

DISTRICT NEWS RELEASE

HAYS CONSOLIDATED INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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District Admin to Recommend Board Change Hays HS Mascot Fewer than Half of the Students Comfortable with Mascot; 1-in-4 Very Uncomfortable

Based on student, teacher, and community feedback, the Hays CISD administration will recommend that the Board of Trustees vote to change the Hays High School rebel mascot. The mascot of a high school is supposed to serve as a unifying symbol and a rallying-point for school pride – a way for all students to collectively celebrate their academic, athletic, and fine arts accomplishments and cheer on their teams. When nearly 60 percent of the students, and more than 70 percent of the teachers and staff members, show little to no comfort with the current mascot, it ceases to serve its intended purpose. When more than a quarter of the students, and nearly a third of the teachers and staff members, are very uncomfortable with the current mascot; that mascot fails in its objective. When a mascot mires the school in political controversy and pits students, families, and community members against each other; it is time to change.

Hays High School Brand Package History and Debate

Hays High school stopped using the confederate flag as an official symbol of the school in 2000. In 2012, the district banned the flag's display on any district property, ending its unofficial use. In 2015, Hays High School stopped using *Dixie* as its fight song. Because of the previous association with symbols of the confederacy, the district now believes it would be impossible to rebrand the Hays High School rebels and completely sever the mascot's connection to confederate imagery that is hurtful and hateful to many.

The specific timing of the decision to recommend a change to the rebel mascot has occurred during the summer and it was not in the district's current plans to address. Instead, the district has been and is focused on the incredible challenges of COVID-19. However, the call for a mascot change, this time in the wake of the current events in the country, is not sudden, nor unexpected. It is, in fact, a debate that has been occurring in Hays CISD for more than 20 years.

The arguments regarding keeping or changing the branding package for Hays High School are well vetted and well heard. No doubt, the debate will continue on the merits of what we as a nation choose to honor, but it's a debate that should take place without embroiling a public school in the discourse. It's not necessary for the school or the district, which represents a diverse community with opinions that are equally varied, to take a position. That's not the point. The mere fact that the rebel mascot is indisputably divisive is enough to warrant its change.

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Rebel Mascot Survey Results

During the week of June 29, 2020, the district sent 2,325 invitations to the Hays High School 2020-2021 school year 9th through 12th graders to participate in a mascot survey. The survey, created by the district's administration, using the district's third-party survey platform, asked students to gauge their comfort level with the rebel mascot on a seven-point scale from very uncomfortable to very comfortable. There were 1,152 responses.

Student Survey Results: How do you feel about the Hays High School rebel mascot?						
Very Uncomfortable – Change It 26.82% (309 students)	Uncomfortable 7.55% (87 students)	Just Slightly Uncomfortable 6.60% (76 students)	Neutral – No Opinion 17.53% (202 students)	Just Slightly Comfortable 0.87% (10 students)	Comfortable 6.08% (70 students)	Very Comfortable – Keep It 33.42% (385 students)
Total Uncomfortable 40.97% (472 students)				Total Comfortable 40.37% (465 students)		
Total of Students Showing Little-to-No Comfort Level with Mascot 59.37% (684 students)						
13 (1.13%) out of 1,152 students did not answer this question on the survey.						

The district sent 265 invitations to the Hays High School teachers and staff to participate in a mascot survey during the week of June 29, 2020. The survey asked employees the same questions as students – to gauge their comfort level with the rebel mascot on a seven-point scale from very uncomfortable to very comfortable. There were 146 responses.

Teacher and Staff Survey Results: How do you feel about the Hays High School rebel mascot?						
Very Uncomfortable – Change It 30.14% (44 staff)	Uncomfortable 15.75% (23 staff)	Just Slightly Uncomfortable 6.16% (9 staff)	Neutral – No Opinion 19.18% (28 staff)	Just Slightly Comfortable 0.68% (1 staff)	Comfortable 6.16% (9 staff)	Very Comfortable – Keep It 21.92% (32 staff)
Total Uncomfortable 52.05% (76 staff)				Total Comfortable 28.76% (42 staff)		
Total of Teachers and Staff Showing Little-to-No Comfort Level with Mascot 71.91% (105 staff)						
All teachers and staff who took the survey answered this question.						

Petition to Change the Rebel Mascot & Community Conversation

In addition to the teacher, staff, and student surveys, the Board may also consider, when making its decision, a community petition that was submitted through an internet website that had more than 1,400 signatures as of July 2, 2020. Students have also formed a committee to change the mascot and have reported to news organizations that they have a petition that has garnered more than 500 signatures. Furthermore, Board members are reading the many comments on the subject posted to community-managed social media sites, as well as sites operated by news media organizations.

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Next Steps – Potential New Mascot

According to local school board policy, the Board of Trustees must vote to change an existing secondary school mascot. Should the Board choose to make a change, trustees will need a recommendation on a new mascot to consider. The student rebel mascot sentiment survey also asked students what they would like to see as a new mascot, should the Board make a change. From the top write-in responses that met criteria – mascots not currently in use at Hays CISD secondary schools and options that are not silly or offensive – the district has prepared a choice selection sheet. The top choices that made the selection sheet are: Hawks, Hornets, Patriots, Cowboys, Eagles, Hurricanes, Hyenas, Phoenixes, Lions, Mavericks, Wildcats, Dragons, and Honey Badgers. Each Hays High School student will have an opportunity to express his or her favorite choice from the selection sheet. Students will receive links to the choice selection sheets beginning the week of July 6, 2020. The choice selection sheet responses will be presented to the Board to consider, should the Board vote to change the mascot.

The Board is expected to consider the mascot issue as early as later this month. If the Board changes the mascot, the district will help Hays High School make the transition to the new mascot based on a workable timeline that would be developed and announced after a Board decision. In anticipation of a possible change, the district will begin preparing an inventory, with associated costs, of items that would need to be changed, including uniforms and signage. No total cost estimate was completed at the time of this news release.

Growing and Learning

The administrative recommendation, and the potential Board decision to change the mascot, is not intended to erase campus history or cast any type of judgement on past supporters of the Hays High School rebels. For students, teachers, staff, and community members who rallied behind the rebel brand for more than 50 years with no nefarious or ill-intent; their good memories and moments, and accomplishments will always remain. And, the district will always be proud of those achievements. For alumni who, with pure hearts, embraced the slogan, “Rebel Pride Never Dies;” a change in mascot could never change the essence of that statement – a declaration of school pride.

The district encourages students and the community to support its schools and is forever grateful for the support of Hays High School, both in the past and in the present. However, Hays CISD is a much different community than it once was, and so is the world. We all grow and learn. As a school district, we are, in fact, in the business of growing and learning. The administration believes that it is time to change the mascot and open a new chapter at Hays High School – one that, moving forward, can be embraced and celebrated by all.

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