

Shawnee Mission North banner removed from gym

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Intertribal Club members say the mascot is offensive

[Griffin Nelson](#)

The Shawnee Mission North school banner hanging in the main gym lobby was removed this morning amid complaints by Native American students about the use of the school's mascot, the Indians.

The removal came at the request of the Intertribal Club, which emphasized that the banner was offensive. The banner displayed the Shawnee Mission North's mascot a chief in headdress.



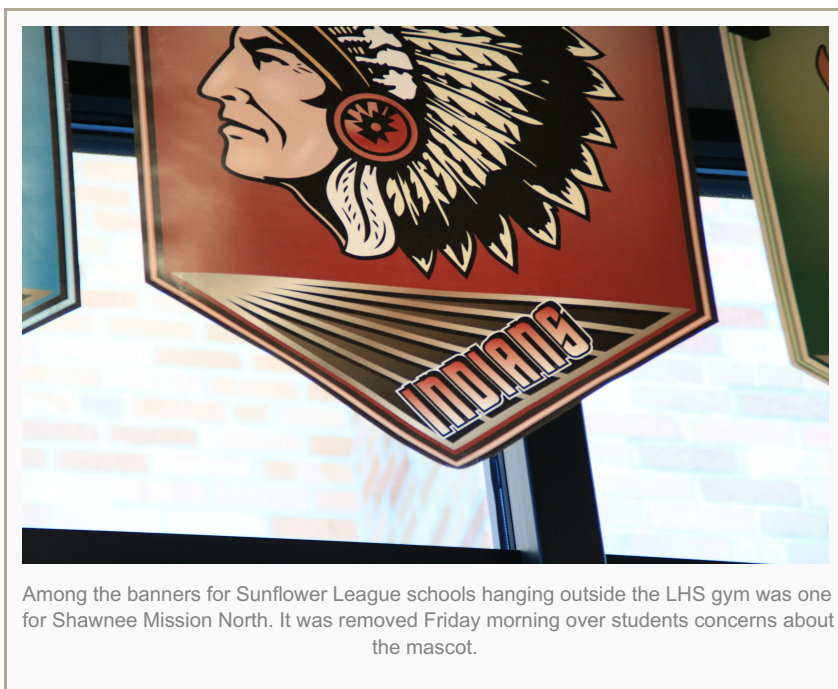
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“The fact that the banner was taken down, it shows a sense of unity and support between the administration and our club, which means a lot throughout the racial tension going on with the [Community Conversation](#),” said sophomore Inez Robinson, who is a part of Intertribal Club. “It definitely shows that native students, indigenous students are safe here in our school.”

Many schools recently have discussed changing mascots that use Native Americans. The Manhattan, Kan., school board voted in December to [retain its mascot](#). Twenty-four high schools in Kansas use Native American-related mascots, according to a [story](#) from the *Lawrence Journal-World*.

The movement toward removing the banner at LHS came from the Intertribal Club, after members were troubled by interactions during a basketball game at Shawnee Mission North on Tuesday. Senior Madison McKinney was disturbed by students doing a tomahawk chop cheer and student mascots wearing native dress during the game. Her Facebook post about the game had 32,253 views of a video she posted as of 11:37 a.m.



Among the banners for Sunflower League schools hanging outside the LHS gym was one for Shawnee Mission North. It was removed Friday morning over students concerns about the mascot.

Intertribal Club members met on Wednesday to discuss what they wanted to see happen.

“They were trying to think of ways that we could do something as a school to show that we do not support that, and so their banner hanging out in the gym lobby was just a way that we could try to show that we don’t support their mascot,” McKinney said.

On Friday morning, members asked Athletic Director Bill DeWitt to remove the banner.

DeWitt said it was not much trouble to remove the banner. He said there are other symbols for Shawnee Mission North that they can use instead of the mascot.

“When we have the opportunity to control things and it puts kids in a place where they feel some trust and some respect by their own school, then we’ve got to try to do that,” DeWitt said.

DeWitt, who runs the [athletic Twitter](#) for LHS, recently stopped using the mascot’s name in tweets. He said that was an easy change so he had no problems doing that. LHS this year also stopped using the mascot’s name when announcing plays during football games.

“

I don’t want our kids to be in environments where they have to worry about things other than just beating whoever is on the court against them.”

— Bill DeWitt

“When there’s things that we can do that directly have an effect, we do it,” DeWitt said. “So that’s why we adjusted the way we tweet.”

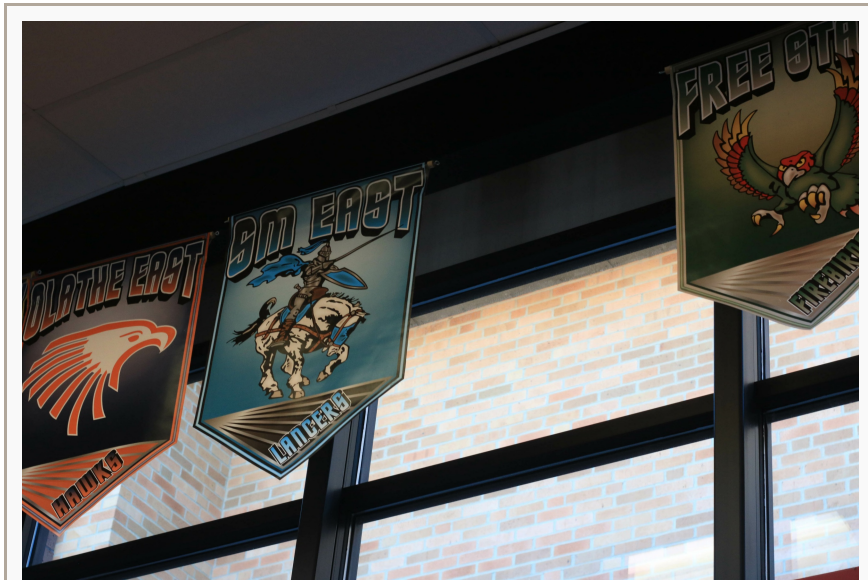
DeWitt said LHS will also discuss the use of the mascot when LHS plays home games against Shawnee Mission North.

“There’s nothing official, but part of being a good league partner is being able to control your own environment and what you allow and don’t allow, and so we want to have conversations with our league partners about some imagery that they use that our students here, particularly with a large indigenous population of students, find offensive,” he said. “Our goal is not to obviously stop free speech at the door, but it’s to have conversations and educate and see if

people do the right thing.”

McKinney does not expect quick change from Shawnee Mission North.

“We understand that it’s not going to happen as easily and quickly as we want it to,” she said. “We do hope that over time we can educate them [Shawnee Mission North], we can find a way for them to understand how their chants and their actions are disrespectful toward our culture. At the least we want to educate them and to help them understand where we are coming from as a people.”



The Shawnee Mission North banner was removed from the main gym on Friday, Feb. 17.
Photo by Griffin Nelson

DeWitt doesn’t predict much blowback from the decision to take down the banner.

“If you would’ve gone to the game Tuesday night at Shawnee Mission North, and you were a Native American student, you would have walked away from that game going ‘You know what? That’s a little much,’ ” DeWitt said.

Removing banners may not be an issue for other schools. Free State, for example, just lists school names and not mascots in its gym.

“It’s a huge issue to those kids and when kids have issues, then we want to try to address them,” DeWitt said.

Editors Note: Read the latest story on this topic, [“Tribe’s chief says SMN should consider mascot concerns.”](#)

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