

Presented by



Written by
[Megan Pauly](#)

June 8 2020, 04:53

Fight To Change Hanover Schools Named After Confederates Reignited

The Hanover County NAACP has been asking the county's school district to change the names of Lee Davis High School and Stonewall Jackson Middle School for years. It even [sued to get the district to change the names](#). Last month, a federal judge dismissed that lawsuit, but the group's fight to change the names isn't over.

"In 1966 a federal judge wrote, 'The duty rests with the [Hanover County] School Board to overcome the discrimination of the past.' It is 2020 and Hanover County has still not overcome the 'discrimination of the past.' Hanover County is part of that changing world," wrote Robert Barnette, president of the Hanover County NAACP to the school board for public comment during Tuesday night's meeting.

Barnette said it's about time the district addresses the school names, especially now that Monument Avenue's Robert E. Lee statue is coming down. "That's a symbol of racism [Lee statue], and these school names are symbols of racism," Barnette said in an interview with VPM Monday. "So monuments, schools...these symbols of racism should come down immediately."

A [petition to change the names of the schools](#) circulated by a current Lee Davis student has thousands of signatures. Virginia Education Secretary Atif Qarni has also asked localities to change the names of schools and mascots that are traumatizing to students.

“It was wrong then to name the names after Confederate leaders, and it's wrong today,” said Randy White, a 40-year resident of Hanover County and leader of nonprofit Love of Learning, dedicated to providing educational opportunities to low-income kids in Central Virginia.

White attended both Lee Davis High and Stonewall Jackson Middle School as a kid. He said he became aware of the county’s dark history with racism while at his first sleepover at a friend’s house.

“His dad came home later and had a robe on, and it was explained to me that he had just gone to a Klan meeting,” White said. “We were watching In Living Color. And here comes his dad with a Klan robe asking us what we're watching, but he didn't say it nicely.”

White said it’s the responsibility of district leaders to create a culture of learning where kids feel safe and not subject to racist symbols, and he said superintendent Michael Gill and school board members should start by renaming schools named after Confederates.

“By choosing not to come out in favor of changing the school names, Dr. Gill is sending the message that he and Hanover schools revere this whole Confederacy idea and its ideals,” White said. “And that is really insulting to Black and Brown students. It’s degrading and it’s hurtful.”

Chris Whitley, spokesperson for Hanover County Public Schools wrote in an email to VPM that “the naming of our schools is solely the responsibility of the School Board, not school division administration.”

VPM did not receive a response from the Hanover County school board chairman John Axselle by deadline Monday. The school board is one of only a handful in the state where [members are appointed, not elected](#).

The superintendent and school board chairman of Prince William County Public Schools recently announced plans to rename its two schools named after Stonewall Jackson.

The Hanover County NAACP has been asking the county’s school district to change the names of Lee Davis High School and Stonewall Jackson Middle School for years. It even [sued to get the district to change the names](#). Last month, a federal judge dismissed that lawsuit, but the group’s fight to change the names isn’t over.

“In 1966 a federal judge wrote, ‘The duty rests with the [Hanover County] School Board to overcome the discrimination of the past.’ It is 2020 and Hanover County has still not overcome the ‘discrimination of the past.’ Hanover County is part of that changing world,” wrote Robert Barnette, president of the Hanover County NAACP to the school board for public comment during Tuesday night’s meeting.

Barnette said it’s about time the district addresses the school names, especially now that Monument Avenue’s Robert E. Lee statue is coming down. “That’s a symbol of racism [Lee statue], and these school names are symbols of racism,” Barnette said in an interview with VPM Monday. “So monuments, schools...these symbols of racism should come down immediately.”

A [petition to change the names of the schools](#) circulated by a current Lee Davis student has thousands of signatures. Virginia Education Secretary Atif Qarni has also asked localities to change the names of schools and mascots that are traumatizing to students.

“It was wrong then to name the names after Confederate leaders, and it’s wrong today,” said Randy White, a 40-year resident of Hanover County and leader of nonprofit Love of Learning, dedicated to providing educational opportunities to low-income kids in Central Virginia.

White attended both Lee Davis High and Stonewall Jackson Middle School as a kid. He said he became aware of the county’s dark history with racism while at his first sleepover at a friend’s house.

“His dad came home later and had a robe on, and it was explained to me that he had just gone to a Klan meeting,” White said. “We were watching In Living Color. And here comes his dad with a Klan robe asking us what we’re watching, but he didn’t say it nicely.”

White said it’s the responsibility of district leaders to create a culture of learning where kids feel safe and not subject to racist symbols, and he said superintendent Michael Gill and school board members should start by renaming schools named after Confederates.

“By choosing not to come out in favor of changing the school names, Dr. Gill is sending the message that he and Hanover schools revere this whole Confederacy idea and its ideals,” White said. “And that is really insulting to Black and Brown students. It’s degrading and it’s hurtful.”

Chris Whitley, spokesperson for Hanover County Public Schools wrote in an email to VPM that “the naming of our schools is solely the responsibility of the School Board, not school division administration.”

VPM did not receive a response from the Hanover County school board chairman John Axselle by deadline Monday. The school board is one of only a handful in the state where [members are appointed, not elected](#).

The superintendent and school board chairman of Prince William County Public Schools recently announced plans to rename its two schools named after Stonewall Jackson.

Hanover School Board votes to change names of schools named after Confederate leaders

Updated: Jul. 14, 2020 at 11:16 PM EDT

HANOVER, Va. (WWBT) - The Hanover County Public School Board has voted to change the names of the schools named after Confederate generals.

Tuesday night, the Hanover County School Board voted 4-3 in favor of renaming Lee-Davis High School and Stonewall Jackson Middle School on Mechanicsville Turnpike. It also includes changing the school mascots.

The board heard an hour of comments read out loud by the clerk during the virtual meeting. While there were people who asked the board to not change the name, the comments were overwhelmingly in favor of the move.

“We have gone to the point of trying to remove the word ‘Confederates’ and the word ‘rebels’ from the majority of our - if not all - of our athletic uniforms. Most of our places throughout the building. So we ourselves have acknowledged that issue,” board member Robert Hundley Jr. said.

“Their actions have made their names and images enduring symbols of the enslavement of Black Americans. Later generations made choices to reinforce this narrative,” board member Sterling Daniel said.

The school board will follow the process used for naming new schools which involves public input. However, the school board gets the final say on new school names and mascots.

Copyright 2020 WWBT. All rights reserved.