

## **CONTACT**

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## **FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

July 18, 2025

### **Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Grants Consent for Continued Use of Thunderhawks and Warriors Mascots**

CASS LAKE, MN — During a regularly scheduled meeting on July 16, the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe Tribal Council unanimously approved requests from Grand Rapids Area Schools and Deer River Schools to continue using their current school mascots — the Thunderhawks and the Warriors, respectively.

The approvals were granted under a 2025 amendment to Minnesota law, which permits schools to retain mascots that reference American Indian imagery or names if they receive formal consent from a tribal nation. In accordance with the law, both districts identified the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe as their primary tribal partner based on the location of the tribal government offices, the fact that Leech Lake students represent the largest American Indian student population in both districts, and the significant portions of Leech Lake Reservation lands located within each district's boundaries.

During the meeting, representatives from both school districts presented histories of their mascots and highlighted efforts to ensure respectful representation, including ongoing engagement with American Indian students and families. Each district's American Indian Parent Advisory Committee expressed support for keeping the mascots in place. Before reaching their decision, tribal leaders examined the provided materials and engaged in dialogue with district representatives.

"This decision reflects the value of collaboration and honors the intent of the law, which rightly recognizes tribal sovereignty and the importance of local relationships," said Faron Jackson Sr., Chairman of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe. "We appreciate that both districts have engaged with us in good faith and shown a real commitment to supporting American Indian students and honoring our culture."

Leech Lake council members expressed their support by acknowledging the historical context, the value of engaging with the tribe, and the meaningful backing from the local American Indian Parent Advisory Committees.

"We're grateful for the Leech Lake Band's leadership and their willingness to engage in a respectful, community-based process," said Matt Grose, Superintendent of Grand Rapids Area Schools. "This decision reflects the kind of partnership that honors both local control and tribal sovereignty."

“Deer River Schools has long valued its relationship with the Leech Lake community,” said Deer River Superintendent Pat Rendle. “We appreciate the Band’s thoughtful consideration and their continued support for our students and families.”

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**MASCOT PROGRESS REPORT, FEBRUARY 2026  
INDEPENDENT SCHOOL DISTRICT #317, Deer River  
Deer River High School - "Warriors"**

This report is submitted per M.S.121A.041, updated during the 2025 Minnesota legislative session.

M.S. 121A.041, Subd. 3 provides that:

“A public school may seek an exemption to subdivision 2 by requesting a letter of consent from the federally recognized Tribal Nation in Minnesota that is located nearest to the public school and a letter of consent from the school's American Indian Parent Advisory Committee. If the school does not have an American Indian Parent Advisory Committee, the school may seek a letter of consent only from the federally recognized Tribal Nation in Minnesota that is located nearest to the school. A public school whose request for an exemption is denied must comply with subdivision 2.”

A letter of consent from the school district's American Indian Parent Advisory Committee was obtained and submitted with the district's application for an exemption (attached).

The Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe are the Tribal Nation nearest to the Grand Rapids district and Grand Rapids High School, when measuring the distance from the school district boundary to the reservation boundary, and also when measuring the distance from the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe headquarters to the district office of Independent School District #318, Grand Rapids Public Schools.

At a July 16, 2025 meeting of the Tribal Council of the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, a motion was made by Secretary/Treasurer Leonard Fineday and seconded by District 1 Representative Kyle Fairbanks, followed by a unanimously vote of the council, to give consent for the continued use of the Thunderhawk name and mascot. While minutes of that meeting are not currently available, a verification can be found at (10:40) of the video recording of the meeting produced by the Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe and available here:

[https://vimeo.com/event/5257257?fbclid=IwY2xjawQK8hJleHRuA2F1bQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAvMjIwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEezZnxgxCV7z2IJEKFevn-Aj6MF3fE05eltujjhVW5p3GCIdNxOO6UmdkaLGY\\_aem\\_aonWhj4VT35R54jeHblcqQ](https://vimeo.com/event/5257257?fbclid=IwY2xjawQK8hJleHRuA2F1bQlxMABzcnRjBmFwcF9pZBAvMjIwMzIxNzg4MjAwODkyAAEezZnxgxCV7z2IJEKFevn-Aj6MF3fE05eltujjhVW5p3GCIdNxOO6UmdkaLGY_aem_aonWhj4VT35R54jeHblcqQ)

Numerous news sources reported on the action of the council, such as this one from MPR news. <https://www.mprnews.org/story/2025/07/22/mascot-exemption-approved-by-tribal-nation-for-minnesota-schools>

A copy of the agenda has been attached.

Since the school has fulfilled both requirements of M.S. 121A.041, Subd. 3, the school will maintain use of the Thunderhawk logo and mascot.

*This report was completed by Pat Rendle, Superintendent of Independent School District #317, on behalf of Deer River High School.*

*Pat Rendle, Superintendent*

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**Leech Lake Tribal Council  
 Special Meeting  
 Wednesday, June 26 2025  
 9:00 A.M.  
 Government Center – Cass Lake, Minnesota**

**A G E N D A**

I. Meeting Called to Order at \_\_\_\_\_.

II. Roll Call:

- \_\_\_\_\_ District I – Kyle Fairbanks
- \_\_\_\_\_ District II – Steve White
- \_\_\_\_\_ District III – Leon Staples, Jr.
- \_\_\_\_\_ Secretary/ Treasurer – Lenny Fineday
- \_\_\_\_\_ Chairman – Faron Jackson, Sr.

III. Approval of Agenda

a) Motion by \_\_\_\_\_, Second by \_\_\_\_\_  
 Aye \_\_\_\_\_, Oppose \_\_\_\_\_, Silent \_\_\_\_\_

IV. Meeting Minutes

a) Approve the May 22, 2025 Special Meeting Minutes as presented.

Motion by \_\_\_\_\_, Second by \_\_\_\_\_  
 Aye \_\_\_\_\_, Oppose \_\_\_\_\_, Silent \_\_\_\_\_

V. New Business

a) **Presentation by Matt Grose and Pat Rendle, Deer River and Grand Rapids Schools**

1. Approve the continued use of the Thunderhawk’s and Warrior Mascots and Logos as presented.

Motion by \_\_\_\_\_, Second by \_\_\_\_\_  
 Aye \_\_\_\_\_, Oppose \_\_\_\_\_, Silent \_\_\_\_\_

b) **Presentation by Nancy Beaulieu**

1. Discussion on the MNDOT HWY 371 Urban Reconstruction Project.

