

Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind mascot controversy — The Daily Moth

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Renca: There is a controversy that is happening between Virginia School for the Deaf and Blind and alumni, students, and community members of VSDB related to their mascot change. VSDB made a decision that there will be one new mascot for VSDB that represents both, the Deaf school and the Blind school.

To clarify, VSDB always had two mascots, one representing the Deaf school which is Cardinals. The other one is representing the Blind school which is Chiefs. The Blind school had to change their mascot because Chiefs is not culturally appropriate. However, it seems that decision to change has impacted the Deaf school to change their mascot too. That decision made some people upset.

So, we reached out to Patti Cooke, an alumna of VSDB, head coach and sub dorm staff, and Neil Sprouse, an alumna of VSDB and advocate for the school to better explain what is going on.

[interview begins]

Patti: I've worked at VSDB since 2008. In July of 2022, the superintendent, Trice, announced —

Neil: To clarify, Pat Trice.

Patti: Yes, Pat Trice, that's right. She opened the meeting up by welcoming employees back. She showed us a picture of the Cardinal, which is the mascot of the Deaf department, and the Chief, which is the mascot of the blind department. The picture showed the Cardinal with the Chief, wearing a hat, and the blue and red colors inside the circle coming together to become the color purple. I was confused and as I looked around the room, everyone else was confused too. She said that we should merge the mascots together and use the color purple. I was like no! Many of us disagreed with her idea. Fast forward to October and it was announced that they decided to remove the Chief mascot because they realized it wasn't politically correct. So they needed some new ideas with our current mascot, the Cardinal, and what we could do with that. Since the Chief mascot was removed, the blind department was feeling left out so maybe something else could be added and they were looking for ideas. Then on February 23rd, it was announced that they decided to remove the Cardinal mascot, too. We were like wait, what? Why?! They said that it wasn't fair. The blind school's president and Pat Trice said it felt like it wasn't fair to the blind school. It was said, word for word, that if we lose the Chief mascot, then it must be fair and the Deaf department must lose the Cardinal mascot. We were shocked! All of us alumni and students were all shocked. So that's what's going on right now.

Neil: To give you a little background about who our superintendent is. Pat Trice is hearing and used to be an ASL interpreter. She became superintendent around 2012-2013, I believe —

Patti: 2015, I think it was 2015.

Neil: 2015, so it's been a short time. And this is not the first time our school has faced these kinds of problems. Going back to 2011, our principal at the time, who was Deaf, was Jack Johnson. And he suggested some ideas, which came from a logical place, since some staff felt stuck in between, Johnson discussed how this could be framed differently. But after the Deaf alumni pressured him on the topic, he ended up dropping the idea all together. The Cardinal mascot meant a lot more to us. It's not just a simple mascot. We're The Cardinals.

Patti: Another reason why we were angry and upset about this is because Ms. Trice did not confer with the alumni. The original plan was supposed to be to talk with the alumni, students, and stakeholders to get their ideas and input on what to do. And she didn't do that. She took it upon herself to decide to move forward with removing the Cardinal mascot. She didn't tell the students, alumni, or anything. We found this out through the VSDA, Virginian School for the Deaf —

Neil: Alumni Association.

Patti: Yes, Alumni Association. Some of the employees who work there had made comments to other alumni about what they had heard. That's how we started finding out. She didn't share it with us or ask us our opinion. We are upset because she didn't take the appropriate due process.

Renca: So what's next? What can you do now?

Neil: Right now, they have not exactly moved forward with this yet. At the end of the last meeting, the Board of Regents said they will look into it and will continue to receive feedback. But it's still not over. I want to emphasize another issue, if we go back a little bit, is that Pat Trice misrepresents a lot of situations. She talked to the board and the board asked her why the students weren't given a survey among other things. Pat Trice said that the students wouldn't be able to understand the concept of a survey and that it is too abstract for them. But we've seen that the students, right now as we speak, have created their own petition themselves. They have drawn a picture of a mascot themselves. They already have that motivation to do this. Somehow the students found out, even though they weren't supposed to know, that the Cardinal mascot was removed. They found out on their own.

Patti: We have offered solutions. We said to allow the blind department to pick their new mascot that they would use for sports only. We also offered another solution which would be to create a crest or emblem that would be for official use like on meeting documents or letters that are sent home to parents. And on that seal, we would merge the two together or design something new. We have offered that solution but it seems that [Pat] Trice has ignored that solution.

[interview ends]

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Thank you, Patti and Neil. We got a YouTube link to different videos of people speaking up at meetings. We included the link in this transcript.

We reached out to the superintendent of VSDB, Ms. Pat Trice and this was her reply to us.

"The goal of the Unified VSDB effort is to create a learning and living environment and a shared community where all students feel welcomed, included, and equally valued. The neutral process is student focused and designed to enable current VSDB students the opportunity to express their independent voice. The shared mascot concept supports these goals in that the VSDB of today is much more inclusive than in the past and students from the Blind Department and the Deaf Department interact at a much greater level than ever before. Through the Unified VSDB process, students are empowered to create shared mascot options that reflect VSDB's current values while honoring the mascot history of the past. Those options will then be provided to all stakeholders, including students, staff, and alumni in order to determine the final shared mascot choice."

That is the summary of what has been happening so far.

Link: <https://www.youtube.com/@vsdcardinals-ts7vm>