

Dear Alexandria School Board,

I am speaking tonight in support of naming the new West End Elementary School for the distinguished and Honorable Ferdinand Day. I appreciate the work that the naming committee has done to come up with a worthy list of names of people who should have schools named after them, and perhaps all of their achievements are greater than those of Mr. Day, but he has one thing that none of them have, which is a deep connection to Alexandria. I got to know Mr. Day personally when we worked together to preserve the Carver Elementary School, which we succeeded in doing, despite lack of support by elected officials, who had already voted for its demolition. Like many endeavors in Mr. Day's life, he persevered despite the odds and despite the opposition.

If the purpose of naming a school after a distinguished individual is to teach the children who attend that school about the achievements of that person, what better way to do it than to name the school after someone with a local connection. Mr. Day's life is a history lesson in how to overcome, and there are many people here in the Alexandria Community, including his daughter, Gwendolyn Day-Fuller, who can attest to his memories, and share them with the children at this new school. He will not be a distant historical figure but a local fixture of our community who can teach children about Alexandria. He can teach them how he was denied an education, how he had to go away to a different jurisdiction for his education, and also to teach. His life can teach the lesson that separate but equal is never equal, and that we must fight for equal opportunities for all Alexandria children and students.

Even though he may not have felt welcome at times, Mr. Day came back to Alexandria to break barriers. He was not only the first African American appointed to the school board (long before we had elected school boards) but the first African American Chair of a school board in the Commonwealth of Virginia, which was once a slave owning state, and where the capital of the confederacy was located, and home to Robert E. Lee and where we still have a statue of a confederate soldier. In fact, where once it is possible that Mr. Day's ancestors were sold into slavery in front of our present City Hall. He would often start a conversation by saying "Did you know that the last lynching in Alexandria was in 1907?"

Naming this school after Ferdinand Day would directly tie in to the history of Alexandria. Like Samuel Tucker he played a seminal role in the evolution of Alexandria from a state of massive resistance to a state that elected the first African American Governor in the south since Reconstruction. We are well aware that we continue to have schools like TC Williams and Maury named after people who were not always good role models in our community, so wouldn't it be nice to have a school named after someone who was. In my humble opinion, he deserves a school named after just him. We must embrace the good and bad in our history, and therefore embracing someone who was a victim of segregation but overcame it, just like many of our students have to overcome their own adverse situations, would be an example for us all.

In April of 2015 The Alexandria Democratic Committee passed a Resolution that if a new school was created in Alexandria it should be named after Ferdinand Day. Last Week the School Board heard the results of a naming committee for a new school at 1701 N. Beauregard St. Ferdinand Day was not one of the names chosen, but his name was paired with Ellen Ochoa, Director of the Johnson Space Center, to create the Day-Ochoa School. He was also a lifelong advocate for education and fairness, and was part of a legendary group of African Americans known as the Secret 7, who advocated for inclusion in the early 70's. He is the only deceased member of the potential nominees. He is also the only one who has not had a school named after him. This would be a great way to celebrate Black History Month and honor Mr. Day, a Living Legend, near his 100th Birthday in August.

Boyd Walker