

## Use of American Indian Mascots, Nicknames, and Logos

### MEA Resolution Adopted at 2003 Fall RA

The Michigan Education Association believes that people of all cultures, races, and religions have a right to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Association believes it is important that all students learn about the cultural aspects of various communities so that they will understand cultural norms, develop tolerance, respect differences, and become good citizens and productive adults.

The Association recognizes that some American Indian tribes, organizations, state and local officials, and private citizens find the use of American Indian mascots, nicknames, logos, and symbols within our public schools to be offensive, and further find that their use has a detrimental effect on the educational achievement of American Indian students.

The Association supports and strongly recommends the elimination of American Indian mascots, nicknames, logos, fight songs, insignias, antics, and team descriptors by all Michigan schools.

#### **Rationale:**

The Michigan Civil Rights Commission and Michigan State Board of Education “encourages all school districts to ensure that instructional materials, course work, policies, and procedures are respectful of cultural difference, enhance cultural competency, and are void of stereotypic language and representations.”

The United States Commission on Civil Rights have called for an end to the use of American Indian images and team names by schools: “Schools should not use their influence to perpetuate misrepresentations of any culture of people. Stereotypes of American Indians teach all students that the stereotyping of minority groups is acceptable, a dangerous lesson in such a diverse society.”

The Michigan State Board of Education supports and strongly recommends the elimination of American Indian mascots, nicknames, logos, fight songs, insignias, antics and team descriptors by all Michigan schools.

The use of “Indian” mascots and logos in our school athletic events, as well as in other community activities, contributes to many stereotypes and misperceptions of American Indians. As long as ‘Indian’ team names, mascots and logos remain a part of school athletic programs, we as educators are tolerating and perpetuating racism and stereotyping. Most communities are proud of their athletic teams, yet school traditions involving Native American imagery typically reflect little pride in or knowledge of Native cultures. These traditions have taken the trappings of Native cultures onto the athletic field where young people have played at being “Indian.”

Native people do not feel honored by this symbolism. Instead, they experience it as a mockery of their cultures. Sacred objects that are part of their religion, such as the drum, eagle

feathers, face painting and traditional dress, are being used in another culture’s game. This would be similar to depicting the “cross”, for example, at an athletic event.

Depictions of mighty warriors of the past emphasize a tragic part of Native history; focusing on wartime survival. They ignore the strength and beauty of Native American cultures during time of peace.

Native people state that the logos are harmful to their cultures, and especially to their children. When someone tells you that you are hurting him or her by your actions, then the harm becomes intentional if you persist.

MEA has always supported diversity and the appropriate use of terms and materials as it relates to culture. The use of “Indian” mascots, nicknames and logos is inappropriate.

(The Michigan Education Association is aware that some individuals prefer the term Native American. According to the 1995 United States Census Bureau survey, 49 percent of the persons asked preferred American Indian and 37 percent preferred Native American. American Indian is also the term used by the Michigan Civil Rights Commission).

#### NEA Releases Recommended Reading List

List includes titles for kindergartners through high school. To mark the 13<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Native American Heritage Month in November, the National Education Association (NEA) has released a recommended reading list that includes titles ranging from such pre-K classics as “Mama, Do You Love Me?” to Tony Hillerman’s Joe Leaphorn Series that has been thrilling young – and older -- adults for more than a decade.

“The books on this list,” said NEA President Reg Weaver, “reflect the rich culture and heritage of Native Americans and the contributions that Native people have made to the development of our country. Learning about the history, traditions, and cultures of the many populations that make up today’s classrooms help to create the sense of community that builds great public schools for every child.”

The list includes collections of short stories by and about Native American children, such as “Children of the Sun”, by Beverly Hungry Wolf; “Dancing Teepees”, a compilation of poems of young American Indians by Virginia Driving Hawk Sneave; a picture book of America’s first prima ballerina Marie Tallchief; and the new classic, “Skeleton Man” by Joseph Bruchac.

Compiled by Association staff, the Native American booklist is the sixth list to be released as part of NEA’s Read Across America, a year-round program that culminates with a nationwide reading party held annually on or near Dr. Suess’s birthday (March 2). The Native American list as well as previous lists can be found at <http://www.nea.org/readacross/resources/nabooklist.html>.