

To: South Burlington School Board  
From: Superintendent David Young  
Re: Rebel Identifier  
Date: February 1, 2017

### Past

- We have always strived to make our schools inclusive.
- We have learned -- most notably in the past year -- that the Rebel identifier is not inclusive of all our students and staff.
- At the same time, we are aware that some students who have traveled through our system have recognized themselves as “Rebels” and taken pride in that. It is a part of our school district’s history and therefore should not be ignored or erased.

### Present

- My recommendation to the Board to retire the Rebel identifier comes from the many points of view expressed both publicly and privately by current and past students, staff, families, and community members.
- A series of events has led me – even driven me – to this decision: stories shared by students, staff, and families; training and learning we’ve been doing as a staff; a series of local and national events; research from the American Academy of Pediatrics on the impact of racial bias on children as well as a study done by Pew Research recently on race relations.
- Additionally, surveys conducted both at the high school and after our implicit bias training this fall further affirmed my decision and also made clear to me that we have work to do in these areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion in our school community.
- In the high school survey of staff, of the 90 SBHS staff who answered the question of whether they were “comfortable” or “uncomfortable” with the Rebel identifier, 31 or over 1/3, said they were “uncomfortable.”
- In the high school survey of students, when SBHS students were asked, “Please describe how comfortable or uncomfortable you are with your school's continued use of Rebel as a nickname?” 39 students (or 8.14% of the total student body who took the survey) responded they were “uncomfortable.”
- Responding to the same question, 14.82% of students -- 71 additional students -- answered that they “don’t care either way” about the Rebel identifier.
- In summary, 110 students indicated that they were uncomfortable or ambivalent about the name. A mascot should not be a point of ambivalence *or* offense.
- I will not be sharing these surveys publicly. After careful consideration, I realized sharing the surveys would risk the anonymity of certain individuals based on their words and how they self-identified.
- To continue, we’re an organization that has worked hard and will continue to work hard in allowing all children to feel safe and respected in our schools.
- First impressions are important. We want to be a place where new students, new families, and new staff feel safe and supported right from the start. This makes any transition and welcome go even more smoothly. Therefore, why would we not have that? If we can make that better, why wouldn’t we? We know that the Rebel identifier does not create that welcoming feeling for all in our school community.

- We're living in a different time now than when the Rebel identifier was first chosen. Additionally, change has occurred since the Board made their decision 1-1/2 years ago. At the time of the Board's decision, you asked to remain informed about updates. The information provided to the Board and public at recent meetings provided those updates. Additionally, the information contained here is a response to that request for updates as well as a review of points previously shared that have informed my recommendation.
- We know biases exist in our world and -- as difficult as it is to admit -- in our schools and community. Some of the work and training we've been doing as a school community has made that clear to us.
- Additionally, many of our students have spoken up and made clear that the Rebel identifier feels exclusive not inclusive to them.

### **Future**

- First and foremost, we are committed to ensuring that our schools remain inclusive.
- If the Board approves my recommendation, the plan for next steps will become an agenda item at an upcoming Board meeting.
- Additionally, if the recommendation is approved, I plan to leave it up to the high school and middle school to come up with steps that would best represent moving forward.
- The steps may include yet not be limited to the following:
  - a thoughtful way to retire the Rebel identifier;
  - a thoughtful way to make changes to school items such as signage, uniforms, and more for the 2017-2018 school year;
  - a mindful discussion of how to choose a new mascot with a committee designated to lead that effort;
  - And, perhaps most importantly, inclusive ways to move the district further in being aware of ensuring that all students, staff, and families feel welcomed, included, and safe in our schools. We envision this last point will involve our school family as well as our larger South Burlington community.