

Public Comments for Virtual School Board Meetings #147

I would like to provide: * Written Public Comments

My public comments are related to: * School Renaming

Topic * Proposal to Rename Matthew Maury Elementary School

Full Name * Timothy Doyle

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

Enter your comments here OR upload below:

Regarding the proposal to rename Matthew Maury Elementary School, please have the following information entered into the record.

While recognizing the rightly heightened concern for racism that exists throughout the country, I believe that the rush to rename institutions is being presented as a panacea to these problems. I think this may be case in the effort to rename Matthew Maury Elementary School.

I believe that the information presented in the Biographical/Historical Data portion of the petition presents an inaccurate portrayal of Matthew Maury. To state that all the traits and beliefs associated with a group (the Confederacy) are to be ascribed to a single member of that group (Matthew Maury) is to stereotype.

The petition does not fully address Matthew Maury's professional accomplishments. Not only was he internationally recognized for his work in charting the winds and currents of the oceans, but he also developed systems for weather forecasting, founded the Naval Observatory, was instrumental in the establishment of the Naval Academy, helped launch the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and advocated for the creation of what is now Virginia Tech. But for the Civil War no one would oppose naming any American institution for this great man.

Matthew Maury did not own slaves. He endeavored to end slavery. As a man of his time and place his efforts to end slavery were based on reality as he saw it. Specifically, his dealings with Brazil were done in conjunction with operations to end the African slave trade and to phase out slavery in Virginia. Because of the destruction in Virginia during the Civil War, where one third of the battles were fought, he became involved in the New Virginia Colony in Mexico. This was done out of a belief in helping those whose homes and livelihoods had been destroyed to get a fresh start. I liken this chapter in our history to the 14,000 loyalist refugees who, following the American Revolution, moved to New Brunswick, Canada. Importantly, Matthew Maury ultimately returned to the United States to teach at the Virginia Military Institute.

In deciding which schools in the ACPS district should be renamed, it is also worth pointing out the irony that, except for T.C. Williams, only Matthew Maury has been the subject of such consideration. A survey of the names of schools in the district includes:

George Washington, a slaveowner who twice waged war on Indians;
Patrick Henry, a slaveowner;
Thomas Jefferson, a slaveowner;
George Mason, a slaveowner;
William Ramsay, likely a slaveowner;
Douglas MacArthur, fired for insubordination; and
my personal favorite, James Polk, a slaveowner who brought his slaves to the White House and started the Mexican–American War to gain more land for slaveowners.

However, if the democratic process decides that MMES should be renamed, then I ask that consideration be given to following candidates:

Guy Spence Gardner Elementary School
Kathleen Anne Higdon Wilson Elementary School

Guy Gardner was an astronaut who attended MMES.
Kathleen Wilson was a women's rights activist who lived in the neighborhood near MMES.

While I am very glad that a part of the Parker Gray community is included within the MMES zone, I believe that the Parker Gray community in general has a greater affiliation with Jefferson–Houston.

Likewise, Judge Dawkins and Blois Hundley have greater affiliations with Lyles–Crouch.

Thank you for your consideration.