



One Community. One Commitment. Ready for the Future.

Superintendent of Schools | Justin Gardner

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April 21, 2023

Dear Willsboro Central School District Community,

I am writing to inform you of a recent decision by the NYS Board of Regents that will impact our district's Warrior mascot. On Tuesday, the NYS Board of Regents unanimously approved changes in regulations that will prohibit public schools from using Indigenous names, mascots, and logos, which specifically bans the use of the Warrior. Under the new regulation, school boards must commit by the end of June 2023 to eliminate the use of names and imagery and must completely discontinue use by June 30, 2025. As a result of this mandated change, Willsboro Central School District will now need to start the process of retiring the use of the Warrior as a school nickname/mascot.

This information was initially shared with NYS school districts in a November 2022 memo from the NYS Department of Education, and included penalties for non-compliance with their directive, *"Should a district fail to affirmatively commit to replacing its Native American team name, logo, and/or imagery...it will be in willful violation of the Dignity Act. The penalties for such a violation will include the withholding of State Aid."*

Since the release of that memo last fall, the district has worked closely with the NYS Department of Education to make repeated requests to keep the Warrior nickname while changing the image used for our school mascot. The district explained that any Native American imagery attached to the Warrior nickname within our district was removed decades ago. However, the Department's final response was clear and stated, *"Team names such as the "Warriors" are vestiges of practices contrary to the requirements of the proposed regulations and New York State's Dignity for All Students Act given the history of the team name in the Willsboro Central School District. Although some imagery and other aspects of the connection between the team name and Indigenous Nations or individuals may have been changed, even if it was 20+ years ago, the connection, connotations, and importantly, history of these practices remain with the use of "Warriors" as a team name."*

While we understand that our Warrior mascot has a long history within our district and has been a source of pride for many members of our community, we respect the decision of the NYS Department of Education and the NYS Board of Regents. At the same time, we are committed to identifying a new mascot that will reflect the mission, vision, and values of the district while maintaining the positive aspects of our district's past. We will develop a collaborative process to proceed with the selection of a new mascot, which will begin at the start of the next school year and will include input from a variety of school stakeholders including students, staff, parents, and community members.

We know that this change will be difficult for some members of our community. Therefore, will strive to engage in a thorough and transparent process that will provide all members of our school community with frequent updates and opportunities to provide input.

Thank you all for your understanding and support as we navigate this important change within our school community.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Justin Gardner".

Justin Gardner
Superintendent of Schools