

Request to change “Columbus Day” to either “Indigenous People’s Day” or “Columbus Day/Indigenous People’s Day” on 2020-2021 School Calendar

Dear Shrewsbury School Committee Members,

I apologize for not being able to appear in person today, but thank you for allowing time for my request to be heard and discussed at your meeting. To briefly introduce myself, my name is Sanam Zaer and, although I am not currently teaching, I am a licensed high school English teacher in the State of Massachusetts. I have three children invested in Shrewsbury Public Schools: a first grader at Spring Street Elementary, an incoming kindergartener, and a foster daughter at Shrewsbury High School.

My first grader came home from school this weekend and spoke to me at length about Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. She could tell me who he was, what his profession was, why he was killed, and what he stood for. The reason I’m mentioning this is because we have a day specifically celebrating Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and, as a direct result, teachers and schools are reminded to spend time talking about him. In contrast, I was disappointed to see that my daughter had learned very little about Indigenous People in school, when they are such an important part of our history. While I have certainly met teachers in the district that spend time discussing Indigenous people in their classes, I believe that that changing “Columbus Day” on the school calendar to either “Indigenous People’s Day” or “Columbus Day / Indigenous People’s Day” would serve as an important reminder for all teachers to have these discussions within classrooms and create more consistency across the district. I believe it will also encourage schools and PTOs to bring Indigenous resources and programming into Shrewsbury Public Schools.

As you probably already know, State Representative Lewis has submitted a Bill to the State requesting that the Commonwealth of Massachusetts officially eliminate Columbus Day and replace it with Indigenous People’s Day. Like most Bills, it is moving slowly through the appropriate channels to bring this issue to a vote at the State level. At the same time, several municipalities opted to change the name locally, including Amherst, Northampton, Brookline, Cambridge, Somerville, and Great Barrington. Two years ago, the Pittsfield School Committee voted to change Columbus Day to Indigenous People’s Day and, last year, the Framingham School Committee voted to change Columbus Day to Columbus Day / Indigenous People’s Day. I believe it is important for Shrewsbury to make a change as well, and I believe this change would make a significant impact simply by appearing on the school calendar. While I would personally love to see Columbus Day changed to Indigenous People’s Day and hope that this is discussed and considered, I also do recognize that this may be controversial and offer an alternative suggestion to do what the Framingham School Committee did. By changing Columbus Day to

Columbus Day / Indigenous People's Day, I believe it will still elevate discourse in the schools and encourage more discussion about Indigenous people within every school across the district.

I am happy to provide supplemental news articles, related research studies, and resolutions that have been used in other districts if the Committee would find it helpful.

I thank you in advance for your time and consideration,

Sanam Zaer



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