

Scott Zweig
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West Hartford, CT 06117

Sent via electronic mail and personal delivery

Dr. Lorna Thomas-Farquharson, Chair
Ms. Deb Polun, Vice Chairperson
Dr. Ari Steinberg, Secretary
Dr. Jason Chang
Clare Nesoralla
Ethan Goldman
Dr. Gayle Harris
West Hartford Board of Education
50 South Main Street
West Hartford, CT 06107

May 16, 2022

Re: Rescission of February 1, 2022 Votes Regarding High School Team Names

Dear Dr. Thomas-Farquharson and Members of the West Hartford Board of Education,

I write this letter to formally demand that the West Hartford Board of Education (the “Board”) rescind the votes taken on February 1, 2022 regarding the Hall and Conard high school team names. These votes must be rescinded, and the corresponding motions nullified because the actions of the Board lacked due process and constitute unlawful violations of Board policies.

During its consideration of, and ultimate decision to change the team names at Hall and Conard high schools, the Board violated at least four different Board policies. Specifically, the Board violated Policies 1700, 1800, 8310 and 8120 as detailed below.

Policy 1700 – School Nicknames and Images

The Board violated Policy 1700 by voting to discontinue the use of the names “Chieftain” and “Warrior” despite express language in Policy 1700 permitting their continued use. As of the date of this letter, Policy 1700 has not been amended or repealed, and remains in full effect.

Policy 1800 – Educational Equity

The Board violated Policy 1800 by applying unequal criteria in reaching its decision to change only the team names at Hall and Conard high schools. The Board concluded that the names “Chieftain” and “Warrior” were systemically racist and warranted removal. However, the Board failed to conduct any reasonable analysis or review of King Phillip Middle School, which is named after a Native American chief. The Board failed to take this necessary action despite the school’s name falling squarely within the language of Public Act 21-2, which the Board claims its actions are designed to comply with.

Policy 8310 – Formulation, Adoption, Amendment of Policies and Bylaws

The Board violated Policy 8310 by failing to hold two readings at public meetings of the Board, prior to any vote to substantively amend an existing Board policy. By voting to change the high school team names already permitted under Policy 1700, the Board effectively allowed a substantive amendment to Policy 1700 without satisfying the necessary notice requirements or holding a vote.

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Policy 8120 – Limits of Authority

The Board violated Policy 8120 by exceeding its authority in directing the principals at Hall and Conard to “appoint a committee at their school...to develop a new name by June 7, 2022.” Such action by the Board is prohibited by the language of Policy 8210, which states the Board “shall not...command the service of any school district employee...”

In addition to the above violations, the Board also violated the rights of students, teachers, coaches, parents, alumni, and other interested parties by deciding to rename the team names without due process. Given the Board’s numerous breaches of its legal and ethical duties, the decision to change the team names cannot stand.

In the interest of resolving this issue amicably and without litigation, I encourage you to act immediately and rescind the unlawful votes, nullify the invalid motions, and cease all actions related to the renaming of the team names at Hall and Conard high schools, which the Board initiated without proper authority.

As you are aware, this issue is of great interest to the residents of West Hartford and alumni at both schools. These individuals expect and demand that you will act in accordance with your stated policies, as well as state and federal law. If the Board chooses to revisit this issue in the future, you will be required to engage in a comprehensive, transparent, and unbiased process that complies with all Board policies and bylaws, as well as applicable state and federal law.

Should you have any questions about the points raised herein, please refer this letter to Corporation Counsel to review the points set forth above and issue an opinion, so that the Board will fully understand the need to reverse its course of action. I look forward to your prompt response. Thank you.

Sincerely,



Scott Zweig

CC:

Thomas Moore, Superintendent – West Hartford Public Schools (via electronic mail & personal delivery)
Dr. Andrew Morrow, Assistant Superintendent – West Hartford Public Schools (via electronic mail)
Dan Zittoun, Principal – Hall High School (via electronic mail)
Jamahl Hines, Principal – Conard High School (via electronic mail)