

## Neshaminy officials could use some schooling

by Karen Heller, Inquirer Columnist

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Growing up in Washington, we worshiped the football team, partly because baseball's Senators had gone and moved to Texas, of all places, but mostly because D.C. is more of a football sort of place. The sport, like politics, is nasty, expensive, and quick to adopt rules that defy logic.

We warbled "Hail to the Redskins," donned burgundy-and-gold shirts (unflattering to all), the whole business, even though my father was a civil rights attorney who defended Native Americans in the 1972 takeover of the Bureau of Indian Affairs building to demand improved treaties and living standards.

But times changed. People evolved. New monikers flourished, my favorite being Gregg Easterbrook's "Potomac Drainage Basin Indigenous Persons." The U.S. Patent and Trademark Office recently canceled the Redskins' registration.

Correction: Most people evolved, but not Redskins owner Dan Snyder - the guy who makes other NFL owners look good - and not the officials of the Neshaminy School District, who I thought had better sense than Snyder.

Neshaminy has a far more winning team - with eight decades of gridiron glory - but is saddled with the same outdated, misguided name. Its girls' teams are inexplicably called the Lady Skins, which is outdated *and* sexist while sounding like a really bad razor or bar snack.

Schools all over the country are changing with the times. Other Redskins teams have been reborn as Red Hawks. Nobody asked, but I'm partial to the Neshaminy Creeks - respectful to the region and to Native Americans. Or, in honor of the county, why not the Bucks?

### **Crusaders**

Fortunately, the district is blessed with a terrific trio of young journalist-crusaders. In October, the editorial board of the school newspaper, the Playwickian, decided that the team name is racist and would not appear in the paper, only to have copies of the paper trashed and face constant run-ins with officials. While democracy was taught in history classes, a board member went so far as to suggest the editors be criminally charged. The issue grew well beyond the name to involve free speech and editorial freedom - or the decided lack thereof.

Gillian McGoldrick, Reed Hennessy, and Jackson Haines, rising seniors and Playwickian editors, have consistently shown more common sense and respect than many of the officials. They have been the grown-ups in this eight-month saga, which shows little sign of abating.

### **'Reasonable'**

Faultlessly polite, far more so than several bored-looking board members at a recent meeting, the trio remain undaunted. "We're all strong-willed enough that we want to keep fighting," McGoldrick said. Hennessy donned a straw Stetson for the occasion: "I'm a cowboy at heart."

Last week, the board voted 8-1 to adopt an oversight policy that is a farce. The Playwickian may omit the team name in news stories, but not in editorials and letters. "Which is just as unconstitutional in that the First Amendment doesn't make a distinction between editorials and reporting the news," said Matthew Schafer, one of the editors' lawyers. (Yes, lawyers are involved, but, so far, no lawsuit.)

The paper's oversight has grown, as if on steroids, to encompass rules of Orwellian absurdity. Administrators may censor newspaper material for "any reasonable reason," rendering the 18 other stipulations moot.

The new policy restricts social media to the point where it is neither. Staff members have been locked out of the newspaper's e-mail and social-media accounts. Editors will be required to submit articles to administrators 10 days before publication instead of three. "It makes the newspaper irrelevant," McGoldrick said. The Playwickian might as well be delivered by stagecoach.

One resident stated the obvious: "People in Neshaminy have a fear of change." It's no longer 1929, the year the football team was founded, not even in the Neshaminy School District. Free the Playwickian. Let these admirable student journalists enjoy freedom of the press and a working laboratory of democracy. There isn't one reasonable reason not to.