

**Peru Board of Education background information for the resolution to retire the term
Indians and form a committee of stake holders to guide the process.**

At the July 14th, School Board Meeting the Peru Central School Board of Education voted to retire the “Indians” name and mascot for the Peru Central School District. Superintendent Dr. Thomas Palmer has been directed to assemble a stakeholder task force, inclusive of community members, students and staff, to develop a new Peru name that will carry forward into the future while still respecting the proud traditions and school spirit that Peru School and the entire community has displayed over the years.

This change has been discussed in recent years, and Peru has made incremental changes to the logo/mascot to satisfy the minimum requests of native American representatives over the years. As such, there are very few actual references to the “Indians” mascot on school grounds. The Board has had meaningful discussions over the last nine months and has recognized the necessity of this change through the contradiction of the use of the name with the District’s own core beliefs.

It is the Board’s position that Peru's mascot is referring to people who inhabit India, misapplied as a racial term to describe a race of people that didn't select this name, who have endured centuries of cultural destruction where valuable parts of their culture have been taken and appropriated without permission. The Board recognizes that Peru had intended to use the term “Indian” and related symbols to honor the heritage of the Indigenous. However, the use of the mascot and symbols is considered by many, if not all, national level indigenous representative groups to be culturally inappropriate.

As part of the District’s efforts to provide a more inclusive environment in line with its Mission and Core Beliefs: **“We value inclusivity and hold diversity and respect paramount.”** The Board of Education believes that it has the responsibility to correct the culturally inappropriate use of the term “Indians” as a logo, in media or as a mascot. The Board of Education is respectful of the past and the pride that was exhibited over the years through the success Peru has accomplished and does not diminish those proud traditions. It is time to move forward and adopt a new nickname/mascot for the district that creates a more inclusive environment for future generations.

The District will move forward with the support and recommendation of the task force to the Board of Education with a name and mascot that supports the core values that the Peru Central School District represents.

Reference from the Commissioner of Education in 2001, the complete document can be found at <https://www.aistm.org/2001nysed.htm>.

April 5, 2001

TO: Presidents of Boards of Education and Superintendents of Public Schools

FROM: Richard P. Mills

SUBJECT: Public Schools Use of Native American Names, Symbols, and Mascots

Some time ago, I directed Department staff to study the use of Native American mascots by public schools. I would like to share with you the results of that work.

What I conclude

Our review confirmed that the use of Native American symbols is part of time-honored traditions in some of our communities, and that there are deeply felt, albeit conflicting, ideas about them. Some members of these communities believe that the mascots honor or pay tribute to Native Americans and their culture. However, most Native Americans appear to find the portrayal by others of their treasured cultural and religious symbols disparaging and disrespectful. Many others who have looked at this issue concur.

After careful thought and consideration, I have concluded that the use of Native American symbols or depictions as mascots can become a barrier to building a safe and nurturing school community and improving academic achievement for all students. I ask the superintendents and presidents of school boards to lead their communities to a new understanding of this matter. I ask boards to end the use of Native American mascots as soon as practical. Some communities have thought about this and are ready to act. Others already have acted, and I commend them. Yet, in others, more reflection and listening is needed, and so I ask that these discussion begin now. I believe that local leaders can find the right way to inquire into this matter and resolve it locally. Next year I will formally evaluate the progress on this issue.

The argument:

Schools must provide a safe and supportive environment that promotes achievement of the standards for all children. The use of Native American mascots by some schools can make that school environment seem less safe and supportive to some children and may send an inappropriate message to children about what is or is not respectful behavior toward others. For that reason, we must question the use of such mascots. If children and parents in the school community are offended or made to feel diminished by the school mascot, what school leader or board would not want to know that and correct the situation? School mascots are intended to make a statement about what the school values. School leaders and communities may not be aware that the statement heard can be contrary to the one intended.