

Pending BOE Approval

**Watertown Board of Education
Special Board of Education Meeting**

Meeting Date: November 23, 2020
Meeting Time: 6:30 p.m.
Meeting Place: REMOTE MEETING

Members Present: Ms. Leslie Crotty, Chairman
Ms. Janelle Wilk, Secretary
Mr. Robert Makowski
Ms. Cathie Rinaldi
Ms. Diane Bristol
Ms. Cindy Eastman
Mr. Jason Malagutti
Ms. Josephine Cavallo-Rosa

Members Absent: Mr. Robert Makowski
Mr. Brian Flaherty

Others Present: Dr. John Ramos – Interim Superintendent of Schools
Dr. Glenn Mitoma - Professor of Human Rights and Education and the
Director of the Thomas J. Dodd Research Center at the University of
Connecticut

- A. Convene Regular Meeting – 6:30 p.m.
- B. Pledge of Allegiance
- C. Roll Call – Ms. Davidson
- D. Predestination of information on the use of Native American mascots by schools and the impact of Native American mascots upon students, school districts, and the community.

Dr. Mitoma –Dr. Mitoma began by thanking the Board for inviting him to speak and for taking on the challenge. He feels while the year has been challenging in so many ways, that this is also the year we come to see things in a different way and come to identify things that are really important to us. Many of us have found new ways to deal with what matters and I feel this matters. By inviting me here, you feel this matters as well. Tonight, I want to provide you with

my perspective and then I want to open this up for your questions and hear what you are thinking as well. I am happy to be a resource for you tonight but also after the fact if things come up.

(Dr. Mintoma then went on to explain his credentials.)

He then went on to explain the courses he is a part of at UCONN and what the human rights initiative does for both students and adults. He explained how it builds broader cultures of human rights within schools. That means to make an entire school community one that is supportive of everyone's human rights that is involved. It is not just the students but the teachers, the families, educators, to make these communities as robust and respectful as they can be.

Dr. Mintona went on to talk about Thomas J. Dodd and what he did in the Second World War. He spoke about the trial that was 75 years ago and it is widely regarded at the most important trial in history and is really the foundation for the current understanding of the Holocaust. One of the things that the Dodd Center was founded to do was to ensure a living legacy not only preserving Tom Dodd's papers, but the idea of promoting and upholding human rights and the rule of law everywhere in the world. It also has a special attention to the issue of the Holocaust and genocide. I serve on a Statewide Advisory Committee on the new genocide and Holocaust Education mandate which was passed about three years back and requires each and every district in the state to provide Holocaust and genocide education opportunities to their students. Is about the knowledge of these past episodes, some of the most horrific violence, can be transformed into values and actions in the hearts and minds of our students and community. I want to let you know that I, along with most genocide scholars in the country and indeed the world, recognize that what happened to Native people in North America is best characterized a genocide. It is a well-documented, thoroughly investigated, historical perspective that stretches through the entire country. (He went on to talk about where in the country the wars were and how they affected Native Americans)

In regards to the Native American mascots, what I want to share with you today is around decision making. In working with past districts and ones that are currently going through what you are going through, it has led me to believe that there are four key principles that I think an effective process really highlights and is rooted in. I will then say a few words about process. I am also fundamentally interested in a good Democratic process. Processes that make our community stronger and better. Processes that are dedicated to freedom but also equality. Processes that help us find justice but also moves forward with progress.

The principals: The first one is most likely the most fundamental one that you should base all of your decisions on which is the educational impact. You are fully charged with stewarding the education of all the children in your community. The educational impact of the decision you make should always be front and center.

The second principal is also important and it is an equity principal. Every one of your students in your system deserves the best possible education they can receive. They're entitled to it by law. Your job is not only to aggregate test scores but to drill down and make sure each student it's getting the best education they can get. If you find there are students that are not getting the education they deserve, it is 100% your job to pay special attention to them. Here you will look at psychological literature on Native youth. It has a negative psychological impact on self-

perception and self-esteem and accomplishment. That being said, you may find some additional literature on the broader impact of Native mascots on all children of color. What it suggests, is not only does a Native mascot create an environment which stereotypes images of Native people, which is presented on a daily basis to students, it also suggests that Native mascots can create an environment that authorizes the use of stereotypes for all types of people and all different kinds of identities. There also is some indication schools that have Native mascots experience higher levels of racial agonism in particular.

The third principle is actually liability. All of your students have a legal right to the best possible education. If you go through this process that you have begun and uncover what we know about the educational and equity impacts with the use of Native mascots, I think you will find that the evidence will show pretty clearly that it is negative on both counts. If then you make the decision to keep a Native mascot, you may be putting yourself in a position of legal exposure. The last principle, which is also important, is community. It is very clear that one of the reasons why this issue can be so challenging is because at the end of the day a school is not just a school, a mascot is not just a mascot, a name is not just a name, there is a lot wrapped up in that. Particularly for schools who share the name of their town and community that they are in. We are in a time where some of our community connections have been stressed. One of the things that communities tend to do is look to their schools. It gives them a sense of community, a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, and a sense of history. You must pay attention to the role you play in the community. There is clearly stickiness. People are attached to this mascot. It makes them feel like their history matters. It makes them feel like their experience is recognized. But that being said, it is also important to recognize that in those community feelings, often what people are really concerned about isn't necessarily just that image. They are concerned about all of the things that make them feel a part of the community. You don't just have a binary decision here; to keep it or to get rid of it. You will really need to think about how you will move your community forward.

When you think about these four principles: education, equity, liability, and community, you will have to do some balancing. They do not have easy checkbox solutions. You will have to think about trade-offs you can live with. What does that mean for both you and your community? if you do it in a way that puts these principles out front, makes it clear to yourself and your fellow board members, and your wider community how and why you are going to make the decision but you make, will find that the process is one that actually confirms parts of your community. Regarding the process, there are obviously many ways to get from point A to point B. I have seen the creation of subcommittees like you have done that you can produce recommendations. I have seen boards themselves make the decisions and I have also seen them hire outside consultants to help them go through the process. All of these processes help them get to the end road which is the school board. One thing I will tell you not to do is to put this up for a vote. Do not survey the students or the community. There is a tendency when we are faced with difficult decisions to have someone else make it for us. You would not put up a math curriculum for a vote. You would not put the grading of a student midterm up for a vote. It doesn't mean you can't listen to all different voices and consider them. Another reason that a straight up and down vote is not a good reason is that we know it is a really bad idea to put the rights of minorities up for a vote in a majority. We are talking about making sure the Board is protecting all of their students, all of the members of they're community. Everyone gets a chance to belong and to learn in your schools. In that case, majority votes are not the way to come to a decision.

At this point, Dr. Mintona opened the talk up to questions and answers.

To see the Special Board of Education meeting in its entirety and hear the questions and answers, please go to <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCIf9pwrH64gbrzGfmV4dtSw>

E. Adjournment

Agenda Item:	E.1
Subject:	To adjourn the meeting
Motion Presented By:	Ms. Wilk
Motion Seconded By:	Ms. Rosa
Text of the Motion:	Madame Chair, I move that we adjourn.
Discussion:	None
Opposed:	None
Abstained:	None
Vote:	Motion Passes

The meeting adjourned at 7:08 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Mindi Davidson
Recording Secretary

Cathy Rinaldi
Secretary of the Board