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Subject: ARHS - Update from Study Group for Mascot Review

## Notification from: **Algonquin Regional High School (ARHS)**

Good afternoon,

I am writing this afternoon to update you on the progress of the Study Group for Mascot Review, which consists of stakeholders who are working together to examine our school mascot, the tomahawk. The Group's charge is to ultimately develop a recommendation for the Northborough-Southborough Regional School Committee about whether the mascot should be changed and, if so, what the timeline and costs of that change may be. The Group's work complements the ongoing work of The Public Schools of Northborough and Southborough's ' Coalition for Equity, and several members of the Study Group participate in both groups.

Reviewing our mascot and considering a change is a major undertaking, and I am thankful to the members of the Group for their time and energy in examining the issue. The tomahawk is an important part of our school's rich history, and I am committed to keeping all of the members of our school community informed about the work of the Study Group and providing for community members opportunities to share their perspectives. A summary of the Study Group's work last night is below.

The goals of the Study Group's meeting were to:

- establish clarity about this group's mission, norms, and timeline
- develop a basic, shared understanding of the history of our school and mascot, and
- for each group member to consider their role as a stakeholder in our forthcoming work.

The agenda for last night's meeting is [here](#), and the slides we reviewed are [here](#). Below is a brief summary of the most notable segments of the meeting:

- Group members introduced themselves, including what role(s) they play in our community (i.e. student-athlete, parent, School Committee member, etc.).
- I explained our task, to provide a recommendation to the School Committee, and our timeline, meeting monthly to generate the recommendation by the Spring. Additionally, I discussed our norms, which are included in the slides. I also shared that the Study Group's work complements the work of the Coalition for Equity, and reflects the school's response to [an online petition](#) lobbying for changes to the school name and the mascot. I explained that, through conversations over the summer with the petitioners, it was determined that a change to the name of the school is not under consideration at this time, but a close examination of the tomahawk is worthwhile and necessary.
- ARHS Librarian Kim Honey and Social Studies teacher John Barry provided an overview of the school's history and of a previous movement to retire the tomahawk. An in-depth summary of the presentation is [here](#); their presentation included the following critical points:
  - Peters HS (Southborough) and Northborough HS appear to have had more fluid conceptions of school traditions, including mascots and school colors, than we have today. However, Northborough High School's mascot was the "Mounties" for at least the decade preceding regionalization in 1959.
  - When Southborough and Northborough were regionalized in 1959, the choice of a Native American name reflected a statewide movement to combine multiple towns' schools. In 1959, the principal of the then-new Algonquin Regional High School convened a group of students to choose a mascot. The group chose the tomahawk.
  - Yearbooks from 1960 and 1961, the first two years of the existence of ARHS, reflect no use of the tomahawk on athletics uniforms, except for the Winter Cheer team, which also included stereotypical features like headaddresses and fringed hems.
  - In the 1970's, "Tomahawk" was featured on athletics uniforms, the school's literary magazine was named *Sachem*, and the school newspaper, *The Smoke Signal* was changed to *The Harbinger*.

- Throughout the 1990's, the image of the crossed tomahawks was increasingly emphasized on athletics uniforms, apparel, and in the school building. Crossing tomahawks is considered a sign of disrespect by some Native Americans.
- In 1997, ARHS undertook a close examination of the tomahawk. A schoolwide vote by voice resulted in keeping the symbol. The vote was endorsed by the School Committee with the stipulation that student behaviors and customs that are demeaning to Native Americans be eliminated. However, in the absence of systems for maintaining these changes, some of the behaviors returned over time.
- In June 2018, as a farewell gesture, outgoing superintendent Christine Johnson gifted a ceremonial tomahawk to ARHS in an effort to deepen the community's appreciation for the tomahawk as an honorable, appropriate symbol for the school.
- The Group discussed the role of the stakeholder briefly and, in small breakout rooms, shared their personal perspectives on whether the tomahawk should be retired. Additionally, the small groups identified next steps that the Study Group should consider. When the Group reconvened, there was consensus that the school's history is largely unknown to students, staff, and families and should be prioritized in our plans to process the mascot issue with the community. Additionally, this information should be incorporated into students' coursework and/or incoming students' orientation to ARHS so that our history is well understood by the student body.
- The Group agreed that an examination of the cost and timeline for a possible change to the mascot will be necessary, but doing so at this time would be premature. Additionally, the Group agreed that the most immediate next step would be to conduct research on the impact of using marginalized groups as mascots. A working group of four members volunteered to identify suitable texts next week, which I will share with the Group (and the ARHS community) before the holiday break.

As I facilitate the Mascot Review Study Group's work, I will do my best to keep all of the interested members of the ARHS community informed. Additionally, I am happy to accept feedback and information from members of the community. If you would like to share your thoughts and perspectives - now or at any point during the period of the Study Group's work - please email [MascotStudyGroup@nsboro.k12.ma.us](mailto:MascotStudyGroup@nsboro.k12.ma.us) and your feedback will be noted for the Study Group. Shortly, I will create a web page to reflect information about the Study Group's work, including agendas and other materials from the Group's meetings and resources we are consulting through the course of this examination.

I am thankful for the contributions of time and effort from the members of the Study Group. Engaging this process would be impossible without their help.

Sincerely,  
 Sean Bevan  
 Principal, ARHS