- Retire the mascot and name
- Increase education about individual Native Americans and step away from generalizations
- Continue education beyond the 4th grade on Native American history, culture, and present events.
- Bring in Native speakers to talk about their culture.
- Teachers should bring up difficult issues in classrooms
- Education on how images/symbols/logos/mascots affects those minority group

Community Recommendations

Below are community recommendations for how to best handle the mascot issue and the various ways it has impacted the community. Team Bridges has synthesized the information but has not altered the ideas or included its own.

Adjust curriculum in the following ways:

- Include native voices in literature beginning in elementary school
- Teach the origins of Cambridge mythology, traditions, evolution of the mascot.
- Attend to the students that have gone neglected during the pandemic because of the distractions and resources dedicated to the mascot issue.
- Introduce and explore accurate and inclusive Native American history that courageously confronts the genocide of native peoples.
- Task each department to find ways to permeate existing curriculum with native culture, history, technology, spiritual values
- Teach about the history of Cambridge, as related to native communities, period of settlement, period of colonization, and revolutionary war to present.
- Teach about current events that impact the native community
- Applicable classes to participate in archeological studies/digs of local import
- District field trips highlighting the value/importance of local tribal sites
- Research and Cultivate the Native American trail that runs through campus
- Raise up the contributions of local families and individuals in development of the school district and school history.
- Research and draft, with student body participation, a land acknowledgment and prominently display at important building locations

- Land Acknowledgement offered before sporting and other school events and along with the pledge.
- Students should be taught to see guest speakers as teachers and not as entertainers.
- Use this process and curriculum improvements as a model for teaching about and engaging different identities (African American, gender, sexuality, socio-economic groups) in our culture.
- Develop an educational unit focusing on the 357 Indian boarding schools in the US that occurred from 1879 until 1996, where the motto was “kill the Indian to save the man.”
- Celebrate traditional and contemporary Native American culture including drumming, singing, dancing, language, agriculture, story telling, circle practice, lacrosse, arts, cooking, indigenous knowledge and justice systems.
- Connect and draw parallels of the historical injustices of native americans to other current injustices in American society.
- Teach that injustices are still happening to native peoples.
- Make sure recent arrivals are actively made to feel more comfortable at the school in the greater community.
- Teach that for many in native communities, historical conflicts are ongoing and unsettled.
- Teach the roots and impacts of the Holocaust.
- Develop a unit to explore the American government's policies of removal and reservations of native peoples from 1829 to 1886, the termination era of 1946-1960 and self determination era from 1975- present.
- Develop a unit that explores the modern era of self determination of sovereignty of Indian nations
- Develop a current event focus for ongoing issues in native communities.
- Clarification of tribal communities in Cambridge. Specifically understanding the nuances and overlapping presence of the Haudenosaunee including the Mohawk Nation and the Mohican Nation. .

The timing of the process of mascot evaluation or change was discussed at length. Those ideas are summarized here:

- The mascot should be retired as soon as possible to minimize and end ongoing harm associated with the current logo and name.
- The mascot should be phased out by overtime
- Give the educational efforts and assess the impact of these efforts on attitudes related to the mascot.

Other recommendations related to the mascot from the circles and interviews:

- Discontinue the use of the logo and retain the name Indians.
- Keep the logo and rename the identity: “the pride”
- Use the Cambridge C as the logo.
- Use “The Pride” as Cambridge’s name and logo.
- Also suggested was lions, or mountain lions to be the image associated with “The Pride.”
- A completely new direction should be explored unrelated to the past image or controversy. Mentioned: Bulldogs,
 - Butterfly was also discussed as the monarch butterfly would retain the orange and black color combination and would serve as a metaphor for the rebirth of a species or community pushed to near extinction.
 - Invite the student body into the creative process of generating a new mascot that uses Native American imagery icons and symbols in lieu of the physical likeness of Native American people. Ideas expressed in interviews and community circles include: owls, eagles, wampum belts, deer,

bear, arrowheads, mountains, lakes, rivers, skies, sunrises, sunsets, and moons. Also discussed was using the native words for these symbols or imagery could create a unique identity for Cambridge.

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-Allow more autonomy as to how sports teams and organizations use the logo/mascot. Provide Indian free uniforms, calendars, cafeteria and groundskeeper uniforms, etc. alternatives (specifically mentioned was the “sport C” or “the pride”)

Manage inappropriate behaviors as students discuss, express themselves and try to persuade each other regarding the mascot issue. Support respectful conversations and curtail unsafe conversations and behavior. Show no tolerance and offer alternatives for racial slurs, and other othering language such as “transplant”, “new comer”, “real” community members, “apples”, “commuters” “old timers” “founding families” and “outsiders”.

John Kane, Dillon and Duane Honyoust to speak on Native American history and issues and local community. It was also expressed that a healing of these families and appearing and speaking in a unified voice could spark broader community reconciliation and healing.

An ongoing fundraising effort should establish ongoing financial support of economic, social, and educational needs of local native communities and the communities where tribes were forced to relocate west ward to colonization.

Implement Curriculum and school community changes and assess the impact of these efforts on attitudes related to the mascot.

Also discussed was the idea of adopting the name “Cambridge Pride” to reflect the current conflict and sensibilities.

Talk with NY state to make umbrella changes around mascots

- Ask NY state to take stronger leadership role around mascots
- Lobby state for funds to support restorative processes around mascot transitions
- Lobby for funds to assist local communities in financial load of mascot transitions
- Request funds for focussed staff and faculty training around this issue so they can effectively support students and one another in these discussions

Teach/Encourage community standards in the social media debate for students, staff and family members. Explore possibilities for disconnecting from social media.

Items that are to be venerated should be displayed in a public cabinet within the school. This case should also feature an explanation/rationale of the retirement processes.

Find ways to actively acknowledge the harms of community members rather than debate whether their harms are valid. Actively seek to reach out to others who feel differently than yourselves.

Have key players in this dispute settle their differences and publicly lead the unity process.

Find ways to heal wounds, reestablish communications, and calm social media brawling.

Create methods for open, regular community conversations.

Actively get back to what is best about Cambridge; a sense for community, a sense for care, and the ability to move as one.