

BOARD MEMO

Date: April 8, 2021

For ACTION

For INFORMATION

Board Agenda: Yes

No

FROM: Julia A. Burgos, Chief of School & Community Relations

THROUGH: Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., Ed.D., Superintendent of Schools

TO: The Honorable Meagan Alderton, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Superintendent's Recommendation on the New Name for T.C. Williams High School

ACPS 2025 STRATEGIC PLAN GOAL:

Goal 1: Systemic Alignment

Goal 2: Instructional Excellence

Goal 5: Family and Community Engagement

SY 2020-2021 FOCUS AREA:

Focus Area 3: Strategic Plan Implementation

Focus Area 4: Renaming of Schools

Focus Area 5: Academic Disparities

FY 2021 BUDGET PRIORITY:

Cultural Competence for All Staff

Outreach to Hispanic Families to Improve Attendance and Graduation

Outreach to Underserved Communities to Increase Engagement

SUMMARY:

The presentation presented to the School Board on March 4, 2021 regarding the final polls in Phase II of the Identity Project provided data and information about the top three candidates for each school from the public poll and the final recommendation from the superintendent for consideration by the School Board.

BACKGROUND:

On Nov. 23, 2020, the Alexandria City School Board voted to change the names of T.C. Williams High School and Matthew Maury Elementary School, citing the fact that neither name was aligned with ACPS' values of equity and diversity.

Engaging the community in the renaming process and moving forward with semi-finalist names and finalist names was built off of the following board policies in renaming of school buildings.

[ACPS Policy FF](#) states that the naming of schools or facilities can

1. honor individuals that have made an exceptional contribution to a particular school, school program or the school division as a whole; or

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2. recognize places or events of historical significance for their contribution to the community or their impact or related to the school facility itself
3. cannot be named after a current ACPS employee
4. should not cause confusion with other public facilities in Alexandria, adjoining jurisdictions or other areas of the Commonwealth

[ACPS Reg FF-R](#) outlines the process:

1. ACPS staff will present a timeline to the Board that allows for sufficient public engagement and outreach.
2. The decision-making process should not involve committees.
3. The Board Clerk will help compile the name requests as they come in.
4. The Board has the final decision.

This will be the first time that ACPS has been required to rename a facility/school. Renaming in ACPS schools has previously focused on:

1. Naming a new school/facility
2. Naming a wing of a building in honor of a donor

The policy has been updated to reflect the processes followed in each of the above situations, but this process is a somewhat new process for ACPS.

In July 2020, Gov. Ralph Northam wrote a letter to state school boards urging them to evaluate Virginia public schools with names and mascots “that memorialize Confederate leaders or sympathizers.” As a result, many Virginia school districts have considered and made name changes or mascot changes over the past year. Guided by our strategic plan “Equity for All 2025,” ACPS responded to two petitions received in summer 2020, to change the names of T.C. Williams High School and Matthew Maury Elementary School.

Many ACPS schools were named during a time in our city and our country when vastly different attitudes and beliefs guided our decisions. In 2020, a spotlight has shone on the many inequities in today's society, and a new determination to right the wrongs of history has swept the nation. To that end, the School Board answered a call to look again at the morality of naming our city's only high school after Thomas Chambliss Williams, a staunch segregationist whose views could not have been more inconsistent with the vibrant, diverse and inclusive place we know today. As that process began, questions were raised about the name of Matthew Maury Elementary School. Was it right to immortalize a commander of the Confederate Navy even though he was also a celebrated oceanographer and astronomer?

And so, began ACPS' The Identity Project, a wide-reaching community conversation that allows all voices to be heard as we look toward a more equitable future in Alexandria. The process for Phase I required considerable community engagement to involve the public, understand the history and make informed decisions. Phase II of the Identity Project focused on community engagement to find new names after

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the Board voted to change the school names on Nov. 23, 2020. Phase II includes a wide-reaching community engagement effort to narrow down new naming options that meet all Board policies and be inclusive. The Board will make the final decision on April 8, 2021.

Phase II of the Identity Project moved forward with community engagement around the new name selection process following this timeline:

1. Dec. 8, 2020-Jan. 8, 2021: Student Essay and Poster Submission Opportunity
2. Jan. 11-13, 2021: Renaming Poll Number One which allowed the public to choose one of the student submissions or to add their own nomination.
3. Feb. 5-Feb. 19, 2021: Renaming Poll Number Two which allowed the public to choose one name between the nine semi-finalists for each school.
4. March 4, 2021: Board is presented with the top three names for each school and a recommendation from the superintendent for a final name for each school.
5. March 18, 2021: Public Hearing on name recommendations
6. April 8, 2021: Action Item: School Board votes on new names
7. July 1, 2021: Implementation of the new names

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends the School Board approve the new name of T.C. Williams High School and rename the school, Alexandria High School in accordance with Regulation FF-R. The new name would become effective at the start of the 2021-22 School Year on July 1, 2021. As part of the school renaming, the Titan school mascot and school colors will be retained and continue in the long-standing tradition of "Titan Pride."

IMPACT:

To complete the robust public community engagement process that was launched in the midst of the pandemic to rename T.C. Williams High School as part of The Identity Project. The process has incorporated the voices of the community through educational efforts, name submissions and polls.

ATTACHMENTS:

None

REFERENCES:

- [September 25, 2020—The Identity Project: Renaming Our Schools Working Plan for Communications and Engagement](#)
- [November 16, 2020--Superintendent's Recommendation for Renaming T.C. Williams High School & Matthew Maury Elementary School](#)
- [Superintendent's Recommendations for Renaming Matthew Maury Elementary School and T.C. Williams High School](#)

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