

# Pascack Valley and Pascack Hills high schools will remove Indians and Cowboys mascots

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The sports teams at Pascack Valley and Pascack Hills high schools will no longer be named the Indians and Cowboys.

During Monday night's virtual meeting, the Pascack Valley Regional High School District Board of Education voted unanimously to remove both nicknames and logos.

The district will assign new names at a later date in a “thoughtful and expeditious manner,” according to multiple posts on social media and an article in the Pascack Hills Trailblazer, the school's student newspaper.

The vote followed two hours of public comment that mainly focused on the racial undertones of Pascack Valley's Indians nickname. The school phased out its "Indian Head" logo in 2015 but kept the nickname.

“Indian mascots are dehumanizing and cause psychological damage to natives,” said one of the speakers, a former Pascack Valley teacher. “Personal feelings of nostalgia do not absolve us from our responsibility to stand up for a marginalized group.”

Several other New Jersey schools are also named the Indians, including Passaic and Wayne Valley high schools in Passaic County and Weehawken High School in Hudson County. Indian Hills High School in Bergen County uses Braves as a nickname, which has similar racial undertones.

The Cowboys nickname is much less common in New Jersey.

“The cowboy is in no way free of bias as it excludes women and people of color,” said Charleen Schwartzman, a Pascack Hills math teacher

who will move into an assistant principal position on July 1. "Let's choose a mascot that we can all be proud of."

Added board member Kenneth Ralph: "We shouldn't have nicknames that are in contrast to each other; we should have something that unifies our district and that shares we have mutual goals between our two high schools."

**NICKNAMES: Ideas for the new team names of Pascack Valley and Pascack Hills**

On Tuesday, a Pascack Hills student started a Change.org petition to keep the Cowboys name. By 3:30 p.m., the petition had more than 1,000 signatures.

A similar petition was started to keep the Indians name at Pascack Valley, but that petition had less than 300 signatures as of Tuesday afternoon.

Team nicknames have become a point of controversy as the Black Lives Matter movement sweeps across the country. In Monmouth County, a petition is circulating to remove "Rebels" as Howell High School's nickname. The logo of a Confederate soldier was removed years ago, but the nickname remains.

*Jared Mitovich of the Pascack Hills Trailblazer contributed to this report.*