

BOARD MEMO

Date: November 16, 2020
For ACTION _____
For INFORMATION x
Board Agenda: Yes x
No _____

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

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

TO: The Honorable Cindy Anderson, Chair, and
Members of the Alexandria City School Board

TOPIC: Superintendent’s Recommendation on the Renaming of T.C. Williams High School
and Matthew Maury Elementary 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:

On Aug. 27, 2020, the Alexandria School Board charged the superintendent with establishing a robust community engagement process to consider a name change for T.C. Williams High followed by the community petition that was sent to the School Board in June 2020. On Thursday, Sept. 18, 2020, the School Board voted to consider renaming Matthew Maury Elementary School. The joint process, launched in September 2020, for considering both name changes is known as [The Identity Project](#).

To allow for a meaningful community conversation, it was important to first ensure an understanding of the history of our city, our school division and of the individuals our schools are named after. We also worked with the Teaching, Learning and Leadership team to create five lessons that could form the basis for in-class discussion, both in elementary and high school. One of the central tenets of The Identity Project was the desire to have our students

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lead the conversation. In particular, we wanted to hear the voices of our Black and Brown students. We were deliberate in handing over the reins, the direction and the parameters of the engagement with the adults taking a back seat. This resulted in three student-led chats for all ACPS students. We also hosted three community conversations on the name changes in general and one Family Forum for the Maury community. These were hosted by key representatives from our community. When the community began to call for a name change for T.C. Williams High School, our local media jumped on the story where we gained significant earned media coverage to include lessons, promotion and coverage of the read-ins and student forums to promotion of the survey. The attached Identity Project Community Engagement Report provides a comprehensive snapshot of the analytics and reach of The Identity Project thus far.

BACKGROUND:

Many ACPS schools were named during a time in our city and in 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 [The Identity Project](#), a wide-reaching community conversation that allowed for all voices to be heard as we look toward a more equitable future in Alexandria.

RECOMMENDATION:

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the Superintendent's Recommendation on the Renaming of T.C. Williams High School and Matthew Maury Elementary School in anticipation of a vote on the matter.

IMPACT:

To assess the reach and impact of The Identity Project in the community through the educational efforts and the robust public community engagement process that was launched in the midst of the pandemic.

ATTACHMENTS:

1. Presentation: Superintendent's Recommendation on Renaming T.C. Williams High School and Matthew Maury Elementary School
2. Estimated Costs of Renaming T.C. Williams High School
3. Estimated Costs of Renaming Matthew Maury Elementary School
4. The Identity Project Community Engagement Report

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REFERENCES:

[Sept. 25, 2020--The Identity Project: Renaming Our Schools Working Plan for Communications and Engagement](#)

CONTACT:

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