

Public Comments for Virtual School Board Meetings #64

My public comments are related to: * General Public Comments

Topic * Request to Rename T.C. Williams High School

Name * Greg Hittelman

What is your relationship to ACPS? * Parent/Guardian of an ACPS Student

To include your comments as part of the Public Comments agenda item at weekly Special Called School Board Meetings, enter your comments here:

Dear Chair Anderson and ACPS Board Members,

Our 14-year old will be entering the currently-named T.C. Williams High School this year. Having her enter a school named after the ardent segregationist and vicious racist T.C. Williams is completely unacceptable.

The Board must vote now, today, without any further delay, to rescind the name of T.C. Williams from the high school.

Thank you for bringing this topic to the agenda today. Previously we were told by the Chair you could not do so, but where there's a will there's a way.

However, I was deeply disappointed to see that the current plan by this Board seems to be to agree to work on a report to decide on a plan to consult on the idea to prepare for sometime next Spring to discuss whether it is feasible to potentially change the name.

That proposed plan is dangerous.

As an experienced public relations, crisis strategy, and reputation management expert with strong contacts at all the major media outlets in the nation, from left to right, coast to coast, CNN to Fox News, NY Times to LA Times, I promise that you are putting our district's reputation at risk by any further delays. Get out in front of this, and do it now.

Every day you delay continues to put the district at risk of a national media spotlight that would burn away in a flash any credit you may be planning to receive for educational justice and equity initiatives that you may have in the works. It would eradicate any positive associations that come from the Hollywood film about the school. Instead, the phrase "Remember the Titans" will be forever linked to hard-hitting 2020 news stories about a school board that dragged its feet as the rest of the nation began to move forward.

There is zero excuse for the Board not to act today to make official that the name T.C. Williams will no longer be the name of the high school. The

time is now, this is the historic moment and opportunity, and any delay will be understood by our community, the nation, and your grandchildren as a disgraceful dereliction of your duties as stewards of the reputation and integrity of the school district.

I have heard all the Chair's rationales about the process taking time. It's certainly reasonable to have an open community process to explore and select a new name. But let me be clear, that is a totally separate issue from the simple decision you have the power to make, to no longer have that despicable name adorn our high school. That simple act can be done today and in a matter of minutes, if the Board is willing.

There truly are no acceptable rationales for retaining the name. Not cost, not hassle, not further consultation, and not being too busy with other things. If Mississippi can take down its flag, if Princeton can change the name of its international affairs school, if we can remove statues of Confederate traitors from our public spaces, you can take that one initial step, that simple honorable action, today, on July 10th.

As our governor has just said, in letters to all the school boards in Virginia, "When our public schools are named after individuals who advanced slavery and systemic racism, and we allow those names to remain on school property, we tacitly endorse their values as our own."

Today is the day it must happen. The name represents bigotry, cruelty, and injustice, and any argument against changing the name is per se an argument in support of white supremacy, and thus untenable. The name must go. To delay even another day or week would be an act of sheer cowardice and allyship with systemic racism, hiding behind bureaucracy when clear right and wrong is before you as our elected officials.

I hold a sincere hope that you will be moved today to do the right thing. When you do so, you too will be remembered as Titans.

Best regards,
Greg Hittelman
Alexandria, Virginia
