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PROTECTED CLASSES
 “When I first started talking about the gym floor, I hadn’t thought about equity,” Mapleton High School Principal Brenda Moyer said. She thought the big decision would be whether or not to reproduce to the old Salty picture or have a new one designed.

The reason for the change was due to the school’s \$4.8 million remodel. Much of the gym and locker rooms have had their remodeling finished, but the floor needs to be stripped down and resurfaced. The cost to sand, seal, stripe, paint and apply three coats of finish is \$26,795.

But even as Mapleton began working on its initial district remodels, there were a slew of high school mascot controversies in Oregon, beginning with South Eugene late last year. The school was known as the Axemen, but a petition signed by “hundreds of students, parents, teachers’ coaches and members of the community” requested the name be changed to something “non-gender specific that better represents the entire student body,” according to a December 2017 Register-Guard article. That led to a heated, months-long discussion over the mascot, with overflowing town halls discussing the merit of changing

the name to simply “Axe.”
 In April, South Albany High School officially dropped the name “Rebels” after hundreds of letters and emails requested the change following the 2017 riots in Charlottesville, Va., after a protest turned violent over the removal of a confederate monument.

In May, Portland’s Franklin High School determined its mascot, a Quaker, was discriminatory after parents filed a complaint in 2015, arguing the mascot violated the separation of church and state.

But those changes were spurred by community action. Has there been backlash to Salty?

“I have not been approached by one person who has come forward and said they were offended by the sailor and wanted a change,” Burruss said.

O’Mara and Moyer had not received any complaints either. Part of the Salty debate stems from financial and legal considerations that may occur.

Reading from an email from Oregon School Board Association (OSBA) Attorney Spencer Lewis, Burruss listed the considerations the board could consider to her fellow board members:

“It’s OSBA’s recommendation that we avoid any logo that discriminates against a protected class, whether that’s race, gender, ethnicity, religion. ... I think the key is whether it singles out or leaves out a group of students. This could be in the name of a mascot, or the imagery used to represent the mascot. A mascot could be offensive to other protected classes, such as students with disabilities, sexual orientation, etc.”

However, she pointed out that OSBA’s recommendations are just that: Recommendations. The only state law regarding school mascots involves Native Americans, whose use was banned in 2012, giving schools a five-year grace period to phase out appropriate mascots. But that could change.

“We do foresee that there may

be additional actions, at some point, from the state,” Burruss said in the meeting. “They are always updating those kinds of

just came back from a hiatus after “her children were grown.”
 However, studies have shown that fans, particularly young

in a broader spectrum than they have been in the past.”

And it’s these conversations that Burruss hopes students and community members can have before making a final decision on Salty.

But is the complexity of the conversation getting through to the students?

CHANGE

Freshmen JJ Neece thinks that the change to Salty is unnecessary.

“Everyone I talked to likes Salty,” he said. “I know it wouldn’t change in my head, but different schools would come in and see us differently.”

As far as gender inequality, Neece pointed out that “Salty” could be a girl or a boy’s name, it just depends on how you view it.

But ultimately, it came down to preserving history.

“The school is changing a lot, and it’s good to change,” he said. “But if we change our logo, we’re not Mapleton. We’re Salty the Sailor. It’s been that way for a long time.”

Moyer understood the sentiment.

“Sometimes when you’re so rooted in history, you don’t want anything to change. We’ve had a lot of changes, and so, to them seeing this one thing stay is probably comforting.”

Mapleton sophomore and volleyball champion Briena Jensen was asked about her feelings on Salty.

“Salty the Sailor has been forever, for generations,” she said. “My family has gone to Mapleton, and Salty the Sailor was on that floor. ... When everybody talks about the Sailors, it’s always Salty. Salty the Sailor. That’s just the first thing you talk about.”

Jensen stated that it would be acceptable to replace Salty, but only if he were represented in another way in the gym.

“I think it’s good because I heard he might be painted on a wall,” she said.

The board has discussed doing a retrospective of Salty throughout the decades on the school gym. That way, the school could still preserve and respect the history of Salty without making him the official mascot of the court.

There was no mention if Sally would be included in the mural.

“I think that would be almost better with the world like it is,” Jensen said, couching the issue under sexual identity. “There are people that don’t go by a specific gender, so I understand why they would want something more neutral on the floor because they don’t call themselves a male or a female.”

The board was given a plan for a logo that had Sally and Salty together, but an official drawing was never submitted. There were other issues with the concept.

“In these times we are more aware of the binary notion of Salty and Sally,” Holman said in the board meeting. “There’s a continuum, and there are students in our school who don’t identify as a boy or a girl. So, that’s problematic itself.”

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— JJ Neece, Mapleton High School Freshman

laws. So, that’s one thing we’re considering because it costs a lot of money to do what we’re doing to the floor now. We want that to last.”

If the state law changes down the road, the school could be forced to do away with Salty anyway, thus forcing the school to redo the floor for another \$26,795.

The board could easily hide behind this reasoning, using potential litigation as a scapegoat for the conversation. Instead, board members are taking a different route, using this moment to have an open and honest discussion on what fair representation means in schools.

SALLY THE SAILOR

“Not being offended and not feeling represented are two different things,” Burruss told the Siuslaw News. As a Mapleton alumna, she said she had a wonderful experience as a student, and the small family atmosphere suited her well.

“I played every sport there was to play over the years, and I spent a lot of time in the gym,” she said. “But I never had an attachment to Salty as a mascot. I more identified with the general ‘Sailors,’ which can be represented by many different images. I was a girl. I never felt represented by a male mascot myself.”

However, she stressed that she never felt underrepresented because Salty was there.

“I’m attached to a general feeling of support for the Sailors, and for me there’s many images that are representative of that,” she said.

And she never felt offended.

“I’m also not offended by someone who feels that they’re represented by Salty,” she said. “In other instances of imagery (such as Native American mascots), you’re working with people who are deeply offended by that imagery. I feel like if people were offended by Salty, that would influence our conversation strongly. But that’s not what is driving this.”

When it comes to mascots, female representations have been traditionally underrepresented.

The University of Delaware, known as the Blue Hens, has YoUDee, a fighting blue chicken. While it’s technically a hen, the portraits are more unisex, and some fans to refer to YoUDee as a male.

Most of the time, female mascots are accompanied by males. The only female mascot in professional sports, Mrs. Met of the New York Mets, is the counterpart to Mr. Met. According to a Mets spokesperson, Mrs. Met

ones, feel an affinity toward female mascots.

In a May 2017 article on Fatherly.com, St. John Fisher College associate professor Emily Dane-Staples focused on two mascots of the Rochester Red Wings, Spikes and Mittsy.

“We did see gender preferences,” says Dane-Staples. “Girls and boys were contacting Mittsy more frequently than they were contacting Spikes.”

But the mascot performers spent the majority of their time with their male fans.

“The problem is sports are generally targeting boys and not girls,” Dane-Staples said. “The origins of mascots came from boys. Cheerleaders and yell leaders were all originally male.”

The problem with this? If girls don’t feel represented in sports, they can shy away from it altogether. Or if they do get into sports, they can feel like the “other.”

In Mapleton, girls play sports just as hard as the boys. There is even a female football player.

Plus, Mapleton does have Sally the Sailor for a female mascot, but she’s never made an appearance on the gym floor to staff knowledge. She was painted on the girl’s locker room.

At Wednesday’s meeting, there was conversation about putting a picture of Sally on the girl’s locker room door again. The picture that had been submitted, which had been drawn years earlier, portrayed Sally in rather short shorts. The comments from the female students?

“Yes, but not sexualized short shorts. ... Can she wear a skirt or something?”
 O’Mara and Moyer stressed that this issue is not about how females are portrayed in such drawings, however. If Salty was a Sally on the gym floor, they would be having the exact same conversation. This is not about female empowerment — it’s about inclusion.

“But let’s be honest, in the 1970s it would be unheard of to have a female mascot,” Moyer added. “I think that’s part of the reason we need to look at this. When Salty was done, culturally a female mascot would never have been chosen.”

That mindset played a role in how Burruss thought about Salty when she was in school.

“For myself, when I was in high school, playing with Salty on the floor there and not feeling super represented, I didn’t have strong feelings on it. The public conversation, at this time in the world, is equity issues and looking at representation. Those are much more publicly discussed

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