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The Killingly Mascot Case Study

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CHALLENGE CONVENTION.
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The Killingly Mascot Case Study

Jordan Lumpkins

School of Professional Studies

Fall 2020

Acknowledgement

I would like to start by thanking all Clark University School of Professional Studies faculty for providing me with a foundation of knowledge that was applied when completing this case study. I would also like to thank my advisor, Mary Piecewicz for her valuable guidance both this semester and throughout my time at Clark. I must also thank and acknowledge Town of Killingly, Connecticut employees who made valuable information readily available for my use when writing this case study. Finally, I must acknowledge news sources such as the Norwich Bulletin, WINY, WFSB, Fox News, and CNN for covering the events connected to this case.

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Abstract

In the summer of 2019, in Killingly, Connecticut the local Board of Education voted to retire the "Redmen" mascot name it had used for nearly a century. This legislation was widely opposed and received extensive media coverage. Within a few months, the town experienced a massive political referendum where several local Board of Education members and Councilmen were replaced by single issue politicians promising to reinstate the "Redmen" name. Now holding a majority on the Board of Education, these Board members made Killingly the first school in U.S. history to reinstate a mascot after being deemed "derogatory."

It is the responsibility of public administrators to balance the dichotomy that exists between politics and administration in the public sector. This case study seeks to understand how balancing this dichotomy may have been a major issue for administrators like the Superintendent, Town Manager, and other Town officials in Killingly. Further, by examining other similar cases and related literature, I seek to explain what these administrators could have done to see a successful implementation of a politically and socially acceptable mascot. The purpose of this case study is to provide a case for other administrators to turn to and apply key learnings from the Killingly case to their own experience. With Thousands of schools around the country facing pressure to move away from Native American mascots, this case will be extremely valuable in the future.

Section 1: Method

The dichotomy that exists between administration and politics is something every public administrator must learn to manage. Academics such as Max Weber and Woodrow Wilson have explored this dichotomy and theorists continue to develop methods to assist administrators in balancing administration and politics. It is the responsibility of public administrators to serve their public stakeholders, and as a result, politics can oftentimes make the jobs of these officials extremely difficult. This case study explores how something as small as changing the name of a high school mascot can create major administrative problems in the public sector.

The significance of this case lies in the uniqueness of the situation. While much of the nation has shifted towards political correctness, a portion of the population opposes it. The changing of mascot names has been a major part of moving towards a more politically correct world, and has sparked political debate in both the private and public sectors. In the private sector, the Washington Football team has become the most recent organization to pursue a name change. In 2020 the “Redskin” mascot was revoked after key sponsors threatened to sever ties with the team (Carpenter, 2020). In the private sector, particularly in professional sports, sponsors are a major stakeholder and have significant power. As a result of the threat, team executives were forced to revoke the name, regardless of public opposition. The public sector is far different. In towns like Killingly, Connecticut, residents ultimately act as the chief executive body. If enough people are upset about a decision made by elected officials, the Town reacts by voting for a different official. In turn, administrators are responsible for answering to both the Town’s people and the elected officials voted into office. Killingly offers the first case in United States history where a Board of Education’s decision to change the Town’s “Redmen” mascot name to something socially acceptable led to a mass political movement where the new

administration opted to reinstate the original name. This case allows individuals to explore how public administrators handled this unique situation. By examining how administrators handled this case, public administrators facing similar challenges can respond appropriately.

Exploring this topic required extensive research and my method for drawing conclusions is based on both qualitative and quantitative data. Qualitative data, particularly pertaining to the political debate over this issue, provided me with an excellent foundation for understanding the political aspect of the issue. Articles from local newspapers provided me with several statements by Killingly officials and residents regarding their opinion of the name change. These articles also provide information on the administrative impact of these changes such as reports of costs associated with the change. Additionally, video footage and meeting minutes from three Board of Education Meetings, where the issue was discussed, provided statements from residents, officials, teachers, students, Native American groups, and Town Administrator's expressing their opinion of the name change. On the other hand, quantitative evidence like election results provided me with concrete figures that show the Town's opinion of the matter. These figures demonstrate the challenge public administrators faced when answering to political demand.

Section 2: Literature Review

Research Topic Definition

Before undertaking the Killingly Mascot Case Study, it was important that I develop a strong understanding of the overall topic being investigated. For the purposes of this paper, the topic being discussed is the changing of mascot names from names that have been deemed derogatory by historically, and/or socially oppressed peoples. The majority of these instances have been linked to institutions who have replaced mascots that have been deemed derogatory

towards Native American's and replaced them with politically correct or neutral mascots. The literature review part of this case study will provide a brief history of how Native American Mascots became popularized in the United States.

Mascot name changes have occurred in both the private sector and public sector on several different occasions. Privately owned sports teams and privately owned educational institutions have opted to accept more socially acceptable mascot names and images. Additionally, many public sector organizations, like public schools, have moved away from these derogatory mascots. Regardless of the business sector, these name changes have been met with heavy political debate. Ultimately, the success of this name change relies heavily on the power of the stakeholder. In the private sector, where money is king, investors and sponsors can oftentimes have enough pull to make a name change happen, even if there is a majority of public opposition. However, in the public sector, where politics dominate debate, and the public is the main stakeholder, the success of a name change relies on developing a pro-name-change majority. This literature review investigates how different institutions in the private and public sector have handled a mascot change.

Questions that will be investigated:

What is the history of Mascot names in the United States?

- Why are Native American Mascots controversial?
- What is the history of Native American Mascots?
- How is the implementation of a new politically correct mascot name the same in the public and private sectors?

- How is the implementation of a new politically correct mascot name different in the public and private sectors?

Introduction to Literature Review

I engaged in six different pieces of literature to investigate the changing of mascots from names that have been deemed derogatory by historically, and/or socially oppressed peoples. The purpose of this literature review is to provide the reader with background information about the topic before engaging in the Killingly Mascot case study. Additionally, this research provided me with significant background information that allowed me to assemble the case study and draw conclusions. Each piece of literature contributed to helping me develop a case study that contributes to the greater conversation surrounding this topic.

To answer the questions of “Why are Native American Mascots controversial?” and “What is the history of Native American mascots?” I turned to C. Richard King’s text *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook*, Robert and Hope Longwell’s work “Chiefs, Braves, and Tomahawks: The Use of American Indians as University Mascots,” as well as Elizabeth A. Locklear’s thesis “Native American Mascot Controversy and Mass Media Involvement: How the Media Play a Role in Promoting Racism through Native American Athletic Imagery.” To compare and contrast the implementation of new politically correct mascot names in the private and public sector I reviewed Gary Arthur’s case study “The Aftermath of Redskins Indian Mascot Decisions: What’s Next?,” TJ Dmyterko’s case study “Bedford Road Redmen Athletic Mascot Change Colonization, Naming, and Power,” and Jeff Kettle and Chelsea Master’s case study “Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American College Sports: Changing the Mascot at Dartmouth, Stanford, Oklahoma and

Syracuse.” By examining these pieces of literature, I have been able to gain valuable knowledge that I used to produce a valuable case study.

Literature Review Components

This literature review is made up of 2 main components. The first component seeks to provide a brief history of Native American mascots while also answering the question of why they are so controversial. The second component will examine previous cases from both the private and public sector where organizations have moved away from controversial mascots. These cases include the general use of the “Redskins” mascot, the Bedford Road “RedMen,” and U.S. college cases like Dartmouth University, Stanford University, the University of Oklahoma, and Syracuse University. By analyzing these cases, I am able to compare and contrast how different sectors handle this controversy, and use this new learning for the Killingly Mascot Case Study.

Before diving into the analysis of the literature, I must make some assumptions clear. Due to the fact that this topic is highly controversial, I must assume that the author of each of these works has inherent bias, however I must also assume the authors of the case studies examined have produced work that is as impartial as possible. I must also assume that all accounts and statistics provided in these sources are accurate. With these assumptions in mind, I will be able to objectively review each piece of literature.

Types of Published Documentation – Academic and Commercial

For this case, I will be reviewing one book, one academic journal, two theses, and two case studies. C. Richard King’s text *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook* was published by Rowman & Littlefield in 2015. Robert and Hope Longwell’s work “Chiefs, Braves,

and Tomahawks: The Use of American Indians as University Mascots” was published by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators Journal in 2003. Elizabeth A. Locklear’s thesis “Native American Mascot Controversy and Mass Media Involvement: How the Media Play a Role in Promoting Racism through Native American Athletic Imagery” was published by the University of North Carolina at Wilmington’s Explorations Journal in 2012. Gary Arthur’s case study “The Aftermath of Redskins Indian Mascot Decisions: What’s Next?” was Published by Evergreen State College in 2014. TJ Dmyterko’s case study “Bedford Road Redmen Athletic Mascot Change Colonization, Naming, and Power” was produced by the University of Saskatchewan in 2020. Finally, Jeff Kettle and Chelsea Master’s case study “Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American College Sports: Changing the Mascot at Dartmouth, Stanford, Oklahoma and Syracuse” was published by American University Washington College of Law in 2014. Each of these pieces of literature come from accredited and respected institutions. The information from these pieces of literature is pertinent to my case study because they provide valuable background information about the mascot controversy that exists.

Investigation: Theories, Models and Research Studies

In his book *The Native American Mascot Controversy: A Handbook*, C. Richard King stated that Native American Mascots are offensive because they “prevent a full understanding of why such names, images, and logos matter: They exclude history, take mascots out of context, discourage an appreciation of how race and gender matter, and reduce the question to one of feelings and opinion” (King, 2015 p. 1). King notes that that Native American mascots are even one of the most important signs of institutional racism in the United States because of the decades of ignorance to the fact that these names and images are offensive (King, 2015 p. 13).

Through his research, King was also able to conclude that the use of these mascots is even an infringement of Civil rights because it is the “stereotyping of any racial, ethnic, or religious group by other groups and social institutions - especially public educational institutions” (King, 2015 p. 213). In the end, King demonstrates that the mascot issue is so controversial because the defense of policies protecting these derogatory mascots is not only offensive, but it is illegal.

The Longwells’ work explores the topic of Native American mascots through the context of history and sociology. The Longwells’ note that Native American mascots have been widely used by collegiate athletic teams for over a century and argues that support for keeping these names stem from “tradition, money, and broader societal support” (Longwell, 2003 p. 3). The couple would agree with C. Richard King’s opinion of the matter of tradition and they state that “mascot support, like other examples of stereotyping, is also linked to emotional and economic arguments and a long history of society-sponsored racism” (Longwell, 2003 p. 3). The Longwells’ also note that over time several major Native American Groups and civil rights groups, including the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights have called for the end of Native American mascots (Longwell, 2003 p. 2).

Locklear’s thesis further builds on the Longwell and King’s texts by noting that the Native American mascot controversy has been disputed for nearly 30 years (Locklear, 2012 p. 152). Similar to the Longwells’ she states that “ there are two conflicting viewpoints: (1) Keeping this imagery honors Native American people, supports nostalgic feelings, and saves funding; and (2) Keeping this imagery is offensive and degrading because it is sacred to Native Americans and perpetuates negative stereotypes.” (Locklear, 2012 p. 152). Locklear states “no other ethnic group in the United States is portrayed as a mascot, and no other ethnic group would tolerate such portrayal” (Locklear, 2012 p. 155) and therefore the argument that these mascots

are not offensive is simply inaccurate. In the end, Locklear demonstrates that regardless of “tradition” or “financial impact” Native American mascots should no longer exist.

Gary Arthur’s case study “The Aftermath of Redskins Indian Mascot Decisions: What’s Next?” looked into several cases where public schools changed their mascot from “redmen.” and explored the procedure he found to be the most effective method of implementing the change in a public setting. The most notable case he discusses is the Cooperstown High School case from upstate New York. He states that the move away from the name “Redmen” came as a result of a student wide vote to make the change, and with the majority of students supporting the change, the Board of Education granted this change (Arthur, 2014). Arthur notes that the five stages that occur during a name change are 1.) A decision and discussion about changing the mascot, 2.) The Exploration of New Mascots and vote, 3.) Discussions on retirement and replacement of paraphernalia and uniforms connected with the mascot, 4.) Opportunities and efforts to educate school and community about native American History and Culture, and 5.) Ultimate adjustment by school and community (Arthur, 2014). The author notes that schools that have followed this process in order have found the most success in experiencing a smooth transition.

TJ Dmyterko’s case study “Bedford Road Redmen Athletic Mascot Change Colonization, Naming, and Power” explored the transition of a the Bedford Public High School from “Redmen” to “Redhawks” that “revealed powerful fault lines within the school and community that reflected deep and long- 3 standing differences about issues of race, culture, language, naming and power” (Dmyterko, 2020 p. 2-3). Dmyterko notes several reasons why this transition was successful regardless of intensive pushback. He references the fact that School Administrator Cody Hanke selected “Redhawks” because it tied back to the “red” part if “Redmen” and linked the Town to the past as an effort to appease people who claimed

“tradition” and “history” (Dmyterko, 2020 p. 2) Additionally, the author cites exceptional communication and social media presence as a key reason the name change was successful. He states that by educating people through communication campaigns, locals were able to better understand why the change was important (Dmyterko, 2020 p. 27). Just as King and Longwell's literature noted, the name was offensive, and people needed to be educated on the actual facts pertaining to this. By following the steps outlined by Arthur, and included an education communication campaign, schools in the public sector will experience more success in implementation because the public will have a better understanding of why the change is necessary, and feel like they have a role in the change.

Jeff Kettle and Chelsea Master's case study “Racist Stereotypes and Cultural Appropriation in American College Sports: Changing the Mascot at Dartmouth, Stanford, Oklahoma and Syracuse” looks at how private and public schools handled the name change. For the purposes of this paper we will examine one of the private schools listed to be able to compare it to cases with public schools. Stanford University, a private university, became one of the first schools in the nation to officially stop using a Native American Mascot (Kettle et. al, 2014). The decision stemmed from a petition from students that led to the creation of a committee to be formed to investigate the change. After pushback from students, the school opted to have a referendum where 58% of students voted to keep the Native American Mascot (Kettle et. al, 2014 p. 4-6). Even with students voting to keep the current mascot, Stanford President Richard Lyman felt evidence demonstrated the name was offensive and “announced, ‘any and all Stanford University use of the Indian Symbol should be immediately disavowed and permanently stopped’” (Kettle et. al, 2014 p. 6). In the end, the decision was never a democratic decision. What this case study demonstrates is that the private sector can handle this issue

through executive order so long as they can demonstrate just cause, like President Lyman had done. This could never happen in the public sector because in the public world the public is the executive voting authority. In the public world, every topic can become political, and stakeholders possess the actual power to make or prevent change

Conclusions

These six authors make it incredibly clear that the use of Native American symbols and nicknames is in fact derogatory. This delegation is crucial to the case, as it transforms the opinions of constituents from powerful statements to empty ramblings. The nostalgia of an old letterman jacket, the fond memories associated with a championship banner, or their coveted high school yearbook are not justification for promoting racism and oppressing a people. There are many political issues that can fall down to a dichotomy of philosophy, and each man is entitled to his own opinion. However, in the case of the Redmen name change, the opinion of those who oppose the change is backed by no true efficacy, but rather selfish and close minded reasons. As harsh as this may sound, the work of the six scholars above points to the fact that the name and mascot of the Redmen is unsatisfactory for reasons related to racism, oppression, history, and legality. Additionally, these readings provided a clear demonstration of practices the Town of Killingly should have used when implementing the change. Had the Town used better communication and followed proven effective procedures, the result may have been different.

Methods for Investigating My Research Topic

To gain a deep understanding of the case, many research methods were employed. First, the local news articles outlining the proceeding of the Killingly High School name change were read.

Following the local news sources, videos of all Town meetings that discussed the issue were

watched, and notes were taken. After hearing from local constituents, stakeholders, Native American representation, and the Killingly Board of Education during these meetings, more research was done on cases similar to Killingly. This portion of the research is detailed in the Literature Review Section.

Lessons Learned

It was not difficult to find six pieces of literature which made it abundantly clear that Killingly High school should change its mascot, regardless of potential pushback. It was very difficult to find opposing literature, in my thorough search I uncovered just one source, an opinion piece from an academic journal. At this point the discussion centers around how to take action, and how to deal with the repercussions far more than it focuses on whether or not names and mascots should change. As someone who strives to one day lead a Town, it was not the research or even the literature itself which taught me the most, but rather the fervent and unwavering opinions of the citizens of Killingly. This process opened my eyes to the unfortunate but true fact that constituents will not always complete their due diligence. In small towns especially, opinions are rooted in feelings and memories, in the comfort of the way things have always been. This is an incredibly hard wall to break through, but one that a successful leader will have to. As a result, public administrators must be willing to engage the political world in order to have some control over their administrative function. If the citizens of Killingly were willing or able to access and read academic pieces on mascots and team names, this dilemma would not exist. However, a Town Administrator cannot expect that from its citizens and therefore must engage in political discussion. They can expect to do research to ensure that they make informed decisions that contribute to the greater good of their community, even at the risk of upsetting constituents.

Having spent the last 20 years of my life, so essentially my entire life, in the world of academics, I have become accustomed to conversations where all parties involved have evidence and information to bring to the table. I am used to learning new information and then making new decisions based on that learning. While this is a skill I will use throughout my career and life, it is not an assumption I can make about every individual I will interact with. So more than anything, this literature review inspired me to begin thinking about what difficult decision making looks like in a leadership role, how knowledge is power in my hands, but not an excuse to make decisions without giving fair and transparent information to constituents, and how stark political issues can affect Town dynamics and even local politics.

Section 3: Background Information

The target audience for this case study are municipal administrators who could potentially be faced with the same problem. As previously stated, the problem this case study investigates is how public administrators handle the dichotomy of politics and administration when faced with a divisive issue such as a mascot change from something controversial to something more socially acceptable. These administrators include school superintendents, athletic directors, Town Managers, and other municipal employees who have the responsibility of carrying out the administrative functions and/or handle the backlash that comes with the mascot change. By examining the Killingly, Connecticut case study, these administrators can use the lessons from this case to more effectively handle a controversial mascot change in their municipality.

As of October 2020, 1,232 high schools in the United States still used Native American mascots, with only 23 of these schools having tribal ties (Bleier, 2020). As much of society

moves towards a more politically correct world, while others resist this movement, public administrators such as school superintendents, athletic directors, Town Managers, and other employees in these districts will eventually be faced with deciding whether or not to retire mascots deemed to be derogatory. When going through this process, these administrators will be confronted with the demands of elected officials, the public, and interest groups with strong opinions about the topic.

This case study will show readers how the politics of a mascot change can impact administrative function and visa versa. In Killingly, this came in the form of a political referendum where elected officials were voted out of office and replaced with single issue politicians. This not only led to the reinstatement of a derogatory mascot, but also resulted in other unintended consequences. After the name was reinstated inexperienced Board Members stayed on the Board and have since been forced to make important decisions such as how to handle the COVID-19 Pandemic. In the end, administrators had to figure out the best way to work with these elected officials to continue “business as usual.” Administrators were also responsible for actually implementing the controversial decision and were responsible for handling any pushback. This case study will lay out how administrators in Killingly handled these issues.

Section 4: About the Organization

The Town of Killingly is a municipality in northeastern Connecticut and serves a population of roughly 17,370 people based on the 2010 census (city-data.com, 2020). The mission of the Town of Killingly is to provide services to residents such as infrastructure development, public safety, and education. This case primarily focuses on the Board of

Education in Killingly and their relationship to the High School. The Board of Education is made up of 9 elected members, who meet on a bimonthly basis, excluding November and December. (killinglyschools.org)

The case largely focuses on the Town's High School, specifically the athletic Department. This mission of the High School is as follows: To promote responsibility, excellence, and dedication to lifelong learning in a safe environment, and to provide relevant and challenging learning opportunities that address individual needs and foster talents (killinglychools.org, 2020). The athletics Department has authored their own handbook, last updated in 2018, which states expectations for athletes, and the department's overall mission. Simply put, the system emphasizes character, positive attitude, appropriate behaviour, and achievement (killinglychools.org, 2020).

Key players to consider during this challenge is Steven Rioux, Superintendent of Schools during the controversy; Mary Calorio, Town Manager; and Kevin Marcoux, Athletic Director. Additionally, it is important to note that the Board of Education members during the vote to initially rescind the "Redmen" name were Democrats John Burns, Hoween Flexer, Lydia Rivera-Abrams, Jeffrey Buchbinder, and Christopher Viens as well as Republicans Greg Biggs, Doug Farrow, Craig Hanford, and Diane Summa (Killingly.org, 2020). The Board of Education Members when the Board decided to reinstate the Redmen name were Democrats Hoween Flexer, Lydia Rivera-Abrams, Jeffrey, and Christopher Viens as well as Republicans Greg Biggs, Craig Hanford, Doug Farrow, Norm Ferron, Karen Fremuth and Jason Muscara (Killingly.org, 2020). Additionally, Town Council Chairman Jason Anderson was very verbal during this controversy.

Section 5: The Challenge

Although there may seem to be a sudden burst in controversial team names, most notable being the saga of the professional football team formerly known as the Washington Redskins, this is a long standing cause. Organizations have stood against racist or culturally appropriated names and mascot representation for over 20 years. There are even accounts of major colleges and universities undergoing this change in the 1970s, half a century ago. However, for a small Town nestled in the quiet corner of Connecticut, the awakening was a little late.

In the Spring of 2019, a student group at Killingly High School gathered signatures to petition for a change in the school mascot and team name. Enough signatures were gathered for the Board of Education to allot time on their agenda to discuss eliminating the outdated and offensive Killingly Redmen name. On June 26, 2019, at a scheduled Board of Education meeting, the Board received public comments from both non-residents and residents expressing support and displeasure for the changing of the “Redmen” name (Killingly Board of Education, 2019 p. 1). Many speakers stated that they felt the name was offensive, others stated they felt it was part of the Town’s “tradition” and the Board referenced how local tribes such as the Nipmuc found the name to be derogatory (WINY, 2019). In a vote of six yes, two no, and one abstention the board voted to “to direct the superintendent to ensure Killingly Public Schools shall not have or adopt a name, symbol, or image that depicts or refers to another race, individual, custom, or tradition and that is used as a mascot, nickname, logo, letterhead or team name of the school and that the Superintendent consult with members of the Nipmuc Tribe and based on their input, take action” (Killingly Board of Education, 2019 p. 2). This vote was taken after the Board formally rejected putting the mascot change question on the November ballot. Additionally, this vote meant the “Redmen” mascot would need to be changed. The final remark on the topic came from

Superintendent Rioux who stated “ there are significant costs related to removing or changing imagery on chairs, sport uniforms, helmets, high school gym floor etc” (Killingly Board of Education, 2019 p. 2). On October 9, 2019, the Board voted to accept the “Red Hawks” mascot which had been accepted by a student vote.

After the Redhawks name was announced, citizens of Killingly were outraged. Opinions were voiced on the community facebook page, and other forums, largely in favor of changing the name back to “Redman.” Talk transformed into action when local election season arrived. Several Republican Board of Education candidates ran an overwhelming number of single issue campaigns, all promising to return the “Redmen” name. One particular candidate, Jason Muscara, had previously held the title of Vice Chairman of “the Connecticut chapter of the American Guard group, which the Southern Poverty Law Center has deemed a ‘general hate group’” (Penney, 2019) but received overwhelming support. The election resulted in a major party power shift where republicans held a 6-3 majority of the Board seats (Penny, 2019). Additionally, several Town Council members ran a campaign promising to intervene in the issue and resulted in Republicans taking a 8-1 majority of Council seats. Chairman Jason Anderson regularly communicated with the Board of Education encouraging they either reinstate the “Redmen ” name or bring it to a Town election (WINY, 2019). Voter registration in the town increased dramatically, and resulted in all four of the Republican Board of Education candidates receiving over 1,700 votes each, an unprecedented occurrence (killingly.org, 2020).

Following the election, the newly elected Board of Education held a special meeting on December 11, 2020. Speakers, including residents, academics, Board Members, and Native American tribe members, were given three minutes to state their reasons for opposing or supporting the removal of the “Red Hawk” mascot and the reinstatement of the “Redmen”

mascot (WINY, 2019). The only major administrator to speak during this time was Athletic Director Kevin Marcoux who stated that students had accepted the “Red Hawk” mascot and that reinstating the “Redmen” would not save the town money, and in fact would cost the Town the money they already invested into “Red Hawks” (WINY, 2019). The main guest speaker was Mark Onewolf, a member of the Native American Guardians Association and was brought in by the overwhelmingly Republican Town Leaders. Claiming to be Native American, Onewolf claimed the “Redmen” mascot was an honor and supported its reinstatement (WINY, 2019). Before his presentation, academics from the University of Connecticut, alerted the meeting goers that Onewolf was considered a fraud in the world of academia and was not officially a member of any tribe in the United States (WINY, 2019). This did little to change the minds of citizens, or Board Members, who believed he was Native American, and that his support of the Redmen name and mascot justified the Town using them. After all speakers had a chance to speak, the Board voted 5-4 “to rescind the previously approved motion on 6/26/19, which directed the superintendent to ensure Killingly Public Schools shall not have or adopt a name, symbol, or image that depicts or refers to another race, individual, custom, or tradition and that is used as a mascot, nickname, logo, letterhead or team name of the school and that the Superintendent consult with members of the Nipmuc Tribe and based on their input, take action” (Killingly Board of Education, 2019 p. 3). The Board then voted to officially “rescind a motion, approved on 10/8/2019 changing the mascot name to Red Hawks” (Killingly Board of Education, 2019 p. 3).

On January 8, 2020 the Board voted 5-4 “to reinstate the Killingly Redmen name and to form a subcommittee to look at updating the logo design so any imagery used shall not portray Native Americans in a negative stereotype and is displayed with cultural sensitivity and in an

historically correct manner. The subcommittee will also develop an educational curriculum to install in students an appreciation of Native American Heritage and insure that they do not form the idea that it is acceptable to stereotype any group” (Killingly Board of Education, 2019 p. 4-5). The mascot was reinstated, and the money already invested into “Redhawks” equipment was lost. School Board Member’s who campaigned on a platform of reinstating the mascot name now had to focus on different issues and primarily rallied for the implementation of a \$500,000 Turf football field (Beale, 2020). The Superintendent, who remained relatively silent throughout the debate, was forced to answer to the Board moving forward. Town Council Members who also ran on a platform of support for the “Redmen” mascot now found themselves in a position to make important decisions such as issues related to COVID-19 policies and other important issues. In line with their party politics, Councilors requested that Town Manager Mary Calorio work with Town attorneys to submit letters to the Governor requesting the state’s economy be entirely reopened in the midst of a global pandemic (Killingly Town Council, 2020). This strictly symbolic action cost the Town Manager time she could have spent working on other projects, as well as cost the Town any legal fees associated with work done by the Town attorney.

Section 6: The Solution (Recommendations)

I approached this challenge by looking to gain an understanding of the issue of mascot changes throughout history. By understanding what has worked and not worked in the past, I was able to understand where Killingly administrators fell short and how they should have handled the issue in the first place. Luckily for me, the challenge of Administrators handling the dichotomy of politics and administration during a mascot change is not new, and I was able to examine several cases from the past to better understand what these administrators should have done in the first place. Based on my research, and my understanding of the past, I would

recommend that any Town wishing to move away from a controversial mascot, including if Killingly wishes to attempt this again in the future,, they should remember the following:

1. **Get Engaged:** When Killingly Superintendent Steve Rioux was presented with the mascot issue by students, his reaction was to simply allow students to present the issue to the Board at a June 12, 2019 meeting. He took a hands off approach and treated it as simply a political issue. While Woodrow Wilson would praise this behavior, as someone who believed administrators should act a-politically (Wilson, 1884), history has shown the more engaged a Superintendent is in the change process, the more likely the change will be successful. Take the Bedford case mentioned earlier during the literature review. The Superintendent actively engaged in recommending new names and made sure he communicated his thoughts with both the public and the Board. In the Killingly case, the Athletic Director, Mr. Marcoux, is a great example of an administrator who was engaged however, he needed more support from fellow administrators. Public Administrators who face similar issues in the future need to get engaged.
2. **Get your facts straight:** When Killingly Superintendent Steve Rioux stated that “there are significant costs related to removing or changing imagery on chairs, sport uniforms, helmets, high school gym floor etc.” at the June 26, 2020 meeting). This statement immediately was taken by residents and kick started a campaign to reinstate the “Redmen” name based solely on cost. On October 10, 2019, it was revealed that “The district will spend an estimated \$40,000 to put it (the name change) into effect. That includes about \$27,000 for new football uniforms and about \$10,000 for changing the gym floor. **But Rioux said those are not all new costs.**” (Beale, 2019). In reality, many of the costs such as uniform and facility updates had already been budgeted in regardless

of the name change. In the end, Rioux's statement led to alarm within the Town and provided ammunition that further divided the Town. Public administrators need to make sure their facts are correct before they make bold statements.

- 3. Communicate, Educate, and Promote Understanding:** As discussed in the literature review, Dmyterko states that educating people through communication campaigns, allows locals to better understand why the mascot change is important and can lead to more success (Dmyterko, 2020 p. 27). If people understand why the name is offensive, and actually a violation of civil rights, they will better understand why the change is necessary. The Town of Killingly did not implement a communication plan for this process whatsoever. All information regarding the topic was received during Board meetings, which were often saturated with opinionated statements, and even academically discredited presentations. The Superintendent and initial Board never sent out credible newsletters regarding the issue, or formed a communication committee to actually communicate facts before making a decision. Further, as the administrator for the Board of Education, it is the responsibility of the Superintendent to follow up with residents regarding major decisions. Mr. Rioux's lack of communication after the decision, and the progress that was being made, raised further scepticism from residents led to a political referendum against the "town establishment."
- 4. Have a Plan, and Stick to it:** Through his research Gary Arthur developed five stages that must occur during a name change: 1.) A decision and discussion about changing the mascot, 2.) The Exploration of New Mascots and vote, 3.) Discussions on retirement and replacement of paraphernalia and uniforms connected with the mascot, 4.) Opportunities and efforts to educate school and community about native American History and Culture,

and 5.) Ultimate adjustment by school and community (Arthur, 2014). In the Killingly case, the Superintendent should have developed a plan according to these steps and presented it to the Board. The discussion that occurred regarding the mascot was extremely brief, only occurring during one meeting before the Board voted to rescind the “Redmen” name. There should have been several discussions before making a decision, and the Superintendent should have openly suggested this to the Board. The Superintendent also did not have a clear plan for developing a new mascot for the school and therefore left the public feeling uncertain after the vote was made. The Superintendent also provided little factual information about the actual impacts of the name change financially, and much of this information was inaccurate. Finally, the Superintendent never had a plan for following up with the decisions made and communicating with impacted stakeholders. If the Superintendent had a formal plan and timeline at the first meeting, the decision making process could have been handled more appropriately and therefore not failed. Having a plan, and sticking to it is vital.

- 5. Remember your Sector:** Unlike the private sector, where stakeholder value is based on financials where many stakeholders can be disregarded based on rank (ex. The Stanford Students who wanted to keep their controversial mascot), public administrators must answer to all stakeholders one way or another. Killingly Superintendent Rioux’s decision to take a hands off approach and allow the Board to figure things out on their own, had major repercussions. It ultimately led to the mishandling of the situation and led to a political referendum where many Board members, his bosses, were replaced. The Superintendent has an obligation to the public to see that procedures are thorough and complete. Forgetting this obligation can make things very difficult.

6. Collaborate: Even though Town Manager Mary Calorio stated that “school-specific issues like mascots are under the school board umbrella of responsibility as agents of the state Board of Education” (Penney, 2019) she should have been more open to collaborating with the School Department to see that this issue be handled appropriately. In the end, all Town officials have a responsibility to serve the residents of their Town. In the case of Killingly, you had a Town Manager who felt it wasn’t her problem, a Superintendent who passively pushed the process along, while the Athletic Director, Kevin Marcoux, became an outspoken advocate of speaking for the students. This is three different administrators not on the same page. In reality, the outcome of this issue impacted all of them by flipping the elected representation in the Town and impacting their operations. A committee of all the major executives impacted by this policy (whether directly or indirectly) should have been created, and from there they could have planned together. In the end, the more invested minds coming together to solve a problem, the better.

These recommendations have come through the extensive analysis of what went wrong in the Town of Killingly, and comparing them to previous cases and literature. This analysis included taking a step back and critically thinking about how town administrators can impact a political process. Even though these administrators do not have legislative power, they do have the power of influence. It is the requirement of these administrators to use their influence to see effective outcomes and in turn serve the public.

Section 7: Conclusion

In the beginning of this process, I made the statement that it is the duty of public administrators to balance the dichotomy that exists between administration and politics. In the public sector elected and appointed officials must work together to provide services for the public. The Killingly Mascot Case Study demonstrates that oftentimes balancing these two forces can be extremely challenging, particularly when dealing with something as controversial as a mascot that has been deemed derogatory. Through my research, I found that the administrators in Killingly had grossly mishandled the mascot controversy, and by refusing to do their due diligence in pursuing a fair and comprehensive procedure, led to the unprecedented reinstatement of a controversial mascot.

The literature I engaged in helped me better understand the history behind this controversial topic. It helped me understand the different ways public and private institutions have handled the mascot issue in the past and allowed me to develop a solid foundation of knowledge regarding the topic. This literature also showed me cases where towns were able to successfully retire controversial mascot names and therefore provided me with the insight necessary to critique the methods used by Killingly officials.

While this literature provided me with excellent information, it all had one thing in common: they all explored cases where mascots were retired for good. The Killingly Case provides the first known case where the retirement of a derogatory mascot is reversed, and therefore was the first time in U.S. history where a Board voted to reinstate a mascot deemed offensive. The reinstatement of the “Redskin” mascot was the direct result of administrators like

the Superintendent failing to engage the issue properly. The significance of this case lies in the fact that it provides a unique opportunity for individuals to learn about the topic of controversial mascot name changes through the context of failure. By examining where administrators have gone wrong, future administrators will be able to avoid making similar mistakes. With over 1,000 schools still possessing controversial mascot names, it is my hope that this case study will allow public administrators faced with this issue in the future avoid the same failure experienced in Killingly, Connecticut.

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