

Oregon bans Native American mascots in schools

The 5-1 vote followed months of passionate and emotional debate about tolerance and tradition.

The schools have five years to comply with the order or risk losing their state funding. Another seven high schools identified as the Warriors will be allowed to keep their nickname but will have to change mascots or graphics that depict [Native Americans](#). An unknown number of elementary and middle schools also will be affected.

The ban doesn't apply to colleges, but none in Oregon have Native American mascots after [Southern Oregon University](#) and Chemeketa Community College dropped them.

Since the 1970s, more than 600 high school and college teams across the country have done away with their Native American nicknames, including 20 in Oregon.

Critics say Indian mascots are racist, contending they reinforce stereotypes and promote bullying of Native students. Supporters say the mascots are a way to honor Native American history, evoking values of strength and bravery.

"It is racist. It is harmful. It is shaming. It is dehumanizing," Se-ah-dom Edmo, vice president of the Oregon Indian Education Association, told the board.

In 2006, the Oregon Board of Education adopted a nonbinding recommendation that schools stop using Native mascots. A handful did, but some small communities have resisted the trend, saying the nicknames are a source of pride.

"It's a chance for us to talk about family and tradition and loyalty," said [Jim Smith](#), principal of Banks High School — home of the Braves — who grew up on the Fort Peck Reservation in Montana.

Banks, west of Portland, has a logo depicting an Indian head on the gymnasium floor and walls, and even on the hurdles used by the track team. When the Star Spangled Banner is played at the beginning of every game, the crowd joins in and tweaks the last stanza: "and the home of the Braves."

Some critics of the ban said they were concerned about the costs of changing sports uniforms and equipment, school letterhead and street signs.

In some areas, schools have worked with nearby tribes to change their practices without changing their nickname. Roseburg High School, home of the Indians, switched a logo depicting a Native American to a simple feather. Molalla High School changed sports jerseys to say "Molalla" instead of "Indians" and stopped using a mascot dressed like a Native American to lead cheers.

Students and teachers from schools with Native American nicknames packed two public hearings on the topic. Some suggested they be allowed to keep their Indian nicknames if nearby tribes consent.

The board rejected that idea, with board member Artemio Paz describing it as a "search for acceptable levels of racism."

Native American mascots are a form of oppression that contributes to isolation among Native Americans and its social consequences, said Tom Ball, assistant vice president of equity and diversity at the [University of Oregon](#). Those include high rates of suicide, incarceration and school dropout.

Oregon Department of Education officials say Wisconsin is the only other

state to enact restrictions on Native American mascots. Wisconsin's law, approved by the Legislature in 2010, requires school boards to prove that their Indian mascots don't promote discrimination, harassment or stereotyping if someone complains. Dozens of Wisconsin schools still have Native American mascots.

The [NCAA](#) limits the use of imagery and names considered hostile and abusive, and a debate still rages over the University of North Dakota's "Fighting Sioux" nickname and a logo with the profile of an [American Indian](#) warrior.

The [Oregon Legislature](#) voted in 2001 to eliminate the word "squaw" from geographic names because many Native Americans consider it offensive.