



December 14, 2022

President of Seneca Nation Rickey Armstrong
Seneca Nations of Indians
90 Ohi:yo' Way
Salamanca, NY 14779

Commissioner of Education Betty Rosa
New York State Education Department
89 Washington Avenue
Albany, NY 12234

Greetings Seneca Nation of Indians President Armstrong and Education Commissioner Rosa,

As the Superintendent of the Canandaigua City School District (a district that has reviewed our current school name and symbol in detail and included the influential voice of then Ganondagan Manager and respected Seneca Nation member who ultimately agreed upon a Native American team name and a logo that includes Native American imagery), I would like to request that the Canandaigua City School District be afforded the opportunity to continue to borrow the use of our name "Braves" and school symbol, the Friendship Belt. This, of course, is contingent upon the leadership of the Seneca Nation deeming them to be appropriate, historically accurate, respectful, and valuable in the sense of an explicit reminder of the importance the Canandaigua area is within the Seneca Nation heritage. The Canandaigua City School District (CCSD) has a unique history and has made a concerted effort to incorporate Haudenosaunee culture, history and imagery in an attempt to educate our community about Haudenosaunee culture and raise awareness of the government-to-government relationship that continues to exist between Haudenosaunee Confederacy nations and the United States. It is because of this that I believe my request is worth consideration and reading this letter is worthy of your time.

A primary concern of mine is that the current structure for compliance is likely to achieve a result counter to the State Education Department's intended goal and undo much of the joint efforts that have served to educate our community about Haudenosaunee history and culture. What follows is additional background concerning Canandaigua's unique history and our efforts to provide a positive learning environment for all students, inclusive of Native American students. It by no means should be considered fully comprehensive of this history or our efforts.

Canandaigua as a Community of Historic and Cultural Significance

The 1794 Canandaigua Treaty has played an important role in defining the relationship between Haudenosaunee Confederacy nations and the United States government by establishing peace and friendship between its signatories. A ceremony honoring the signing of this treaty takes place in our Canandaigua City center, at Treaty Rock annually on November 11th. Historically, the ceremony has begun and ended at our primary-elementary school complex.

It should also be noted that Canandaigua is a place of special importance to Seneca people. The name Canandaigua is a derivative of a Seneca word. Tganödä:gwëh, has been colloquially translated to mean "The Chosen Spot." This is a reference to the town's proximity to The Great Hill, the site where Seneca people first emerged from Turtle Island. In addition, a fire is lit on Bare Hill, overlooking Canandaigua

Lake each year, to give thanks, celebrate the changing of the season and remember the people who came before. This ceremonial fire initiates the annual Ring of Fire event that circles Canandaigua Lake with lights and plays an important part in bringing our communities together.

The Establishment of the Current Moniker and Logo

Up until 1949, the school's nickname was the Canandaigua "Cans." At the time, the City of Canandaigua began discussions with a professional baseball team, the Boston Braves, about bringing an affiliate organization to Canandaigua. The semi-professional baseball team never came to fruition, but at that time students petitioned for a name change, from the "Canandaigua Cans" to the "Canandaigua Braves." Their petition was approved by the Board of Education in 1949.

In 2001, State Education Commissioner Richard Mills called for school leaders in communities that use Native American symbols, names, or mascots to reconsider their use. In response, we began a process to evaluate the use of our name "Braves" and our mascot/imagery. This led to us forming a committee that engaged with stakeholders from multiple constituencies, including Steve Uebbing (CCSD Superintendent) and G. Peter Jemison (Seneca, Heron Clan, Faith Keeper, and Manager of Ganondagan State Historic Site). The committee concluded that it was important to retire our traditionally used "Indian Head" logo and no longer have a mascot, as both were deemed to be inaccurate and offensive. To this day, there are no "Indian Head" logos and we do not have a mascot. A choice was also made to keep the "Braves" name and have it connected with a new school symbol emphasizing the Friendship Belt. This image is pictured below:



We believe this symbol highlights the importance of the continued relationship between Haudenosaunee Confederacy nations and the U.S. federal government as well as our community's place in it. Because of this history and work, this logo is featured prominently and proudly throughout our district and community. We have created a detailed style guide to ensure our community and programs remain both respectful and historically accurate to the 2001 agreement and Haudenosaunee heritage. This style guide is found prominently displayed on our website: <https://www.canandaiguaschools.org/use-of-logo>. At that time, we also began emphasizing the relationship between the moniker "Braves" and the characteristic of being brave or having "bravery," the quality or state of showing mental or moral strength in the face of danger, fear or difficulty, as a core community value within our curriculum.

A Focus on Education

In 2001, we committed to use our logo and moniker as a way of teaching our community about Haudenosaunee and Seneca culture and history. Examples of these include:

- Students at nine different grade levels have curriculum strands specific to Haudenosaunee and Native American history;
- Each year kindergarten students attend an assembly that teaches them about the Haudenosaunee Creation Story;
- All fourth-grade classes take a field trip to Ganondagan State Historic Site; and

- All new teachers and teaching assistants take part in a training offered by employees at Ganondagan State Historic Site.



The photos above show our kindergarten students learning about the Haudenosaunee Creation Story. Behind the presenter, is a mural located at the school's main entrance for staff, students, and parent/community members. It serves as an everyday reminder that we reside in land that was maintained by and supported Seneca people. Part of the presentation (right) also includes a discussion of other agreements involving Haudenosaunee Confederacy nations.



The photos above show our fourth-grade students visiting Ganondagan State Historic Site. During this trip, they go to the Seneca Art and Culture Center, the Seneca Bark Longhouse, and interact with Native American interpreters and artisans. They are instructed on how Seneca people made use of available resources and land to meet their needs for food, clothing, and shelter. They also learn about the traditions and social structure of the land's original inhabitants and examine the contributions of Haudenosaunee people still in evidence today.



The photo above depicts Canandaigua teachers and teaching assistants outside the Seneca Bark Longhouse while at Ganondagan State Historic Site. Since 2001, all new faculty attend training on the history and culture of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy at Ganondagan.

In Summary

The Canandaigua area is a place of historic and cultural significance to Seneca people. Consequently, we have tried to be specific, respectful, and accurate with our imagery as a way of retaining and acknowledging this fact. It is my belief that in 2001, the CCSD responded earnestly to the Commissioner's call to action. The discussions that ensued resulted in a thorough and proper process that evaluated our school symbol in the most respectful and inclusive of ways. It is my hope that we can continue to build upon the work that was started at that time and engage in similar discussions.

Over the last 20 years, we have worked to improve the visibility and understanding of Haudenosaunee culture and history for our students and in the community. Recently, I received some anecdotal evidence that supports this conclusion. While seeking advice concerning how to comply with the State Education Department's November 17th memo that directed school districts to ensure district mascots, team names, and logos are non-discriminatory, I spoke with a new resident of the CCSD, whose father is an enrolled citizen of Onondaga Nation. He shared with me that part of what drew his family to Canandaigua from another Rochester area school district was the amount of positive Haudenosaunee imagery in our school system. During our conversation, he conveyed his opinion that what Canandaigua City School District does to demonstrate Haudenosaunee culture is not witnessed in other places, outside of those school districts directly serving a Haudenosaunee Confederacy nation. He specifically emphasized the Friendship Belt logo as an important image in combating the negative images often associated with Native Americans and that it helped create a positive learning environment for his daughters, who have ED 506 Forms documenting their eligibility for Title VI Indian Education Formula Grant Programs on file.

I believe our prior effort to engage in meaningful conversation, make adjustments and educate our community has kept the significance of Haudenosaunee history and culture at the forefront. It is for this reason that I request that Canandaigua City School District be given an opportunity and time to seek guidance concerning the appropriateness to continue to borrow our current images and moniker from the Seneca Nation. I worry that the inability to consult with representatives from the Seneca Nation of Indians may force us to erase one of the few images highlighting Haudenosaunee sovereignty within public

education. This outcome would appear to be counter to the intended goal of the State Education Department.

I would be grateful for the opportunity to discuss our specific situation further to determine if it is possible for us to retain our school's moniker and school symbol given the information shared in this letter. Based on the draft Regulation from the State Education Department, we would need a written agreement from Seneca Nation prior to April 30th of 2023 in order to retain our school symbol and name if Seneca Nation deems it appropriate.

Thank you for your time and consideration and I look forward to hearing your response to this request.

Sincerely,

Jamie Farr
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