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The New York State Education Department Building in Albany, New York. Photo: [Onasil - Bill Badzo - Be Happy](#).

New York bans use of Native mascots in public schools

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Public schools in New York will no longer be allowed to use mascots, symbols or depictions of Native people following a long-awaited vote this week.

At a meeting on Tuesday, the [New York State Board of Regents](#) voted unanimously to ban the use of Native imagery in schools. The decision is being hailed by leaders of the [Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe](#).

“The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is pleased that the New York State Regents took this critical action to ensure that Native American people are not treated as cartoons but rather living people with a culture and languages that were given to us by the Creator,” Chief Ron LaFrance said in a [news release](#) on Thursday.



Saint Regis Mohawk Tribe

about 2 years ago



The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council would like to applaud the efforts of the New York State (NYS) Board of Regents' in banning New York schools from using Native American mascots. This much needed effort moves away from perpetuating harmful stereotypes and recognizes the significance of Native Americans as people.

"The Saint Regis Mohawk Tribal Council is pleased that the New York State Regents took this critical action to ensure that Native American people are not treated ...

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4

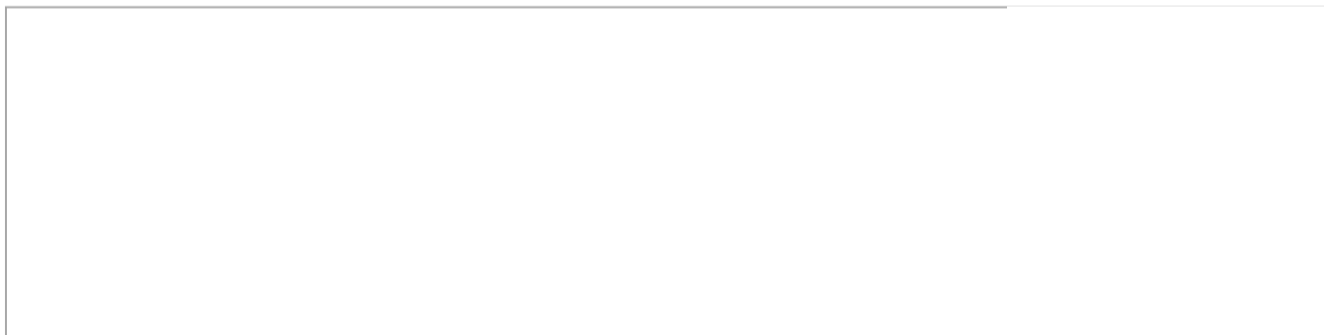
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According to a [memo prepared by the New York Education Department](#), the use of Native people as mascots causes harm to students. Research cited by the state shows that such symbols and imagery reinforce anti-Native stereotypes and prejudice.

"We are not mascots. We are people who are not to be exploited for gain, fun, or entertainment," said Chief Michael Conners.

The proposal adopted at the [state meeting on Tuesday](#) recognizes an exception to the use of Native mascots by tribes themselves and in cases where a school enters into an agreement with a tribe. Additionally, the ban doesn't apply to "a public school, school building, or school district named after an Indigenous tribe."



Along with prohibiting the use of Native mascots, symbols or depictions by schools, a forthcoming regulation will bar school officers, employees and all individuals on school property from "utilizing or promoting any Indigenous name, logo, or mascot." Citizens of tribal nations will not be subject to this ban.

"Sports teams and institutions, including schools, have been asked politely to understand our point of view on this subject. For centuries we have been labeled and characterized as a people not deserving of respect even though we have sacrificed the most of this country," said Chief Beverly Cook.

According to a [December 2022 memo](#), the regulation banning Native mascots becomes effective on May 3, 2023. The document contains the text of the rule, titled "Use of Indigenous Names, Logos, or Mascots Prohibited."

The rule states that schools with Native names, logos and mascots must take action to address their removal "by the end of the 2022-23 school year." The imagery must then be removed "no later than the end of the 2024-2025 school year." Extensions to these deadlines are allowed for "good cause," according to the regulation.



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Public school officials in New York have opposed the use of Native mascots as far back as 2001, according to a [memo from November 2022](#). The document notes that several school districts have since retired their mascots while others have [kept them](#) around amid ongoing controversy.

Following the release of the mascot regulation last November, another tribe based in New York expressed support. Ray Halbritter, the Representative of the [Oneida Indian Nation](#), said the ban was long overdue.

“At its core, this issue is really about how this state views its responsibilities to an increasingly diverse population,” [Halbritter said in a statement](#) at the time. “For too long, we have permitted old traditions to persist – the kind that suggest, in some circumstances, that it is acceptable to use dictionary defined slurs as mascots, like was the case with the Washington NFL team before they changed their names.”

“Native American organizations, civil rights groups and public health organizations have made clear the damage that the mascotization of Native people has on our youth. Promoting inclusivity and mutual respect is the best way to unify our communities moving forward,” said Halbritter.

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