

# Conard High School

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*Diversity is our Strength  
National Exemplary School*

December 15, 2014

Dear Parents and Guardians,

As you may know the Board of Education recently initiated a conversation on the use of high school mascots that reference Native American names and images. I want to share with you the discussion we are having at Conard and how we are engaging in this process.

Over the past month I have had numerous conversations with both students and staff regarding this topic. Our student council conducted a survey to gauge how students felt about the topic. Last Monday we partnered with the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) and held a joint Conard and Hall student workshop which focused on ways to alleviate prejudice and discrimination. In addition, as part of our Human Rights Day activities one of the student panels presented on the topic of Native American imagery as a mascot. During this presentation more than 200 hundred students listened and then asked thoughtful questions to the presenters. I was extremely proud of the spirit in which they held such meaningful discourse around an issue that is so near and dear to our hearts.

As principal, I am always looking for teachable moments that will help our students gain knowledge, reflect on what they have learned, and express what they know and feel. My goal is never to tell students what to think. Therefore, as we continue to have engaging conversations on this topic, we need to be sensitive to the deep passions on both sides. My hope is that these conversations can be filled with genuine reflection and not defensiveness. This cannot be a debate that ultimately marks winners and losers, the end result of which causes everyone to lose.

Having been a member of the Conard family for over 13 years, I know how passionate everyone is about Conard, its history, and its traditions. It is one of the reasons I absolutely love being the principal. I also know that regardless of our name or our logo, we will continue to be one of the top high schools in the country. The hard work that is done every day by our students, staff, and community is makes us who we are.

As we move forward with the process, I know that the Board of Education will be looking for community input on this topic, and will be hosting a forum in February. This decision is not just about our current students, it is about our parents, our alumni, and the entire West Hartford community. As decisions are made, I will continue to keep you informed.

Sincerely,

Julio Duarte  
Principal