

SONG: Upbeat 'Wabash' Version Chosen

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The committee of 13 included Haver, current students and faculty, class presidents, Fort Smith Public Schools athletics director Jim Rowland, Band Director Sean Carrier and others.

"We listened to hundreds of fight songs," Carrier said. "After a while they all started sounding alike. But this one kind of stuck out as something that would have spirit to it. It's not as well known. But it's kind of in the style of our previous fight song."

The locomotive-related song was first sung in the late 19th century, according to BalladOfAmerica.com, which explores traditional folk music.

"It's an old song," Haver said. "I remember Roy Acuff sang it on the Grand

Ole Opry, and Johnny Cash."

The high school's arrangement will be "very fast-paced and upbeat," Haver added.

"There will be a short version to play after say a touchdown or an extra point," he said.

Carrier said it won't be a problem to learn the new song in time for the school's first football game Aug. 25 at Siloam Springs.

"Our job is to make it our own," Carrier said. "It will be kind of like how 'Dixie' evolved over the years. That's how traditions are built."

The school's version may be called "Southside Fight," Haver said.

"We'll probably write some words to it different than the 'Wabash Cannonball,'" he added, "and

make it a fight song."

A Fort Smith attorney suing the School Board over an alleged open meetings violation said he also has a problem with how the new fight song was determined.

"The public is learning about it second-hand," attorney Joey McCutchen said. "This fight song committee, it should have been announced it was being formed, who was going to be on it and how they were going to go about their business."

McCutchen has filed an Arkansas Freedom of Information Act lawsuit against the School Board on behalf of resident Curtis Sorrells. The suit alleges the agenda for the June 23 Committee of the Whole meeting did not publicize the fight song and mascot-related vote.

CHANGING MASCOTS

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All Aboard With SHS Fight Song

COMMITTEE CHOOSES 'WABASH CANNONBALL'

By Chad Hunter

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American folk song "Wabash Cannonball" will replace Southside High School's longtime "Dixie" fight song on the heels of a decision this week by the School Board to retire Rebel-related symbols.

Principal Wayne Haver said a fight song committee was unanimous in its decision to adopt an "upbeat" version of the song, "very much" like adaptations performed by Kansas State University and Texas A&M.

"The regular 'Wabash' is very slow," Haver said Thursday. "This is about three times as fast."

The committee's song choice was made following Monday's unanimous vote by the School Board to retire "Dixie" as Southside High School's fight song "immediately" and phase out its Rebel mascot over the next year.

The fight song and Rebel, Southside's mascot since the school's doors opened in 1963, were targeted for removal by the School Board's Committee of the Whole in June in the wake of national publicity and controversy over the Confederate flag. The move, according to a statement from the school district, came after "giving great consideration to the continuing impact of perceived symbols of racism on the community, state and nation."

Haver said the fight song committee was formed after the School Board's intentions were made clear in June.

"We were caught in that predicament of having a month to do it," Haver said. "So, we formed a committee trying to be proactive, you might say, and get things kind of going because we knew we had such a short time frame."

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