GUIDE

Get written approval for the school mascot before anyone draws the club shirt.

In October, New York began moving one school mark decision from a state board back to local districts, partway through the school year. An advisor who gets the yes in writing before the first sketch never has to guess which office holds it.

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A club shirt usually starts the same way. The student council wants the mascot on the back, the robotics team wants the school name over its gear logo, and the advisor wants the order in before the first event. Somewhere between the first sketch and the size roster, someone has to ask whether the school's mark can be used at all, and nothing in a club's routine gives that job to anyone.

The club owns the shirt, and the school owns its mark

School Club T-Shirts carry two kinds of content, and only one of them belongs to the club. The club shirt is the club's identity, planned by the advisor with the student leaders: the club name, the year, the members' names and a slogan the officers voted on are theirs to choose. The school's name, crest and mascot belong to the school or the district, and the yes for those has to come from whoever controls them.

The print shop cannot give that yes. Impact SpiritWear can proofread every name and date and check that a file will print cleanly, but it cannot tell whether the district has signed off on its crest. In an Impact SpiritWear order, the advisor approves the design and the school signs off on its name and mascot before anything is printed. Only the advisor can bring that second answer to the order.

Inside a club, the approval step has no natural owner. The officers assume the advisor asked, and the advisor assumes a school club needs no permission to print its own school's name.

New York moved a school mark decision in the middle of a school year

New York shows that the office deciding a school mark question can sit above the building and can change while the school year is underway. In 2023 the Board of Regents adopted a rule that took one mark decision away from districts and gave it to the state: school employees could not wear or promote Indigenous names, logos or mascots on school property or at school events. The same policy required most districts to move away from prohibited Indigenous mascots by 2025, and that broader ban stays in place.

That employee decision is now headed back to districts. K-12 Dive reported on October 28 that the state Attorney General's office, in an October 16 update to the courts, disclosed that New York is repealing the employee section. A New York State Education Department spokesperson told K-12 Dive that "the Department will recommend that the Board of Regents leave decisions regarding employee clothing, including apparel displaying offensive Indigenous imagery, to local school districts."

October 16 falls inside the school year. A club that planned its shirt in September planned it under one rule, and it may hand the shirts out under another. A club advisor is a school employee, and an advisor in a club shirt is an employee in employee clothing. An advisor who asked in September whether staff could wear a club shirt with an Indigenous mascot at a school event had a state rule for an answer. An advisor who asks the same question after the Regents act will need the answer from the district. Same shirt, same question, different office.

Written approval dated close to the order comes from whoever holds the decision now.

Written approval names the exact mark and comes before any artwork

Written approval for a club shirt names the exact mark being used, shows it in the actual design, comes from the person or office that controls the mark, and arrives before anyone draws. An email is enough when it is specific and on the record.

A useful approval covers five things: the school name exactly as it will be printed; the logo, crest or mascot file being used; where the mark sits on the shirt and whether its colors change; the club name and any slogan printed beside it, since some schools review the whole design and not only the logo; and who approved it, with the date.

Ask for the official artwork file at the same time. A mascot redrawn from a phone photo is a different drawing of the school's mark, and the approval should cover the drawing that will actually print.

The order of work: the officers decide what the shirt needs to say; the advisor asks the office that controls the mark for written approval and the official file; the artwork is drawn with the approved mark and any conditions that came with it; the advisor approves the design and every name and

date is proofread; then sizes and payments are collected together, with a few extras, because a small reorder costs more per shirt. Conditions learned at step two shape the art from the start instead of forcing a redraw at step four, and no family pays for a mark that cannot be printed.

File the approval with the size roster and the payment list, so it is already in hand when the order goes to Impact SpiritWear through the request form or by phone. When a new principal or next year's advisor asks why the shirt looks the way it does, the answer is one email away.

Written approval is overkill only when it goes higher than the mark

The strongest case against written approval for a club shirt is that it can create a problem that did not exist. In many schools the principal can approve the school name on the spot. A twenty-member chess club printing that name is not a licensing deal, and sending the request up to the district office can produce a no that nobody in the building would have given, or a review that pushes the order past the first tournament.

The objection is right about escalation. Written approval goes to whoever controls the mark, and no higher. If the principal controls use of the school name, a two-line reply from the principal is the written approval, and routing it to the district is overkill. Going above the building makes sense only when the school says the district controls the mark, or when the design alters the mark itself: new colors, a redrawn mascot, a cropped crest. A design with no school mark needs no request at all, and the time is better spent on the size roster.

The objection is wrong about the writing. A hallway yes also does not travel. It never reaches the district office, it is gone when a new principal arrives, and it cannot be checked when the rule above it changes, the way New York's employee rule did in October. A two-line email costs the principal a minute. A refused mark found after printing costs the whole order.

Ask once per design, not once per order. A club reprinting an approved design can point to the earlier email, after confirming that the mark, and the office that controls it, have not changed.

A slow answer or a no from the school still leaves the club a shirt

When school approval for a mark is slow, the club holds any artwork that depends on the mark and carries on with everything that does not. Student leaders can settle the club name treatment, the colors, the slogan and the member list, and the advisor can draft the size form without opening it.

When the answer is no, the club can still have a shirt. The club name, the year, an illustration the students draw themselves, or a line only the members understand can carry a club's identity without the school's mark.

When the school says the mark itself is changing, such as a mascot being replaced or a new logo on the way, the money is better left unspent for now. Print without the mark this year, or wait for the new one. A shirt carrying a mark the school is retiring is a purchase the club can skip.

> A club advisor is a school employee, and an advisor in a club shirt is an employee in employee clothing.

The useful question for an advisor is not whether the school will say yes. It is who says it, and whether that yes is written down where next year's advisor can find it. One email to the right office, sent before the first sketch, settles both.

Further reading

1. K-12 Dive, report on the New York Attorney General's October 16 court update repealing the employee section of the state's Indigenous mascot ban, with the State Education Department's recommendation on employee clothing k12dive.com/news/new-york-eases-part-of-native-american-imagery-ban
2. K-12 Dive, explainer on the New York mascot ban and the U.S. Department of Education's 2025 Title VI finding and referral to the Department of Justice k12dive.com/news/racist-native-american-mascot-controvery-Massapequa-new-york-mascot-title-vi

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