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# Fairfax County School Board Public Hearing, Tuesday, October 10, 2023

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- Official meeting video (YouTube): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H-4ehJWrNQ4
- Official School Board page (FCPS): https://www.fcps.edu/about-fcps/leadership/school-board

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Speech-to-text: whisper.cpp, model large-v3-turbo. Produced 2026-11-03. Each paragraph starts with its time [HH:MM:SS] in the meeting video.

**[00:00:07]** - Good evening and welcome to our public hearing on the Woodson High School renaming. I do want to remind board members that there will be three minutes for each speaker. At this point, the October 10th, 2023 public hearing on choosing to move forward with renaming the Woodson High School is officially called to order.

**[00:00:31]** Ms. Tolan is our chair of the board and she has submitted a written request to attend virtually for this evening's public hearing due to personal reasons. All board members in favor of granting this request, please raise your hand. I have Ms. Corbett Sanders, Dr. Anderson, Ms. Koufax, Mr. Frisch, Ms. Omish, Ms. Cohen, and Ms. Rajna Seismerheiser.

**[00:00:56]** Those opposed, those abstaining, and also myself approving that for Ms. Tolan. Ms. Tolan, thank you for joining us here this evening because board members are not speaking this evening, I won't do a mic check as we normally do.

**[00:01:17]** To our audience, good evening and welcome to this public hearing on choosing to move forward with the Woodson High School renaming process. On behalf of the entire board, I would like to thank you for sharing your comments with us. This hearing is being broadcast on channel 99 and livestreamed at fcps.edu/tv/ch99.

[00:01:43] We have 12 registered speakers who will address the board at this public hearing. The speakers will be allowed their three minutes and we ask that you stay within that time limit. The timer will start when you begin and the timer will sound after that time is over.

[00:02:00] Please ensure that your remarks are limited to choosing to move forward with the renaming of the W.T. Woodson High School. If you are not registered to speak, but would like to address the board, please see the clerk or deputy clerk to sign up for one of the five extra reserved speaker slots.

[00:02:21] At the conclusion of the speakers, we will have some final remarks. And so with that, Madam Clerk, I would like to please call our first speaker. - Kai Shaw, Christine Bennett, Jasmine Kennedy.

[00:02:57] Aaron Yohei. - Good evening. My name is Aaron Yohei, and I'm an alumnus of Woodson High School, where I attended from 2008 until my graduation in 2012.

[00:03:13] The identity of Woodson High School's namesake was never a big topic of discussion during my time there, nor was it a secret. At the library in Woodson High School, there is, or used to be, a rather low-key stone bust of Wilbur Tucker Woodson behind a glass case with an accompanying plaque in small writing explaining his significance.

[00:03:37] Woodson's support for massive resistance was known to all of the inquiring minds of the student body at Woodson and was surely the reason that his legacy is not given much more attention by interested students even. After all, who would want to be associated with such a prejudicial and destructive policy as massive resistance at their graduation? There is a great deal in a name as it turns out. This summer it was no coincidence that Vice President Kamala Harris chose to give

[00:04:11] an historic address from John Lewis High School. Every day since that school's name was changed, Lewis High School students can hold their heads high by their association with one of the civil rights movement's greatest leaders. Compared to the understated bust of Wilbur Tucker Woodson in our library there, there is a huge mural of John Lewis adorning the walls of that school accompanied by his famous words written large. No student there should be ashamed of their association with his legacy. I wish for the same for the deserving students of my alma mater

[00:04:48] Woodson High. In contrast, C.G. Woodson is someone who I look forward to learning everything about. I know he is called the father of black history and with good reason. Please give Woodson students, families, and alumni such as myself every reason to be proud of that great legacy in the name of our school.

[00:05:10] Thank you. Theodora Geis. Stewart Williams. Thank you. My elementary school daughters will go to this high school. Megan and I are actually neighbors and we

[00:05:50] saw each other the other day so it's good to see you Megan. If the board decides to rename Woodson, I have two asks. The first is move completely away from the Woodson name. The second is to open the aperture for proposed names, preferably a Woodson graduate. Note, I am not an alum. We have a once in a lifetime opportunity to inspire the community and students with this name change. 26% of FCPS schools are named after people. Only 2% of schools are named after women

[00:06:29] and only two buildings for women in STEM. For decades, FCPS boasts one of the best school systems in the country and I am a product of that and I'm very proud of that and thank you for the work you do. However, zero schools have been named after its accomplished graduates.

[00:06:50] Let's inspire our students and pay homage to our community by renaming the school after one of our own. The proposed name is from Mr. Woodson to Mr. Woodson.

[00:07:06] The unintended consequences is W.T. Woodson will still hang in the shadows, still venerated. Changing the name to a different person with a different last name would completely sever all ties and disassociate the school for the reasons the board wants to change.

[00:07:25] Homes in the Woodson Pyramid draw families because of the excellent schools. Let's shine a light on the accomplishments of our community and choose a notable Woodson alumni to showcase the academic excellence we are so proud of and bring the community together. I was in awe of many Woodson graduates have led successful impactful lives. As you can tell I did a little bit of research.

[00:07:45] We can tell students to reach for the stars by spotlining an alum who actually made it there. for example katie coleman graduated from woodson in 1978 and served a career of selfless service to the nation she was a pioneer breaking glass ceilings in the male-dominated military she actually entered the military only two years after west point and the other federal academies admitted women she rose to the rank of colonel she was a nasa astronaut and was on three successful missions to space logging over 180 days she continues to serve on various stem boards

[00:08:23] advocating for inclusion. By honoring an accomplice Woodson graduate, we can inspire our students, honor our community, and promote inclusion. Thank you. We're going back to Mr. Geis. He was on, but we just needed to promote him. So Theodore Geis. Thank you, Ms. Clark. Good evening, everyone.

[00:08:51] Thank you for bringing this forward. Megan, I really appreciate it for all you've done for Woodson community. As also an alumni, I want to express my desire that Woodson High School should be changed, that W.T. Woodson did lead FCPS through a very troubling time and through a troubling practice and massive resistance, and there should be no reason to celebrate that.

[00:09:16] And I think that the proposal that has been made, Carter G. Woodson, is a good idea. It will keep that last name intact so there won't be much you know confusion when changing the school and I find it to be and hopefully the community finds it to be a non-controversial changing because it will be somebody to celebrate more at the school however listening this I want to let the community think that it could be different we could let another person a grad or somebody else change the name too there's so many things we could do but what I do know is that this is more important about

[00:09:54] just making sure that name is changed. I am fully supportive of that. I won't waste your time tonight thinking about any other names I can think of, but I am happy that you went through with this and that's all I can give you is my appreciation and hopes that we can find a new name soon enough.

[00:10:13] Thank you. Andre Arcadineco, Vanessa Hall. So nice to get three minutes. My name is Vanessa Hall.

[00:10:36] I have two children at Woodson. My sister graduated from Woodson. My parents have deep roots in the Woodson community my mother's real estate signs were on every corner for like 20 years so I care change is hard but necessary right now we must change the name of WT Woodson High School because segregationist names should not grace our children's schools I've heard people say we didn't know who he was well I'm here to say that generations of black families who are prohibited from attending any high school in Fairfax County knew because for

[00:11:13] them school ended in eighth grade until 1954 unless they were lucky enough to commute hours to Prince William or relocate to DC with family and if WT agree agreed to pay their tuition also late in his tenure WT was called out by the community for spreading anti-semitic propaganda and trying to forced teachers to watch a McCarthy Red Scare propaganda film. This means that the entire community knew who he was. This was in the Washington Post way back in the 1950s and 60s.

[00:11:46] It was posted in there. People say that W.T. shaped FCPS into the school system. It is today, which is true, but he only did that for white people. For much of his tenure, black students remained in unheated, unplumbed shacks while W.T. built gleaming modern schools for white students and black families had to self-fund and constantly demand basic education rights from WT.

[00:12:11] As early as 1954, his peers in surrounding counties like Arlington, Falls Church, and Montgomery County all wanted to integrate. It's also in the Washington Post. Yet, as late as 1960, WT continued to advocate to segregate dances and athletics despite petitions by PTAs and students.

[00:12:32] but that didn't isn't all did you know that the school board broke a policy against naming a school after a living person in 1960 I don't know if that still exists you guys probably know yes they did with little protest WT accepted this rule-breaking slapped his name on WT Woodson and retired months later yet his legacy continued even in retirement he had recommended a slow role of integration in FCPS. The school board approved this grade-by-grade approach which meant FCPS wasn't fully integrated till 1971 which means FCPS was

[00:13:09] segregated in my lifetime. Our Fairfax County schools still feel the sting of segregation 62 years after his retirement which is nothing to celebrate. Current families and students ask you to change the name. Change may be hard but it is necessary. Please vote to remove his name from my kids high school And I really love the name Carter G, but I talked too long and I can't explain why. Thank you, John Bartoloni

[00:13:39] Okay, I'm John Bartoloni I've spent most of my 71 years here in Northern Virginia and although most of my high school years were spent elsewhere I am a 1970 graduate of W.T. Woodson high school I do not subscribe to mr. Woodson's views on race and integration

[00:14:15] Those views are anachronistic that haven't been said I oppose Renaming Woodson high school as members of the board know Virginia elects a new governor every four years for much of the 20th century the Commonwealth had a de facto Dictator a newspaper publisher who also owned apple orchards out in Clark County as VO key noted in Chapter 2 of Southern Politics in State and Nation 1949 quote of all the Virginia

[00:14:52] states Virginia of all the American states Virginia can claim to the most thorough control by an oligarchy end quote. Mr. Key of course was referring to the infamous bird machine which ruled Virginia during the entirety of Mr. Woodson's tenure as an appointed official Mr. Woodson was not a member of the bird machine but he certainly had to deal with it during the unfortunate period known today as the masters resistance public schools were closed in Norfolk Charlottesville Warren County and Prince

[00:15:28] Edward County in Fairfax County though schools remained open I think we can thank mr. Whitson for that one of my literary heroes is the African-American author Zora Neale Hurston who was also opposed to the Brown decision as Zora disturbed people she wrote in dialect i dare not use the terms

she used to describe her critics to the best of my knowledge students at woodson high school still study zora neale hurston in the

[00:16:02] 2023 school year woodson honor code was revised students were advised that plagiarism is stealing another's work and passing it off as one's own yet every january fcps closes to honor a man who who plagiarized his dissertation at Boston University.

[00:16:22] Martin Luther King's PhD was not revoked, but his transgression was acknowledged. Zora Neale Hurston and Dr. King were flawed individuals. So was Mr. Woodson. Given his service in World War I and leadership during the consolidation era and post-World War II years, I asked the school board of Fairfax County not to tamper with the legacy of Mr. Woodson.

[00:16:50] Keep his name on the building, please, thank you. - Marcia Schindl.

[00:17:07] - Thank you. My perspective here expands a little beyond this one individual act because this has been in a time of turmoil and anxiety and angst for many people. Those currently with Woodson and I myself as an alumnus of Woodson.

[00:17:25] And I think the board has the authority and the responsibility to ensure that no parents or students or graduates have to go through this again by simply updating the policy that we do not name our elementary, middle schools or high schools after individual people.

[00:17:47] We have many other ways to honor these people that won't subject future generations to the kind of turmoil that we've gone through with this process, which goes back into, I know, 2014 and '15 and possibly before that. It's been hard on the community.

[00:18:03] You can't predict the future. You guys have a lot of talents, a lot of skills, and believe me, a lot of stamina to do what you've done year after year, and I appreciate it very much. But please take that authority and responsibility and make sure that our naming policy continues what you did with justice and a human quality, a public quality that we can all admire.

[00:18:29] And if we take lessons and experience and combine them, it gives us wisdom and wisdom would be a wonderful name to change. Thank you.

[00:18:50] Scott Persky. Thank you very much. I want to thank the board, Dr. Reed and all the staff for making this happen. I'm speaking in support of a name change.

[00:19:06] I think most reasonable people who know the history of W.T. Woodson would certainly not name the school after him today. I think that's fair to say that somebody who opposes the name change said the same thing. But I do think it matters, and I think we should think about what it says to the kids who are in the school that we wouldn't name the building after him, but we're not willing to change it.

[00:19:30] I didn't come with any prepared remarks. I did make some observations as I was talking to some people before this and then listening to the comments that people have made after. And I think this is actually a much bigger opportunity to, we talk a lot about STEM, right?

[00:19:48] We push STEM, math, engineering, science, and I think sometimes history gets lost. And I think this is an awesome opportunity to talk about the history. I did some research as well. Like I said, I didn't do much to prepare my remarks, but I think it's important for the people who are thinking about not only the name change, but the name of the mascot, to understand a bit more of the context of the schools

that have been on Main Street, because Woodson is actually not the only Fairfax public school on Main Street.

[00:20:18] 400 square miles or so in this county, and about a mile down the road, there is actually a historic public schools Fairbanks Public School as our first brick building it was historic for a number of reasons and it's in the National Register of Historic Places and it was built in 1873 of course it was a segregated school all schools back then here were probably segregated and and it existed with the district until it was sold and I think that was in the 1920s and when it was sold it was sold to the Cavaliers so actually Woodson is not

[00:20:58] only not the first public school on Main Street but just a mile down the road we actually had another Fairfax public school with Cavaliers and I think you know who the Cavaliers were but in case you didn't it was the Ku Klux Klan they were a real thing back then maybe they still are today I don't know but they certainly were then they were in the newspapers they had parades they went to fairgrounds and and you know we're pretty out in the open I think it would be great for students to understand that to be able to go to the library and look at the deed of when that was sold because they would find two names on it one of the superintendent and the other of Wilbur Woodson who's a clerk at the

[00:21:37] time who certainly would have known about the Cavaliers at the Fairfax Public School on Main Street so now we have Cavaliers in Fairfax Public School on Main Street and I think that needs to change most importantly though if we do change when we do change please don't erase the history like people are saying casting people to the side. Let's teach that history. Let's not

[00:21:59] put it to the side out. Todd Cranford. Good evening. My name is Todd Cranford and I am the parent of a Woodson High School student. Thank you for the opportunity to address you regarding consideration of the proposal to change the name of WT Woodson High School. I will begin by briefly sharing with

[00:22:36] you why I think names of public places, whether they be roads, government buildings, libraries or schools are important. To To state the obvious, the names of public places and spaces are important because they are public. Thus, I believe that anytime we think about naming a public space or space after any individual, we must consider the individual's legacy and how that legacy relates to the public space that could potentially carry their name.

[00:23:02] In the instant matter, we are considering changing the name of WT Woodson High School, named after Wilbur Tucker Woodson, a former FCPS superintendent who is widely considered to be a critical figure in the history of FCPS.

[00:23:18] During his 30 plus years at the helm, Superintendent Woodson guided FCPS through consolidation, the Great Depression, World War II, the early baby boomer years leading to its ascension to becoming the premier school district it is today in the envy of many in the country.

[00:23:37] An appropriate question for discussion, as I noted a moment ago, names of public places matter because who we honor, Who we lift up speaks volumes about the values that are reflective of that community. I would hope that most people would agree that someone for whom a public school is named should be someone whose legacy is one that inspires and uplifts all children.

[00:24:00] Superintendent Woodson made many contributions to see FCPS, but not all students benefited from his contributions. He presided over over the system during the legal segregation of the 1940s, 50s and

60s. So we know that not all students benefited.

[00:24:18] I do not rise this evening to impugn the superintendent's character, suggest that we ignore his many contributions, or that we erase him from history. In fact, I think we should know more about him and all the people for whom FCPS schools are named.

[00:24:34] I can see how support for naming the new high school then under construction after one of the longest serving and impactful superintendents was attractive to many people at the time. But it does not mean it was appropriate. Schools, by definition, are places of exploration and learning.

[00:24:50] The fact that black children were precluded from having the same opportunities to learn and explore that many white children at the time had does not change that immutable fact. We have an opportunity to show our children and our community that FCPS values all students by renaming this school in a manner consistent with the county's one Fairfax policy.

[00:25:12] Superintendent Woodson's opposition to desegregation is only one aspect of his legacy, but it's an important one when considering that a school is named for him thank you miss McLaughlin that's the last public speaker madam clerk could you just do one last call for the names of those who did not speak yet Kai shawl Christine

[00:25:50] Bennett Jasmine Kennedy and Andre Arcadineco my apologies for that thank you very much and to everyone here who joined us this evening for the speakers as well as members of the audience and those watching from home thank you so much for being here this evening and for the speakers for sharing your comments the board is scheduled to vote on this decision to move forward with renaming

[00:26:29] W.T. Woodson High School at a regular business meeting this Thursday October 12th if the board does choose to move forward with the renaming we will then continue to determine what the new name will be in that case another community meeting will be held on October 23rd. Another public hearing will be held on October 24th. The board will then make a final vote on November 9th. If you wish to provide feedback to the board before our vote this Thursday, please do so by

[00:27:04] visiting our website at FCPS.edu where you will find the Woodson renaming link link where there is an electronic feedback form. You may also write to communityparticipation@fcps.edu.

[00:27:21] Again, thank you all so much for participating and for being here with us tonight. We wish you all a good evening. The public hearing is now adjourned.

