



## Public survey starts on Erie Veterans Stadium logos

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School district launches public poll to select from four options for logos on new turf. All designs include current veterans-related logo and proposed logos for Erie High Royals. Voting lasts a week.

The Erie School District is fielding input about its well-known playing field.

The district on Thursday is launching a public survey to determine which of the logos will go on the new artificial turf to be installed over the coming summer at the district's Erie Veterans Memorial Stadium, whose name is not changing.

All of the four options include variations of both the current veterans-related logo at the center of the field and the proposed logos for the Erie High School Royals, whose teams use the stadium.

Starting at 10 a.m. Thursday, the survey will be available on the Erie School District's website, at [www.eriesd.org/survey](http://www.eriesd.org/survey), and its Facebook page, [www.Facebook.com/eriespublicschools](http://www.Facebook.com/eriespublicschools).

The public can also use a paper ballot and vote in person in the receptionist's area on the second floor of the district administration building at West 21st and Sassafras streets. The in-person voting runs from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. on Thursday and from 8 a.m. to 4 p.m., or the building's regular hours, thereafter.

The district will keep the survey open for seven days, until 2 p.m. on April 17.

Anyone can take the survey, though the district will ask for home addresses, officials said at the School Board's committee-of-the-whole meeting at the administration building on Wednesday evening. The district will break down the data by city of Erie residents and noncity residents in evaluating the survey results, Neal Brokman, the district's executive director of operations, said after the meeting.

The district administration and School Board will use the survey results to settle a dispute that has simmered for weeks. The debate has been over whether the district should replace the current logo during the \$410,000 installation of the new turf to replace the existing turf, which is fraying.

"It is our intention to bring you a recommendation based on the results of the poll," Erie schools Superintendent Brian Polito told the School Board on Wednesday.

A potential complication developed despite the district's hope that the results of the poll would drive a final decision.

School Director John Harkins said he plans to present a resolution at the School Board's next voting meeting, on April 17, that the veterans-related logo remain on the field, with no other logos, no matter what the results of the poll. Harkins said he respects the idea of a poll but wants the veterans-related logo to remain as a way to continue to honor veterans.

"I just don't think it is appropriate to change the memorial status," Harkins said at the board meeting.

The district administration has emphasized that the name of the 10,000-seat Veterans Memorial Stadium, which opened at 26th and State streets in 1924 and honors military veterans of World War I, is staying the same. And no one is challenging the need for new turf.

Some residents have lobbied for the current logo to remain at the center of the field, where it has been since the existing artificial turf went in 12 years ago. The red-white-and-blue insignia features images of a soldier and a football player.

Others have pushed to have the logo for the Erie High School Royals placed at the center of the field and the Royals name placed in the endzones. The logos would signify the field as the home to Erie High, created in 2017-18 through the merger of East and Strong Vincent high schools and Central Career & Technical School.

The four options presented in the survey represent a compromise. All feature, on different areas of the field, the current logo and the Royals logos, rather than just each logo exclusively.

The push for a compromise follows the direction of a special 12-person committee that the district administration set up at the request of the School Board in March, Brokman told the School Board.

“We had emotional ties to putting the Erie High logo on the field and the original logo on the field,” he said.

Brokman said the committee was made up of four students and 12 adults. The adults, he said, are Erie School Directors Darlene Feeney and Tom Spagel, who is an Army veteran; two members of the Erie County World War I Centennial Committee; four school district personnel; two community members; and two members of the Erie Stadium Commission, which oversees the operations of the stadium for the Erie School District. The commission is using accumulated revenue from ticket sales and stadium lease fees to pay for most of the cost of the new turf.

At the committee’s first meeting, on March 25, all the members agreed that the district should pursue a compromise design that incorporates the veterans-related logo and the Erie High logos, Brokman said. On Monday, he said, the group met again and narrowed the options to the four designs up for a vote through the survey.

“Every single member of the group said they were fine with a compromise,” Brokman said in an interview, citing the vote tallies from the meetings.

The School Board must make a decision on the logo soon so contractors can install the turf in time for the start of the 2019-20 sports season in late August. The district is installing the turf in a \$1.3 million facelift to the stadium, where sections of concrete will also get renovated.

The stadium work is part of the district's \$80.8 million project to renovate its 16 school buildings and other sites. The district is paying for the project through a bond issue and with some of the \$14 million in additional annual state aid it started to receive in 2018 to stay solvent while it improves its educational programs and buildings.

Polito on Wednesday night briefed the board on how lower interest rates for the bond issue are saving the district \$6 million. His comments elicited no discussion, unlike the topic of the stadium logos. That debate dominated Wednesday's meeting.

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These are renderings of four possible designs for new turf planned for Veterans Stadium in Erie. The Erie School District, which maintains the stadium, has launched a survey to solicit community input on logo proposals for the turf, which will be installed this summer. [CONTRIBUTED PHOTO]