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Washington State Wants Schools to Ban Native American Mascots



If the Washington State Board of Education has its way, high schools across the state will no longer count Warriors, Braves, and Redskins among their mascots.

The state board passed a resolution last Wednesday encouraging districts to stop using Native American mascots, according to ABC affiliate KOMO-TV, in Seattle.

The resolution, which is similar to resolution passed by the board in 1993, cites research conducted by Dr. Stephanie Fryberg, a member of Tulalip Tribes in Washington State and an associate professor of Social and Cultural Psychology at the University of Arizona.

Fryberg and the American Psychological Association presented their research on the psychological consequences of using Native American mascots before the Senate Indian Affairs Committee in May, 2011. Other findings include an increased achievement gap between Native American and other students and negative effects on race relations in the United States.

In the past decade, 10 Washington State high schools gave up their Indian-named mascots, including Eatonville Middle School, which went from the Warriors to the Eagles, and Eisenhower Middle School in Everett, which went from the Warriors to the Patriots.

But 50 more, including some tribal schools, haven't given up their nicknames. And despite the resolution, the board doesn't have the authority to require schools to comply with the change, board spokesman Aaron Wyatt told KOMO. However, he added, there will be no adverse consequences for schools that don't voluntarily choose a new mascot.

The Native American mascot controversy — that is, whether to ban the names from school sports teams — has been hotly debated for decades.

In February, 2006, the National Collegiate Athletic Association began banning 18 colleges and universities that had Native American logos, mascots, nicknames from hosting post-season competitions. Fourteen schools ended up removing all references to Native American culture. But other schools — among them Florida State University Seminoles, the University of Utah Utes, and Central Michigan University Chippewas — were allowed to continue using their nicknames because Native American groups endorsed them, ESPN reported.

The University of North Dakota, home of the Fighting Sioux, wanted to continue using its moniker and had received permission from the nearby Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe. But the neighboring Standing Rock Sioux Tribe never voted on the matter, and the NCAA insisted the school remove its mascots and logos.

The school refused, and the NCAA then banned UND from hosting post-season tournaments. A committee of tribal members brought on a federal lawsuit trying to save the moniker, but the suit was thrown out in May.

In early 2011, the North Dakota Legislature passed a bill requiring UND to use the Fighting Sioux nickname and Indian head logo. But in June, North Dakota voters chose to dump it altogether.

Under a new agreement between the NCAA and the state's attorney general, thousands of logos depicting an American Indian warrior will be allowed to stay in the school's hockey and basketball arenas, although six signs saying "Home of the Fighting Sioux" must be removed.

In May, the Oregon State Board of Education voted to ban Native American mascots, nicknames and logos from eight of its high schools. The schools have Oregon five years to comply, or they will risk losing their state funding.

Other Washington communities have had vicious battles over removing the mascots. For example, in 1997, The Colville Indians asked the Colville High School Indians to use another name, but the school refused, saying the mascot was part of its legacy.