

T. Andrew Brown, Regents Vice Chancellor
925 Crossroads Building, Two State Street
Rochester, NY 14614
December 23, 2020

Dear Vice Chancellor Brown,

I write to bring to your attention a resolution recently passed by the Seneca Nation Council calling on the state Board of Regents to publicly take a stand against cultural appropriation and racist practices and encourage school districts statewide to implement curriculum changes to educate students about the history and contributions of Native people.

Education is the key to combatting racism and changing long-standing misunderstandings and prejudices regarding Indigenous populations. But New York has thus far failed to advance a comprehensive effort to ensure that every student is taught the full breadth of Native history, resulting in the harmful perpetuating of stereotypes and false narratives.

A [2019 report](#) by the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) found that 87 percent of state curricula in the U.S. do not mention Native American history after the year 1900. While New York does include Native American education in its state standards it does not require that curricula to be taught in K-12 schools, nor does it provide any designated funding to do so.

More than two decades ago, the Board of Regents [committed itself](#) to revamping New York's American history curriculum to better reflect the contributions of nonwhite cultures, and unanimously voted to direct the state education commissioner at the time to prepare a detailed study of potential curriculum revisions. This effort caused [considerable controversy](#) and resulted in the adoption of watered-down recommendations that arguably exacerbated, rather than improved, an already dire situation.

The past year has presented both significant challenges and transformations. We have seen issues of equity and racial justice brought to the forefront of national debate – from the [disproportionate burden borne](#) by Native people during the coronavirus pandemic to rallies in response to long-standing harms inflicted on minority communities by the country's criminal justice system.

There have also been hopeful notes, including President-elect Joe Biden's [selection of](#) the first ever Native American to be nominated to serve as a Cabinet secretary. New Mexico Rep. Debra Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe, if confirmed by the U.S. Senate, will lead the Department of Interior. In addition, two national sports teams – one [in Cleveland](#), the other in [Washington, D.C.](#) – plan to drop names long considered racial slurs derogatory to Indigenous people, and countless local and school teams across the state and nation are either following suit or may soon do so.

Now is the time for the Board of Regents to get on the right side of history and publicly declare, once and for all, that racism has no place in New York – especially not in its public-school classrooms. This is an opportunity for the Empire State to be a leader and underscore the

important role Native people have played in shaping its history as well as the important contributions they continue to make to its economy, culture and environment.

I respectfully ask that you and the Board consider taking up this resolution and give it the time and attention it deserves. Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Nya:wëh.

President Matthew Pagels, Seneca Nation of Indians