

Amid controversy, VSDB chooses new mascot

VSDB is proud to announce its
new Unified Mascot...



THE VSDB DEFENDER

STAUNTON — The Virginia School for the Deaf and the Blind recently announced it had selected a new mascot. The decision comes after months of discussion to find a unified mascot for the school, which had been using separate mascots for the blind and deaf departments.

The school for deaf students has been known as the Cardinals since 1967, while the school for the blind has been using Chiefs as its mascot since 1959. However, it's hard to find the Chiefs image on campus while Cardinals are everywhere, including painted on the side of a building as you enter campus. That has led to a feeling of inequity for those students who are blind, said Superintendent Pat Trice.

Therefore, as more blind students began attending the school — and because the use of Chiefs as a mascot was insensitive to many Indigenous people — the school decided to find one unifying mascot for the entire school.

That mascot, The Defender, was announced recently. Per a release from the school, The Defender is a

fox-like image with fur streaked with red and blue.

"Its snout has red, blue, and white fur. Its red eyes are intense with a determined stare. They are alert and see everything around it.," the release said. "There is a mix of red and blue feathers gathered closely around the neck. The feathers honor the history of the Cardinal and the Chief. The Defender's ears are upright, alert and strong, listening intently even for the faintest sound. This Defender is bold, strong, fierce, alert, powerful, and protective. It is ready to attack quickly to defend VSDB."

The school said that the process used in the voting was student-focused and led by outside consultants in order to ensure neutrality, with students from both departments working together to create a variety of designs and a list of characteristics they wanted to see in the new unified VSDB mascot.

"The students did a wonderful job of working together," said Trice.

The students chose the top two images — a fox and a bird — and those images along with the list of characteristics were then given to a professional artist to create the final two mascot choices for the VSDB official ballot. At that point, each of five groups (students who are deaf, students who are blind, VSDB staff and board members, alumni of the blind department, and alumni of the deaf department) were given the opportunity to vote with the winner from each group receiving one collective vote.

Students in the deaf department, along with staff and alumni of the blind department, chose the fox, while students in the blind department picked the bird.

"The students worked hard on this and I'm so proud of them for taking so many things into consideration and coming up with a design that they feel is representative of our whole school," Julie Saum wrote on Facebook.

Not everyone was thrilled.

Alumni of the deaf department boycotted the vote. Many in that group [have been unhappy with the decision](#) to change mascots, saying the Cardinal was part of their identity. They recently launched a [petition to fire Trice](#), with the mascot change apparently being the catalyst in that effort, although many have been displeased with Trice for a number of years. There's a protest against Trice planned in downtown Staunton June 23 and 24.

"Pat Trice has not shown satisfactory performance with her duties as Superintendent of VSDB," the petition reads. It goes on to give reasons, accusing her of "oppression" and "control."

Posted June 9 on change.org, the petition has received 241 votes as of Monday evening.

"I am a former employee of VSDB," Dawn Koontz wrote on the petition. "Pat Trice needs to go. Her behavior is tyrannical and not acceptable. The alumni, staff and Deaf students have spoken. They do not want their mascot changed, it's that simple. Let the Cardinal rule their school."

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