

342 South Main St
Albion NY 14411
February 17, 2018

Board of Education
Canisteo Greenwood School District
84 Greenwood Street
Canisteo, NY 14823

Dear Board of Education,

I am a retired teacher from the Churchville-Chili School District in Churchville, near Rochester and also from Saint Joseph Catholic School in Batavia. My son is the Varsity Boys Swim Coach from a competing Section 5 school. My son's team competed against your Varsity Boys Swim team at the Sectional meet for Section 5 Class D schools held at Gates-Chili pool on February 13 & 15.

As a spectator in the crowd I watched a boy swim past me in lane 1 wearing a red swim cap with "Redskins" printed on the side. As a Native American, I was *stunned* and offended to see this. When I arrived home, I googled your school district on the website to find that "Redskins" is the name of your athletic teams. While it is a controversial subject, *many* Native American people consider the use of "Redskins" in any context to be a derogatory racial comment.

As educators and parents, we hope we have equipped our children with the appropriate tools to leave us and go out into the world to meet new people and deal with new situations. We hope they will do this with grace, tolerance and respect, making choices along the way using values that we have instilled in them. We want our students using language and conversation that those they meet feel respected.

On your website you state.... Our policies reflect our dedication to the educational process and the well being of all who enter our school.

And.... The District will foster positive growth in social/emotional behavior and attitudes.

The studies regarding education of Native American children show that negative imaging of Native Peoples has a direct and hurtful result in emotional, educational and overall child development. While you may not have identified Native children in your student population, you may have mixed blood children and families whether they identify as Native or not. We hope that those children will have the opportunity to develop emotionally with pride in their ancestral heritage.

I'm sure you are aware of the nationwide conversation, requesting professional, collegiate and high school teams to change their Native American logos and mascots to something that is not offensive to any racial group. To date numerous teams have changed their logo and team names, including many school districts in NYS. The Cleveland Indians have just announced that after *many years* of conversation they will retire their *Chief Wahoo* logo.

Every time your students enter into a competitive athletic event, they are representing your school and with your school name on your uniforms stating that it is OK to use "*Redskins*" in spite of the fact that it is hurtful to Indigenous children. Your school name of "*Redskins*" displays a particular attitude to not only your own students but to all the students and fans of those schools in your league and section. You compete against many other schools that see this name on your uniforms. Your cheerleaders and fans use this name in their cheers in front of many other communities. To all these people you are perpetuating the attitude that you are disregarding the hurt of Indigenous people and children.

In the sectional meet this week your athletes competed against Harley Allendale Columbia. One of my Traditional Indigenous friends sends her two children to Allendale Columbia, both enrolled Mohawks. While these two teens are not on the swim team and both are not confrontational people, their father was very active in approaching his home school district of East Irondequoit to change it's Native American logo several years ago. I would hope no uncomfortable situation should happen for any of your student athletes being approached by a concerned fan over the use of your district's chosen name, but that is a possibility.

If any of your graduates attend SUNY Fredonia, any of the Buffalo area colleges, RIT, Syracuse University or Cornell University, they are very likely to meet Native students, professors and staff. I hope they will approach these new people with the grace and respect not to use the term "*Redskins*". This term will not serve them well on any of these campuses.

Please consider entering into community conversations to discuss choosing another logo and name, one that will be respectful to all people both within your community and respectful to those communities you compete against.

The red faced man and red feathers of your logo are another discussion, one that can't be addressed in a few short sentences. But I will add that feathers are of deep, spiritual significance to Traditional Indigenous people here in North America, one not to be taken lightly.

I am writing to you as a parent from the Section 5 swim team community, but I also voice concern as chair of the Committee on Native American Ministries of the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church.

I can't close this letter without complimenting your swim coach and athletes on their performance at the Section 5 Class D swim meet this week. Not only were your students well behaved, they competed with top results. Congratulations to them and their parents on many hours of dedication and hard work.

Best Regards,

Kae Woodruff Wilbert, Cherokee

cc:

Michael Wright, High School Principal

Ann Hosmer, Athletic Director