

The Identity Project

Renaming Schools in a Dual Pandemic

**2021 NSPRA Gold Medallion Award Entry
Special Communication Projects/Campaigns**

**Alexandria City Public Schools
Office of Communications**

1340 Braddock Place • Alexandria, VA 22314
703-619-8003 • news@acps.k12.va.us

Type of School/Organization:
School district: 10,001-25,000 students

Number of Communication staff: 8



SYNOPSIS

Many schools in Alexandria City Public Schools (ACPS) were named during a time in our country when vastly different beliefs guided our decisions. In 2020, the dual crisis of COVID-19 and social justice protests helped shine a spotlight on the many inequities in today's society and within the school division. A new determination to right the wrongs of history swept the nation.

T.C. Williams High School — whose 1971 football champions are immortalized in the Disney movie “Remember the Titans” — was named in 1965 in honor of superintendent Thomas Chambliss Williams, a staunch segregationist whose views were inconsistent with the vibrant, diverse school we know today. Matthew Maury Elementary School was named after a Confederate commander in the 1920s.

For years, key community leaders, including members of the 1971 Titan football team and the current superintendent — a T.C. alumnus and African American — had resisted calls to change the name of the high school.

However, unrest over the murder of George Floyd, increasing inequities created by COVID-19, and the adoption of the new ACPS *Equity For All* Strategic Plan increased the pressures on the school district to take immediate and decisive action.

Over the summer, the community started to feel unheard on the issue. The School Board and superintendent began to lose control of both the message and the decision-making process. ACPS was criticized for hypocrisy, threatening to undermine other equity work.

To acknowledge the need for decisive action, ACPS launched The Identity Project. The goal was to lead a wide-reaching community conversation that allowed all voices to be heard as we looked toward a more equitable future in Alexandria.

In November 2020, the campaign achieved its goal of ensuring all voices were heard and the Board felt comfortable enough to vote unanimously to change the names of the two schools and refocus their attention on the equity work of the new strategic plan. The campaign went on to exceed the goal by serving as a platform for further conversations the community was now ready to have.



RESEARCH

ACPS School Renaming History and Policy

ACPS rewrote its policy on school name changes following the naming of the new Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School in 2018. [ACPS School Board Policy FF \(PDF\)](#) and [ACPS School Board Regulation FF-R \(PDF\)](#) outline that ACPS is required to follow a robust engagement process, but stops short of outlining what that should look like. Policy indicates the process is initiated by a petition of 100 signatures. Prior to June 2020, no formal petition — in line with School Board policy — had ever been submitted to the School Board requesting any school's name be changed. However, speakers had approached the Board before.

Evaluation of the naming process for Ferdinand T. Day Elementary School revealed several issues. The process was assigned to a committee for which each of the nine School Board members selected a representative. Members brought preferred options from the beginning or represented a group campaigning for a specific name. The committee recommended four names to the School Board. The School Board ultimately discarded all four recommendations at the dais and opted for their own choice: a name that was a hybrid of two of the committee-recommended names. This led to public dissatisfaction with the process, a sense that the committee's work had been devalued and complaints about wasted time.

School Renaming Processes of Neighboring School Divisions

Fairfax County Public Schools renamed two high schools in the past five years, using different processes for each. The process used for renaming Jeb Stuart High School in 2017-18 took 18 months and required residents and staff to show up to cast an in-person vote on a single day. The process for Robert E. Lee High School took six months to complete and was largely School Board driven. The decision to change school names within Newport News Public Schools during the pandemic was also largely School Board driven, with engagement limited to School Board meetings. Arlington Public Schools created a committee to rename Washington Lee High School, which included the principal, who was required to remain neutral throughout and support the student body's selection.

The Naming of T.C. Williams High School (Early 1960s)

T.C. Williams High School was named after Thomas Chambliss Williams, who served as ACPS superintendent of schools from the 1930s to 1963 and was a [noted segregationist](#). The name was decided while Thomas Chambliss Williams was still superintendent. He was present at both the [January 10, 1962 \(page 5\) \(PDF\)](#) School Board meeting and the meeting on [February 14, 1962 \(PDF\)](#) when the list of proposed names was shared (page 3) and the Board voted to select the name T.C. Williams High School for the new school (page 1). The names proposed in 1962 included places (Alexandria, Midtown, Mudtown, Braddock Heights) and names on the left and right wing of the political spectrum (John F. Kennedy, Dollie Madison, Thomas Jefferson, Jefferson Davis). Several were connected to the pro-segregationist movement run by Harry T. Byrd, of which Thomas Chambliss Williams was a member. Naming the school after the superintendent who was about to retire was viewed as honoring his 30 years of service.

Reluctance to Renaming T.C. Williams High School

The conversation around renaming Alexandria's only public high school has been ongoing since the early 1990s and was brought about again in 2017, when the idea was raised at the same time protesters called for the removal of a statue of Confederate Gen. Robert E. Lee in Charlottesville, Virginia. The renaming of T.C. Williams High School was [supported by local newspaper, The Alexandria Times](#), over the same period. However a community poll by the newspaper in 2018 showed the community almost evenly split over a name change, with 50% in favor and 49% against. Further, the high school's 1971 state championship-winning football players, whose story is told in the Disney movie "Remember the Titans," were consistently largely opposed to a name change and equally adverse to engaging with the school division in a name change discussion. Dr. Alvin Crawley (the superintendent from 2014 - 2018), Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr. (the [current superintendent](#), who was hired in 2018 and is also a T.C. Williams alum and African American), the current [School Board Chair](#) and members of the current and previous School Boards had publicly resisted [student calls](#) to change the name for years. The reasons they cited were issues with scholarship donations, college admissions and the fact that the current school name would have Thomas Chambliss Williams "turning in his grave" (quote used on multiple occasions by superintendent Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr.). [Former Alexandria Mayor Bill Euille](#), who graduated from T.C. Williams in 1968, petitioned to distinguish between the legacy of T.C. Williams the man and the legacy of T.C. Williams the school: "I just think if we change the name at this stage, we'll lose a lot of those positive gains and that support in the future, particularly for the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria." Petitioners to change the name cited the fact that it does not align with the [vibrant, diverse and inclusive high school that T.C. Williams is today](#).

The Naming of Matthew Maury Elementary School (1929)

[On January 16, 1929 \(PDF\)](#) the Alexandria City School Board voted to name Matthew Maury Elementary School. The new school was named after Matthew Fontaine Maury, known as the "Father of Modern Oceanography and Naval Meteorology" for his contributions to charting winds and ocean currents, including ocean lanes for passing ships at sea. Maury was an architect of the [1861 "Peace Conference"](#) in Washington, which failed to hold the Union together. Maury then resigned his commission, took a boat across the Potomac River to Alexandria, and offered his services to Virginia. He was appointed to a three-man Advisory Council overseeing the state's military preparations. Maury's primary contributions to the Confederacy were a series of successful experiments to improve the effectiveness of underwater torpedoes or mines, and to supervise the creation of torpedo defenses. The Confederate government sent him abroad in 1862 to acquire supplies, ships and technology. He was in England when The Civil War ended. After the war, Maury left England for Mexico, where he became commissioner of immigration in the government of Emperor Maximilian. In that role he tried to persuade other former Confederates, including Robert E. Lee to emigrate to Mexico and form a "[New Virginia](#)" that would salvage the attributes of the South's plantation society, especially the exploitation of unfree non-white labor.

In the 1920s, during the era of Jim Crow segregation, the Cult of the Lost Cause was created as the South searched for justification for its loss and its need to find a substitute for victory in the Civil War. In attempting to deal with defeat, Southerners created an image of the war as a heroic epic. To celebrate the Confederacy, places were named after people they viewed as Confederate heroes. The Appomattox statue was put up in Old Town Alexandria, and highways and streets were named after Confederate leaders. Naming buildings and streets after members of the Confederacy was just one way in which the city and City Council rejected integration following the Civil War.

Race Card Project

In the fall of 2019, ACPS leadership and the superintendent agreed to use the [RACE Card Project](#) as part of a comprehensive [communication plan \(PDF\)](#) around its work on equity. The plan was designed to spark a citywide conversation. However, despite support from Alexandria's [Equal Justice Initiative](#), the city's equity committee felt the city was "not ready" for such an open discussion on race and the joint city-schools project was postponed indefinitely.

Build up of Pressure Around Racial Equity and Renaming Schools (Summer 2020)

Equity issues at the high school and in the Alexandria community came to the forefront in 2018 during [discussions around the need for a second high school \(PDF\)](#).

The COVID-19 pandemic saw a [widening of inequities within the school division \(PDF\)](#) regarding grades, access to technology and chronic absenteeism.

May 29, 2020: George Floyd is murdered, sparking social justice protests across the U.S.

June 2, 2020: ACPS superintendent [video](#) condemning racism and committing to equity

June 11, 2020: [Change.org petition](#) to rename T.C. Williams High School is started.

June 15, 2020: The School Board receives a [petition \(PDF\)](#) of 100 signatures to consider changing the name of T.C. Williams High School, which automatically initiates the process to consider renaming under School Board policy.

June 17, 2020: ACPS Honors Juneteenth with [Resolution Condemning Racism](#).

June 26, 2020: Alexandria City School Board [approves new strategic plan](#): [ACPS 2025: Equity For All](#).

July 6, 2020: Virginia Governor Ralph Northam [calls for school boards to reexamine the names of their schools](#).

July 23, 2020: [Statue of Matthew Maury removed](#) from Virginia State Capitol in Richmond.

July 24, 2020: Adult activists begin to steer students to take illegal actions against school property. T.C. Williams students begin daily "tarping" of school marquee to cover up the school name. "[Rename T.C. Now](#)" yard signs pop up across the city.

July 28, 2020: Efforts to rename T.C. Williams High School receive national attention, [published in The Washington Post](#).

Aug. 6, 2020: The School Board receives a [petition of 100 signatures \(PDF\)](#) to consider changing the name of Matthew Maury Elementary School.

Viewpoints Expressed by the Two Black Student School Board Representatives Regarding Equity and School Names

- Modern-day segregation exists inside T.C. with students self-segregating during free periods
- TAG/honors/AP classes are predominantly white
- The opinions of all students, particularly Black and brown students, are not often heard
- School name changes are just a start
- Most students do not know the history of the names of their schools or the history of Alexandria

GOAL

Ensure a robust and inclusive engagement process that allows the School Board to retain control of the name-change process and feel confident in their decision-making.

ANALYSIS & PLANNING

Audience Identification

Students of color from all communities, across the high school and elementary school: High School Student School Board Representatives; International Academy students; Black Student Union; Ethiopian students; students of Middle Eastern origin; Minority Student Achievement Network (MSAN); Hispanic students; Matthew Maury Elementary School students

Alumni: 1971 Titans football players; Families of Titan football coaches Herman Boone and Bill Yoast; Alumni who still live in Alexandria; Scholarship Fund of Alexandria alumni

Key stakeholder and influencer communities within Alexandria: [Secret Seven](#) group of civil rights activists; Family of [Ferdinand T. Day](#); Neighbors of T.C. Williams High School, whose [land was taken by eminent domain](#); NAACP; Departmental Progressive Club; Tenants & Workers; (all-black) Parker-Gray High School alumni; PTAs; Black History Museum of Alexandria

Timeline

The School Board wanted to move swiftly to a decision-point but allow sufficient time to ensure it did not look like they were being driven by activists. School Board policy also required a robust community engagement process.

- Oct. 29, 2020: Public Hearing on the renaming of T.C. Williams and Maury
- Nov. 16, 2020: Superintendent's Recommendation to the School Board
- Nov. 23, 2020: School Board vote on renaming

Objectives

Objective 1: By November 23, 2020, all current students at T.C. Williams and Maury will be aware of the history of the person after which their school was named.

Objective 2: By November 23, 2020, student voices across all demographics will have been solicited and their views documented to assess where the current student body stands.

Objective 3: By November 23, 2020, all key groups of alumni and community stakeholders will be aware of opportunities to engage in the process of renaming.

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy 1: Educate and Inform

Educate the greater Alexandria community about the history of Alexandria and its school names so that they can make an informed opinion regarding whether they wanted the schools renamed.

- Three virtual [community history “read-ins”](#) — led by a Georgetown social history professor and author of [Building the Federal Schoolhouse](#), along with ACPS executive director of equity — aimed at helping the community know more about the history of Alexandria and its schools. All events were held with simultaneous interpretation in Spanish, Amharic and Arabic.
- Collaboration with the Department of Teaching, Learning and Leadership to create two weeks worth of [student lessons on the history of the Confederacy and Matthew Maury for elementary students](#) and [two weeks worth of student lessons](#) on the history of desegregation, Brown versus Board of Education and Thomas Chambliss Williams for high school students.
- Media outreach about read-ins and [student lesson plans](#) to further inform and educate parents, community members [and staff](#).
- History of both schools detailed on the [ACPS website](#) through accessible [video content](#), [snapshots](#), and [personal memories](#).

Strategy 2: Student Engagement

Ensure students have broad and diverse ways to engage in the process and are therefore active and informed participants and/or leaders in the process.

- Planning for the campaign was led by students of color.
- School Board student representatives managed student engagement, with support from the Office of Communications.
- School Board student representatives collaborated on the [name, brand and logo \(PDF\)](#) for the T.C. part of the campaign: “Redefining the Titans.”
- School Board student representatives were involved in all planning meetings.
- Campaign focused on ensuring Black and Hispanic student voices were involved/heard.
- [Student voice was recorded and played](#) to kick off student history lessons.
- [Three virtual student forums were held](#), designed and led by students of color.
- Student takeover of the superintendent's monthly [Alexandria Times column](#).

Strategy 3: Community Engagement

Allow the community ways to actively participate in the process and register their concerns/support.

- Three virtual [community discussions](#) on the name changes across both schools, and one [Family Forum for the Maury community](#).
- [Clearly recognizable branding \(PDF\)](#) that aligns across all platforms and updates. “The Identity Project” is selected as a name to encompass all efforts around the renaming of any of ACPS’ schools, rather than just the renaming of T.C. Williams. The name reflected the fact that this process was about a deeper reflection of our history: who we are today with students from more than 145 countries speaking 132 different languages, and what we want to be known for in the future.
- Outreach to specific community groups to ensure they know the process and how to get involved.
- Proactive media engagement.
- Regular updates posted to the ACPS website, community newsletter, social media every week of the 12-week campaign.

Strategy 4: Key Stakeholder Endorsement

Ensure the voices of all key stakeholder communities are heard and they are actively engaged in the process, thus influencing others in the community.

- All [10 community engagement sessions](#) (3 read-ins, 4 community conversations, 3 student forums) were hosted by a School Board member to ensure visibility of their leadership and active participation in the process.
- All 10 community sessions were co-hosted by key representatives from our community, including:
 - The head of the Alexandria Black History Museum
 - A representative from the League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
 - Former principal of T.C. Williams
 - NAACP
 - High profile African Americans from the era of segregation
 - Parent Teacher Associations
 - Former Alexandria Police chief and 1971 championship Titan football player
- 1971 Titan football players and families of coaches Boone and Yoast were kept up-to-date on the process.

EVALUATION

To evaluate our objectives, we surveyed our staff, students and community. But this had to be informed by data so we asked respondents their opinions on how well they understood the history before we asked them their views on the name change. Output data was collated in a [report for the School Board \(PDF\)](#) and [summarized in a presentation \(PDF\)](#). We used this data in combination with [survey data](#) to triangulate and create a fuller picture of awareness and engagement.

Objective 1: By November 23, 2020, all current students at T.C. Williams and Maury will be aware of and understand the history of the person for which their school was named.

- 100% of students at T.C. Williams and Maury participated in teacher-led classroom discussions around the history of their school and the name changes
- [79% of T.C. Williams student survey respondents said they understood the history of T.C. Williams \(PDF\)](#)
- [83% of Matthew Maury student survey respondents said they understood the history of Maury \(PDF\)](#)

Objective 2: By November 23, 2020, student voices across all demographics will have been solicited and their views documented to assess where the current student body stands on the name changes.

- [34% of all survey responses came from students \(PDF\)](#). The fact that student comprehension was balanced across all demographics demonstrates an [equitable level of education and engagement across student demographics \(PDF\)](#):
 - 75% of African American students; 76% of Hispanic students; 79% of white students said they understood the history of T.C. Williams
 - 55% of African American students; 53% of Hispanic students; 56% of white students said they understood the history of Maury
 - 70-80% of all three student panels were made up of students of color. Two of the three student panels included the white students involved in the tarping incident.
- The three student conversations had 1,518 total video views (1,101 on Facebook, 164 on YouTube, 253 live on Zoom).

Objective 3: By November 23, 2020, all key groups of alumni and community stakeholders will be aware of the proposed name change and have had opportunities to engage in the process.

- [The Identity Project survey \(PDF\)](#) received 3,198 responses.
- 85% of survey respondents said they felt well informed about The Identity Project.

- 13% of survey responses were from T.C. alumni.
- 20% of survey respondents were Black or African American; 14% of survey respondents were Hispanic; 49% of survey respondents were white, almost perfectly in line with [demographics of the City of Alexandria](#)

What We Heard

There was overwhelming support for the name changes with little vocal support to retain either name:

- 72% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted the name of Maury changed.
- 75% of survey respondents agreed or strongly agreed that they wanted the name of T.C. changed.

The older African American community, students of all demographics, the Hispanic community, and the [1971 Titan football players](#), including the families of 1971 football coaches Herman Boone and Bill Yoast, largely supported the name change with many changing their views during the process.

OVERALL GOAL

On November 23, 2020, the [Alexandria City School Board voted 9-0 in favor of changing the names](#) of both T.C. Williams High School and Matthew Maury Elementary School. The School Board Chair, superintendent and Board members who had previously expressed reservations about the change all vocally endorsed both name changes. They praised the robust engagement process, which had helped educate the community and allowed them time to understand, evaluate and process the breadth of community support. Moreover, through retaining control of the engagement process, the School Board also retained control of the decision-making process, allowing them to save face with their constituents and feel they were making their decision independent of external pressures.

At the public hearing, families of '71 coaches Herman Boone and Bill Yoast along with several other '71 Titans who had previously expressed reservations [spoke in favor of changing the name of T.C. Williams](#). Student School Board representatives said students felt heard through the process for the first time in their school careers, particularly highlighting inequities in the Talented and Gifted Program, which will now be addressed by the division as part of the next steps.

The campaign also exceeded its goal in creating a blame-free historical context to drive broader conversations around real educational inequities and racial disparities across Alexandria — two conversations the city had not been ready for prior to the summer's social unrest.

Next Steps

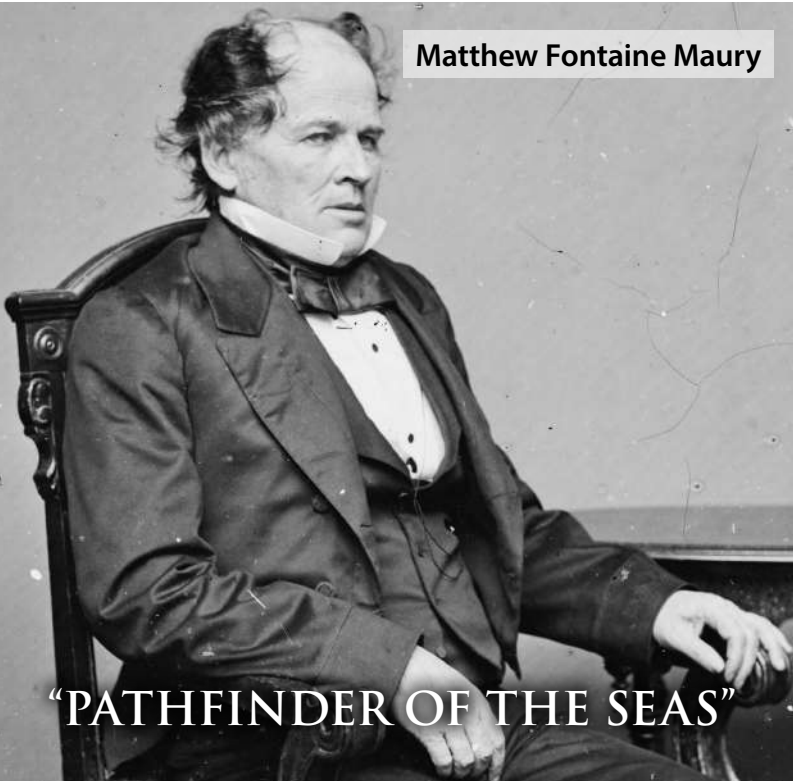
The process to select a name continues with [Phase II of The Identity Project: Selection of New Names \(PDF\)](#). This continues to be led by students of color. The School Board is scheduled to vote on the final names for each school in April 2021 and the new names will come into effect as of July 1, 2021.

While a name change was important, it is an initial symbolic step. The work to ensure equity is ongoing. Real inequities still exist in the classroom, and have been exacerbated by the closing of school buildings due to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, with the community education and dialogue begun through [The High School Project \(PDF\)](#) in 2018-19 and continued through this renaming effort, genuine and meaningful change has a platform from which to launch.

RESEARCH

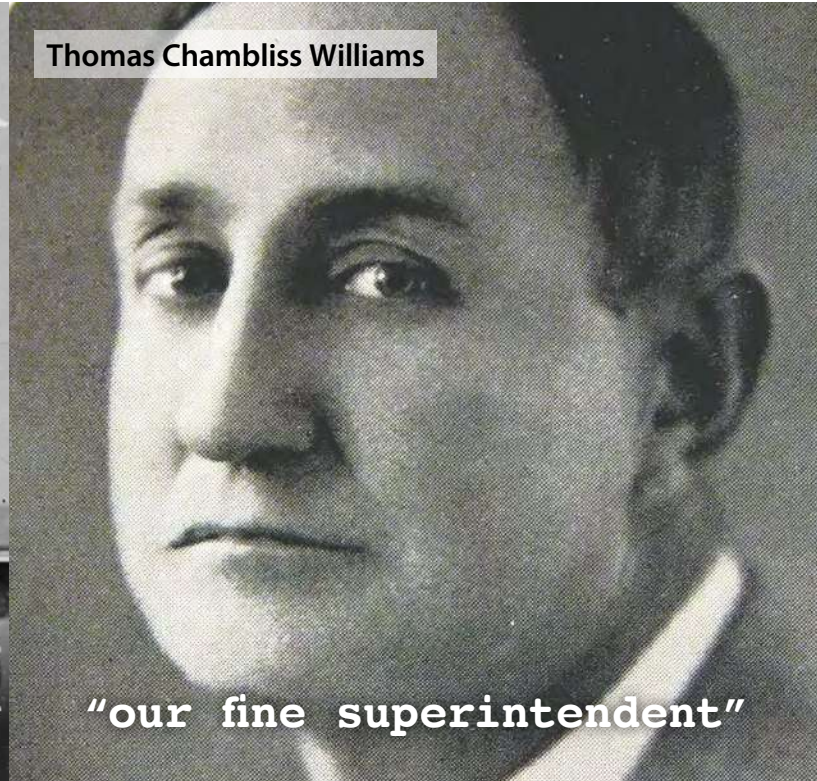
Naming of Maury Elementary (1929) and T.C. Williams (1965)

Maury Elementary was named after a Confederate commander at a time when Southerners sought to find a substitute for victory in the Civil War. T.C. Williams was named after a longtime ACPS superintendent and staunch segregationist.



Matthew Fontaine Maury

"PATHFINDER OF THE SEAS"



Thomas Chambliss Williams

"our fine superintendent"

1/16/29
 Meeting called to order Jan. 16, 1929 with present
 Chairman Fennert, Mrs. Appham, Messrs.
 Fowler, Herbert, Capt. Clark.
 Moved, seconded and agreed, that the new
 Beaumont School building be named
 "Maury" after Matthew Fontaine Maury
 and the Board offer two prizes the first
 of \$100 and second of \$50 for the best
 essay from children of the first and
 Civil Garden on the life of Maury.
 The essays are to be of from three to
 five hundred words and judges to be
 selected from the English teachers
 of the High School faculty.



The only Official and Authorized Southern History of the War.
 By E. A. POLLARD.
THE LOST CAUSE,
 BY
 EDWARD A. POLLARD,
 OF VIRGINIA,
 EDITOR OF THE "RICHMOND EXAMINER" DURING THE WAR.
 Completing a full and authentic account of the rise and progress of the
 late Southern Confederacy-The Campaigns, Battles, Incidents
 and Advantages of the most glorious struggle
 of the world's history.
 COMPLETE IN ONE LARGE ROYAL OCTAVO VOLUME OF NEARLY 600 PAGES
 WITH
TWENTY-FOUR SPLENDID STEEL PORTRAITS,

THE OLDEST DAILY NEWSPAPER IN THE UNITED STATES

The Alexandria Gazette

ESTABLISHED 1784

ALEXANDRIA, VIRGINIA

EDDIE CRAME
 SPORTS EDITOR
 OFFICE: KING 9-7188

December 11, 1961

I'm suggesting, as a native born son of Alexandria, that the new school be named the T.C. Williams High School after our fine superintendent. Surely no one deserves to have a school named after him more than Mr. Williams for he has dedicated his life to seeing that our city has the finest schools and turns out the finest graduates.

Williams Confident On School Needs

"We have no aspiration
 to be spectacular"



The Washington Post
 T. C. WILLIAMS
 ...the fundamentals

RESEARCH

Reluctance to Renaming T.C. Williams High School

The push to rename T.C. Williams High School has been ongoing since the 1990s and was brought about again in 2017. At that time, and even most recently, the School Board, alumni and community members — many of whom are people of color — found reasons against renaming.



THEOGONY
IN PRINT AND ONLINE

Political Voices Split on TC Williams Name

The Alexandria City School Board members took neutral positions on the name "Thomas Chambliss Williams" for the city's high school.

POSTED BY: GRIFFIN HARRIS OCTOBER 10, 2017

“I actually think that it’s a poetic dichotomy that TC Williams High School is now perhaps the most diverse high school in the state!” — School Board Member Bill Campbell in 2017



“I just think if we change the name at this stage, we’ll lose a lot of those positive gains and that support in the future, particularly for the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria.” — Former Mayor Bill Euille, 1968 T.C. graduate

“The non-racist whites and blacks thought it was great that Alexandria’s first truly integrated high school was named for a segregationist. We pictured him rolling in his grave. Yes, we were aware of the irony. We thought it was wonderful. It showed how far we had come.” — Fred Reiner, 1973 T.C. graduate, in a letter to *The Washington Post* in 2004



“...the attachment to this feel-good movie about the racial integration of our ‘71 football team was one of the reasons that the school’s name became the elephant in the room that no one wanted to tackle.” — Current ACPS Superintendent Dr. Gregory C. Hutchings, Jr., 1994 T.C. graduate

Alexandria Times
Weekly Poll March 29, 2018

Last Week

Should the name T.C. Williams stay on the high school or be removed?

49% Leave it. The whole world knows it from the movie.

51% Change it. There are many more deserving people to honor on the high school.

RESEARCH

Build up of Pressure Around Equity and Renaming (Summer 2020)

In Summer 2020, social justice protests spurred a nationwide reckoning around racial inequities. The ACPS 2025 Strategic Plan was adopted, with a focus on not just equity, but specifically racial equity. T.C. students and community members began grassroots campaigns and protests to rename not only T.C. Williams, but Maury Elementary as well.



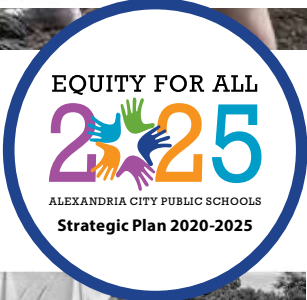
The Washington Post
Democracy Dies in Darkness

History meets mythology: Debate stirs over push to rename T.C. Williams High School, of 'Remember the Titans' fame

Marc Solomon
Admin · July 22, 2020

Today I had the privilege of attending the first daily "tarping" of the name T.C. Williams. A diverse group of students frustrated with the continued presence of the name T.C. Williams reached out to our movement for assistance and adult "cover" as they began a series of planned protest actions. I was honored to help document their powerful statement.

Richmond Times-Dispatch
Northam urges education leaders to remove Confederate names from schools



Alexandria Times

Our View

Time for a new name

We have been saying for more than two years that the name T.C. Williams should be removed from Alexandria's only high school.

"Both the financial and emotional costs of a name change are real. But in light of the nationwide movement for equity following George Floyd's killing by a white police officer, those reasons no longer justify keeping the name of T.C. Williams on the school."



Rename T.C. Williams Now

Private group · 1.8K members



+ Invite



ACPS rename Matthew Maury Elementary

Private group · 169 members

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy: Community Engagement - Branding

“The Identity Project” name was chosen as a way to bring together the engagement efforts around renaming T.C., Maury and any other school whose name could have come into question. The name also conveyed a sense of racial identity and a reflection on who we are as a school district, both crucial aspects at the heart of the project.



The Identity Project

“I feel that calling it the ‘The Identity Project’ truly encompasses the purpose behind this constructive, methodical engagement process which is to conceptualize a new name that reflects our efforts of ensuring inclusiveness and equity remain at the heart of all decision making...It facilitates the opportunity to understand people’s varying perspectives and overlapping identities.”

— Ashley, Student School Board Representative



Variation 2 - White and Blue



Variation 3 - Black and Blue



Light Blue
R:2 G:192 B:204
HEX #02c0cc

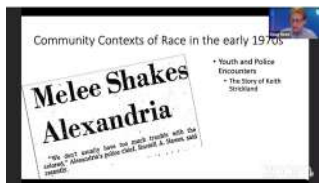
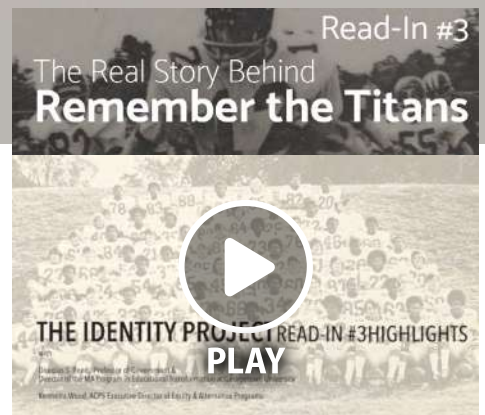
Dark Blue
R:81 G:214 B:155
HEX #5172ff



IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy: Educate and Inform

ACPS partnered with a Georgetown professor and content expert to host three virtual, multilingual community “read-ins” to give historical context for school renaming. Additional historical information was provided via video, imagery and text on the ACPS website and social media.



ACPS Alexandria City Public Schools was live.
★ Favorites · October 8, 2020 ·

Tune in to learn the real story behind "Remember the Titans" -- riots, protests, systemic injustice, and a civil rights crisis in Alexandria, alongside the merger of our black and white high schools, our integration plan, and a winning football team.



T.C. Williams High School initially opened its doors in 1965, and graduated its first class in June 1967. At the time, it was one of three public high schools along with George Washington High School and Francis C. Hammond High School. Parker-Gray High School, which served Black high school students from 1950 onward, had begun to phase out grades in the early 1960s. By 1964, its students had been integrated into other schools.

In order to build T.C. Williams High School in the 1960s, land was acquired by eminent domain from the community of African Americans who owned the houses on and near the current Parker-Gray Memorial Field.

Oral Histories from the City Archives

- [Maydell Casey Bell](#) (Page 12, 29 homes taken by eminent domain)
- [Julia Bradby](#) (Page 19, describes property adjacent to T.C. Williams)
- [Elizabeth Douglas](#) (Page 29, Macedonia area adjacent to T.C. Williams)
- [Lucian Johnson](#) (Page 6, fight to preserve land around T.C. Williams)
- [Charles McKnight](#) (Pages 21-24, African Americans were bussed to Manassas--past six white schools)
- [Dorothy Hall Smith and Barbara Ashby Gordon](#) (Pages 10/11, discussion on the ride to Manassas to school and how fortunate African American students felt when they could attend school in Washington)



IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy: Educate and Inform - Student Lessons

The ACPS Office of Communications worked with the district's lead social studies instructional specialist to develop lessons for T.C. and Maury students. The lessons included a history of Matthew Fontaine Maury and the Confederacy, Brown versus Board of Education, and the segregationist actions of Thomas Chambliss Williams.

The Washington Post
Alexandria turns controversy into opportunity by teaching students the racist history behind school names

Today in Virginia Studies:
Is Matthew Maury, the person, a fitting representation of the Maury school family & community?

PLAY

ACPS Alexandria City Public Schools @ACPSk12 · Oct 28, 2020
In class this week, @TCWTitans and @MauryMariners are learning the facts about their school's namesake in an age appropriate manner so they can come to an informed decision about whether the schools should be renamed. Learn more about these lessons: bit.ly/3e3E9U1



Pamela Wurst Vetrini Admin · October 29, 2020
Overhead in virtual school... the librarian at maury doing her best to explain a possible name change to five year olds! Thank you, Ms. Ravenell!



The Identity Project
Redefining THE TITANS

Learning about the Past to Understand the Present

Norms:
Stay Engaged | Be Respectful | Be Open

AGIPAS

PLAY

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy: Student Engagement

Student leaders were empowered to not only lend their voices to the renaming process, but to lead engagement as well. With support from the Office of Communications, a diverse group of T.C. Williams students held three virtual, multilingual student forums. Student voice was recorded and played to kick off student history lessons.



Should we change T.C. Williams High School's name?



PLAY



Alexandria City Public Schools @ACPSk12 - Oct 5, 2020
 STUDENTS: Join @stu_reps Ashley and Lorraine, plus a panel of @TCWTitans, for the first of three student forums about school renaming.
 Weds, Oct. 7 from 6 to 7pm.
 Join on Zoom: bit.ly/3irNBBe
 #redefiningthetitans #identityproject

Question 2
 Knowing the brand we have created with the name T.C. Williams, how do you think this hinders our ability to create inclusive, equitable spaces for all students?

Raise your HAND!
 Your turn!
 Tell us your story
 Speak Your Truth
 What's on your mind

acpsk12 12h



Filling in the Blanks
 with Dr. Gregory Hutchings, Ed.D.

Time to let the next generation lead

In line with my commitment to empowering young people and encouraging them to share their voices, I have invited Alexandria City School Board Student Representatives and T.C. Williams High School Seniors Lorraine Johnson and Ashley Sanchez-Viafara to lend us their voice for this month's Op-Ed.

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategies: Community Engagement & Key Stakeholder Endorsement

Four virtual, multilingual community forums were co-hosted by key community influencers, including School Board members and representatives from Alexandria Black History Museum, NAACP, League of United Latin American Citizens, PTAs, 1971 Titans football team, and the families of local civil rights heroes.



What's in a **name**?
 Can a name promote **pride**?
 Can a name invoke **harmful memories**?



The Identity Project

Community Conversation #1, Oct. 14, 2020

Panelists:
 Earl Cook, 1971 Titans, Retired Alexandria Police Department
 Audrey Davis, Director of the Alexandria Black History Museum
 Ramee Gentry, Member of the Alexandria City School Board
 Ashley Sanchez-Viafara, T.C. Williams High School Student

AGTPS

ES PARA ESPAÑOL SELECCION "Español"
 AM AMTC "Arabic" PPS/PPSP
 AR اللغة العربية "Arabic" العربية



ESTA NOCHE a las 6:00PM:
 ¿Qué tienen que ver nuestros valores comunitarios con los nombres de las escuelas?
 Únase a ACPS y a tres residentes de Alexandria de toda la vida para una conversación Zoom sobre la posibilidad de cambiar los nombres de las dos escuelas.
 Haga clic aquí <https://bit.ly/2HpzQpX>

TONIGHT at 6:00PM: What do our community values have to do with school names?
 Join ACPS and three lifelong Alexandrians for a glimpse of Alexandria history and a conversation about the renaming of schools. Join us on Zoom at 6:00PM: <https://bit.ly/2HpzQpX>



Alexandria City Public Schools @ACPSK12 · Oct 28, 2020
 TONIGHT: Last Community Conversation on the renaming of schools. Join @tcwtitans alumni Chris Harris, President of @NAACPalexandria, and Sindy Benavides, CEO of the League of United Latin American Citizens @LULAC.

Join on Zoom at 6:30pm: bit.ly/2TwXCTz



IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy: Community Engagement - Media Coverage

To ensure that alumni and others in the community were aware of the renaming process, a wide-ranging media campaign was launched, targeting print, web and broadcast media.



69+
broadcast TV/radio
mentions



"The Identity Project": renaming Matthew Maury Elementary School



A Name Change is in Process at T.C. Williams High School

When T.C. Williams High School initially opened its doors in 1965, it seemed like a good time to name one of the three city high schools after Williams.

By Mike Salmon - August 3, 2020



Read-Ins Starts as Part of Process to Rename Local Schools

Alexandria's school board is starting discussions about renaming T.C. Williams and Matthew Maury schools.



ACPS Community Read-In Reveals Racist Actions of Thomas Chambliss Williams

James Cullum September 25, 2020 at 1:30pm

IMPLEMENTATION

Strategy: Key Stakeholder Endorsement

Key influencers, including the 1971 Titan football players and families of coaches Boone and Yoast, were kept personally informed to ensure their positive engagement in the process.

REMEMBER THE
TITANS

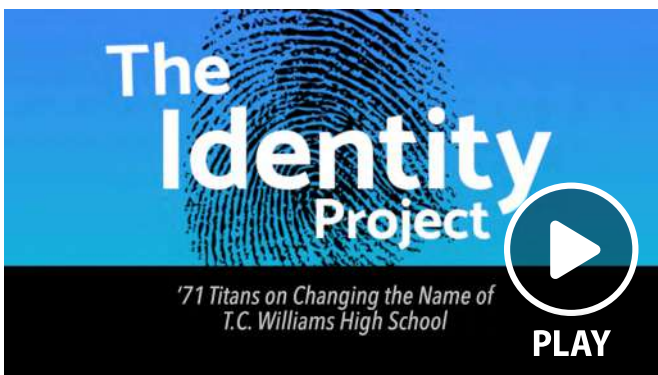


Heather Graf
@ABC7HeatherGraf

NEW — I just got this response from Earl Cook, retired Alexandria police chief and member of the 1971 @TCWTitans championship football team. (Of 'Remember The Titans' fame) Here's his reaction to today's @ACPSk12 school board vote to change the name of T.C. Williams High School:



“I think this vote to change the names dove tales closely with the advocacy of the Black lives matter movement and the greater sensitivity brought forward by Mr. Floyd’s murder...I applaud the decision to change the name of both schools, especially T.C. Williams.”



Remember The Titans: Families of Famed Coaches Want T.C. Williams High School Renamed Boone-Yoast High School

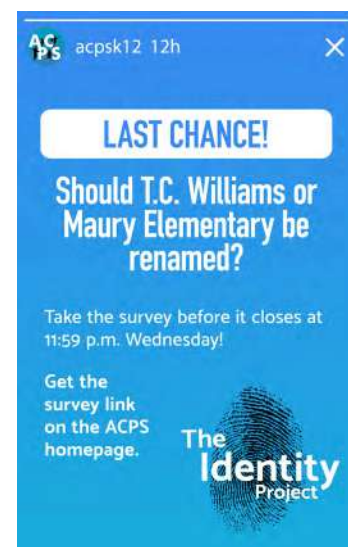
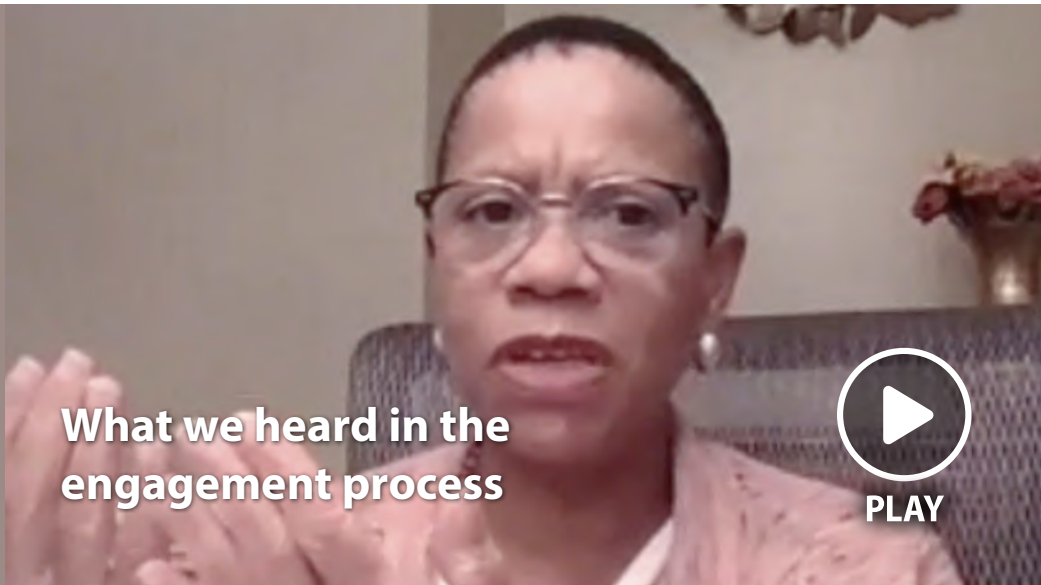


“I believe [renaming T.C.] would communicate the City’s commitment to inclusion for all of the extremely diverse student and community demographics of Alexandria, Virginia.” — Sharon Henderson, daughter of “Remember the Titans” Coach Herman Boone, speaking on behalf of Boone and Yoast families at the School Board Public Hearing on Oct. 29, 2020

EVALUATION

Robust and Inclusive Student and Community Engagement

As one way of measuring our efforts at the conclusion of the engagement process, we launched The Identity Project Survey for everyone in the community. The results showed overwhelming support to rename both schools, balanced student understanding of the history of their schools, and balanced community engagement across demographics.



75%

of survey respondents wanted to rename T.C.

72%

of survey respondents wanted to rename Maury

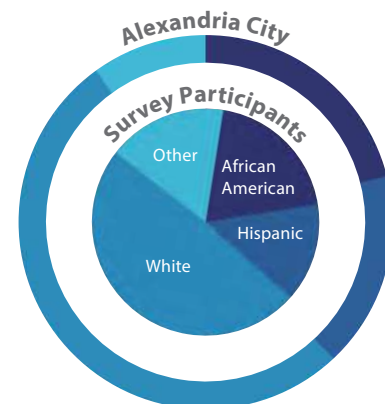
BALANCED STUDENT ENGAGEMENT

% of students of each demographic who said they understood history of **T.C. Williams** and **Maury**:

African American:	75%	55%
Hispanic:	76%	53%
White:	79%	56%

BALANCED COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

Demographics of survey participation nearly matches demographics of Alexandria City.



EVALUATION

School Board Vote

On November 23, 2020, the School Board voted 9-0 in favor of changing the names of both schools. Those who had previously expressed reservations all vocally endorsed renaming. They praised the robust engagement process, which helped educate the community and allowed them time to understand and process the breadth of community support.

“I know we got those petitions right before summer occurred and we were all really anxious to address it. But looking back, I’m grateful for the thorough engagement process that we had.”

— Heather Thornton, School Board Member

9-0 School Board vote to rename T.C. Williams and Maury

