

USD 383

## 'We're still the Indians'



Staff photo by Taylor Irby

The Manhattan-Ogden School Board votes on recommendations surrounding the MHS mascot at a meeting Wednesday evening. Manhattan High will stay the Indians, and students will select an additional mascot by Dec. 1.

## Board again keeps mascot, will honor Prentup

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**M**HS will remain the Indians. The Manhattan-Ogden School Board approved five recommendations for the Manhattan High School mascot during its meeting Wednesday night.

The board unanimously approved the recommendations developed by a committee that met from March to July to focus on issues surrounding the Indian mascot.

The board created the committee in December 2016 after months of protest from a local advocacy group that claimed the Indians name and image are offensive and considers them appropriation of Native American culture. Others have defended the mascot and have argued it honors Native Americans.

After a five-hour listening session in December, the school board decided to keep the mascot and create the committee.

The board approved each recom-

mendation individually Wednesday, offering comments or amendments for clarity on each.

The board voted for the following actions:

- Naming the MHS West Campus commons the "Frank Prentup Commons." Officials also will create an exhibit explaining Frank Prentup was a well-regarded former MHS coach and the inspiration for the school's team name Indians.

SEE NO. 1, PAGE A8

# Board again keeps mascot, will honor Prentup

NO. 1, FROM PAGE A1

- Directing Superintendent Marvin Wade to work with the Manhattan-Ogden Public Schools Foundation to create a Native American student scholarship and/or a teacher grant named for Prentup using guidelines set by the committee.

- Directing Lacey Sell, executive director of teaching and learning, to include local Native American history, religion, culture and contemporary issues in curricular and professional learning considerations of the district.

- Creating of a diversity committee, including one seat for a board member, to assist and advise efforts of diversity awareness, educational equity, and reduction of racial, ethnic and economic prejudice.

- Directing Greg Hoyt, MHS principal, to work with students to craft and recommend an additional physical mascot "for students to rally behind" that is separate from the Indians name and image.

## DISCUSSION

Board member Marcia Rozell said she believed one of the biggest positive developments to come out of the committee's recommendations is the board's ability to reinstate a committee focusing on diversity issues.

"Because of K-State, the community we live in, we have a very diverse population," she said. "That's a blessing, that's something we learn from. We learn from each other. That's a very positive thing that this has been added from this whole discussion."

Board member Curt Herrman agreed, not-

ing the Manhattan community has grown more diverse since the board last had a committee on the topic. Herrman said the committee was dissolved when the school district's diversity coordinator left for a different job.

Board members have said previously the position was never filled because of budget cuts from the state in recent years.

"I think (the committee) could go a long way and could help us in our bullying programs," Herrman said. "To me it makes sense to resurrect that committee and make sure there is representation for all."

The board seemed to get through approving the recommendations without much difference in opinion except for two recommendations: the directive to Sell to include local Native American history, religion and culture in curriculum and professional development considerations, and creating a student group to explore an additional physical mascot that will exist concurrently with the Indians name and image.

Prior to approving the recommendation on Native American tribal history, Herrman asked why they should focus only on Native Americans and not other minority groups.

Board member Leah Fliter pointed out no other ethnicity was used as a mascot in Manhattan.

"The reason we specifically mention local Native American history, religion, and culture, etc., when we are discussing this is that the Native American is the only one with their face on the wall across the street," Fliter said, referring to an image of a chieftain head in front of MHS to represent the

school's mascot. "That's why we're starting with this... That's why we're doing this tonight."

Board member Dave Colburn, following Fliter, said the history of the land of Kansas, specifically who it belonged to, is especially relevant to focus on Native American culture in the directive. Colburn said he agreed there are many issues related to the treatment of other ethnic groups, but focusing on Native Americans is a good place to start.

"There is no other ethnic group that occupied this land prior to the white man's arrival," he said. "This land (belonged) to a Native American tribe — the Kaw — and it was taken away. This gives our community, our schools, a unique responsibility to acknowledge the history of this land."

When the board considered the creation of a student group to explore the selection of an additional mascot, Greg Hoyt, MHS principal, said he believed the students will be able to convene and perform the charged task prior to any deadline set by the board.

Board members said they wanted the students to provide a recommendation to them by Dec. 1, which would allow the board to act on it prior to new members joining in January.

But when it came to approving an official recommendation, tension grew on how to word the directive. When the MHS mascot committee deliberated on the guidelines for creating the additional mascot, it decided on several criteria, including: not a person, having no relation to the Indian name or image, being gender neutral, and being respectful, affirming and inclusive.

Herrman asked if there is a guideline for

genderless mascots, would that mean the students could not propose bison because male bison have horns while female bison do not.

While Herrman's question was trying to clear up confusion of the motion to approve the recommendation, Fliter became frustrated with how focused the discussion was on the language.

Fliter said some of the hand wringing over the exact terminology of the motion is moot because the final decision remained with the board and she didn't want to get too deep into a touchy subject for many in the community.

"The board has the final say," she said. "We do not need to get into the weeds to cause further aggravation tonight getting into a species or something like that."

"Pardon me, if I'm getting agitated," she added.

## REMAINING THE INDIANS

Prior to any discussion, board president Darell Edie went over the history of the topic and why the board created the committee. He noted the board voted to retain the Indians name and image in December and it was not up for consideration on Wednesday.

Although the subject matter of the recommendations were related to the mascot, there was never any discussion from the board on removing it, which some in the community seemed to believe was a possibility.

Rozell quelled any underlying concerns from the community on the status of the name and image when she joked on the way out of the meeting.