

Reasons Why Union Chose to Discontinue the Use of Its Previous Mascot

On Aug. 10, 2020, Union’s Board of Education appointed a committee to study the impact of the district’s Redskins mascot in light of changing attitudes among Union students, parents, alumni and patrons.

“Without question, our mascot is one that has become increasingly divisive,” said Superintendent Kirt Hartzler. “For many, it has been a symbol of pride, honor and tradition. For others, it has caused pain. We received an overwhelming number of requests from Union insiders calling for change. With a name like Union, we can’t hang on to things that cause division.”

A 35-member committee was appointed by the Board on Aug. 10, 2020, and included student leaders, teachers, support personnel, administrators, parents, members of the district’s Native American committee, alumni and representatives from each board district. Four members of the committee were non-voting, including two tribal representatives and two board members.

The committee met bi-weekly over a two-month period to discuss the impact of the mascot on students (both Native and non-Native), alignment with the district’s Core Values, as well as the mascot’s 75-year history and changing cultural norms. Ultimately, 88.9% of the committee members voted in favor of dropping the mascot. On Nov. 9, 2020, Union’s Board of Education voted unanimously to accept the committee’s recommendation.

Below are the reasons given by the committee for their recommendation to drop the mascot:

1. Unity: Union was created when three districts came together and became something new. This mascot causes strife and division.
2. It is a derogatory term and a racial slur, as defined by the dictionary definition.
3. Large number of Union “insiders” are now calling for change
 - a. Union United for Change: 1,200+ people have signed the petition to eliminate the mascot.
 - b. 70% of incoming emails are calling for elimination of the mascot. (30% asking to keep it).

4. Union values its diversity

Student Population

Asian – 7.2%

African American – 14.7%

Caucasian – 29.4%

Hispanic – 35%

Multi-Racial – 9%

Native American – 4.5%

Pacific Islander – 0.2%

5. Union can make a strong statement in support of racial equity by eliminating a mascot that is based on skin color [RED + SKINS].
6. Union's mascot does not align with three of its Core Values:
 - **Collegiality:** Demonstrate respect and an ability to work as team members.
 - **Inclusiveness:** Cultivate an organizational culture of accepting children, families, and employees for who they are rather than categorizing them by income, ethnicity, or ability.
 - **Empowerment:** Help people reach their full potential.
7. The name reinforces the idea that stereotypes and caricatures of NA people are okay. The symbols, imagery and mascot teach non-Native children it is acceptable to participate in culturally abusive behavior.
8. Union students are often put in awkward situations having to defend a mascot that many consider offensive.
9. People are not mascots, nor should they be. NA mascots:
 - Glorify and perpetuate stereotypes of indigenous people that dehumanize them.
 - Undermine the ability of NAs to portray accurate and respectful images of their culture, spirituality and traditions ([Davis, 1993](#); [Rodriguez, 1998](#); Witko, T., 2005).
 - Disrespect their spiritual beliefs and values and undermines their cultural identity ([Gone, J.P., 2002](#)).
 - Violate the civil rights of indigenous people ([Dolley, 2003](#); [King, 2001](#); [Springwoode & King, 2000](#); [U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001](#)).
10. NA Mascots – Harmful Effects on NA students:
 - Harms those who are unfamiliar with their cultural identity by giving them stereotypical images to honor instead of helping them find their true ethnic identity.
 - Native people have trauma associated with the name and seeing it celebrated at school makes them feel marginalized, powerless and mocked.
 - Creates a climate of division at a place where young people should feel they are in a safe and welcoming learning environment. NA youth have higher suicide rates of suicide and self-esteem issues.
 - Increases experiences of stress, depression, anxiety and anger ([LaRockque, McDonald, Weatherly & Ferraro, 2011](#)).
 - Decreases self-esteem, community worth and academic aspirations ([Fryberg, Markus, Oyserman & Stone, 2008](#)).
 - Leads to explicit discrimination against NA students and people ([Johnston-Goodstar & VeLure Reholt, 2017](#); [Steinfeldt, et. Al., 2010](#)).

- Holding implicit negative attitudes toward NA mascots limits what teachers and non-Native people view as what's possible for NA youth. ([Chaney, Burke & Burkely, 2011](#)).
- Establishes an unwelcome and oftentimes hostile learning environment for NA students that affirms negative images and stereotypes ([Fryberg & Markus, 2003](#); [Society of Indian Psychologists, 1999](#); [Staurowsky, 1999](#)).
- **Research from the U.S. Department of Education: White House Initiative on American Indian and Alaska Education** – Oct. 2015 (page 39-42)
<https://sites.ed.gov/whiaiane/files/2015/12/81326-SchoolEnvir.-394-260.pdf>
 - a. "Listening sessions illustrated how stereotypical imagery and symbolism harm all students, especially AI/AN students, by interfering with self-identity, perpetuating negative stereotypes, encouraging bullying and teasing, and creating unhealthy learning environments."
 - b. Native imagery is dehumanizing
 - c. **"The stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, religious or other groups when promoted by our public educational institutions, teach all students that stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable,** a dangerous lesson in a diverse society. Schools have a responsibility to educate their students; they should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture or people."
 - d. "The self-esteem of Native youth is harmfully impacted, their self-confidence erodes, and their sense of identity is severely damaged. Specifically, these stereotypes affect how Native youth view the world and their place in society, while also affecting how society views Native peoples. This creates an inaccurate portrayal of Native peoples and their contributions to society."

11. Harmful Effects/Non-Native Students:

- Maintains inaccurate understandings of Native Americans and cultures, especially for individuals with little or no NA contact ([Connolly, 2000](#); [U.S. Commission on Civil Rights, 2001](#)).
- Leads to non-Native people viewing NA mascots as accurate representations of NA people ([Chaney, Burke & Burkely, 2011](#)).
- Largely inures them toward racism aimed at native people.
- Gives them the sense that native people are "relics of the past."
- Less likely to have empathy for native peoples.
- Normalizes stereotypical imagery, resulting in more acceptance and greater support for the use of NA mascots ([Bresnahan & Flowers, 2008](#); [Neville, Yeung, Todd, Spanierman & Reed, 2011](#)).

12. The Cost of Not Rebranding

- a. By keeping the current mascot, Union opens itself up to a potential lawsuit.
- b. Lost donations/sponsorships from prospective donors.

- 1) We know there are organizations that limit their giving – or don't give at all – due to the mascot name.
 - 2) At minimum, it costs the district hundreds of thousands of dollars every year (and likely more).
13. Large number of [national organizations](#) have been seeking to eliminate NA mascots for decades.
- More than 100 Native American organizations across the U.S. have spoken out in opposition to the mascot of the Washington football team.
 - [Inter-Tribal Council of the Five Civilized Tribes](#) – currently representing over 750,000 citizens – passed a [resolution](#) in 2013 asking the Washington D.C. football team to change their name.
14. The Washington Redskins – along with other major brands this year – have abandoned mascots in the wake of the current discussion around racism in America:
- a. Washington Redskins
 - b. Land O'Lakes Butter
 - c. Eskimo Pie
 - d. Aunt Jemima syrup
 - e. Mrs. Butterworth's syrup
 - f. Uncle Ben's Rice
 - g. Cream of Wheat
15. The district essentially has a mascot that it cannot use – many NA elements have already been removed from football games.
16. Union has a strong identity on its own. We can transition to a mascot with attributes that fit Union's culture and Core Values.
17. The mascot issue will continue to be a bone of contention unless Union's Board of Education takes decisive action to change the name.
18. Doing the RIGHT THING isn't always the easy thing.

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