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Diminishing the Use of Native American Mascots in Schools

In recent years, public tolerance for companies and teams who have been advertising with controversial and racist images has come to a steady halt. Big-name brands like Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben's, changed their product imagery and names in reaction to public protest against this type of advertisement. The Washington NFL team soon followed suit.

Although many activists have advocated for a name change and protested the widely recognized racial slur used as Washington's mascot, it wasn't until corporate sponsors began threatening to pull out of their deals that the team announced it would "review" the name change. Ten days later, the Washington NFL team announced they were changing their name to "The Washington Football Team" until further notice. Two years later in 2022, the team unveiled its new name as the "Washington Commanders".

With help from high-profile cases like the Washington NFL and Cleveland MLB teams, the number of Native American mascots in sports has been shrinking. However, Native mascots still exist in every level of sports and schools. As of 2021, nationally 1,935 schools have a Native-themed mascot or name. Names range between Indians, Warriors, Chiefs, Braves, etc. In Iowa, there are still roughly 60 schools that have a Native mascot.

Luckily, some action has been taken to shut these derogatory names down. In 2020, The Sac and Fox Tribe of the Mississippi in Iowa – the Meskwaki – called on all Iowa schools to retire their offensive mascots. "... The will of Indian Country is clear – Native 'themed' mascots and the dehumanizing stereotypes they perpetuate must go", stated the [Meskwaki Nation's letter](#). In response, school districts like Marion have officially changed their name from "Indians" to "Wolves". Yet, there are still many school districts deliberating this conversion.

Although countless schools across the country still have Native-themed mascots, change has begun within many state governments. In 2012, Oregon outlawed Native American mascots in public schools with a State Board of Education resolution. According to the National Congress of American Indians, seven states have some form of ban on Native mascots, with more states following behind. Earlier this year, four Iowa House members introduced [HF 2224](#), a bill that "shall prohibit public and non-public schools from having or adopting a name, symbol, or image that depicts or refers to a Native American tribe, individual, custom, or tradition to be used as a mascot, nickname, logo, letterhead, or team name of the school on or after January 1, 2024". No action has been taken on the bill since it was introduced in February.