



MEMORANDUM

TO: Superintendent Greg Baker

FROM: Dr. Linda Miller, Principal, Bellingham High School, Co-Chair
Dr. Janis Velasquez Farmer, Director of Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion, Co-Chair

RE: Bellingham High School Mascot Change

DATE: June 10, 2021

We present the following document to share our collective work and the narrative of the change process for the Bellingham High School (BHS) mascot. As a core, we graciously waded through multiple iterations of input and rationales to get to a recommendation and potential next steps that represent our conversations and those of the BHS community.

The document is organized in four sections:

- I. History, Context and Alignment with The Bellingham Promise
- II. The Charge, Challenges, Membership and Process
- III. Summary of Work
- IV. Recommendation

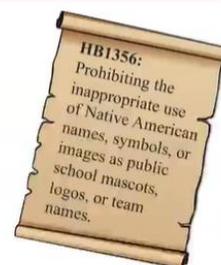
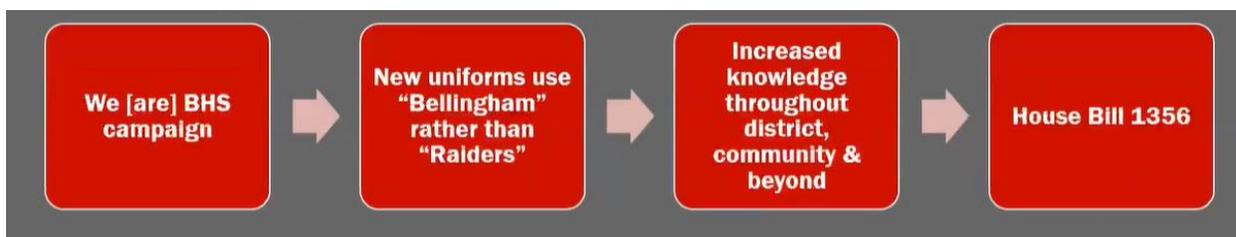
I. History, Context and Alignment with The Bellingham Promise

Prior to 1937, the school operated as Whatcom High School with the mascot name Warriors. A name change in 1938 resulted in the mascot name Red Raiders with a non-local Native American image. In 1998, the school closed for a remodel for two years. Upon return, the mascot image shifted from the Native American head to a red tailed hawk, although the name remained.



Students at BHS reignited a conversation regarding the Red Raiders mascot in the fall of 2020. Student leaders were engaged in conversations to promote socio-cultural awareness, amidst a nationwide emphasis on removal of offensive mascots in schools and professional sports. Their advocacy led to the development of the Bellingham High School Mascot Change Task Force in January 2021. Additionally, Washington State passed legislation in April 2021 to prohibit “the inappropriate use of Native American names, symbols, or images as public school mascots, logos, or team names.” BHS student Logan Foy, one of the student leaders who initiated the most recent iteration of this conversation, was featured on [Q13 News](#), along with Rep. Debra Lekanoff.

Recent efforts to transition away from the Red Raiders mascot name include BHS’s We [are] BHS campaign, sports uniforms with Bellingham rather than Raiders, and increased communication within the BHS community.



The Bellingham Promise makes a collective commitment to Bellingham’s children, a commitment that includes caring for and respecting our students. Additionally, the promise includes equity, diversity and inclusion as a key strategy. Making a change from a mascot that

devalues culture and harms students and local families aligns with The Bellingham Promise overall, emphasizing the points above.

II. The Charge, Challenges, and Membership

The Purpose

The task force was charged with changing the BHS mascot name and, potentially, image. To accomplish this change equitably and inclusively, the task force was also charged with developing and delivering an educational program to emphasize both historical and contemporary impacts of the mascot name and change process.

The task force convened to initiate dialogue about the purpose, then developed opportunities to gather input from students, staff, and community, including three student surveys, one staff survey, one community survey, and a forum for each group.

Challenges

The BHS community holds strongly to the values, experiences and identity of the school. Often the school mascot played into all three for current students and alumni. The first challenge faced by the task force was explaining why change was necessary.

The second challenge was selecting a mascot name. The task force received input from students, staff, and community members during specified asks and throughout the process, via email and direct conversations.

A tertiary impact was timing. As students returned to in-person instruction, sports began, and many other events were straining the group's priorities, the deadline for completion moved deeper into the school year.

Committee Membership

The committee membership was solicited through email invitations, website postings, and word of mouth. The membership was drawn from a wide range of stakeholder groups and was comprised of the following:

- Janis Velasquez Farmer, Director of equity, diversity and inclusion, co-chair
- Linda Wise Miller, Principal, BHS, co-chair
- Chad Larsen, Activity/athletics coordinator, BHS
- Ben Goodwin, Administrative intern and leadership teacher, BHS
- Jay Jordan, Assistant superintendent of teaching and learning
- Jackie Brawley, Executive director of communications and community relations
- Tyler Dockins, ED Tech Coach, Kulshan
- Nicole Baker, Community Member
- Ellie Takemura, Community Member
- Kaycee French, Student
- Logan Foy, Student

- Farhad Variava, Student
- Jared Ibarra, Student Equity & Inclusion Coord., BHS, SHS, SQHS & SMS
- Grace Schamber, Student
- Cedar Grendon, Student
- Jon Knutsen, Coach, BHS
- Mark Wright, Teacher, BHS
- Owen Geis-Poage, Student
- Eric Bachmeier, Library Media Specialist, BHS
- Heather Steele, Teacher, BHS
- Elias Plaster, Student
- Annabelle Schudlich, Student
- Kaleb Payne, Student

The task force met six times during the Spring 2021, and minutes are available on the task force website.

III. Summary of Work

The purpose of the task force is to determine a new BHS mascot name (and possibly image) and develop and deliver educational activities on why a mascot name and possible image change are necessary. The committee discussed that the why would include educational activities on systemic racism to BHS students and the community, promoting a more inclusive environment.

Overview

The Bellingham High School Mascot Name Change Task Force was tasked with developing a program for input and community guidance on a new mascot name, along with development of an educational program for BHS students, staff, and community. Following the education program, input from students, staff and community was gathered via surveys and forums. In June 2021, the committee authored a final recommendation for Dr. Baker.

Learning

The task force began their charge with conversations regarding the nature of the change. Representation of voices allowed the group to work through the purpose and charge with a justice orientation. Often, the group returned to image, as part of the name change process; however, to move forward, the group focused on the history of the BHS mascot, the intention of the change, and the impact of the change.

Creating

In a weeklong program of educational activities, the BHS community was engaged in teaching and learning on the *what*, *why*, and *change* of this process. The activities were created by task force members and piloted in the leadership class. Each activity was delivered in advisory classes and also made available to families and broader community through social media, weekly newsletter, and BHS Mascot Change website.

Bellingham High School students created an [introductory video](#) to introduce the week of learning to the community. Following the introductory video, students learned about the [history](#) of the

mascot name and image. Near the time, Q13 Fox was also airing stories on Native American mascots and the legislation to ban these Native American names, symbols, and images in public schools. BHS senior Logan Foy provided an interview on a [February 6 news clip](#).

Next, the community learned about settler-colonialism and the impacts of colonization through Manifest Destiny and broken treaties. Junior Cedar Grendon, member of Sauk-Suiattle, provided a [video](#) as part of this learning, featuring her mother, Christina Grendon. Cedar provided a powerful testimonial based on blood-quantum.

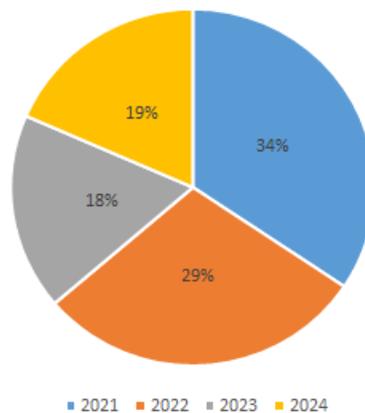
The learning week concluded with an advisory lesson based on the impact of Native American mascots on Indigenous Peoples. Students watched two separate videos from Change the Mascot, [Change the Mascot](#) and [Proud to Be](#), and participated in discussions with questions developed by the task force subgroup. The videos and conversations highlighted Indigenous culture, tribes, family, and leadership.

Engagement:

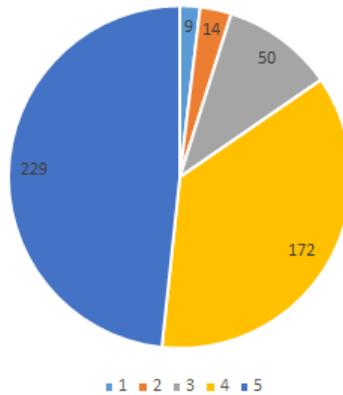
To engage the BHS community, we developed and implemented multiple surveys and offered three forums on Zoom, one each for students, staff, and community. At one community forum many participants spoke for the support of the mascot change and thanked the task force for their efforts. We also had a member of the Lummi tribe offer his support for the community lessons. Surveys provided more reliable input, as indicated below:

The first survey asked students about readiness for change. The survey was based on graduation year and received 480 responses. It opened for students on Friday, Apr. 16, following the week of education in advisory classes. Approximately half of the student body responded to the survey, averaging 4.26/5 to confirm understanding of why the name needed to be changed. Common themes in the comments indicate that students understood how and why the existing name is offensive.

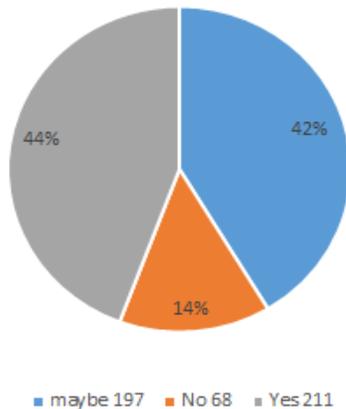
Responses by graduation year:



Level of understanding why the mascot NAME is changing (5 being expert):



Number of students who want to keep the bird image for the mascot:



A summary of name suggestions, drawn from an open-ended question in the survey, elevated Hawks, Raptors, Bayhawks, Nighthawks, Birds, Bears, and Bigfoot/Sasquatch to the top. Discussion and research followed to help determine feasibility of the suggestions, based on number and geography of other schools with the mascot, cultural significance of the mascot, and other considerations, ie. color schemes. The task force discussed putting additional options in front of students, resulting proposed additions of Breakers, Barnacles, and Dragons. Breakers and Barnacles were ruled out.

After receiving a long list of student suggestions, the task force engaged in conversation to examine school values, culture and mission. We investigated regional mascots to identify a unique list of 8 choices that were presented back to the students.

On Apr. 30, the task force offered the eight choices to students and asked them to rank the choices in order of favorite to least favorite. On this survey, the task force found that Bayhawks and Bigfoot were the top two choices and the last two choices, by percentage. The task force utilized a ranked choice/instant runoff voting approach to assessing the results. This approach eliminates the last choice vote and then redistributes those votes based on the voter's second preference; therefore, voters whose initial choice was unpopular were still able to participate in subsequent rounds.

Following this survey, we received concerns that Bigfoot and Nighthawk had multiple connotations: Bigfoot was a derogatory term for persons with disabilities and Nighthawks was a level position within the KKK. Additionally, we were unsure whether Raptors were birds or dinosaurs.

Round 1 – Student Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	140
Bigfoot	125
Nighthawks	79
Raptors (Bird)	64
Raptors (Dinosaur)	71

Round 2 – Student Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	169
Bigfoot	132
Nighthawks	95
Raptors (Dinosaur)	83

Round 3 – Student Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	194
Bigfoot	163
Nighthawks	122

Round 4 – Student Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	290
Bigfoot	189

The final survey, sent on May 25, included all interested stakeholders, including students, future students, staff, alumni, and community members. A Collegiate B option was added because of a suggestion to use the letter “B”, rather than an animal mascot. Using the same ranked choice/instant runoff voting approach to assess the results, Bayhawks rose to the top of the list with 42% of respondents choosing it as their first choice.

Round 1 – Community Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	700
Raptors (dinosaur)	224
Raptors (bird)	273
Collegiate B	463

Round 2 – Community Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	779
Raptors (bird)	365
Collegiate B	516

Round 3 – Community Survey – May 2021	
Name	1 st Place Votes
Bayhawks	1027
Collegiate B	633

IV. BHS Mascot Recommendation

The task force is recommending the following to the superintendent:

Change the Bellingham High School mascot from Red Raiders to Bayhawks.

The task force determined the next step would be identifying a corresponding image. Preliminary conversations in the task force indicated a need for a new team, led by new principal Marty Atkins, over the summer to develop a plan for transition and student engagement. Mr. Atkins, along with the administrative team and athletic coordinator at Bellingham High School will work with Ms. Brawley and Dr. Jordan on a process for the name change and mascot image process. The goal will be to involve student leaders in helping to generate energy and excitement for the name change as well as providing options for students to select images.