



904WARD

For immediate release

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904WARD Statement in Support of Renaming Schools

"A better way to acknowledge and grapple with our history is not to cling to these particular names, but to ask ourselves: What aspects of our community's history do we most want celebrated? What messages do we want to send to our students about the aspects of our history our community holds most dear?" — Dr. Kimberly Allen, CEO, 904WARD

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. — 904WARD supports the renaming of the nine schools in Duval County identified for a potential name change in 2021. These schools, named to glorify the enslavement, oppression, and terrorizing of Black and Indigenous people, must be renamed in order to move our city towards becoming a place that truly provides opportunity and is welcoming for all.

Changing the names of the schools is but one of many things we can do to make Jacksonville a more welcoming and inclusive city for everyone. This is a step towards following a long line of truth, reconciliation, education and advocacy that needs to happen in order to rectify racial injustices. To begin to unpack the history of disproportionate outcomes for Black and Brown communities we see in our city and country, we have to be able to have long-overdue conversations about our racial history openly, often and with the facts. We have to be willing to tell the truth even when it hurts and make decisions that move us towards progress, even when the path is unclear. If we ever want to be able to solve systemic issues that impact certain racial and ethnic groups unfavorably, we have to be willing to do the work that takes us into the deepest, darkest corners of our history so that racism no longer has a hiding place.

When the Duval School Board held a recent meeting on renaming Robert E. Lee High School, some of the most poignant comments came from current students who said they did not want the name of someone with a leading role in preserving slavery atop the building where they come to learn every day, or permanently emblazoned on their diplomas. We owe it to the next generation of leaders to support and elevate their voices. Although many in our community are

expressing opinions on the issue of school renaming, none matter more than the students who currently and will attend these schools.

We cannot ignore the overt and covert racial undertones present in the arguments on this issue, or that perspectives divide along racial lines. Older, White alumni who oppose renaming the school suggest that it would erase history. While we agree it is important to acknowledge Jacksonville's history, doing so requires understanding when and why these school names were chosen. Robert E. Lee's name was chosen for the high school in 1928, during the Jim Crow era, when Black men were lynched in Duval County to terrorize the Black community. Right here in Duval County during this time, at least eight Black men were lynched, their bodies publicly mutilated and discarded to instill fear in the Black community—a trauma that has been handed down through generations. Other Confederate generals' names were selected for schools at the height of the Civil Rights Movement, as a demonstration of opposition to school integration. These names were deliberately selected to communicate resistance to racial equity and justice and to send a message to the Black community about their belonging.

While some White alumni say the name has “never been about racism” for them, today’s students, who are predominantly Black, are right to point out both that the cause these men supported and the context in which the school names were chosen are, inevitably, about oppression and racism — and keeping the names feels like tacit acceptance.

A second objection to renaming is the cost of replacing things like signs and uniforms. Thankfully, the Jacksonville Public Education Fund has launched a fund to collect private dollars to support renaming these schools. You can contribute JPEF’s fund or create your own fundraiser by visiting <http://jaxpef.org/renaming>.

Furthermore, we encourage everyone to follow the School Name Change Tracker at <https://dcps.dualschools.org/site/default.aspx?PageID=29655>. This site is where everyone can learn: (1) when to attend community meetings; and (2) when and how to vote during each respective voting window, if they qualify. Lastly, please send messages to the school board members to vote in favor of the name changes, because they have the final vote.

We hope the Duval County School Board will honor their commitments to serve and support today’s students, and will heed their calls to adopt school names that signal that all students are welcome and valued in Duval County.

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About 904WARD

904WARD creates racial healing and equity through deep conversations and learning, trusting relationships, and collective action. Our vision is an end to racism in Jacksonville so all people thrive. To learn more and sign up to get involved, visit 904ward.org.

