

From: [Jack Johnson](#)
Sent: Thursday, July 14, 2011 11:00 AM
To: [Wayne / Alice Frick](#)
Cc: [Nancy Armstrong \(VSDB\)](#)
Subject: Re: Mascots at VSDB

Alice,

Thank you for taking the time to share historic information and the thoughts of the alumni association surrounding the mascot. I do appreciate the rich history that VSDB has. I would like to share my reasons for looking into the possibility of having one mascot representing the school. It is my hope that after looking at all the factors presented in this letter would encourage the alumni associations to maintain an open mind and actively pursue what is best and right for all of VSDB students.

For the past several years, VSDB has been making history with the closing of Hampton, integrating students with multiple disabilities, and the construction project. As a result, there are many changes being made to the overall structure of VSDB. For example, at the completion of the education building, the Deaf Department and the Blind Department will be housed under "one roof". The elementary program (both Deaf and Blind) will be housed in the newly renovated Peery/Swanson Halls and the secondary program (both Deaf and Blind) will be housed in the newly constructed education building. All students are sharing Lewellyn Gym for PE and athletic events. Also, the newly renovated Stuart Library and Student Center are being used by all students. The consolidation project has been designed to have students in both departments share spaces and resources in effort to conserve funds and resources, which was driven and determined by the Virginia Department of Education. After all, our name, the *Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind*, denotes a singular noun (School) indicating that we are one school as opposed to two separate schools.

In addition to the changes to the physical structure of the campus, the consolidation project is causing VSDB to restructure the operations of the school. Previously, VSDB maintained separate staff serving in each of the two departments. To be more efficient with the budget, VSDB had to share staff resources (OT, PT, SLPs, Behavior Specialists, Curriculum, ITRT, supervisors, etc...) with both departments. In addition, my role as Principal has been changed to serve both the Deaf and the Blind. There are many VSDB staff personnel serving in both departments, so they cannot be "loyal" to either of the two departments (they are neither a Cardinal nor a Chief).

As the School Principal, I must be sensitive to the needs and the well-being of all the students at VSDB. One of my duties is to evaluate aspects of our great school to best serve our students to develop appropriate academic skills and appropriate social skills, while promoting a sense of belonging at our school. My position has allowed me to gain unique perspectives of both departments that most people do not have the luxury of having. We have a group of students and staff feeling oppressed because the other group dominates the school in almost every function because of the rooted culture at VSDB. This perspective prompted me to look into making changes to promote equality for all students.

There are multiple examples of one group dominating the other group that I observed. To name a few: school spirit, prom, field trips, clubs, and campus signage. The school spirit is mostly encouraged and highlighted during VSDB sporting events (volleyball, basketball, goalball, soccer, and track). The sporting events should be for all VSDB students and staff, but the dominating school spirit surrounds the Cardinals and not the Chiefs. Many students from the Blind Department want to enjoy the sporting events and root for their VSDB team, but are torn because they are not especially loyal to the Cardinals. Our soccer and track teams have students from both departments competing together representing VSDB. Which of the two mascots should represent the soccer or track teams?

Homecoming is an event that signifies our school spirit, not only in our school, but out in the community. Homecoming is also an event for which VSDB alumni can visit VSDB and pay tribute to their memories and support the school. For several years, VSDB has had only one homecoming event signify VSDB and it is always been the Cardinals. Where do the Blind Department and alumni fit in the annual VSDB Homecoming celebration?

The other functions and things shared in both departments that cause conflict due to segregated mascots and school colors. The VSDB graduation ceremony is an area where both groups of students celebrate together but have a difficult time deciding the colors of their robes and tassels. The yearbook showcases memories for all students but difficult to organize without compromising specific groups of students. Student organizations (clubs, class, sports) are limited with what they could sell for fundraising ideas. They would like to sell shirts or hats, they have to sell only within their respective department if they use their mascots or colors. What about those who serves both groups of students, which items should they buy/wear to support VSDB?

Looking on our campus, we have signage in several areas that signify Cardinals and not the Chiefs. For example, on the Strader Hall building, we have painted on the exterior wall, "Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind, Home of the Cardinals". In the Lewellyn Gym, the only mascot represented there is the Cardinal. On our VSDB webpage, the only mascot represented there is the Cardinal. The problem is that the Cardinal only represents the Deaf Department, not the Blind Department. Not all of VSDB students feel a part of VSDB because the dominating campus mascot is the Cardinal.

Let's take a look at our students. We currently have several students who are Deaf-Blind, being served in both departments. While most of them are considered either deaf first or blind first, we have some who are equally deaf and blind. It would be difficult determine their place at VSDB (a Chief or a Cardinal). In addition, when VSDB sister school in Hampton closed, the students lost, not only their school, but their mascot (Eagles). We did not create a third mascot representing the students with multiple disabilities. Please note that our former sister school had only one mascot representing the entire school.

I believe history is very important. I also believe that preservation of historic artifacts and traditions is very important. But it is equally important to recognize when to let go of traditions in favor of new traditions that would allow us to usher into a progressing world. There are countless examples of events that forced society to change for the better, to name a few: abolishment of slavery, women rights reformation, civil rights movement, Oralism vs. ASL, Public Law 94-142, Deaf President Now, American with Disability Act, IDEA, NCLB, and etc. In each of the societal progression, all the changes were met with a lot of resistance, but in looking at the results following each change, we can generally say that they were for the better.

On a side note, in the Commonwealth of Virginia, a couple of organizations have made changes to their mascots in respect toward Native Americans. For example, The Richmond Braves baseball team has recently changed their mascot to the Flying Squirrels and William & Mary College has changed their mascot from Tribe to Griffons. To respect the Native Americans, the Blind Department would probably need to change their mascot.

Of the eleven schools for the deaf and the blind, only four have two different mascots representing the two groups of students (Alabama, Florida, Utah, and Virginia) and the other seven have only one mascot. In Alabama and in Utah, the two groups of students (deaf and blind) are served on two separate campuses. Florida and Virginia are the only schools that have two mascots for both groups of students on the same campus, but both groups have been housed in two different buildings. Starting with the 2012-13 school year, Virginia will be serving both groups of students in shared buildings.

The following are schools for the deaf and the blind and their respective mascots:

- Alabama Institute for the Deaf and the Blind (Indians, Redskins)
- Arizona Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (Sentinels)

- Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind (Bulldogs)
- Florida School for the Deaf and the Blind (Dragons, Cobras)
- Hawaii Center for the Deaf and the Blind (Dolphins)
- Idaho School for the Deaf and the Blind (Raptors)
- Montana School for the Deaf and the Blind (Mustangs)
- South Carolina School for the Deaf and the Blind (Hornets)
- Utah Schools for the Deaf and the Blind (multiple)
- Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (Cardinals, Chiefs)
- West Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind (Lions)

While the mascots of both departments (Cardinals and Chiefs) are important to their respective groups' history, VSDB is at the crossroad of progression to best educate students with deafness and with blindness. It is time to move from an established VSDB tradition that oppresses one group of students to a better tradition that is shared with all VSDB students. It is my recommendation that VSDB select a mascot that is neither Cardinal nor Chief. It is my sincere hope that both alumni associations and the stakeholders of VSDB can see beyond the preservation of the old traditions in favor for establishing a new tradition that ultimately gives a school spirit that can be shared with each and all students at VSDB.

Dr. Armstrong and I would be happy to meet with both alumni associations to discuss and hear their thoughts.

[You have my permission to share my letter with the alumni of VSDB.]

Sincerely,

jack

J. Jack Johnson

School Principal

Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind

"Celebrating Diversity and Maximizing Potential"

(540) 332-9993 / (540) 324-4560 (VideoPhone)

www.vfdb.k12.va.us

Quote for the Day:

"The smallest act of kindness is worth more than the grandest intention." **Oscar Wilde**

On Tue, Jul 12, 2011 at 16:51, Wayne / Alice Frick <wafrick@verizon.net> wrote:

Dear Jack,

I know that you are busy getting classes ready for this fall. It won't be long before the school starts again.

I learned from my friend recently that you are thinking of have only one mascot for both schools. I want to share my two cents with you.

When the bill in the Legislature in Richmond in 1838 was passed, it stipulated that there will be two schools on one campus because the Deaf and the Blind have their own identities and cultures.

Please read a short report below written by Aumon Bass who was the historian of Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind book. Have you read it yet? If not, the library should have a copy.

It is impossible for me to use all of these valuable letters in full, so I shall quote brief statements as follows:— (R. Aumon Bass)

While working on a "History" of this school, I noticed that there was hardly any information telling how the deaf and the blind happened to be brought together. So I searched among the rare historical papers for some time, Finally I found that the Perkins Institution for the Blind in Mass, had some valuable old letters. I am fortunate to say that we have secured copies of twenty-one of these old letters written by Dr. Samuel G. Howe, former President of Perkins Institution, Dr. F. A. P. Barnard of New York School for the Deaf, Dr. William Swan Plumer, a member of our first Board of Visitors, and Dr. Lewis W. Chamberlayne of Richmond, Vs. who were to a great extent instrumental in advertising the need of our school to the public, and brought it to the point of establishment. Dr. Howe and Dr. Plumer were working in the interests of the blind; Dr. Barnard and Dr. Chamberlayne in the interests of the deaf. Their efforts were finally combined, Dr. William Swan Plumer .was the patron of the Bill to put the blind pupils with the deaf children in the same institution. He saw the necessity of an institution in Virginia for the instruction of the blind. He caused a bill for the establishment of such an institution to be presented in the Legislature, and while this bill was pending, he wrote Dr. Samuel G. Howe, of the Perkins Institution for the Blind, Boston, Mass., who visited Richmond and exhibited to the members of the Legislature of Virginia, then in session, the proficiency which several of his pupils had made, and having otherwise furnished them with irrefutable proofs of the capacity of the Blind for Instruction, a law was passed establishing the **"Virginia Institution for the Instruction of the Deaf and Dumb, and of the Blind, and providing that in the said Institution there shall be two schools, each separate and distinct from the other, in all respect whatsoever....."**

Deaf children are happy to have teachers who sign for themselves, not using interpreters in classrooms. They learn much better from people who sign for themselves. So it is best to keep both schools on the campus separated. That is what the Virginia School **for the Deaf and the Blind** means.

The Alumni is upset about your vision of having one mascot for both schools and they are **not** in favor of having only one mascot. They are proud of their mascot, Cardinals and their history of sports at

VSDB. Perhaps you could visit the VSDB Deaf History Museum and take a look around, especially the Hall of Fame Room?

I am asking you to think very carefully on this matter. If you have any questions, please feel free to ask me.

VSDBly yours,

Alice