

State of Maine
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Karen Kusiak, Ed.D. Legislative Affairs

L.D. 944

An Act To Ban Native American Mascots in All Public Schools

Before the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs

Sponsored by: Representative Collings

Co-sponsored by: Representatives Babbidge, Brooks, Evangelos, Grohoski, Maxmin, McDonald, Reckitt and Talbot Ross and Senator Vitelli

March 25, 2019

Senator Millett, Representative Kornfield, and members of the Joint Standing Committee on Education and Cultural Affairs:

L.D. 944 is An Act To Ban Native American Mascots in All Public Schools.

On March 1, 2019, Commissioner Makin distributed *Priority Notice: Maine Department of Education's Position on School Mascots and Logos*. The notice is attached as is a copy of the American Psychological Association's Summary Resolution on Recommending Retirement of American Indian Mascots which is referenced in the Priority Notice.

The APA's statement is emphatic about concerns associated with using American Indian mascots: "APA's position is based on a growing body of social science literature that shows the harmful effects of racial stereotyping and inaccurate racial portrayals, including the particularly harmful effects of American Indian sports mascots on the social identity development and self-esteem of American Indian young people (APA)."

The APA's statement continues with establishing that use of American Indian "mascots, symbols, images and personalities" have negative effects on non-American Indian students, too.

Psychology scholars Melisa Burkley et.al. published an article in *The Journal of Social Psychology* in 2017 that reports on their study of the connections between Native American sports mascots and stereotype application. The findings of their study support the hypothesis that exposure to Native American mascots triggers negative associations, or evaluations, to individuals who are Native. Thus, continued use of Native American mascots is likely to contribute to negative associations, or stereotypes, with people who identify as Native American or American Indian among non-Native or American Indians thus perpetuating the marginalization of Native people.

The Department was pleased to learn of the recent vote of the School Board from the last school in Maine to have a Native American mascot; that Board earlier this month voted to end the use of “Indians” as their mascot. That Board likely also recognizes the hurt and harm that continued use of Native American mascots has on both Native people and non-Native people.

For these reasons, the Department continues to encourage Maine School Boards to avoid use of Native American mascots. Nevertheless, the Department recognizes the authority of local School Boards to develop policies and procedures that reflect community sentiment and thus we stop short of supporting a state-wide ban.

I am happy to answer questions or locate additional information for the work session.

References

American Psychological Association, Summary of APA Resolution Recommending Retirement of American Indian Mascots <https://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/indian-mascots>

Burkley, M, et.al. (2017). Symbols of pride or prejudice? Examining the impact of Native American sports mascots on stereotype application, *The journal of social psychology*. Routledge.

DOE, *Priority Notice*, March 1, 2019; Maine Department of Education’s Position on School Mascots and Logos



PRIORITY NOTICE: Maine Department of Education's Position on School Mascots and Logos

Because our schools must provide safe, inclusive, and respectful learning environments, and because schools teach many lessons by example, DOE urges schools to refrain from using mascots and logos that depict Native American tribes, individuals, customs, or traditions. For information about the negative impact of using such mascots/logos:

<https://www.apa.org/pi/oema/resources/indian-mascots>

<http://www.changethemascot.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/10/DrFriedmanReport.pdf>

While we recognize that DOE does not have jurisdiction over local decisions like these, we encourage schools and communities to consider the impact of promoting symbols and stereotypes that marginalize individuals or groups of people.

The DOE is working to enhance our office of Student Supports with additional staff and resources to assist Maine schools and districts in the development and strengthening of practices that promote cultural competence and reduce bias and inequity.

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