

HONORING IRONDEQUOIT'S INDIGENOUS ROOTS

A special publication by the West Irondequoit CSD — April 2022



As challenging as the past two years have been, one silver lining continues to be the focus and efforts within our district and the Irondequoit community to ensure all students feel welcomed, included, seen, and heard in school. In order to create a collaborative structure for this work, the West Irondequoit Central School District created the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Coalition in the fall of 2020 and identified four key focus areas — Curriculum, Human Resources, Family and Community Partnership — and the DEI District Policy Task Force.

After working with community members and local organizations, and through our own discussions, we looked at ways our district celebrates and honors the many different groups in our community, particularly Indigenous Peoples, since so much of our town's heritage is directly connected to the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. As a result of this research, the district created an Indigenous Peoples' Sub-Committee (IPSC) as part of our DEI Coalition. We also adopted a Land Acknowledgement in 2020 that you see below. It is displayed in the foyer or main office of every school building and District Office.

The IPSC includes community members (two of whom are of Indigenous descent), teachers, administrators, and the Superintendent. Our first task: Crystallize our purpose by developing the following mission statement:

"The Indigenous Peoples' DEI Subcommittee is committed to building a strong partnership approach across our community to ensure that Indigenous voices, heritages, and histories are accurately taught, honored, and woven into our district culture."

Next, we began to explore our priorities for this work and identified concrete steps we would take. But, we hit a speed bump. Before we could address many elements of our mission statement, we realized that we needed to combat the invisibility that has so often obscured awareness and understanding of Indigenous history and heritage. That's why we created this publication — to tell and share more. We intend for these two upcoming community events to do the same:

- **Haudenosaunee Flag Raising Ceremony** on Wednesday, **May 4** at 5 PM at the Irondequoit HS stadium before the girls' lacrosse game against Canandaigua
- **Community Connections** virtual panel discussion on Tuesday, **May 24** at 7 PM

We hope through this work, we can join together on this journey to better understand the intertwined identities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Irondequoit, and that from this expanded awareness we will continue growing as the inclusive and welcoming district community we strive to be.

Land Acknowledgement

The West Irondequoit Central School District acknowledges the Indigenous Peoples of this region and that this school district building sits on the homelands of the Onöndowa'ga: (Seneca) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. It is on these lands that we teach, learn, and live.



Revised by the Board of Education
August 12, 2021

Did you know?

IROQUOIS refers to the Iroquois Confederacy, a confederation of six Indigenous nations. Iroquois is a French name; however, they prefer to call themselves the Haudenosaunee, meaning the People of the Longhouse. Today, more than 81,000 people in the U.S. are enrolled in the nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

THE REASON BEHIND OUR LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

A Land Acknowledgement is a formal statement that recognizes and respects Indigenous Peoples as traditional stewards of land or a territory. It is to be regularly shared and widely displayed that the West Irondequoit Central School District sits on the ancestral lands of the Onöndowa'ga:' (Seneca) of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. By regularly making this acknowledgement, we offer our respect and open doors for learning and discourse. We use that knowledge to break down walls and inspire mutual understanding.

The development of the statement (which you can read on the cover) began after Superintendent of Schools, Aaron Johnson, brought together a team of stakeholders. They researched and drafted a statement. First shared with Irondequoit High School Student Council for feedback, it was then submitted to our Board of Education for approval in November of 2020. A revision was approved on Aug. 12, 2021.

The Land Acknowledgement was an important first step. It is read before every school board meeting and most athletic events. Posters of it are displayed in every school. In the summer of 2021,

a team of K-12 teachers began work with two professors of Indigenous History: Dr. Jason Corwin of the University of Buffalo and member of the Onöndowa'ga:' or Seneca Nation. The other was Dr. Debra Spitulnik Vidali, a 1977 IHS graduate and Associate Professor of Anthropology at Emory University. Mr. Ron Garrow, an Akwesasne Mohawk and Director of the Indigenous Peoples Center, also has played a central role consulting with district officials.

Our teachers engaged in professional learning about Haudenosaunee history and culture and developed K-12 lessons. Taught to students for the first time in November of 2021, those lessons will be delivered annually each November.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGMENT TEAM

- Superintendent Student Leadership Group at IHS
- Haudenosaunee community members
- Showing Up for Racial Justice (SURJ) local members
- Tyra Oglesby & Ethan Riester (20-21 IHS student council members)
- Kim Cristal, K-12 Social Studies Curriculum Supervisor
- Dr. Aaron Johnson, Superintendent

DISTRICT'S 2002 NICKNAME CHANGE WAS CRUCIAL STEP TO AFFIRM INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

On April 5, 2001, the day before the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights voted 5-2 to end the use of Indian team names and mascots at non-Indian Schools, the NYS Education Department issued a memo asking all schools to review their choice of mascots, logos and nicknames.

"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," then-SED Commissioner Richard Mills said.

He urged all schools to stop using Native American mascots as soon as practical. Nineteen days later, that happened in West Irondequoit. The Board of Education voted unanimously to eliminate the use of "Indians" as the nickname and mascot by Irondequoit High School. On Nov. 19, 2001, and after a community-wide vote, it was announced that "Eagles" would be the new moniker and mascot effective July 1, 2002.

Our nickname change did not happen without lengthy discussion and consultation among school staff, other districts, and stakeholders in the local Seneca Nation. The decision was met with resistance from many who were nostalgic and emotional. However, as then-WICSD Superintendent, Dr. Glenn Wachter said while announcing the decision, "it's about basic human dignity and respect."

The nickname was offensive and demeaning to Indigenous Peoples. "(Some IHS graduates) felt alienated from parts of their school experience because of the way their culture was portrayed through the West Irondequoit logo," Wachter said in 2001. "While they did not make it an issue at the time, this knowledge makes it incumbent upon us to make it an issue now."

On May 3, 2002, a "respectful retirement" ceremony to bid farewell to the Indians nickname was held in the IHS courtyard and a plaque was dedicated. It remains there today.

The nickname/mascot change was a crucial step by the district to recognize and affirm the human dignity of Indigenous Peoples. "Perhaps the essence of honoring is listening and respecting," Wachter said.

One of the tenets of education is that when we know better, we do better. West Irondequoit schools will always strive to do better.



Michael Galban installs a plaque for a 2002 ceremony at IHS to retire the Indians nickname. The plaque still sits in the courtyard today. Galban was an IHS senior in 1988 when he painted the Indians logo on the gym floor. Following graduation and after learning the inappropriate nature of the depiction, he asked for the logo to be removed (it was). He is now Curator for the Seneca Art & Culture Center at Ganondagan State Historic Site in Victor.

HAUDENOSAUNEE, A CONFEDERACY BORN OUT OF COLLABORATION

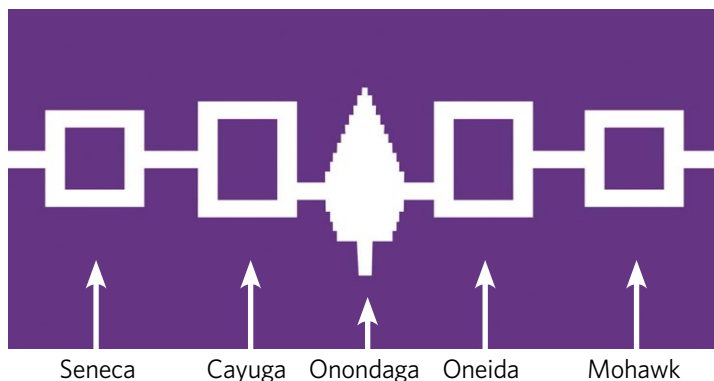
Before this area was known as Irondequoit, it was home to the Seneca people. Along with the Nations of the Cayuga, Mohawk, Oneida and Onondaga, the Seneca Nation lived throughout New York state and Canada. After fighting one another, they learned that working together would make them stronger and formed one of the strongest alliances in North America, the Haudenosaunee.

The name Haudenosaunee (hoe-doe-no-show-KNEE) means People of the Longhouse. The five nations were later joined by the Tuscarora. Their land spread through parts of NYS and Canada. The Haudenosaunee way of governing influenced the way the United States set up its own democratic system and the way it honored women was also inspirational to Elizabeth Cady Stanton. Their ties to the Earth and giving back are lessons from which all cultures can learn.

The Haudenosaunee once moved freely across the land hunting, farming, caring and giving thanks to Mother Earth for providing for them. However, the area where they lived began to disappear. Settlers arrived and bought and stole their land. The government and treaties forced the Haudenosaunee onto small plots of land. Some nations looked elsewhere, into Canada, Ohio, and Wisconsin for new homes. Although these six nations are scattered they are still the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, practicing and teaching their way of life to their children and others.

Did you know?

SENECA is the name Dutch traders used to refer to the Onöndowa'ga' people in the early 1600s when they traded with them for furs. The Seneca were the largest of the original five nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy. Today more than 10,000 Seneca people live in the United States.



THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE HAUDENOSAUNEE FLAG

To understand the significance of the Haudenosaunee Flag, we must know the importance of Wampum Belts, which are beads made from various white and purple mollusk shells. The designs and the colors of the beads have meaning. The belts were mnemonic devices that could help in remembering the history, traditions, and laws with which the belts were associated. During the founding of the Confederacy, Aiiionwatha (Hiawatha), introduced Wampum in the way it is used today, which is to attach authority to a message.

The national belt of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy is the Hiawatha Belt, which forms the basis of the flag. It features its five original nations and symbolizes their agreement to live together in peace and unity. The symbol in the middle is a tree. It represents the Onondaga Nation, which planted the Tree of Peace. The leaders of the Five Nations buried their weapons of war under that tree. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy flag is purple, which is considered the color of the Haudenosaunee. It has four connected white squares and an eastern white pine tree in the center. The Six Nations are:

- Onöndowa'ga:' (aka Seneca)
- Kayonkwe'ha:ka (aka Cayuga)
- Ononta'keha:ka (aka Onondaga)
- Kanien'kehá:ka (aka Mohawk)
- Onyota'a:ka (aka Oneida)
- Taskaroraha:ka (aka Tuscarora) member in 1722

In the 1980s, the flag also became incorporated with the gear of the Iroquois men's national lacrosse team. It needed a flag ahead of a competition to represent the Haudenosaunee as an independent entity. Tuscarora artist, writer, and educator Rick Hill worked with Mohawk father-son duo Harold and Tim Johnson to adapt the Hiawatha Belt design. The team accepted the adaptation as a Haudenosaunee representative flag.

DEI INDIGENOUS PEOPLES' SUBCOMMITTEE

Mrs. Tiffany Archibald, WICSD Elementary Teacher

Ms. Maria Behncke, WICSD Lead Teacher

Mr. Brian Bushart, Parent-Community member

Mr. Kevin Cathy, Parent-Community member/
Mohawk Nation member

Ms. Kim Cristal, WICSD Director of Humanities

Dr. Aaron Johnson, Superintendent of Schools

Ms. Courtney Shouse, Parent-Community member

Mrs. Catherine Shutt, Parent-Community member/Oneida Nation member

Mrs. Rosa Vargas-Cronin, Board of Education member

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Ms. Ava Palo, Student Representative

Newsletter Editors
Mrs. Kim Cristal
Mr. Jeff DiVeronica

TEACHING ABOUT NATIVE AMERICAN HISTORY CAN COMBAT 'INVISIBILITY' OF INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Before Europeans first arrived in the Americas in the 1500s, the Native American population was estimated between 18 and 19 million. By the end of the 19th century, only 250,000 remained — a 99 percent reduction in the Indigenous population.

Today, approximately 6.8 million Americans (2% of the U.S. population) identify as Native American and yet, Indigenous Peoples and communities seem invisible in our society. A 2016 public opinion research project called the Reclaiming Native Truth Project, claims that invisibility in the public, media, education system and popular culture is the largest barrier facing Native peoples. It fuels racism among average Americans, false media narratives, and toxic stereotypes.

A recent survey of Native peoples reveals that while more than 75 percent of Native Americans report facing some form of prejudice and discrimination, only 34 percent of people report believing that Native people have such experiences. Some people even go so far as to suggest that Native peoples have vanished.

A contributing factor: 93% of Native students report experiencing discrimination in school, including teasing and insensitive remarks to the misrepresentation of Native people in coursework.

Justice for Indigenous communities in American society means correcting historical fallacies and teaching factual history about atrocities from 500 years ago to present day. It also means acknowledging that Native people are still here, on their ancestral homeland, have always been marginalized, and need to be made visible with appreciation for their critical contributions to society.

West Irondequoit schools are committed to building a strong partnership approach across our community to ensure that Indigenous voices and heritage are accurately taught, honored and woven into our district's culture.

FLAG RAISING CEREMONY!

Join us for a Haudenosaunee Confederacy flag raising ceremony at 5 PM on Wednesday, **May 4** on the IHS Stadium turf. This event happens before the 6 PM girls varsity lacrosse game against the Canandaigua Braves.

MAY 24 PANEL DISCUSSION

Join us at 7 PM on Tuesday, **May 24** for a virtual Community Connections Town Hall discussion on Irondequoit's Indigenous Roots, our schools and community.

COMMUNITY CONNECTIONS

**BUILDING AWARENESS
STAYING INFORMED**

The banner features three logos: a heart with a blue 'I' and a yellow bird (One Heartbeat), a group of hands stacked together, and the West Irondequoit School District logo. The background is blue with white and yellow accents.