

**REMOVING THE 'I' FROM 'INDIAN': AN IMPLEMENTATION GUIDE TO
COMBAT REGIONALIZED RACISM AND APPROPRIATION**

by

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Abstract:

We are living in a society that is fostering and giving a platform to the festering racism rooted in historical America. Marginalization, denigration, and a lengthy history of disregard for minority groups have rendered American diversity into voiceless underrepresentation. Modern society begs for a change in the narrative. This guide will provide a step-by-step directory to effectively facilitate controversial community conversations, end municipal complacency, and issue progressive and inclusive change toward giving minority groups a voice. A case study of institutionalized racism, its impacts, and a responsive plan within Mahopac, New York, a predominantly Caucasian suburb located an hour north of New York City, will highlight each step. Additionally, this guide will describe how to become a vocal advocate through evidence-based research, collaboration, and community mobilization. This ten-step framework will enable the construction of a strong argument to terminate acrimonious propagation of toxic ideology and oppression within municipalities. The potential scale-up vision for navigating conversations, pertaining to race and cultural appropriation, is discussed with supplementary appendices denoting conceivable challenges and helpful tips to orchestrate an effective movement.

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**Indicates an unwritten section that will be written as the Mahopac Case Study progresses*

Executive Summary Table: Steps Toward Removing Race-Based Athletic Identities in your Municipality:

Step	Activities
Step #1: Community History & Contextual Review	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Perform a State / Community Contextual Review 2. Perform a National Contextual Review 3. Use your Local Library 4. Scrutinize Biases in your Literature Sources
Step #2: Stakeholder Analysis / Consultations	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Scope Out Municipal Iconography 2. Identify Key Stakeholders 3. Identify Ancillary Stakeholders 4. Consult with Diverse Perspectives
Interlude: Consolidating Information	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check if you Need to Gather More Data / Evidence
Step #3: The OpEd	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Write an OpEd with a Strong Vision and Call to Action 2. Scout out Media Sources for Publication
Step #4: 'Key' Stakeholder Discussions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Contact your Key Stakeholders to Start a Conversation 2. Create a Brief and List of Questions for Meeting Preparation 3. Determine an "Ask" for the Conclusion of your Meeting
Interlude: Planning for the Apocalypse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Envision Worst-Case Scenarios 2. Review Common Oppositional Arguments
Step #5: Community Mobilization	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pursue a Method of Amplifying your Message (e.g., Petitioning and/or Door-Knocking) 2. Maintain Organization and Document Communications 3. Develop a Network of Supporters for Further Outreach 4. Differentiate between Active and Passive Supporters
Step #6: Building Capacity, Endorsements, & Testimony	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Begin Establishing a Coalition by Organizing your Supporters 2. Prioritize Safety in your Movement 3. Build Roles for Active and Passive Supporters 4. Gather Multidisciplinary Letters of Support and Endorsements
Scaling-Up Your Initiative	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Create more Internal Infrastructure to Scale-Up 2. Aim to Upscale the Maine Legislation in your Municipality and State 3. Perform a Policymaker Analysis and Contact these Officials 4. Braid together Other Coalitions Running Similar Initiatives

Why this Capstone?

My primary curricular focus at The Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health [JHSPH] was to develop skills for optimizing child and adolescent health through cultural humility and contextually derived methods. The issue, discussed in this guide, is one that affects communities throughout the United States very differently, yet each case generates the same effect; negative health outcomes for indigenous youth. Municipal utilization of symbology and iconography, representing minority groups, creates a polarizing atmosphere. Communities using these racial depictions as emblems experience no harm, while indigenous and minority youth bear impacts of confused self-identity, poor self-esteem, decreased positive belief in their communities, and decreased belief about their ability to reach their goals.¹ Advocating on behalf of the children and adolescents affected by my local community became an opportunity beyond the scope of this capstone and the competencies that I wished to bolster. Throughout this experience, I have saturated myself in contextual knowledge, vocalized my findings, rallied my municipality, and persisted through adversity to pursue justice for indigenous youth affected by my hometown. This capstone provided, and has continued to provide, interactions with my JHSPH curriculum and developed proficiencies.

Competency Reflection:

In Touchpoint #2 of My Portfolio, I identified three competencies to focus on during the MPH program: Community Dimensions of Practice, Cultural Competency, and Leadership and Systems Thinking. This capstone addresses the competency of Community Dimensions of Practice through the multisectoral stakeholder dialogues that I engaged in throughout the process. Additionally, I utilized these relationships and networks to inform my movement and mobilize my municipality. This capstone also addresses the designated proficiency of Cultural Competency through the stakeholder analyses and diverse connections that I facilitated.

Discussing this highly controversial issue with stakeholders of many different backgrounds (e.g., indigenous tribal leaders, policymakers, community members, community-based organizations, etc...) provided the opportunity to consider the role of cultural factors in the propagation of this initiative. Lastly, Leadership and Systems Thinking was addressed by this capstone through holistically looking at this issue through multilevel dimensions. Engaging with stakeholders at the local, state, and national levels allowed me to recognize how systemic race-based athletic identities are embedded in society. Furthermore, I discovered how organizational structures promulgate this issue through complacency and a steadfast inability to modify behavior, despite the presence of a prominent evidence-base opposing their perspectives. Overall, all competencies identified in my MPH Goals Analysis were sufficiently addressed by this capstone.

Author's Statement:

Confrontation gives me anxiety, and this process is the epitome of conflict. Through the sleepless nights awaiting inevitably negative emails, tears in my eyes as I told my parents to be careful in public places due to online threats, and the bile in my throat as I calmly talked to furious members of the opposition, I persevered. It takes thick skin and the aptitude of a leader to pursue justice and equity. Remind yourself to take deep breaths, internalize the validity of this movement, and never forget about the injustices and disparities indigenous people continue to experience.

Although you are advocating on behalf of indigenous people, you must express reflexivity. As a white male leading this campaign in Mahopac, it is imperative that I recognize my privileges and realize that I am absolutely not a representative, expert, and a savior for Native Americans. Acknowledge that the adversity you may face throughout this campaign pales in comparison to the historical and current atrocities faced by Native Americans.

I wrote this guide to consolidate the best practices as described by individuals that have taken on this campaign throughout the United States. In some places this line of advocacy work does not involve ten steps, sometimes it only takes one call to make this change. Although the timeline differs, be prepared for the long-run and never expect instantaneous change, no matter how justified this initiative seems.

This guide is dedicated to the inspirational advocates and organizations fighting for indigenous rights, especially those that have mentored me along this rollercoaster. Thank you, Dr. Melissa Walls, Barbara Munson, Carol & Harvey Gunderson, and Maulian Dana for your passion, support, and dedication. Courage is nothing to fear. Be persistent. Be tenacious.

Sovereignty 101:

Tribal sovereignty is a culmination of treaties, executive orders, laws, and recognition from the United States Constitution that provides tribal nations the authority to self-govern.² Throughout a long history of establishing this sovereign nation, tribes have obtained the legal and political right to have decision-making power over their lands, pass & enforce laws, and provide programs and services to their members. Over 570 tribes are designated as “federally recognized” and have a formal relationship with the United States government. No decisions about a tribe’s lands and citizens can be made without the explicit participation and consent of the tribe.³

The term “American Indian and Alaska Native” can be utilized to identify both race/ethnicity and/or involvement in a federally recognized tribe. It is important to note the dual nature of this identity due to the implications of tribal enrollment, legal obligations, and political designation.⁴

Indigenous rights to exercise sovereignty continues to be a point of contention between tribal nations and the United States government. The construction of the Keystone Pipeline and the United States-Mexico border wall have reignited issues relating to land-use rights and perturbs the protective clauses of legislation enabling tribal sovereignty. The National Congress of American Indians emphasized three major challenges to continued tribal self-government: “(1) outmoded bureaucratic processes; (2) lack of federal agency coordination; and, (3) regulations and laws that prevent tribal governments from equitable access to federal programs on par with state and local governments.”² Although the United States has a system recognizing tribal sovereignty, violations of these legitimate rights are constantly encroached upon.

Background / Context:

Mahopac, New York was inhabited by The Wappinger tribe, a subsection of the Algonquin, up until the French and Indian War in the 1750s. The Wappinger tribe utilized



Figure #1: Topographic Map of Lake Mahopac⁷

Canopus Island, the largest landmass within Lake Mahopac, as their primary meeting place (See Figure #1).

A larger indigenous village was reportedly located just south east of the lake.⁵ During the war, the Wappinger tribe moved their families to Stockbridge, Massachusetts to fight alongside the British.⁶ After returning to Mahopac from a British victory, around

1765, Canopus Island and their adjacent village had been settled by colonists and repurposed as farmland. Sachem Daniel Ninham, a chief of the Wappinger tribe and an American war hero, sought peaceful means to reclaim their land. After continual disagreements with elitist “landowners,” Sachem Ninham appealed to Colonial Courts and even sailed to England to pursue Native landowning rights in Mahopac. English Court sided with Adolph Philipse, a wealthy European settler, in recognizing fraudulent land deeds produced by his family.⁸ Sachem Ninham later died in the Battle of Kingsbridge on August 31st, 1778. The Wappinger tribe’s loss of their principal land rights advocate eventually led to the gradual diaspora of their community. By the 1870s, the Wappinger tribe had no activity within the region; either dying from European diseases, perishing by conflict, or assimilating into neighboring tribes.⁹

As the town began to grow, from the influx of colonial settlers, Mahopac industrialized and shaped into its modern form. In 1935, the Mahopac Central School District [MCSD] began operating educational facilities and utilizing the ‘Indian’ as an athletic identity. Currently, the MCSD manages six learning facilities; all under the identity of the Mahopac ‘Indians’.¹⁰ Iconography depicting tribal Native Americans from the Plains region of the United States were embossed on the school district’s signage and logos until 2018 when the current superintendent decided to change the signs (See Figures #2 & #3). Additionally, this symbology was translated to the Mahopac



Figure #2: Mahopac High School’s Old Sign¹¹



Figure #3: Mahopac High School’s New Sign¹²

Volunteer Fire Department’s vehicles and throughout many other aspects of the town (See Figure #4). After generations of students attended the MCSD, the ‘Indian’ quickly became a



Figure #4: Mahopac Volunteer Fire Department Truck¹³

community staple and identity.

Although Mahopac students throughout the years, primarily starting in the 1980s, expressed their concern with the athletic identity, the MCSD administration consistently admonished any dialogue from students and members of the municipality, claiming no political or community

will for change. On April 5th, 2001, complacency was disturbed when the Commissioner of Education of the State of New York, Richard P. Mills, sent a memo to Presidents of Boards of Education and Superintendents of Public Schools within New York. The memo was entitled “Public Schools Use of Native American Names, Symbols, and Mascots” and encompassed research findings, arguments, and a conclusion on why schools need to retire their Native American athletic identities.¹⁴ The following year Ossining High School, a competitor of Mahopac High School located 40 minutes away, accepted the recommendation of Commissioner Mills and retired their ‘Indian’ athletic identity.¹⁵ Over the next decade, the MCSD persisted with their ‘Indian’ athletic identity despite this recommendation. In 2012, twice in 2014, and 2019, the MCSD was under fire due to four distinct instances of racism flaunted by the Mahopac student body.^{16,17,18,19} Each incident involved racist taunts/displays at sports games and discriminatory posts on social media. Although the MCSD reprimanded and condemned the student’s actions, there was no further conceptualization of a plan to disrupt this repeated cycle. Finally, in November 2019, another MCSD competitor, the Katonah-Lewisboro School District located 30 minutes away, voted to retire their ‘Indian’ athletic identity. This decision secluded the MCSD as one of the only institutions in the area maintaining an ‘Indian’ athletic identity.

Currently, Mahopac has a population of approximately 8,742 people where 85.6% - 94.4% of the population were identified as White and 0.0% - 0.3% were classified as Native American.²⁰ Additionally, the median household income is >\$87,000, making Mahopac one of the most affluent and whitest towns in New York State. Historically, the district votes from a conservative Republican perspective and reflects this in their elected officials (i.e., town boards, committees, school boards, appointees, etc.). In 2018, Anthony DiCarlo, a previous Republican town board member, became the new and current appointed superintendent for the MCSD.

Under his administration, he states that the MCSD “is committed to promoting and nurturing a discrimination-free environment for its students, as well as visiting students from other schools”.²¹

With a well-documented history of Mahopac’s neglect of the Wappinger tribe and the school’s positioning on discrimination, Superintendent DiCarlo should support the retirement of the MCSD ‘Indian’ athletic identity, right? Sometimes this contextual history is enough to generate change, but nevertheless preparation for every scenario is vital.

Step #1: Community History & Contextual Review:

The importance of educating yourself with both contextual and evidence-based knowledge lies in bolstering a stronger argument for issuing change and rallying municipal advocacy. Starting your campaign to retire a racially based athletic identity requires two specific contextual reviews. Your first analysis should encompass a state / community lens to gather the historical and indigenous background of your specific community. A subsequent contextual review should encapsulate a national scope of indigenous rights, credible scientific-based research, generalized narrative from stakeholder groups supporting this change, and a multimedia analysis of videos to explain this issue to audiences with varying levels of education. Both contextual reviews will provide insight, resources, and talking points about this issue. Most importantly, you will begin to build your case to key stakeholders involved in changing this policy within your municipality.

The ideal situation for collecting context would be having active and welcoming tribal participation within your community. Although less common than documented Euro-perspectives, written historical accounts from local indigenous groups can be valuable primary sources of information and narrative. Make sure that you are fact-checking and cross-referencing information, to maintain credible and unbiased sources.

If there are no active tribes within your town, the best place to start this contextual review would be your local library. Librarians and Informationists will be your best friends in uncovering your town's history with Native Americans. Simply ask, if/where they store town history documentation. Mahopac Public Library is a community staple due to both its age-specific programming and well documented history. In Mahopac's case, the local library maintains extensive documentation relating to civic history, including some information on the

Wappinger tribe. It is vital that you read as many published narratives, pertaining to Native American history in your town, to generate an unbiased account of indigenous people's experiences. While reading, scrutinize the text to determine if the information is credible, factual, and impartial. To evaluate your local literature, ask yourself analytical questions such as: "What prompted the author to write this?", "Is the author a reliable/unbiased source?", "Does the author have ties to local governing systems?", and "Is the author indigenous?"

Unfortunately, not all communities will have access to a historical mecca such as, the Mahopac Public Library. In situations of limited access to community-specific literature, conversations with town historians might be your only option to gather context. Although a historian's job is to recount and record history, bias may still be present. To evaluate a historian's credibility, you must also ask yourself analytical questions such as: "Who is paying the historian?", "Is the historian a reliable/unbiased source?", "Does the historian have ties to local governing systems?", and "Is the historian indigenous?"

The last portion of your community-focused review should contain local opinions and policies held by your school district's administration, school board, and state. A snapshot of current educational policies relating to non-discrimination, inclusion, and diversity need to be documented to augment your case. All this information is public knowledge and should be found online on your school district's webpage or within the office of your District Clerk. Furthermore, observing and recording procedures, discussions, and previous meeting minutes from your local school board meetings will assist with Step #9: The Big Day.

After collecting local context and narrative, broaden your research from community to national perspectives. To initiate your second contextual review, begin by traversing peer-reviewed journals, articles, and websites such as, the American Psychological Association

[APA], the American Sociological Association [ASA], JSTOR, and the National Center for Biotechnology Information [NCBI] through PubMed. At these websites, you can begin to type in buzzwords such as, ‘Indian Mascot’, ‘Mascot’, ‘Native Americans’, etc... to begin an expansive search of relevant topics. Other resources that I found to be excellent assets were:

- The Wisconsin ‘Indian’ Education Association’s Mascot and Logo Taskforce Resource Page: <http://www.indianmascots.com/>
- Oneida-Nation / Adidas’ Positioning / Resource Page for Changing ‘Indian’ Mascots: <https://www.changethemascot.org/>
- The National Collegiate Athletic Association’s [NCAA] Position on Race-based Athletic Identities: <http://www.ncaa.org/static/champion/where-pride-meets-prejudice/index.php>
- Maulian Dana’s, the Penobscot Nation Ambassador’s, TED Talk on Race-based Athletic Identities: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVAdGXrU60w>
- Jon Stewart’s Segment on the Washington R*dskins: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loK2DRBnk24>
- 1997 PBS Documentary: “In Whose Honor”
- Oprah Winfrey’s Video on Racism: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dmPWOAoExzk>

Once you are confident in your positioning and comprehension with your collected research, it is time to move on to the next step.

Step #2: Stakeholder Analysis / Consultations:

To initiate this step, start with identifying individuals, groups, and organizations that are influenced by the retirement of a race-based athletic identity. Think about “who”: ‘Who in your community has the power to make this change?’, ‘Who would be supportive?’, ‘Who would be oppositional?’, ‘Who can help you champion this campaign?’, ‘Who are your experts?’, and even ‘Who are you doing this for?’ are questions that will generate a specific list of stakeholders to reference and contact later in your expedition for equity.

Scoping out your stakeholders from a multilevel perspective (i.e., national, community, and individual lenses) will enable you to assess diverse opinions and prioritize your key stakeholders. Start your analysis locally by researching what entities in your community are utilizing racial iconography. In Mahopac’s case, racial symbols were centralized within the school district and local fire department. Therefore, key stakeholders would be identified as the MCSD’s administration, the school board, the fire department heads, and the town board. These four organizational bodies encompass Mahopac’s decision and policy makers, who have the power to enact this change. Thus, due to their authority, these groups will be designated as “key” stakeholders.

Subsequently, utilize your contextual reviews to identify and list organizations and experts that are supportive of this initiative. In this secondary stakeholder analysis, two lists will be generated to capture local internal agencies and external supportive institutions. The first list should consist of local tribes, tribal organizations, and community associations (including faith-based organizations) within your municipality. The second list will highlight national and international tribal affiliates, advocacy groups, and indigenous experts. Cataloguing your ancillary stakeholders will build out your network to mobilize in later steps.

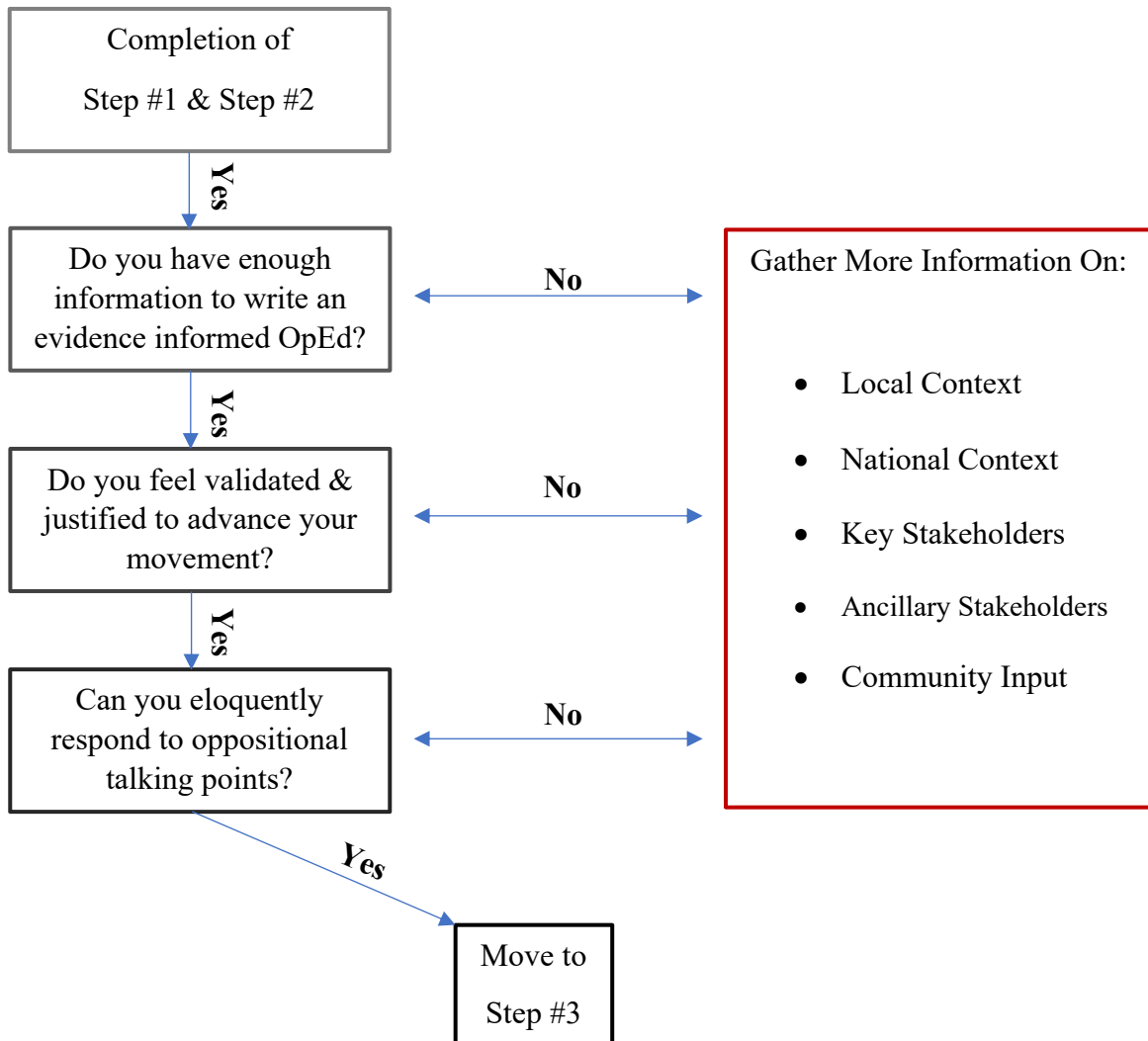
Strategic consultations with diverse key and secondary stakeholders will occur immediately after scoping, to foster fundamental partnerships that will last throughout this process. Chose a stakeholder from each category: key, internal ancillary, and external ancillary that are multidisciplinary vocal instigators for change. In the Mahopac case study, initial consultations began with the superintendent of the MCSD, Anthony DiCarlo, as a key stakeholder, a select group of community members of color as internal ancillary stakeholders, and Dr. Melissa Walls of the Johns Hopkins Center for American Indian Health as an external ancillary stakeholder.

These foundational discussions must involve introductions, a brief presentation of background information and findings, an open discussion, and an agreement to collaborate. Gaining insight and alliance from your identified stakeholders, through conversation, will contribute to your positioning and prepare yourself for future steps. Perspective and relationships are essential for informing and instigating systematic change within your local contexts.

Interlude: Consolidating Information:

There are three interludes built into this guide to provide strategic pauses before moving onto the next step. Think of these intermissions as checkpoints to reflect upon your progress and question whether you have compiled enough information and context to confidently advance your social justice campaign. This first interlude is meant to organize the information you have collected, thus far, to inform your writing of an evidence based OpEd. Additionally, your consolidated evidence should provide a feeling of justification for your actions, especially in the face of anticipated opposition.

Follow the flowchart below to see if you are ready for the next step:



Step #3: The OpEd:

Now that you feel confident in your contextual gatherings, it is time to begin formulating a compelling method of sharing your findings with your local municipality and key stakeholders. An OpEd is the ideal conduit for the presentation of concise and persuasive reasoning that reaches your desired audience. There are multiple methods to write an enticing, fact-presenting, and mobilizing OpEd for your readers. The OpEd, in the Mahopac case study, utilized Monroe's Motivating Sequence Pattern. Monroe's style emphasizes the need for five features to create a captivating OpEd: Attention (get the attention of your audience), Need (describe the problem, demonstrate a need for change), Satisfaction (present a practical, and concise solution), Visualization (allow your audience to picture the results), and Action (request immediate action from your audience).^{22,23}

Although all components are important, your focus should be directed toward the "Visualization" and "Action" steps. In the visualization step, I highly recommended blending your advocacy efforts with a conceptual image of what the district will look like after the retirement of their race-based athletic identity. By presenting your municipality with a phased plan of action, you are proactively addressing oppositional talking points. In the Mahopac case study, a three-pronged approach was presented to combat regionalized racism. The plan allowed for visualization to occur, but more importantly provided answers to questions such as: How will this be paid for?, Will the retirement of our mascot eliminate the history of the Native Americans that reside/once resided here?, and What can we do as individual community members to help issue this change?

The action step must aim to successfully mobilize your community by engaging them with factual evidence and a specific request and open invitation to join your campaign. In the

Mahopac case study, immediate action by community members was requested in the form of a pre-generated email template to send to the superintendent of the MCSD. An emphasis on crafting a mentality of ‘solidarity in numbers’ is vital to ensure key stakeholders are being brought to the table. Additionally, ensure that you provide your email address so you can advance community discussions, clarify any questions, and document responses to your OpEd. My personal tip is to only include your email. Any other pieces of information (i.e., phone numbers, addresses, etc..) could allow for readers to intrusively, and potentially maliciously, invade your privacy.

Lastly, while simultaneously crafting your OpEd, start scouting out potential media sources for publication. Local sources of media should be prioritized to directly reach members of your municipality who can influence key stakeholders. Additionally, locate reputable local platforms that have a pervasive presence (i.e., active coverage of local events, online content, and town-wide dissemination). In areas of low media coverage, broadcasting your OpEd through larger platforms may be the only option to relay your message. Be aware that media sources external to your community will have more stringent levels of eligibility for publication.

See Appendix #1 for the OpEd used in the Mahopac case study.

Step #4: 'Key' Stakeholder Discussions:

Now that your OpEd has been written and published, it is time to begin engaging your designated 'key' stakeholder(s). These exchanges can either make this process an easy transition or an uphill battle, depending on how you instigate the conversation. Always prioritize courtesy over confrontation. Any policymaker will disregard messages consisting of combative/argumentative language, accusatory tonality, profanity, and/or no "ask" or invitation to discuss further. Ensure that in your initial email, you explain who you are, a brief background of your findings, a link to your OpEd, and an invitation to comment and confer face-to-face. By remaining calm and respectful throughout all interactions, you are generating an approachable persona that wishes to collaborate as opposed to antagonize.

There are some instances where an initial email may not be necessary. In the Mahopac case study, Superintendent DiCarlo initiated the conversation by sending an email after the publication of the OpEd. The email was a brief message sent by the District Clerk to schedule a meeting. Although this is the ideal scenario, assume that your key stakeholder(s) will not be the one(s) reaching out to meet. Allow for a full week to elapse, after the publication of your OpEd, to provide your key stakeholder(s) the opportunity to initiate a dialogue. In the meantime, proactively draft the language for you to begin this conversation. Once the designated time for key stakeholder response passes, ensure that you are sending your email during the beginning of their work hours. Since individuals typically check their email as they begin a workday and are in a better mood entering their office as opposed to leaving, 9am – 10am is an ideal time to send this outreach.

My recommended correspondence strategy would be to wait a full week with no response before sending out a follow up email. Once those seven days have passed, your follow-up email

should be a brief message to assure that your key stakeholder(s) have received the original message. If your key stakeholder(s) do not reply five days after the follow-up email, seek other methods to communicate (i.e., telephone, in-person, etc). Depending on your comfortability, it is acceptable to start this conversation through an email alternative such as, a telephone call or an in-person visit to the key stakeholder(s) workplace. These are more direct methods and can cut response times significantly.

Finally, once you receive reciprocal communication, guarantee that you solidify a meeting date, time, and location. All meetings with your key stakeholder(s) should be face-to-face so you can assess non-verbal communication cues to determine how well the meeting went. In the Mahopac case study, the first meeting was not in person, but through Zoom telecommunication due to geographical differences. In-person discussion is ideal, but any form of face-to-face communication will be sufficient. Be persistent about this, because interface communication will be your opportunity to not only assess your key stakeholder(s)' reactions, but also display your competence through poise and professional appearance.

Now that you have established your meeting specifics, it is time to prepare. First, you should write an extremely succinct memo that encapsulates background/contextual facts, your key and ancillary stakeholders, and a list of questions to ask your key stakeholder(s). This memo will be your reference throughout the meeting and your guide to navigating the conversation. The most important item to prepare are the questions you plan to ask your key stakeholder(s). These questions should be primarily open-ended to allow for broad discussion and the ability for your key stakeholder(s) to clarify their perspective in their own words. Here are a few examples of questions asked to Superintendent DiCarlo in the Mahopac case study:

1. Has the MCSD had contact with indigenous tribes in the region? If yes, what have you talked about? Do they feel using the “Indian” as a mascot is offensive? Do you give the tribe anything back in return?
2. How have you dealt with racism within the student body? Anything greater than suspension?
3. Have you, other community members, the PTO, etc... talked about changing the mascot? What is your position on the mascot? Are you comfortable with it in 2019 even with national controversy?
4. Have you read my article? Thoughts on my action plan?
5. What do you envision are pitfalls to my action plan? Is there more research I should do to ensure the success of these steps I laid out?
6. Are you aware of Ossining High School changing their mascot in 2002 due to the New York State Education Commissioner requesting districts to stop using American Indian symbols as mascots?
7. What are our next steps? More involvement from the MCSD faculty/staff? Facilitated conversations with tribal leaders? Thoughts? Plans?

Before posing questions to your key stakeholder(s), exchange pleasantries and express your gratitude for setting aside time to meet. This initial interchange will set the tone for the remainder of your discussion; either creating a disarming or combative attitude. Additionally, if you wish to, always obtain permission from your key stakeholder(s) for recording the conversation. Documentation is a necessary component for generating change, and the direct phrasing of answers from your key stakeholder(s) can aid in future mobilization around this issue.

After you have exhausted your list of questions and progressed the discussion to a point of mutual contentment, deliver your “ask” before concluding the meeting. An “ask” is an actionable item that you impose on another party. In the Mahopac case study, the actionable item resulting from the conversation was a desire to meet again with indigenous health experts and the town historian. The most important request you must make, prior to completing your discussion, will be to set another date, time, and location for your next meeting. The propagation of open communication between you and your key stakeholder(s) is essential to instigating your desired change.

Interlude: Planning for the Apocalypse:

Before you engage your community, proactively envisioning worst case/malicious scenarios must be considered to guide your future advocacy efforts. “Planning for the apocalypse” may be an anxiety-inducing process, but ultimately you will emerge with formulated counterarguments and built capacity prior to mobilization. Addressing any controversial issue will undoubtedly illuminate and empower alternative perspectives. Whenever the issue of race-based athletic identities arises, common oppositional arguments surface within local communities. In the Mahopac case study, many of these counterpoints were exhibited and documented for the sake of reducing the stress of your “apocalyptic predicting”. Please refer to Appendix B: Common Oppositional Talking Points, for the examples found in the Mahopac case study.

Furthermore, evolving from a single advocate to an activist group will increase your capacity to perform further research, broaden your community outreach, maintain and support your efforts, and transform your initiative into a grassroots campaign. In the Mahopac case study, two types of advocates were recruited prior to the next step: passive and active supporters. A passive supporter is an individual who wishes to lend their voice to the cause, in the form of a letter of support sent to your key stakeholder(s). Letters of support and passive supporters will be discussed further in Step #6: Building Capacity, Endorsements, & Testimony.

Primarily, you are seeking active supporters at this step in the process. Active advocates are individuals who have the bandwidth for responsibilities and can further develop your campaign, as trusted confidants. This type of supporter will typically be a close friend, respondent to your OpEd, and/or a chosen ancillary stakeholder. Aim to build a team of 3-5 active supporters to create a centralized “steering committee” for your advocacy efforts. Next,

provide each member of your newly formed activist group a task that contributes to the overall goal (i.e., performing literature/policy reviews, reaching out to various groups within your local municipality, commenting on social media posts to provide respectful and factual insight, etc...). Once you and your steering committee have effectively “planned for the apocalypse”, it is time to open Pandora’s Box and mobilize your community.

Step #5: Community Mobilization:

Your OpEd is the first step toward gaining local traction, but you must think of ways to further vocalize and amplify this issue throughout your municipality. In the Mahopac case study, change.org was utilized as a centralized source to relay the positioning on this issue (See the Mahopac case study's petition here: <http://chng.it/nktrSMwp>). This website enables users to create online petitions that can easily be shared throughout social media sources (i.e., Facebook, Gmail, Twitter, Email, or WhatsApp). Additionally, the site offers the ability to update your petition with supplementary posts as well as allow for other supporters to comment on your main petition and updates.

Utilize your petition as a method to show that there is ample support behind this issue. This should not be presented as your mechanism for change! Petitions are solely meant to unite and rally supporters for the goal of gaining the undivided attention of your key stakeholders.²⁴ Setting a goal for the number of signatures you desire, is an excellent way to engage your community. To assess what this amount should be, focus on the size of your population. Mahopac, for example, is a small community that encompasses approximately 8,700 people. Therefore, a realistic goal of obtaining 1,000 signatures was determined. This number will vary depending on the size and composition of your municipality. Lastly, recognize that the petition itself is a façade. If you emerge with less signatures than intended, but more community members engaged in conversation and the attention of your key stakeholders, then congratulations, you have successfully accomplished the true intent of the petition.

In the Mahopac case study, the petition reached its goal of obtaining 1,000 signatures. Most importantly, the municipality was engaged in conversation. Although these goals were met, local community members who opposed this initiative generated their own petition, which obtained more than triple the number of signatures than the petition to retire Mahopac's race-

based athletic identity. As down heartening as this was, continuing to remind yourself and your supporters of the true intent of the petition is vital for maintaining traction. Nevertheless, we persisted.

If you do not wish to create an online petition, or if you feel more comfortable interacting with your community face-to-face, door-knocking could be the best alternative. Furthermore, attending civic assemblages such as, local community associations meetings, school board gatherings, town board/city council sessions, etc., can afford you the opportunity to meet more members of your community. Take every opportunity to speak to more people, no matter what their standpoint is on this issue. The best way to spread your message is through evidence-informed, non-violent, non-threatening and not-profane critical discussions that provide space for individuals that oppose your perspective. Generating changes in thought and behavior is a difficult process, but through fostering transparent and respectful discussions, you can educate your neighbors in a civil and appropriate manner.

No matter which method you choose to rally your municipality, your top priority should be maintaining organization. Creating a shared drive of various interpersonal communications between either yourself or your steering committee and community members, is essential to interpret locally shifting attitudes and beliefs. Remember that these interactions can be via both the internet and in person. Also, scouting out information regarding the individuals and organizations that support your campaign (i.e., demographics, opinions, attitudes, beliefs, etc...) is fundamental to comprehend which groups you need to reach out to further. Common groups to gain support from are current & former students, teachers, school faculty, guidance counselors, athletics departments, local indigenous people/tribes, community associations, faith-based

organizations/religious leaders, and local businesses. Typically, your identified municipal ancillary stakeholders will be the added backing you need to keep this campaign moving.

After gaining the support from community members and ancillary stakeholders, always ask them to share the importance of this movement with others in the municipality. Developing a web of connections will aid in the publicizing of this endeavor. Your personal networks will not be enough to propagate this initiative. Therefore, utilize your growing web of support to outreach further and create perpetual growth of your movement. Even if this outreach does not result in mobilization, a substantial feat would be to break a community's complacency in using a race-based athletic identity. In the Mahopac case study, the majority of the community opposed the retirement of their 'Indian' mascot. Although this poses a challenge to removing a race-based athletic identity, in particular cases (such as the Mahopac case study), simply generating conversation and reflection may be significant progress for a municipality.

Lastly, empowering your mobilizers to actively engage in this movement is vital to sustainably expand your campaign. At this step, continue to identify your active and passive supporters. This will prepare you for the next phase of your movement by bolstering internal infrastructure and your case for the school board.

Step #6: Building Capacity, Endorsements, & Testimony:

Now that you have visibly mobilized your community, you must harness your supporter's motivation to seek change. Translating support into action requires expanding your internal infrastructure to begin the process of establishing a coalition. Combine the efforts of your steering committee with other supporters that wish to build upon your campaign. Developing your coalition should be a simultaneous process while mobilizing your community. Offering your supporters opportunities to actively participate in this movement will maintain the necessary engagement and bandwidth of your community. Preparing your campaign for a potential long-term battle by coalition building is an effective method to construct a movement.

One incredibly important, and often disregarded, action is ensuring safety. Designating certain members of your coalition as community and media "sentries" will ensure that you, your family, and members of your coalition are properly documenting and reporting any threats or violent acts to the appropriate sources (e.g., local authorities, the FBI, school officials, etc...). These sentries should attend community meetings, town board / city council sessions, and school board assemblies to listen for adverse comments and potential threats. Additionally, social media comments and posts on local community pages should be heavily monitored by a few members of your coalition. This is to track and document who, if anybody, is talking about this issue and safeguard your coalition and its affiliates from violent and threatening acts. In the Mahopac case study, threatening, violent, racist, homophobic, transphobic, and discriminatory language was written down and reported to local authorities and the superintendent of the school. Always remain vigilant and take every comment seriously!

Social media can broadcast your message, but the potential for malicious comments and the spread of misinformation can and will arise. It is your responsibility to ensure your

supporters are engaging individuals with different opinions with respect, poise, and evidence. The internet provides platforms for interactions to get out of control, and if your supporters adhere to generating courteous conversations, you can effectively validate that this is not an initiative meant to divide the community.

After building out roles for active supporters in your coalition, it is time to engage your passive supporters. These individuals may not have the personal bandwidth to actively contribute more toward your campaign, but they can still convey important narratives, on this issue, to your key stakeholder(s). Passive supporters can help by signing and sharing your petition, reading your updates, and writing “one-and-done” letters of support. Standardizing a structure for these letters can ease the burden on passive supporters that may find this activity too time consuming. A sample letter of support, circulated from the Mahopac case study, can be found and adapted here:

Dear Superintendent DiCarlo, Mahopac Board of Education, and Trustees,

My name is [Insert your Name Here] and I represent [Insert your Applicable Organization Here]. I am contacting you today to inform you of my support in retiring Mahopac’s ‘Indian’ Mascot.

[Body of letter should be composed of elements regarding your personal narrative in relation to indigenous culture, your experiences regarding this issue, cited research / statistics on why this form of cultural appropriation is harmful, any stories that you may have relating to this issue, etc...]

In conclusion, I ask that you contact me if you have any further questions, comments, or concerns to clarify and/or elaborate on anything I discussed in my letter. [Include additional flourish of making this a priority in your agenda and to allow indigenous voice into the conversation with evidence-based research].

~Sincerely,

[Insert your Name Here]

[Insert your Applicable Title Here]

[Insert your Applicable Organization Here]

Letters of support are important to show your key stakeholders a broad array of personal narratives relating to the effects of race-based athletic identities. Encouraging your ancillary stakeholders and passive supporters to write these letters can highlight diverse, multidisciplinary perspectives. This can provide unique and vivid narratives within your municipality. Always tell supporters to send their letters to *all* of your key stakeholders with you CC'd on the email. This is to keep track of the amount of correspondences and identify powerful pieces that can be cultivated for future testimony in front of the school board, if needed.

Starting with your individual supporters is an excellent way to expand your network and obtain endorsements for your movement from local tribes, coalitions, businesses, faith-based organizations, etc... Discussing your contextual reviews and the harms of race-based athletic identities with your local leaders is an opportunity to clarify the reasoning behind your campaign. Your key stakeholders listen to the opinions of leaders from their constituency. Therefore, obtaining both individual and local organization endorsements will validate your endeavors and bring more stakeholders to the table.

Now that you have begun the process of gathering local endorsements, you should start to foster strategic external supports. There are many groups, especially tribal organizations and affiliates, that have been championing this issue for decades. Tapping into this strong national network is yet another angle that can emphasize the importance of this issue to your key stakeholders. These groups can provide expert advice, guidance, and important endorsements, which could heavily influence obtaining more supporters both locally and nationally. In the Mahopac case study, there were seven tribes, tribal organizations, and experts that sent in formal

letters of support. To view all external endorsements, please see “Appendix D: Mahopac Case Study Letters of Support”. Utilize these organizations, that support the initiative in Mahopac, as a catalyst for obtaining your own endorsements. Additionally, you can search for more external coalitions through your identification of ancillary stakeholders and social media sources. Most importantly, be sure to take the time to ask your external supporters, who have been advocating on behalf of this issue for years, questions relating to best practices and additional resources concerning this issue. Expert opinions and tips should always be sought and incorporated at every step of this guide.

This step will take the longest amount of time out of all ten steps in this guide. Therefore, it is imperative to be meticulous and thoughtful throughout this phase. Take the necessary time to properly build your coalition and gather letters of support from multiple people and organizations. This will aid in constructing your case’s presentation in front of your key stakeholders. Currently, the Mahopac case study is on this step in the process. Steps #7 – 10 will be written as the case study progresses. Please skip ahead to “Scaling-Up Your Initiative” for further insights on expanding your campaign.

Scaling-Up Your Initiative:

Focusing solely on a local level is limiting to the potential magnitude of this campaign. Establishing greater measures to magnify your scope will create efforts beyond your local capacity. There are multiple opportunities to expand your movement to a bigger scale. Looking into enterprises on the state and national levels can inform how you wish to proceed and grow your initiative into something bigger with greater impact. Starting around Step #5, you should research and create more infrastructure for scale-up.

Recent cases have emerged where school boards have reinstated race-based athletic identities that have previously been removed. For example, in the summer of 2019, the school board at Killingly High School in Connecticut voted to expunge their race-based athletic identity.²⁵ The municipality was heavily divided and strong emotions were evoked for months leading up to the new school board elections. Candidates ran on the premise that if they are elected, they will reinstate the school's race-based athletic identity. In January 2020, the board flipped, and they had the political will to reinstate the "R*dmn" as their mascot.

The Killingly case study exemplifies the need to scale-up your initiative beyond a local level to ensure all of your work, in removing a race-based athletic identity, is sustained. One route to explore is policymaking. A solid piece of legislation to review would be "An Act to Ban Native American Mascots in All Public Schools", which was signed by the Governor of Maine, Janet T. Mills.²⁶ As of May 2019, Maine became the first state to pass this law which bans Native American mascots in their public-school system including college networks. Additionally, in February 2020, the State of Illinois introduced a similar bill, House Bill 4783, in their General Assembly. This act will ask for written consent of Native American tribes every 5 years to continue using a race-based athletic identity and offer school courses and programs on

indigenous culture.²⁷ Pieces of legislation, like the ones in Maine and Illinois, should be explored further and brought to your elected local and state officials. By introducing state-wide bans, situations, such as the one in the Killingly case study, can be prevented.

To initiate conversations around progressing this piece of legislation in your municipality and/or state, you should perform a small policymaker analysis. In this analysis, identify your elected officials and write their contact information down on your running document. Major policymakers that you should identify are your state's U.S. senators, your U.S. house representative, and your municipal senators and delegates to your state's general assembly. Start by reaching out via phone to these policymaker's district offices and explaining the steps you have taken in your local community. Offer to send all documentation and research you have compiled, with the "ask" of reviewing the pieces of legislation found in Maine and Illinois. Prepare for these calls exactly like you prepared for Step #4: 'Key' Stakeholder Discussions. Furthermore, ensure that you set a date to have a secondary call after your documentation was reviewed. Follow-up and open communication will be vital to ensuring that these acts are effectively scaled up in your municipality and state.

Lastly, you can scale-up your local campaign by contacting individuals and organizations running similar initiatives throughout the United States. By coordinating multiple coalitions into a unified network, the opportunity to generate a grassroots advocacy organization, specifically dedicated to lobbying for the removal of race-based athletic identities, can be formed. Identify individuals that have been both working on their local campaigns and those that have succeeded in their efforts. Once you begin building connections with other groups, you can begin to braid resources, share best practices, and organize as a well-staffed collaborative to influence policymakers on a state and national scale.

Appendix A: Mahopac Case Study OpEd:

Removing the 'I' from 'Indian'

Since its founding over 80 years ago, Mahopac Central School District has perpetuated inequity and capitalized on colonialism. Despite our district claiming “it’s...important to us that students’ social, emotional, and overall wellbeing is supported”, our community continues to ignore bigotry as an issue.¹ Have we forgotten the headlines denoting the four instances of racism related to Mahopac student conduct once in 2012, twice in 2014, and again in April of this year?^{2,3,4,5} Turning a blind eye to toxic ideology will only exacerbate the problem for current and future generations living in our community.

In a comprehensive research report by Brown University’s Dr. Michael A. Friedman, “Indian” sports mascots were shown to harmfully “perpetuate negative stereotypes of America’s first peoples, and contribute to a disregard for the personhood of Native peoples.”⁶ Furthermore, “hundreds of tribal nations, national and regional tribal organizations, civil rights organizations, school boards, sports teams, sports and media personalities, and individuals have called for the end to harmful Indian mascots.”⁷

Currently, Native Americans are still being oppressed and marginalized in society. They face continual loss of territory due to oil industry buyouts, voter repression via unjust legislation, and high levels of violence, especially toward Native women (which is often disregarded by local authorities) among many other injustices.^{8,9}

Mahopac’s “Indian” mascot is a reminder of these acts of divisiveness and marginalization, which further emphasizes our community’s inability to eliminate racism. We need to unite together to end the racial discrimination scarring our community by removing a symbol that has held us back from healing for far too long.

Therefore, I propose that instead of complacency, we implement a united systemic transformation of belief. My action plan involves three steps: Community Engagement, Educational Forum Development, and Rebranding. Step 1 involves you. I am calling upon individuals to contact Anthony DiCarlo, the superintendent of the Mahopac Central School District, to inform him of our concerns and propose the solutions addressed in Steps 2 and 3. Step 2 involves the community. Together we can develop an open forum for our municipality to safely and appropriately discuss taboo topics (i.e., race, gender, ethnicity). Let us better ourselves through conversation and education.

Lastly, Step 3 involves Adidas. In 2015, Adidas launched the “Mascot Change” initiative, which is a voluntary program for high schools that “would give schools access to the company’s design team for logo redesign and uniform design across all sports.”¹⁰ This is a grant-funded initiative that requires a simple proposal from a school district to instigate change at little monetary and temporal cost.

It is not my intention to eliminate Native American culture from Mahopac entirely. The biggest issue in our mascot, besides its racist connotation, is that there is no public education regarding the ancestors of our land. Together we can celebrate and learn about the Wappinger tribe who lived on this territory, and how Mahopac as we know it came to be. There is irony surrounding our pride for the “Mahopac Indians” without knowing anything about the tribe’s history.

All three steps can engage the community toward fostering a more inclusive neighborhood. In our current cultural climate, many people will feel that this initiative is too “politically correct” and that they are not responsible for what happened to Native Americans. No, we may not be independently responsible for the genocide and injustices that Native American communities have faced throughout history; however, we are responsible for the cultural appropriation that Mahopac has undertaken in using the “Indian” as our mascot.

There is precedent from a nearby district taking action to address similar appropriation. In 2002, Ossining High School changed their “Indian” mascot after the state education commissioner “requested that districts stop using American Indian symbols as mascots”.¹¹ By separating ourselves from a symbol of imperialist oppression, we can begin the process of redeveloping our values as a community. I am proud and privileged to have grown up in Mahopac, but without a plan to curb the harmful rhetoric that has been tolerated for far too long, our district will be known for our tolerance for racism, rather than the wealth of knowledge and abundant resources in our area.

Join me by initiating Step 1 of my plan to heal our community from the cycle of inequity. This starts with a simple email to Mahopac Central School District’s Superintendent, Anthony DiCarlo, at dicarloa@mahopac.org ([please use the email template below](#)), and ends with growth toward a more inclusive Mahopac.

- Daniel Ehrenpreis is a Mahopac High School 2012 Alumnus currently attending Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health and is partnered with the Center for American Indian Health.

Dear Superintendent DiCarlo,

My name is [Insert your Name Here] and I am a local resident who is very concerned with the continual complacency following multiple incidences of racism involving the Mahopac student body. Daniel Ehrenpreis, a 2012 Mahopac High School Alumnus, wrote an article for the Mahopac News that proposed a 3-step action plan to combat racism in the community [Insert Link to Article Here]. I am in support of his plan and ask that you please contact him via email at dehrenp1@jhu.edu to begin a conversation. The community needs to break this cycle, and you are instrumental in paving the way for a healthier Mahopac. Thank you for your time.

Sincerely,

[Insert your Name Here]

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Appendix B: Common Oppositional Talking Points:

Argument #1: "We've always had the mascot and have never disrespected the Indian. This is a way for us to honor them!"

Response #1: "Some members of these communities believe that the mascots honor or pay tribute to Native Americans and their culture. However, most Native Americans appear to find the portrayal by others of their treasured cultural and religious symbols disparaging and disrespectful. Many others who have looked at this issue concur [1]."
~ Richard P. Mills Commissioner of Education of the State of New York - April 5, 2001

Argument #2: "Other sports teams aren't making this change...why should we?"

Response #2: "Local precedent for this initiative includes: Katonah-Lewisboro in 2019 and Ossining in 2002 which have effectively replaced their Indian mascots [2]. If you want more examples here is a website with a list of over 60 headlines denoting school districts that have changed their Indian mascot: <http://aistm.org/> [3]. The precedent is tangible, yet non-evidence-based arguments and opinions have stymied this process throughout the United States."

Argument #3: "If we change the mascot, we will have to change the symbols on EMS as well!!

What's next, the town's name?! Mahopac is an Indian name!"

Response #3: "This movement is specifically to remove the Indian as a mascot within the school

district, which is where the evidence is in terms of harms to indigenous communities (I.e., "decreasing Native American Youths' Self-Esteem", "decreasing Native American youths' positive beliefs about their community", and "decreasing Native Americans youths' beliefs about their ability to reach their goals"[4]. Overtime we can remove those symbols throughout our community, but that is a different conversation. The name 'Mahopac' is not what we ever want to repeal. The utilization of native culture as a sports symbol and as a mascot is the issue, not the name of the town. Appropriation of a group of individuals to represent a primarily white community is the issue, not the name of the town, which was created by Native Americans."

Argument #4: "This is just PC culture!! [Insert Snowflake Emoji Here]"

Response #4: "We could care less about being PC! This is about giving voice and a platform to a minority group that has been colonized and experienced mass genocide at the hands of previous members of our community! The name 'Indian' is problematic, but the main issue is in us utilizing a culture that does not rightfully belong to our community."

Argument #5: "You don't even know if the Indians hate us being the Mahopac Indians!! So why change it?!"

Response #5: "Daniel Ehrenpreis is partnered with Dr. Melissa Walls and Dr. Melissa Lewis of the Center for American Indian Health. They are experts in the field of indigenous health and have clarified that this is an issue that affects Native American health."

Argument #6: "If you get rid of the Indian you are wiping their culture entirely from Mahopac!

That's furthering the problem!"

Response #6: "Read the whole petition! This is addressed: "It is not my intention to eliminate Native American culture from Mahopac entirely. The biggest issue in our mascot, besides its racist connotation, is that there is no public education regarding the ancestors of our land. Together, we can celebrate and learn about the Wappinger tribe that lived on this territory, and how Mahopac as we know it came to be. There is irony surrounding our pride for the "Mahopac Indians" without knowing anything about the tribe's history." - 4th to Last Paragraph

Argument #7: "Well...I'm part Cherokee...and I'm not offended!"

Response #7: "I highly recommend watching this

video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=loK2DRBnk24> - Start at time mark

3:55." If they choose not to watch the video, ask them the following questions:

"How have you interacted with your heritage? Have you ever lived on a reservation? Do you talk with indigenous leaders/health experts? And if you have, who?" Use these questions as an opportunity to gather information :)

Argument #8: "There are more important issues here that need to be addressed!! Like high taxes!!"

Response #8: "There are many issues that are affecting our community. High taxes are an

excellent example of a priority issue within our municipality. But I propose that the adherence of our society to promoting diversity, maintaining inclusion, and developing equity for all is just as vital of an issue. Every individual will have a different community priority, and this just happens to be mine."

Argument #9: "Our petition has over 3,000 signatures and yours only has less than 1,000. You lost!"

Response #9: "The purpose of this petition was not, and was never, to gain the most amount of signatures. This petition was to start a conversation and reflect upon our emotional ties to a symbol that has never truly belonged to our community. Therefore, I thank you for engaging in this issue, and urge you to continue reflecting on why you feel so strongly about this symbol, and why its retirement enhances your emotions. This is far from over :)"

Appendix C: Mahopac Case Study Letters of Support:



TEACH RESPECT

Superintendent Anthony DiCarlo
Mahopac Central School District
Mahopac, NY

NOT RACISM

January 4, 2020

Dear Superintendent DiCarlo,
I chair the 'Indian' Mascot and Logo Taskforce for Wisconsin Indian Education Association. We are in support of retiring Mahopac's 'Indian' athletic identity. The issue involving race-based 'Indian' mascots is not about feeling good about a sports team identity, or even about treating a logo image with respect. It is not about local-control, high school sport teams travel and host one another in interscholastic play affecting a great many persons who are not district residents. It is not about local historical connections to Indigenous People or place names originating from Indigenous languages. At issue is discrimination law as it applies in our education facilities. It is about schools promoting race-based stereotypes, cultural appropriation and distortion, and the impact of this form of harmful discrimination on all students in all schools. The petition by Mr. Daniel Ehrenpreis is very clear and is supported by a large and ever-growing body of research evidence concerning the impact of Indian mascot stereotypes on Native and nonNative students.

Because it is the responsibility of school boards to set policy and this is an issue involving education policy, it is appropriate that the Mahopac School Board convene the dialogue and take appropriate action toward retiring its race-based athletic identity. This is a matter involving discrimination law, and the question at hand:

Is it ever good education policy for a school to encourage students to stereotype and discriminate against a race of people?

The Wisconsin Indian Education Association has been involved in educational advocacy intended to eliminate the use of this form of stereotyping from Wisconsin school environments since 1991. In 1997 we created the 'Indian' Mascot and Logo Taskforce to work until all such 'Indian' sports team identities are no longer present in Wisconsin schools. Over the years we have seen 37 Wisconsin School Districts retire an Indian mascot identity.

Wisconsin Indian Education Association
"Indian" Mascot & Logo Taskforce
Barbara E. Munson, Chair • 209170 Steeple Rd. • Mosinee, WI 54455

We know that most community members in districts with race-based logos are proud of their sports teams and that as a result it is difficult for many to see that a cherished symbol is in fact a race-based stereotype.

In my role as chairperson for the Taskforce, I have worked with community members, school board members, educators, school administrators, and legislators as they moved through the change process. I am used to seeing people change their view when they think carefully and deeply about this issue. Some changes have been quite elegant and the process of selecting a new and meaningful logo and team name can be a lot of fun for students and community as well. Old athletic identities are often retired with ceremony and teammates and classmates who played under the retired symbols are honored respectfully. We all love our school sports teams and we will love our students when they take the field with a new logo and team name that does no harm to any living person.

I hope that this letter helps you to embrace change. Thirty-seven Wisconsin school districts have found that there is life after logo change. Thousands of schools have changed across the nation. You are now in a position to lead the community of Mahopac through a process resulting in responsible change. This is a difficult journey you are embarking on, as people who have been living in close proximity to 'Indian' mascots become inured to stereotypes. When High School sports teams were first organized in the early 1900's no one knew that 'Indian' mascots were a peculiarly harmful form of racial discrimination. The first peer reviewed research specific to the impact of 'Indian' athletic identities on Native and non-Native students was published in 2002. Since then an ever-growing body of research increasingly reveals the nature of this form of discrimination. We did not know, now we do. I hope that you will create a thoughtful process, that you will move forward with compassion for all, and that you will be surprised to find joy and healing every step of the way. Please feel free to reach out to our Taskforce for resource sharing and support as needed.

Oskⁿsu Peace to You,



Barbara E. Munson (Oneida)

Wisconsin Indian Education Association
"Indian" Mascot & Logo Taskforce
Barbara E. Munson, Chair • 209170 Steeple Rd. • Mosinee, WI 54455
Phone (715) 571-9296 • E-Mail Barb@Munson.net

TO: Members of the Board of Education of Mahopac Central School District
Leslie Mancuso, President mancuso1@mahopac.org
Michael Mongon, Vice President mongonm@mahopac.org
David Furfaro, Trustee furfarod@mahopac.org
Lawrence Keane, Trustee keanel@mahopac.org
Lucy Massafra, Trustee massafra1@mahopac.org
Ray McDonough, Trustee mcdonoughr@mahopac.org
Mark O'Connor, Trustee oconnorm@mahopac.org
Michael Simone, Trustee simonem@mahopac.org
Adam Savino, Trustee savinoa@mahopac.org

CC: Mahopac District Superintendent Anthony DiCarlo
dicarloa@mahopac.org
Daniel Ehrenpreis dehrenp1@jhu.edu

DATE: January 11, 2020

FROM: Harvey S. Gunderson, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, President and Co-Founder, Religious Americans Against 'Indian' Nicknames & Logos (RAAINL)

SUBJECT: Ending interscholastic racial discrimination, interscholastic racial stereotyping and interscholastic racial bullying at Mahopac Central School District

Dear members of the Mahopac Central School District Board of Education:

Our Civil Rights organization, Religious Americans Against 'Indian' Nicknames & Logos (RAAINL) joins with over 117 other American Indian, educational, psychological, sociological, civil rights and religious organizations in asking the Board of Education of Mahopac Central School District to eliminate race from your athletic identity policy. It is educationally unsound, divisive, and a violation of several of your own current policies to use the race-based athletic identity of 'Indians'.

The Mahopac Board of Education has two policies that explicitly involve race, and these two policies conflict with one another. The first policy is your non-discrimination policy which says that you do not discriminate based on race. Your second policy involving race is your athletic identity policy targeting American Indians, wherein your athletic teams are identified by the race-based identity of 'Indians'.

Your race-based athletic identity policy violates your own nondiscrimination policy because unrefuted peer-reviewed research shows that a race-based athletic identity harmfully discriminates against American Indian students but also harmfully discriminates against all other racial minority students. Research of Dr. Stephanie Fryberg et al. has showed that exposure to

race-based athletic identities lowers the self-esteem and has other negative psychological effects on American Indian students while simultaneously artificially ‘boosting’ the self-esteem of European-American students. A policy specifically based on race targeting American Indians which **BENEFITS** the racial **MAJORITY** but **HARMS** the targeted racial **MINORITY** is **the very definition of “harmful discrimination based on race”**.

Second, in addition to a nondiscrimination policy, most school districts have a policy to avoid racial stereotyping. The unrefuted research of Dr. Chu Kim-Prieto et al. has determined that exposure to race-based athletic identities increases receptivity to stereotypes about **ALL OTHER RACIAL MINORITIES**. This is a second reason for why it’s critical that you **FIND A BASIS OTHER THAN RACE** to use as your athletic identity. The fact that research shows that a race-based athletic policy increases receptivity to stereotyping of **OTHER RACIAL MINORITIES** means that your race-based policy not only **HARMFULLY DISCRIMINATES AGAINST AMERICAN INDIANS** but also **HARMS ALL OTHER RACIAL MINORITIES**.

In addition to discrimination and stereotyping policies, most school districts also have an anti-bullying policy. Your District presumably has such a policy. It’s important that you recognize that your school’s race-based athletic policy also violates your own anti-bullying policy because it’s widely recognized among educators that use of an 'Indians' athletic identity is a form of **"racial bullying"**.

Accordingly, your race-based athletic policy violates three very important Mahopac Central School District policies:

- (1) your nondiscrimination policy,
- (2) your policy against racial stereotyping, and
- (3) your anti-bullying policy.

The importance you give these policies is reflected in your website stating: “New York State’s Dignity for All Students Act (The Dignity Act) seeks to provide the State’s public elementary and secondary school students with a safe and supportive environment free from discrimination, intimidation, taunting, harassment, and bullying on school property, a school bus and/or at a school function.”

VERY IMPORTANTLY, the aforementioned research shows that it’s not only American Indian and other minority students enrolled at **YOUR** Mahopac Central School District who are being harmed but also **AMERICAN INDIAN AND OTHER RACIAL MINORITY STUDENTS ENROLLED IN EVERY OTHER SCHOOL DISTRICT THAT YOU COMPETE AGAINST** in athletics. That’s why we call your practice of using a race-based athletic identity (1) **“interscholastic discrimination”**, (2) **“interscholastic stereotyping”** and (3) **“interscholastic racial bullying”**.

I’ve been involved since 2002 as a civil rights activist to eliminate race-based athletic identities at the high school, college and professional level. During those 18 years, I’ve dealt with or followed hundreds of schools and read over 5,000 news articles about this issue. During that time, I periodically encounter school board members who try to avoid dealing with the reality that their race-based policy is discriminatory and promotes stereotyping and bullying. They often say, "Our School Board has more important things to deal with." I ask such board members to

list items they deem so important that they can't also simultaneously address ongoing harmful racial discrimination against minority students, ongoing stereotyping of minority students, and ongoing racial bullying of minority students.

If a board member responds, it's usually a list of items that benefit or impact the White students in their school district (often as well as minority students). The board member in essence is saying "These issues that impact our White students are of greater importance to me than racial discrimination, stereotyping and bullying because those other issues only impact the minority students." Sadly, such a statement in itself implies the board member believes that "only issues that involve and positively impact White students really matter enough to merit our time and attention", and implies that race-based matters that directly negatively impact racial minority students are comparatively unimportant. That demonstrates a racist and/or discriminatory attitude on the part of that school board member.

I've yet to encounter a governmental entity that's so incompetent that they're incapable of dealing with more than one issue at a time. A school board member who says that "We can't deal with harmful discrimination based on race with our athletic identity because we have other more important matters to deal with" is basically admitting that he or she thinks that their school board is so incompetent that they can't deal with several issues at the same time. In reality, it's a "refusal" to deal with (or to delay dealing with) matters that harm minority students --- which indicates a very racist attitude.

I like to ask school board members who believe that using a race-based athletic identity is unimportant, "Can you remember anywhere in our Nation's history parallel to what your School District is going through? Can you think of a time in history when American school boards had a race-based policy targeting a specific racial minority group?" I then remind them of school districts named Topeka, Little Rock, Birmingham and Montgomery.

Other than it being (1) a different protected minority group being targeted and (2) a different area of school policy, they're virtually identical. Both involve an official school board policy ... that's based on race ... that targets a specified racial minority group ... where research showed that that the race-based policy was psychologically harmful to the targeted minority students. One involves attendance policy, and the other involves athletics policy. One involves African Americans, and the other involves American Indians. Other than those two substitutions, the concept is the same: a school board decided to base a school policy on race and to target a specific minority group with that race-based policy. In both cases, psychological research showed that the race-based policy psychologically harms students of the targeted minority race.

You'll likely recall that race-based school policies didn't work out well for the Topeka, Little Rock, Montgomery or Birmingham school districts during the last century. And it's not working well now, over fifty years later in 2020, for school boards like yours that still cling to a race-based school policy.

I like to say (sarcastically), "So you're telling me that your School Board in the year 2020 actually still has a School Board policy based on race? And that policy targets a protected minority group? And there's unrefuted research showing that the race-based school policy psychologically harms the targeted minority students as well as all other racial minority students? Wow! And you're also telling me that unrefuted research also shows that your race-

based school policy psychologically harms minority students attending not only **YOUR** school but also minority students attending **EVERY** school district your high school competes against in athletics? Wow! What could **POSSIBLY** go wrong with an amazing policy like that?"

Having observed hundreds of school districts during the last 18 years, I've noticed common patterns. One is that administrators and school board members are often afraid to address this matter because of fear of the change being controversial. Administrators and/or school board members often then try to "ignore" the issue with the hope that the issue will "go away" if they ignore it or delay action. The implied attitude is "Just go away and leave us alone". Sometimes that approach works ... for a short while ... but then the issue will be brought up again ... perhaps by the same person or group ... or by a different person or group. But the matter of using race for an athletic identity will **ALWAYS** return as an issue ... again and again ... and again and again ... more and more frequently ... until the School Board eventually acts to eliminate the race-based athletic identity. And this will happen in Mahopac as well. I guarantee it!

The sad thing is that board members often don't realize that their refusal to deal with this racial matter today simply prolongs the agony and makes it more difficult for their school and community. It's inevitable that race will be eliminated from **EVERY** athletic identity in **EVERY** public school in the United States. It's only a matter of "when" for any specific school. If the current Board doesn't end the use of race for an athletic identity, then a subsequent School Board will be forced to **AGAIN** address the issue which should have been addressed by the **PREVIOUS** Board. The fact that this issue will be brought up with increasing frequency at your Mahopac Central School District should cause your current Administrators to say, "Let's address this now and get it over with once and for all instead of our school and community enduring this controversy repeatedly. We know it's inevitable that we're going to have to change our athletic identity eventually, so dealing with the matter sooner rather than later is better for both our students, our school and our community. Besides, it's the educationally sound thing to do."

Why don't school board members realize this issue won't go away until they eliminate race from their athletic identity? Usually it's because board members are very uninformed about the issue. They have little contact with American Indian educators and little exposure to matters of concern to American Indians. Board members typically don't realize that the body of educational and psychological research is growing every year that reconfirms the harmfulness of race-based athletic identities. They don't realize that there are over 117 organizations working to eliminate race-based athletic identities in schools. This includes almost every major credible American Indian, educational, psychological, sociological, counseling, civil rights and religious organization. In contrast, no credible organization advocates for retaining these identities. (There is a group that tries to pass itself off as such, but no one whom I respect views the group as even slightly credible.)

Because school administrators and board members often resist having the matter brought to their attention, they often look for someone to "blame" for being put into an awkward and controversial situation. Sadly, they often "blame" the person or organization who brought the matter to their attention by requesting change. But the "fault" lies with their School Board predecessors who served on the School Board typically during the first half of the last century

when they initially decided it would be a “great idea” to use race as the basis for the Mahopac high school’s athletic identity,.

During that time when interscholastic athletics was a new concept, school boards typically chose athletic identities with the idea that the identity should give the impression that the team was strong, tough, fierce and intimidating to opposing teams. Most school boards chose scary and intimidating high school athletic team names based on a predatory bird (eagles, falcons, hawks), a fierce mammal (tigers, lions, bears, panthers, wildcats, cougars, bobcats), a scary ancient war-like occupation (warriors, knights, Trojans, Vikings, raiders, Spartans, pirates), a scary mythical or supernatural being (dragons, devils), a terrifying natural phenomena (hurricanes, tornadoes, thunder, storm), etc.

While other school boards based their athletic identities on the many non-racial options available to intimidate their athletic adversaries, your predecessors on the Mahopac Board of Education decided to use race (i.e., ‘Indians’) as the basis for your team’s identity. During that earlier era of “cowboy and Indian movies” during the first half of the last Century when school districts were establishing interscholastic athletic programs and choosing team identities, the name of ‘Indians’ was viewed as a fierce and scary team name that would intimidate opposing teams just as did predatory birds, fierce mammals, scary ancient war-like occupations, scary mythical or supernatural beings, and terrifying natural phenomena. During that era of extreme racial insensitivity toward American Indians during the first half of the Twentieth Century, those Board members didn’t realize they were creating a future problem for you, a successor Board member, by deciding to use race as the basis for the team identity.

Looking back with the benefit of hindsight from our current position in 2020, it’s clear that Mahopac Board members in the early 20th Century made a mistake by deciding to use race as an athletic identity. When someone approaches you now to ask you to eliminate race from your school’s athletic identity, understand that it’s not “their fault” that you’re being asked to address this matter. In fact, it shouldn’t even be necessary for someone to request the change because you as the decision-makers responsible for students and education in the District should take the initiative and make the change on your own. Members of the Board should initiate the process rather than forcing a person or group to come forward to potentially be demonized as so often happens in communities when a request for change comes from outside the Board. I’ve seen many American Indian families (and others) forced to leave their community because they were demonized for asking the school board to stop using race as an athletic identity. Please don’t put people through this in your District. It’s time for you as individual Board members to demonstrate leadership on this issue and to move forward in a positive way.

In that regard, how your community navigates its way to a successful change is largely up to you. You can manage the process to minimize the chances of extreme controversy, or you can do it in a way that’s likely to prolong agony and tear your community apart. I want to help you design a path forward that will more likely enable positive change that most in your community can accept. And it’s in that spirit that I write this letter, to try to help you avoid potential pitfalls for your school and community.

The approach with the best chance of getting your community to take a healthy path is to consider all relevant evidence bearing on a Board decision to replace the race-based approach. The key word here is “evidence”. Most school boards take pride in their use of “evidence-based

decision making” or “research-based decision making”. Particularly, decisions should be made based on the best and most complete information available.

Most community members can accept a decision that’s transparent and from fact-based “evidence”, not flippantly-generated “opinions” based on nothing more than familiarity and comfortableness with past race-based practices. The research base is vast and growing, confirming and reconfirming that race-based athletic identities are educationally unsound, divisive, don’t allow students to have fun with their athletic identity because vigilance is needed to monitor student behavior to prevent inappropriate signs, cheers, etc. Young people especially understand why using race is so divisive and inappropriate. Educators and administrators usually understand this as well. But it’s only the members of the Board that can make the change, which is why leadership and understanding from each of you is so crucial.

In conclusion, we and over 117 other organizations encourage you to immediately start the process to eliminate race from your policy in the interest of helping everyone including:

- all current and future **American Indian students** attending both your school and all competing schools and their families, (because research determined that American Indians suffer a decrease in self-esteem and other psychological harm by exposure to race-based athletic identities targeting American Indians)
- all current and future **students of other racial minorities** attending your school and all competing schools and their families, (because research determined that exposure to race-based athletic identities targeting American Indians increases receptivity to stereotyping of other racial minorities)
- all current and future **non-minority students** attending your school and all competing schools and their families, (so they aren’t miseducated to believe that racial stereotyping is acceptable, miseducating them for a diverse workplace following graduation)
- current and future **Mahopac administrators**, (so they don’t have to deal with an issue often viewed as a ‘hot potato’ for administrators because they fear retaliation from community members if they were to communicate their honest education-based views regarding this issue)
- current and future **Mahopac teachers and other staff**, (because most teachers typically realize that a race-based athletic identity is educationally unsound)
- **future Mahopac School Board members** (so they don’t have to deal with an issue because you failed to end what otherwise will be a returning and never-ending controversy),
- current and future **school board members at the New York school districts that don’t use a race-based athletic identity**, (because it’s unfair to them that in spite of their efforts to protect their own minority students from racial discrimination, other school boards including yours use race for their athletic identity policy and victimize all minority students through interscholastic racial discrimination, stereotyping and bullying)
- current and future **school board members of the other New York school districts** still using a race-based athletic identity, (because your example of educational leadership can encourage and enable them to follow your lead and eliminate race from their own athletic identity policy)
- all current and future citizens of New York. (because as Doug Chickering, a former Executive Director of another state athletic association said, eliminating ‘Indian’ athletic identities is “the right thing to do” and “now is the time to act”)

We named our Civil Rights organization “Religious Americans Against ‘Indian’ Nicknames & Logos” (RAAINL) because we believe this is a moral and ethical issue. We believe a race-based policy that harms innocent children violates the principles inherent in every major religion. Many religious organizations and national church denominations have advocated for change. We believe that regardless of a person’s sense of religion or spirituality, using a race-based athletic identity is an indefensible moral and ethical matter. Whatever your individual sense of spirituality may be, please consider how this matter is a moral and ethical issue important to you.

Given that there are at least 117 American Indian, educational, psychological, sociological, civil rights and religious organizations with adopted resolutions opposing race-based athletic identities, especially in schools where students are at the critical stage of life where they are dealing with matters of identity formation, how can a responsible adult allow continuation of a policy that harms innocent children and miseducates all students? How does one defend discrimination, stereotyping and racial bullying? Especially how does one justify **knowingly** continuing a discriminatory practice that promotes stereotyping and bullying?

Your website states that “One or more employees in every school building has been designated as a Dignity Act Coordinator and trained in methods to respond to human relations in the areas of race ...” Your website lists 27 “Dignity Act Coordinators”. I ask that a copy of this letter be sent to each of the 27 Dignity Act Coordinators to help them understand the harm that arises from the School District’s use of race for an athletic policy, and also to assist them in understanding why they, while serving in the role of a Dignity Act Coordinator, should be pushing from within the School District to encourage the Administration and Board of Education to replace the ‘Indians’ athletic identity.

To you as School Board members, I thank you for your commitments as reflected on the District website to education, to Civil Rights, and to opposing discrimination, stereotyping and bullying. It’s now time for you to make the required changes and end the interscholastic discrimination, interscholastic stereotyping and interscholastic racial bullying that is harming minority students enrolled in every New York school district across the entire state that may encounter your teams in conference, nonconference, tournament, playoff and championship competition..

Please contact me if you have questions or need clarification. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Harvey S. Gunderson, Ph.D., Professor Emeritus, President and Co-Founder,
Religious Americans Against ‘Indian’ Nicknames & Logos (RAAINL)

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To Whom it May Concern,

I am writing to express my support for the efforts to remove the racially insensitive and harmful Indian mascot in the Mahopac school district. I serve as the appointed Ambassador the Penobscot Nation, one of five Indigenous Nations in Maine. My role is to serve as the government representative and diplomat for my tribe. Last year in working with the Maine State Legislature I was able to help pass two pieces of legislation, one was to change Columbus Day to Indigenous Peoples Day; and the other was a ban on Indian mascots. We are the first state in the nation to accomplish the latter.

I have been active in advocating for the removal in these mascots for twenty years now. I began as a teenager when I saw peers at local high schools acting out stereotypical and demeaning behaviors that diminished and discriminated against my racial and spiritual identity. The fake feathers, war paints, dancing and hollering all were extremely harmful to me as a child who had been raised to view my culture as sacred and worthy of respect. It made no sense to me that others could wear my existence like a costume. As I grew older and developed more of an understanding of why these mascots cause harm I found a large amount of professional research and data that details why my feelings were valid and accurate. I would encourage you to read supporting documentation that will be submitted to you by myself and others about why keeping these mascots is detrimental to students and community members of all races.

Below please find my testimony that I submitted in support of our bill here in Maine that was signed into law by Governor Janet Mills in 2019:

Testimony in Support of LD944: An Act to Ban Native American Mascots by Representative Benjamin Collins by request of Ambassador Maulian Dana of the Penobscot Nation Submitted to: The Education and Cultural Affairs Committee March 25, 2019 Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and Honorable Members of the Committee, Thank you for taking the time to consider this important legislation and for taking public input at this stage of the bill. I know better than anyone that this is an issue that stirs passionate debate on both sides and I encourage you to consider not just the sensationalized nature of people debating a controversial topic but look closer and examine the facts and realities. I will present many factual arguments as to why this bill is the right move for Maine and also my perspective as an indigenous woman who has grown up in a reservation community and raises my children in that community, children who are Penobscot Citizens and at ages 10 and 12 will be high school students very soon. This bill is important for us all on a policy level but deeply important to me personally. Let's start with facts. You will hear many opinions on this today and some of them will try to discredit the factual evidence we can provide. It is a fact that Indian mascot use is harmful and adds to the intergenerational trauma of indigenous people. It is a fact that we have the highest rates of suicide of any group. It is a fact that children as young as 8 have suicidal ideations in our community. It is a fact that we suffer high rates of alcoholism, drug abuse, mental health struggles, and poverty. It is a fact that the societal acceptance of Indian mascots increases the impact of all of these plagues on our people. When people see us as less than human they treat us as such. When people steal and misuse our identity they render us and the totality of the indigenous heritage and experience invisible. When you think you can call yourself an Indian because it is

your high school mascot it is a fact that you are carrying out racism and privilege against those of us who are actual Indians and have requested that you stop your behavior. It is also a fact that under Maine law it is a crime to identify as a tribal nation when you are not one. It is a fact that many scholarly studies have been done on this and all of them have called for the end of Indian mascot use because of the harm it causes to Indigenous students and all students. It is a disservice to the people of Maine to allow a harmful practice in the schools. I will provide these studies as supporting documents to this testimony. I started my activism around Indian mascot use when I was in high school and watched the Nokomis Warriors play the Skowhegan Indians play a basketball game. I was watching at home with my father who was Chief of the Nation at that point so I had a front row seat to many of the issues facing the Wabanaki tribes of Maine the battles over constantly defending our homeland, river, and inherent sovereignty. When we sat down to watch the game together, I experienced a turning point in my life. The fans, students, bands, cheerleaders, and some players from both teams were exemplifying all the reasons that Indian mascots are harmful. Among the shocking behaviors I witnessed there were fake feathers, fake Indian regalia, fake war chanting and stereotypical hand motions, hand over the mouth Hollywood Indian war whooping, and silly looking dancing. A gymnasium full of people of all ages from two communities in my state were all mocking and marginalizing the existence and culture I had been taught to respect and honor things that I held so close to the roots of my identity. I was hurt, I was confused, and I was angry. . . And I wasn't alone. I was able to be mentored and supported by various adults that were fighting to work to end these mascots and I started a now two decades career educating on these mascots and how they affect my people and advocating for their removal so that Indigenous people in Maine have equality and are not discriminated against or degraded because of our race. We are the only group that is used in this manner. Often times people point to Vikings, Cowboys, or Irish themed mascots so invalidate our fight but these other groups are occupations or Nationalities. We are the only racial group used this way. The most challenging case I have seen in my lengthy work on this both prior to my Ambassador appointment and during is the Skowhegan High School mascot. After a long and messy battle the school board voted last month to retire the Indian mascot and this made national news and is widely celebrated as a great thing for Maine and part of what we hope is a new dawn in tribal state relations. A resistance has formed in a group calling themselves Skowhegan Indian Pride. The name is misleading seeing as how the Skowhegan area and surrounding districts are less than 2 percent Native American according to recent census data. They are protesting the mascot removal and attempting to essentially blackmail the school board by making problems for the budget to pass in the town unless the mascot is reinstated. Passing this bill would free up the good people of MSAD54 from this nonsense and allow them to focus on education and the important duties of a school board. Skowhegan Indian Pride has been operating as a racist organization since the 2015 vote that the school board made to keep the mascot. They have produced memes mocking alcoholism in indigenous populations, suggested that I personally should be raped and passed around a tipi" and that my body be traded for beaver grease , they have used slurs against Indigenous people on numerous occasions, threatened to intimidate me with a "scalp towel" (a relic from Skowhegan games many years ago depicting a hand holding a clump of hair which is a reference to the torture, murder, and

hunting of Wabanaki Nations of Maine), and many more aggressive and racist statements emboldened by their mascot. Now that they don't have it anymore they are attempting to manipulate the processes of the district under watch of elected school board members. However this bill is not about Skowhegan. This bill is about landmark legislation that sends a message of truth, honor, respect, and a clear message that Maine will not support racism and that the government represents all of its citizens. These mascots are changing all over the country and other states are looking into statewide bans. In Cleveland the Indians baseball team has agreed to retire the racist Chief Wahoo because of pressure from Tribal Nations and this is a huge step that we hope to keep chipping away at a national level. There is also a battle going on against the Washington DC football team who funds an organization name Native American Guardians Association (NAGA) in order to make it look like Indigenous People are accepting of their racial slur mascot.. NAGA has also made an appearance in Skowhegan. They are not affiliated with any indigenous Nation and some of their members have been proven to be lying about their heritage. This is a very widespread and complicated battle over these mascots and Maine has a chance to be a leader for the Nation in taking a stand over removing this racist practice from learning environments. I regret not being there in person for the hearing but our circle of support has grown into a movement and we will be represented very well. I would love to meet and discuss this bill with any of you personally and will attend the work session. I am out of town for a family matter but will be back very soon. Thank you for reading and I hope you listen with an open heart and mind to the request of all the Tribal Nations of Maine that we do not want to be a mascot.

I am thankful for the work of those in your community who are leading this important change and I am happy to answer any further questions you may have. The Indian mascot ban in Maine has been an important step for my state and has already produced a great deal of positive changes. I am hopeful you can listen to those requesting this change with an open heart and mind and that you can think about those of us who are targeted and most affected by these mascots when considering your options.

Here is a link to a Ted Talk I recently gave on this subject:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XVAdGXrU60w>

Thank you for your time,

Maulian Dana

Tribal Ambassador, Penobscot Nation

Maulian Dana

Penobscot Nation

Tribal Ambassador

(207)817-7306

(207)944-9013

Hello School Administrators and School Committee members in Mahopac -

I am a scholar who studies the topic of Native American mascots (i.e., nicknames & logos) for about 25 years. And, I manage an email list of scholars from a variety of disciplines who do the same.

I am writing to you about your town nickname/logo.

More specifically, I am writing to share critical research findings with you on the topic of Native American mascots.

Here are the most relevant findings:

(a) Scholars agree that Native American mascots in sport are stereotypes. This is because almost all of these mascots depict Native Americans as homogeneous and only as male warriors from the past. Yet, many people in the U.S. do not perceive these mascots as stereotypes because they have little meaningful contact with contemporary Native Americans and because they perceive these mascots as positive compliments. In regard to the latter point, many people in the U.S. do not recognize ostensibly positive stereotypes as stereotypes and do not understand that these stereotypes are harmful, despite the fact that research reveals a variety of problems associated with ostensibly positive stereotypes.

(b) Research demonstrates that Native American mascots reflect and reinforce racial stereotypes and prejudice. More specifically, this research reveals that: these mascots are associated with negative thoughts and negative stereotypes of Native Americans, people who support these mascots are more likely (than people who oppose them) to believe prejudicial ideas about Native Americans, and exposure to these mascots increases stereotyping of Native Americans. For example, in a 2011 article in the journal *American Indian and Alaska Native Mental Health Research*, Chaney et al. report their findings, that although their White participants tended to have favorable opinions of Native mascots, at an implicit level these participants were more likely to associate these mascots with negative thoughts and negative stereotypes of Native Americans. In a different study, in *Journal of Consumer Psychology* in 2017, Angle et al. reported the finding that when liberal people were exposed to a generic Native American sport logo, this strengthened their unconscious stereotyping of Native Americans as warlike. In a third study, in 2010 in *Journal of Applied Social Psychology*, Kim-Prieto et al. reported the surprising finding that exposure to the Native American Chiefs logo from the University of Illinois led to greater stereotyping of Asian Americans!

(c) Most importantly, research demonstrates that Native American mascots directly harm Native Americans in several ways. More specifically, research reveals that these mascots generate a hostile climate for Native Americans, and these mascots diminish Native Americans' self-esteem, capacity to imagine possible future selves, and faith in their communities. For example, in 2011 in the journal *American Indian and Alaskan Native Mental Health Research*, LaRocque et al. reported that they found that Native American students at the University of North Dakota experienced significantly more negative feelings and distress than

non-Native students after seeing slide shows of Fighting Sioux mascot images. In the journal *Basic and Applied Social Psychology* in 2008, Fryberg et al. revealed findings that when Native American youth (from two high schools and one college) were exposed to a variety of Native American mascots, this depressed their self-esteem, sense of future possibilities for themselves, and faith in their Native American communities.

Research reveals that, in mainstream U.S. media and popular culture, Native Americans are both greatly underrepresented as contemporary people and stereotyped as people of the past, contributing to widespread belief in historical myths about Native Americans and very limited knowledge of contemporary Native Americans. One of the many goals of the contemporary Native American rights movement is to rectify this situation. Related to this goal, in the 1960s Native American activists began to address the issue of Native American sports mascots.

A large number of Native American organizations have taken a stand against Native American mascots, including the National Indian Education Association and National Congress of American Indians, which is the largest Native American organization in the U.S. and represents over 250 tribes. People may be surprised to learn that many academic organizations have done the same, including three of the largest bodies of social scientists in the U.S.: American Anthropological Association, American Psychological Association, and American Sociological Association.

To summarize, although many people in the U.S. do not perceive Native American mascots as problematic, research findings demonstrate that Native American mascots are educationally harmful to both Native and non-Native students. These mascots are harmful because to Native youth because they create a hostile climate for learning. These mascots are harmful to non-Native youth because they reflect and reinforce stereotyping. Those making decisions about Native American mascots should make educationally sound decisions, and educationally sound decisions rely on research findings because these findings are derived from systematic and careful collection and analysis of data. The educationally sound decision is to eliminate Native American mascots.

For these reasons, I urge you to eliminate the Native-associated nickname and logo associated with your school district.

Sincerely yours,

Laurel R. Davis-Delano
Professor of Sociology



January 20, 2020

Dear Superintendent DiCarlo and Mahopac School Board Members:

The Center for American Indian Health at Johns Hopkins University has a mission to work in partnership with American Indian and Alaska Native communities to improve the health status, self-sufficiency, and health leadership of Native people. To this end, we wish to bring to your attention several important, empirically supported statements about the harmful effects of “Indian” mascots on health. Namely, such mascots are shown to:

- Promote inaccurate and disrespectful images and stereotypes about Indigenous culture, spirituality, and traditions
- Decrease self-esteem among Native students and young adults
- Increase negative attitudes towards Natives by non-Native Americans (even if the mascot is not perceived as “offensive”)
- Promote discrimination, which has been linked to elevated levels of depressive symptoms, health problems, suicidality, and substance abuse
- Create unwelcoming learning environments, particularly for Native students
- Undermine educational experiences and opportunities to learn about Native culture, history, and modern experiences for all students

“Indian” mascots perpetuate erroneous and troublesome stereotypes about what it means to be an Indigenous person in America and create an environment that can feel unsafe and unwelcoming for diverse students. Numerous health scholars and organizations have called for the removal of these mascots from organizations nationally; for example, the American Psychological Association released a resolution over 15 years ago calling for the “immediate retirement of all American Indian mascots, symbols, images and personalities by schools, colleges, universities, athletic teams and organizations.” We support school districts, colleges and universities, and professional sporting teams in their efforts to remove these mascots and support more just, fair, and appropriate messages and mascots that promote safety for all students.

Respectfully,

Melissa L. Walls, PhD

Bois Forte & Couchiching First Nation Ojibwe

Associate Professor, Johns Hopkins University Bloomberg School of Public Health

Director, Great Lakes Hub, Center for American Indian Health

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218-724-1665

COALITION OF NATIVES & ALLIES
TEACH RESPECT NOT RACISM

Superintendent Anthony DiCarlo ,
School Board of Directors
Mahopac Central School District
Mahopac, NY



January 16, 2020

Dear Superintendent DiCarlo and School Board of Directors ,

Recently created on the East Coast, we are CNA : Coalition of Natives & Allies and we are in strong support of retiring Mahopac's 'Indian' athletic identity sports mascot.

The issue involving race-based 'Indian' mascots is not about feeling good about a sports team identity or even about treating a logo image with respect. It is not about local historical connections to Indigenous People or place names originating from Indigenous languages or honoring Indigenous People.

It is about schools promoting race-based stereotypes, cultural appropriation and distortion, and the impact of this form of harmful discrimination for all students in every school.

The petition by Mr. Daniel Ehrenpreis is very clear and is supported by a large and ever-growing body of research evidence concerning the impact of Indian mascot stereotypes on Native and non-Native students. Supporting one stereotype teaches students that all stereotypes are acceptable, many research studies bear this out.

Because it is the responsibility of school boards to set policy and this is an issue involving education policy, it is appropriate that the Mahopac School Board convene the dialogue and take appropriate action toward retiring its racist athletic identity.

This is a matter involving discrimination law and the question at hand is: Is it ever good education policy for a school to encourage students to stereotype and discriminate against a race of people?

We know that most community members in districts with race-based logos are proud of their sports teams and that as a result it is difficult for many to see that a cherished symbol is in fact a race-based stereotype.

Many Native people and organizations have been working very hard for many decades to help bring about positive changes in schools and sports teams which use natives as a representation for their predominantly non native communities . We often see people change their views when they think carefully and deeply about this human rights issue. The process of selecting a new and meaningful logo and team name can be a lot of fun for students and community as well.

Old athletic identities are often retired with ceremony and teammates/classmates who played under the retired symbols are honored respectfully. We all love our school sports teams and we will applaud our students when they take the field with a new logo and team name that is not disrespectful to any living person or group.

Thirty-seven Wisconsin school districts have found that there is life after native mascotry name/logo change, thousands of schools have changed across the nation and Maine is leading the way by adopting legislation in the first statewide ban on the use native mascotry.

You are now in a position to lead the community of Mahopac through a process resulting in responsible change. This is a difficult journey you are embarking on as alumni and community members become inured to stereotypes which are intertwined with mascots, logos and archaic imagery. When High School sports teams were first organized in the early 1900's no one knew that 'Indian' mascots were a peculiarly harmful form of racial discrimination. The first peer reviewed research specific to the impact of 'Indian' athletic identities on Native and non-Native students was published in 2002, since then an ever-growing body of research increasingly reveals the nature of this form of discrimination. We did not know but now we do and when we know better, we should do better.

We are hopeful that you will create a thoughtful process which will help you move forward with compassion for all and that you will find joy and healing every step of the way. Once you embrace change you'll realize that it can be quite a proud educational moment for the whole community.

Please feel free to reach out to our Coalition for resource sharing and support as needed.

Regards,

Donna L Fann-Boyle , Choctaw/Cherokee , American Indian Movement Central Texas ,
Indigenous 215

Ramona Ioronhiala Woods, Mohawk, American Indian Movement Central Texas

Mabel Negrete (CNS), Chola/Ngulumapu-Chilean artist and activist at Counter Narrative Society (CNS), and cofounder of Indigenous 215 and Indigenous Peoples' Day Philly Inc

Lynne Azarchi, Director, Kidsbridge Tolerance Center

Arla Patch, former Community Engagement Coordinator, Maine-Wabanaki REACH.

COALITION OF NATIVES & ALLIES (CNA)

Cultivating Unity to End Racism (CUER)

Dear Superintendent DiCarlo and all Mahopac Central School District board of education trustees,

Almost 19 years have passed since then New York State Education Department Commissioner, Richard Mills, called upon all relevant New York State schools to retire their institutionalized use of "Indian" sports team tokens like that still used by the Mahopac Central School District. Although Mr. Mills' findings and recommendations were directed to all New York State schools some, such as your own, apparently didn't receive or chose to ignore them. Here for your potential convenience and use is a link to the NYSED's April 5, 2001 position statement. <http://aistm.org/2001nysed.htm>

This document, as you may know, is only one of many others put forth by established, respected, and credible entities. Among such organizations are the National Congress of American Indians, the National Indian Education Association, the American Psychological Association, the National Education Association, and the United States Commission on Civil Rights. All of these documents and more can be found here <http://aistm.org/> and here: <http://aistm.org/more.educators.resources.htm>

It is, as I see it, difficult and just plain wrong for an objective party to purposely disregard the authoritative views expressed by such professionals in preference of biased, self-serving and often uniformed opinions.

Though arguments commonly heard from those who favor retention of these harmful, antiquated practices frequently contend they are intended to be an "honor" or a sign of "respect," it need be asked how this is possible when living Native Peoples have for more than 50 years repeatedly said such things are hurtful, demeaning, and in need of being retired?

Doing the right thing isn't always easy and doing the easy thing isn't right. Far from being a matter falling under the nebulous umbrella of the bludgeon-like "politically correct" buzzwords, I respectfully urge you to embrace what American Indian and non-Native organizations have for years concluded about this. In so doing you have an opportunity to bring your district into the 21st century while making a small but but meaningful healing gesture by way of properly remedying this complex, emotionally volatile, education, civil and human rights related issue in your public schools.

Nothing lasts forever. Not mountains or empires or even public schools' institutionalized use like your own of a historically persecuted minority for its fun, games, and identity. Please choose and act with wisdom, compassion, and forward looking vision.

Sincerely,

Robert Eurich
Endicott, NY

Greetings Principal Lawrence, Superintendent DiCarlo, and the Mahopac Central School District Board:

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), I am writing in response to a request for assistance that we received from a member of the Mahopac High School community. This individual informed us that the Mahopac High School community is [currently engaged in a conversation](#) about whether to keep its “Indians” name and mascot, and asked if NCAI would provide the school and school board with some general information about the facts concerning the harms caused by the continued use of Native “themed” mascots in sports and popular culture. That is the purpose of this email.

NCAI is the oldest, largest, and most representative national organization representing tribal nations and peoples. It has been leading Indian Country’s movement to eradicate offensive Native “themed” mascots from sports and popular culture for the past fifty years. As a resolution passed by NCAI’s membership in 2005 explains, “the use of ‘Native American’ sports mascots, logos, or symbols perpetuates stereotypes of American Indians that are very harmful. The ‘warrior savage’ myth has plagued this country’s relationships with the Indian people, as it reinforces the racist view that Indians are uncivilized and uneducated and it has been used to justify policies of forced assimilation and destruction of Indian culture.”

Below and attached are some links and resources that provide additional details about NCAI and Indian Country’s broad opposition to the use of these mascots, as well as the harms that they cause:

National Education Coalition Resolution: Supporting Removal of Native Themed Mascots

<https://ra.nea.org/business-item/2018-nbi-120/>

National Indian Education Coalition Resolution: Elimination of Race-Based Indian Logos, Mascots, and Names

<http://www.niea.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/promoting-healthy-lifestyles-and-Well-Being%20for-native-students/2009-05.pdf>

CNN: Maine to become first state to ban Native American mascots in public schools

<https://www.cnn.com/2019/05/17/us/maine-bans-native-american-mascots/index.html>

NCAI: Ending the Era of Harmful “Indian” Mascots

<http://www.ncai.org/proudtobe>

NCAI 2005 Resolution: Support for NCAA Ban on “Indian” Mascots

http://www.ncai.org/attachments/Resolution_dZoHILXNEzXOuYlebzAihFwqFzfNnTHDGJVwjauidNvnsFtxUVd_TUL-05-087.pdf

NCAI’s “Ending the Legacy of Racism” Report

http://www.ncai.org/attachments/PolicyPaper_mijApMoUWDbjqFtjAYzQWlqLdrwZvsYfakBwTHpMATcOroYolpN_NCAI_Harmful_Mascots_Report_Ending_the_Legacy_of_Racism_10_2013.pdf

Op-ed: The destructive dynamic of dehumanizing Native Americans

<http://thehill.com/blogs/pundits-blog/civil-rights/296846-the-destructive-dynamic-of-dehumanizing-native-americans>

Why Educators Can't Ignore Indian Mascots

<http://aistm.org/cornel.why.educators.htm>

Please let me know if you have any questions or require additional information as you perform your due diligence on this critical matter.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Ian Record, Ph.D.

Director, Partnership for Tribal Governance

National Congress of American Indians

1516 P St. NW, Washington, DC 20005

O: (202) 466-7767 x207

C: (202) 907-3107

www.ncai.org/ptg

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