

NEWS RELEASE

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South Eugene High School Team Name: “Axemen” Becomes “Axe”

New high school team name to maintain school tradition without gender-specific name

South Eugene High School's athletic team name will change from Axemen to Axe, following a recent community input and consideration process.

The axe is a longstanding part of South Eugene High School's history and tradition. The axe was the first symbol that students and athletes rallied around at the school, and the Axemen name had been in use for some teams since the 1930s, when interscholastic sports teams were all male. Over the years, and again recently, students, parents and community members have raised concerns that the Axemen team name is not inclusive of all athletes and students.

The school administration recently undertook a process to formally reconsider the team name. The school and district invited students, parents, staff, alumni, and community members to attend a community forum or complete an online input form—not a vote on the name but an opportunity to provide input. Thousands of community members provided comments and about one hundred attended the forum in January.

After considering all of the input, researching the school and team name's history, and more, South Eugene principal Dr. Andy Dey recommended that the team name change from Axemen to Axe. The shortened name maintains the school's history and traditions while removing the gender-specific suffix. Eugene School District 4J superintendent Dr. Gustavo Balderas has approved the recommendation.

“Our goal has been to ensure all students, student athletes and teams are united under one name and one symbol moving into the school's future,” says Dr. Andy Dey, South Eugene High School principal. “I submitted this recommendation fully aware that it will not satisfy everyone, but with the hope that all members of our community will recognize that it expresses our shared values of tradition, inclusion and unity.”

“Historically mascots have been a school-based decision process, and I have been gratified by how Principal Dey has addressed this one with a great deal of listening, thought, patience and integrity,” says Dr. Gustavo Balderas, superintendent of Eugene School District 4J. “I support this team name change both because I respect the consideration process that led to the decision, and because I have been convinced it is the right thing to do for our students now and for generations ahead.”

Dr. Dey adds, “South will remain the Home of the Axe. Our boys’ and girls’ teams will step onto the field or court carrying with them more than a century of tradition, expressed in a way that will unify them as a single school community. And yet we are adapting that tradition to a new, more inclusive world in which women compete just as aggressively and skillfully as men. ”

Changes to or replacement of materials where the Axemen name appears will be implemented over time, rather than immediately replacing all materials. The school and district leadership will work together to develop a schedule and budget plan for replacing materials.

The Axemen name is used on uniforms for about half of the school's athletic teams and is displayed in only a few places throughout the school. Most materials that include the Axemen name are items that are routinely replaced or replenished over time, such as school letterhead and athletic uniforms. A one-time change will be required for a smaller number of items, such as the seal on the front of the school, wallpaper in the gym foyer, and dies to produce class rings and graduation certificates. Historical materials such as yearbooks and trophies will not be changed retroactively.

Once this change is fully implemented, "Axemen" will no longer appear on athletic uniforms and other materials. Future uniforms will display "Axe" or "South Eugene." Only the name will change; other aspects of the school's brand, such as the purple and white school colors and the school symbol of two crossed double-bitted axes, will remain unchanged.

Gender equity in athletics is being addressed across the district in other ways beyond this team name decision. In a proactive undertaking unrelated to the Axemen team name or any complaint, the district has engaged in a full athletic program review with an expert Title IX gender equity consultant. The assessment of both athletic programs and athletic facilities is underway and will be completed this summer.

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MEDIA NOTE: Pronunciation guide for South Eugene principal and Eugene School District 4J superintendent:

Dr. Andy Dey: Surname is pronounced with a long I—sounds like "dye" or "die"

Dr. Gustavo Balderas: Standard Spanish pronunciation, or sound out Goo-STAW-voh Bawl-DARE-us