

Minority Informational Report  
Sub Committee of Branding Committee  
November 19, 2018  
Keeping Current Mascot

**To the Talawanda School Board Members:**

- Mark Butterfield, President ([mbutterfield@magnode.com](mailto:mbutterfield@magnode.com))
- Dr. Mary Jane Roberts, Vice President ([mjroberts@woh.rr.com](mailto:mjroberts@woh.rr.com))
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**Speaking for the minority opinion of the Talawanda Branding Committee**

**Bonnie Norris (Parent, Resident, Community Member, Boosters)**

- District resident since 1992
- Part of the Norris family with 3 generations of graduates who have lived in Oxford Township since 1884 and stewards of the land
- Talawanda Athletic Booster President
- Parent of 1 child that has attended since Kindergarten (current Junior)

I am here to speak for the minority opinion of the Talawanda Branding Committee and the majority of the community who believe the mascot and branding should not be changed.

**Primary Recommendations:**

1. Keep current Mascot and Talawanda Branding
2. Continue and Increase Education about Native Americans and Talawanda Mascot and Branding
3. Keep Current Use of "T" in Academic Areas

**General Research**

There has been a rich and steep history of the Talawanda mascot and branding. Since its inception, the Talawanda School District developed its mascot, Indian Head silhouette, and branding based upon it honoring and respecting of our community's roots that included the Miami Indians. According to the Native Americans Guardian Association (NAGA), 80-90% of Native Americans support the use of Native American mascots, silhouettes and branding. There have been several polls, as outlined in the NAGA letter sent to the Board on September 6, 2018, stating this support of the use of these type of images and branding.

**Legal and Financial**

Talawanda's logos have been legally trademarked. The US Patent and Trademark Office did NOT reject our images. They did not consider it offensive and even if they would have, according to a June 2017 ruling by the US Supreme Court against the

government,

([https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts-law/supreme-court-rejecting-trademarks-that-disparage-others-violates-the-first-amendment/2017/06/19/26a33ffa-23b3-11e7-a1b3-faff0034e2de\\_story.html?noredirect=on&utm\\_term=.16f8ef3b927e](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts-law/supreme-court-rejecting-trademarks-that-disparage-others-violates-the-first-amendment/2017/06/19/26a33ffa-23b3-11e7-a1b3-faff0034e2de_story.html?noredirect=on&utm_term=.16f8ef3b927e)), it was determined, under the free speech clause of the First Amendment, speech may not be banned on the ground that it expresses ideas that offend.

Removal of the Braves and the Brave Head will be outrageously expensive. Wouldn't these funds be better spent on the education curriculum, student services, and meeting the needs of every student, including the materials to do a better job of educating about the history of the native peoples of our area that include the Braves that we are named for and represent?

In a time when our district has entered into deficit spending as specified on the 5-year forecast, some of the additional monetary and non-monetary costs to change the branding would include:

- a. High School -just gym floor and turf field would be close to \$470,000
  - i. New Turf field – Braves - \$450,000 – originally funded by COMMUNITY donations, NOT public dollars.
  - ii. New Gym Floors - \$20,000
  - iii. Athletic Uniforms/Warm-Ups - \$66,000 for both THS/TMS
  - iv. Hall of Fame display -Miscellaneous Costs
  - v. Trophy cases and awards displays -Miscellaneous Costs
- b. Middle School
  - i. Retiling Talawanda Tribe logo on Commons Wall in TMS -Miscellaneous Costs
  - ii. Athletics Uniforms/Warm-ups
- c. Elementary Signage -Miscellaneous Costs
- d. Miscellaneous Costs Estimated at \$10,000
- e. Levy passage in the future could be on line - not passing would be detrimental to EVERY kid in the district
- f. The time and money spent to make additional decisions about what needs to be changed, what is altered, and what is not changed i.e. staff time, salaries, changes and alterations, etc. in a period where we are deficit spending. Will fewer services be provided to students and staff, as there is only so much money?

### **Education**

While several individuals attempted to speak on behalf of Native Americans, the opinion of using race based images and branding as established in the Talawanda

School District is split just like our community. The Branding Committee members as well as the Talawanda community all agree that continued education is needed. Honoring and respecting the rich history of the Native Americans is critical as to not lose our community's foundation.

NAGA's mission is to educate, not eradicate the Native American history. There is much misinformation within our community such as the Talawanda name was based after a Native American tribe or that the word is a Native American word. Our current branding and mascot emphasizes the positive qualities of Native Americans. Currently, there is a fourth grade lesson that is being implemented in all three Talawanda School District elementary schools. This is the first step in education as well as ensuring the Native American history is not lost and forgotten, but respected, cherished and honored. Our current branding and mascot also honors, respects, and maintains our community's foundation that started with the Miami Native Americans.

### **Harm to Constituents**

The majority committee's opinion argued that the use of a race based branding and image would harm students. While these parents and students have stated that this type of branding has hurt children, there are other current students, past students, and families - who also have Native American ancestry - who disagree with those opinions. The majority committee's opinion and those that want to change the mascot and Talawanda branding do not advocate for the opinions of all students, past students, family members and community members who differ in their opinion and want to keep the current branding and mascot. These change advocates sight the potential for insensitivity, harassment, and negative behaviors that have occurred and continue to occur thus spawning a reason for change. However, evidence from the discipline records search over the past 3 years found only 2 culturally based disciplinary issues. Neither discipline record was Native American based or repeated after discipline measures were enacted. Even if the branding and mascot were changed, these types of issues and problems may occur in the future. To resolve this negative perception and behaviors, our school district as well as the community need to continue to educate our students. Our school district will continue to address any issue of harassment, injustice, and insensitivity, which we already do. Changing the branding and mascot, alone, will not resolve these types of issues.

Additionally, the majority opinion states, "At a minimum, we should avoid exposing our students to unnecessary risks of harm." However, they are only applying this statement to this particular issue. There are many issues facing our students today that require resources, time, and effort - mental health, school safety, state report card achievement, class sizes, violence and drug abuse. Since this branding issue first came up, districts have been faced with the task of educating students in an environment that is becoming increasingly volatile. The time and money that the majority committee wants to spend on this branding issue could be better utilized to

meet their goal of avoiding exposing our students to unnecessary risks of harm by focusing on these more fatal issues that ALL of our students are facing.

The committee's majority opinion stated that the mascot and branding needs to change. Some people have stated that the Talawanda mascot and branding emphasize stereotypical and negative attributes of Native Americans. The Talawanda mascot and branding has changed over time (4 Times) to ensure the stereotypical and negative attributes were not emphasized. The logo is a silhouette with no distinguishable, stereotypical or comical attributes. The mascot and branding found within the Talawanda school district discourages the negative and stereotypical attributes.

There is evidence to counter the majority committee's opinion that the current mascot and Talawanda branding negatively affects students and the community. NAGA and community members who have Native American ancestry have stated the current mascot and Talawanda branding is honorable and do not negatively impact themselves or others in the community. Replacing or retiring our current mascot and branding will cause harm to our students and community. Our community's foundation was based upon the Native Americans who resided in our area. Taking away this foundation does not honor our Native Americans. It destroys our foundation and hides our rich and steep history.

### **Community**

This issue transcends racial motivations and is a Talawanda community issue. A **community** is a familiar thread used to bring people together. As human beings, we need a sense of belonging, and that sense of belonging is what connects us to the many relationships we develop. Being the "Braves" is an identity that brings our community together. It ties generation to generation, as evidenced by our latest Hall of Fame induction when 2 new inductees wore their letter jackets to the induction festivities at Friday night's game. Being the Braves just bolsters our community values and traditions. It is the familiar thread that spans the generations and peoples within our community.

When students enter the district, whether as a Kindergartener or high school student, they become part of the Braves community, and families with multiple children are embarking on a community membership that could last decades. This has been clearly shown through the speakers at the previous board meetings. Those in favor of keeping with our tradition are not just from a certain age group or demographic, but span from current students and their families to previous generations. This is a farther-reaching commitment than simply 4 years at a university.

The Talawanda School District was built on inclusiveness, education, and respecting others. Removal of artifacts, past history, and the current mascot and branding will do harm to our community. As evidenced by the numerous letters, emails, and

petition, the community believes the current mascot and branding is respectful and honors our foundation. The changing of the mascot and the branding will cause the Talawanda community to be divided. There may be vocal proponents to change, but most of those people are within the small constituency of the city limits and many who do not have any stake in the district or the kids we serve.

Talawanda is a diverse community. Our Board of Education represents many people and communities OUTSIDE of the City of Oxford and Miami University, many who may not have the opportunity or know how to voice their opinion at a board meeting, and a majority of those constituents value the name, the tradition, and the honor that comes with being the "BRAVES". Future levies, financial security of the district, and decisions will be negatively affected as those community members will no longer support or vote for district levies. People who disagree with the Board's decision will vote and use the polls to express their dissatisfaction. People who do not understand the change process may also become disenfranchised and vote against the needs of the school.

### **Lessons to Learn Rebranding - A Case Study**

The majority opinion expressed that changing the mascot would solve and reduce or eliminate the likelihood that this issue would further divide our community. However, this has not been the case for a school in Oregon that has recently adopted the "compromise" of changing their mascot from "Braves" to "Brave."

A school in Reedsport, Oregon recently had to comply with a state mandate that schools could no longer use race based images and branding unless the Native Americans in their area approved of a Native American branding. This school district is very similar to Talawanda. This school had some Native Americans that attended the school just like Talawanda. A majority of the students are not of Native American ancestry. This school changed its name from Braves to Brave. The district used the red letter "R" to represent the school district. This is the same proposal the majority committee members have just presented.

After communicating with staff at this school district, the staff indicated that even though those changes were made, the school district's spirit has continued to dwindle. This change has had other negative effects over time. The Reedsport School also stated that they kept some of the items such as paintings and sculptures that were classified as artifacts. Many of the items found within their buildings and not classified as an artifact were moved and stored offsite. However, other items such as the uniforms, floors, and fields were changed over time and at a great cost to

the district. The amount of money spent to make this change has not been tracked by the district due to two reasons 1) their school funding is different from Ohio and that the districts receive their funds from the state, 2) the changes continue to occur as more items and activities are discovered resulting in a continued expenditure on this change each year.

Can Talawanda afford to make these changes in a deficit spending time? Will these expenditures take away from spending on students, services provided to students, and ultimately impede our student progress?

The Reedsport staff person stated that 2 out of 3 local Native American tribes in that area did not oppose the use of the mascot and branding and did not want a change. There were costs that were not factored or recorded over time that this staff member cautioned us about. Many local Native Americans believed that the images and branding was not offensive. In fact, this community and staff are now stating that the change was negative and will continue to have negative implications for years to come. It is important to remember that education, respect, honor, and community play a vital role in education and the success of the school and community. We are heading down a dangerous road similar to Reedsport that will have negative implications for our community for decades to come.

### **Conclusion**

The community and the minority report committee's members are in favor of keeping the current mascot and branding that capitalizes on our rich history and steep community tradition. We also concur that additional education needs to occur within our schools and community to showcase our deepest and sincerest honoring of our community's foundation. It is imperative to honor and respect, not eradicate our history. We respectfully ask the Talawanda Board of Education to keep the current mascot and branding.

### **Primary Recommendations:**

1. Keep current Mascot and Talawanda Branding
2. Continue and Increase Education about Native Americans and Talawanda Mascot and Branding
3. Keep Current Use of "T" in Academic Areas

## Bibliography

- Barnes, R. (2017, June 19). Supreme Court: Rejecting trademarks that 'disparage' others violates the First Amendment. Retrieved from [https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts\\_law/supreme-court-rejecting-trademarks-that-disparage-others-violates-the-first-amendment/2017/06/19/26a33ffa-23b3-11e7-a1b3-faff0034e2de\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/courts_law/supreme-court-rejecting-trademarks-that-disparage-others-violates-the-first-amendment/2017/06/19/26a33ffa-23b3-11e7-a1b3-faff0034e2de_story.html).
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