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Tulare Union High School seeks new mascot to replace banned ‘Redskins’



Tulare Union High School’s Redskins mascot permeates student life, extending to the costumes worn and signs carried by students in parades. Under a new state law, the school must replace its nickname with a new one by 2017. (Michael Alvarez)

BY BEN POSTON | STAFF WRITER

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A giant mural of an Indian chief in full headdress is painted on the front of Tulare Union High School.

That will soon change. The school district this week announced plans to pick a new mascot to comply with a state law that bans the name “Redskins” and requires schools with that mascot to change it by Jan. 1, 2017.

In signing the bill into law last fall, Gov. Jerry Brown made California the first state to ban the term, which is now widely considered a slur against Native Americans. Four schools still use the nickname, three of them in the San Joaquin Valley.

The Tulare school board voted to approve a new mascot name by the end of June and implement the change by the end of the year, according to a press release from the district.

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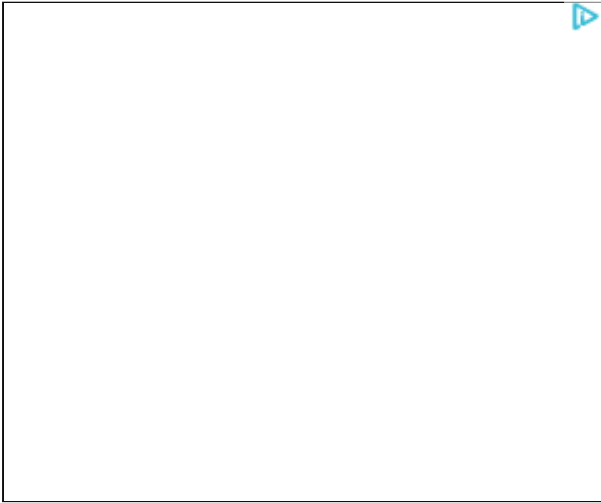
The district is creating a naming committee and asking for input from residents, alumni, members of our local Native American tribes, parents, staff and students.

After the governor signed the law, district Supt. Sarah Koligan said “on behalf of the Tulare Joint Union High School District we are disappointed,” according to a press release.

In Tulare and the other towns that still have the banned mascot, disappointment was a common, though not a universal, reaction. Residents, students and school officials said the law was an attack on a tradition that they said was never meant to offend. Others praised the law, saying it was time to accept that the term is outdated and hurtful.

The Tulare campus is filled with words and images that reflect the current name. Besides the front of the school, another Indian chief is painted on the gym floor. “Home of the Redskins” is spelled out in letters big enough to read a block away. The hallways are lined with artwork depicting Native Americans. Bulletin board posters scream “Redskin Pride” and “Redskin Love,” and there are Redskin football schedules.

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The name has been a part of the school since 1924 -- the same year the United States first recognized Native Americans as citizens with some rights.

Staff writers Diane Marcum and Zahira Torres contributed to this report.

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