

Superintendent Haas' Recommendation to the Albemarle County School Board

Renaming of Cale Elementary School

September 26, 2019

Good Evening, Mr. Alcaro, members of the Albemarle County School Board, Albemarle County Schools staff, and school and community members. Thank you for your investment in our schools and for your support of our students. We have a work session coming up in a few minutes, and I want to deliver my recommendation to the Board regarding Paul H. Cale Elementary School. My recommendation this evening is for information only and it includes my consideration of the recommendation that the Cale Advisory Committee made to me.

I'll get to the topic at hand, but first, I want to talk to the family of Paul Cale. I admire what you have told us about your dad. Each of you are witness to the enduring love and support that Paul Cale had for his family and friends and for the dedication he had to the job he held as superintendent of Albemarle County Public Schools for the longest tenure of any superintendent in the history of the school system.

Throughout much of my career, first as a teacher and assistant principal, and then as principal of two schools later as a school division staff member and now as superintendent, my own children often have shared with me, the impact both positive and negative on them of my job and role in the community. I know a little bit about how you must feel and I am grateful you shared your memories of him with us. Thank you for that.

Mr. Alcaro and members of the Board and our school community, some of you know that each Monday, I visit a school to set me on the right path for the week. This past Monday, I visited Stone Robinson Elementary School first thing in the morning.

I parked right in front of the historical marker commemorating the "Albemarle 26," Pioneers of Equality in Education that was dedicated this past spring.

The text on the marker reads,

On September 3, 1963, nine years after the U.S. Supreme Court declared racial segregation of public schools unconstitutional, 26 African-American students desegregated Albemarle High, Stone Robinson Elementary, and Greenwood School. With the leadership and support of their parents, community members, and the Reverend R.A. Johnson, these students courageously sought and obtained the equal education deserved by all.

The sign names the 18 students who formerly attended Rose Hill Elementary school and were the first to desegregate Stone-Robinson.

Many of its 18 students attended the marker's dedication ceremony. They were proud and joyous, courageous children who overcame a fear most of us will never know, simply to walk through the school door.

Earlier that year, when their parents attempted to register them for school, they had been turned away by the school principal and sent to the central office. At the central office, they were turned away and sent back to Stone-Robinson. At that school a second time, after being told there were no registration forms, they discovered the forms in a desk drawer.

That's why the sign beside Stone-Robinson is important. It reminds all of us of the courage and determination of young children who overcame their fears to do what should be in the hearts of all of us.

Now I want to offer to these brave Americans and to their eight other peers, the thanks they did not receive 56 years ago for the inspirational story they wrote in our school division's history. It is a story, however, with one chapter missing. Nothing ever can be written about the leadership and support from school division leaders that made possible equal educational opportunity in Albemarle County on September 3, 1963.

We cannot know all that was in the hearts and minds of our school division leaders more than 60 years ago. I will not pretend to know what they thought or felt about school integration or civil rights.

We do know this. Those leaders served during a period of time in our history that was unequivocally racist. While it was a time that should always be remembered, it is not a time to be celebrated.

It was a time when the law of the land and the promise of equality for all routinely was ignored across Virginia and in Albemarle County. In fact, it was a time when two Supreme Court orders were deliberately violated; the U.S. Supreme Court in 1954 and the Commonwealth of Virginia's Supreme Court in 1959.

It was a time when children of all races were denied classroom opportunities to develop friendships, to learn from one another, to have access to the same learning resources, to fulfill their highest potential.

It was a time when you could pick up an Albemarle High School yearbook and see no photos of students of color until page 72, when a white student appeared in black face in the midst of a school sanctioned minstrel show in the school's auditorium.

It was a time when it took 13 years after Brown vs. Board of Education to fully integrate our schools; eight years after the Virginia Supreme Court directive and two years after Charlottesville City.

It was a time when black students from Burley High School first integrated Albemarle High School, and were greeted by a large photo of the Confederate Flag in their new school's yearbook.

We often hear about forefathers who owned slaves, and while those times occurred more than a century ago, they are still painful to recall. But this, in Albemarle County, is not of long ago. Those who suffered during this recent and shameful era in our history still are among us. We see them in the grocery store or at the movie theater. Their children or children's children go to our schools. We represent them in public office.

For all of them and for all of us, what took place years ago very much matters today. And it is time to make things right.

I am grateful for the leadership of the Cale Advisory Committee's chair, Dennis Rooker, and for the committee's comprehensive work; the time and effort they devoted to serving their school community; their thoughtful deliberations, their openness to all points of view and their willingness to take on a difficult challenge. I also want to thank John Gray, who came out of retirement from our Human Resources Department to provide professional services for the committee including research, report writing, scheduling, and more.

On October 25, 2018, the School Board voted unanimously to direct me to review our current policy on the naming of school buildings and facilities for the purpose of adding school division values to the criteria for such naming.

The Board also directed me to undertake a review of all schools in the division named after people, taking into account how faithful those designations are to the current values of our school division and to report my recommendations to this Board within six months.

As the committee for the first school to be considered has worked its way through the process outlined in the policy, it has clearly taken more than six months. This has been a complex challenge, one that required thoroughness and fairness above speed. The fruits of this approach can be found in the detailed report before you and made available to the public.

I am here tonight to give my recommendation to the Board on the findings regarding Cale Elementary School. First, however, I would like to address our process. I am recommending four changes to policy FA, the ACPS policy for building and naming schools:

- 1. The policy states that we can only have one advisory committee at a time. I think that with the experience we now have with the process we can and should handle more than one review at a time with the following changes.**
- 2. I think the process for examining the names of our schools can be significantly improved by simply combining the decision to change the name with the selection of a new name and including the existing name in the pool of potential new names.**

As I stated earlier, the School Board has already decided that for each of the 14 schools named after a person there be a process for determining whether the school will be renamed and what that name will be.

The naming process for Cale will have taken about one year. Unless changes are made to the current process, I estimate it will take about ten years to get through the 14 schools now named after people. Before moving on to the next 13 schools, we need to learn from our recent experience with Cale. The process needs to be more efficient, less costly in staff time and less stressful for the community, for the advisory committee and for the family and friends of the persons for whom schools are now named.

As it now stands, the current process includes the following 12 steps:

- 1. A committee is selected and organized.**
- 2. The committee does its research and begins accepting public input.**
- 3. The committee holds one or more public hearings.**
- 4. The committee meets once or more often to discuss and analyze the information it has received and comes to a consensus decision.**
- 5. The committee meets to announce its recommendation to the superintendent.**
- 6. The superintendent meets with the school board and makes a recommendation to the School Board.**
- 7. The School Board makes a decision about whether to change the school name.**
- 8. If the School Board recommends changing the name, the committee reconvenes to begin the process of recommending a new name.**
- 9. The committee starts receiving input and holds at least two public meetings.**

- 10. The committee discusses the information it has received and recommends a new name to the School Board.**
- 11. If the committee is unable to agree on a recommendation, the superintendent recommends a new name to the School Board.**
- 12. The School Board votes on the recommended new name.**

Before the School Board moves any further, the process needs to be changed to the following:

The committee's initial charge will be to make a recommendation concerning the school name, based upon the current values and policies of the School Board. The committee will be allowed to consider a pool of names derived from a process of school and community input to include the existing name. This would eliminate steps 6, 7, 8, 9 and 10 from the above process by combining the decision to change a name with the name selection process for both the committee and the School Board.

This would significantly reduce the time involved in the process. It should also make the process less stressful by changing the focus of the committee's work from whether the existing name should be eliminated to a focus on what the best name for a school should be given the current values and policies of the School Board, as well as the current school community's preference.

3. For third recommendation, I am going to take the liberty of quoting the *Daily Progress* Editorial from this past week:

"Because cultural standards and definitions of success are subject to change, no buildings should be named for people. Then future generations could avoid this kind of agonized retrospection.

Every person is flawed. And as we've seen, different generations interpret flaws differently. A policy that names schools for nearby geographical features would be safer."

One of the first recommendations of the advisory committee chair Dennis Rooker was to recognize the geographical area in which the school is located as the first option for naming future schools and facilities rather than choosing a person's name.

4. My fourth and final recommendation is that when a new school or other school facility is built and named, that name should have an expiration date. Every so often a school renews its mission. So should the school community, from one generation to the next, join together to consider its namesake as well.

With regard to the remainder of our 14 schools named for people, I have no recommendation at this time. Each school community deserves its own due process. I understand this process can be agonizing and controversial in its introspection; however, this kind of societal introspection is part of reframing our historical narrative to be more accurate, relevant, and transparent. Further, with the recommended changes to our policy, the process should not be so agonizing.

The name of a school should stand for something important , which is why your policy on the naming of schools requires that the school name evoke the four values of our school division,

young people, respect, community and excellence.

These values drive all that we do, from the people we hire, to the programs we operate, to our daily actions and interactions with those we serve, to the naming of our facilities.

The lessons we teach our children are grounded in the decisions we make and the actions that follow. Our children, our students, are listening and watching. They will hear us and say what we say. They will watch us and do what we do.

I greatly respect the decisions and actions of our School Board as they have made possible,

an anti-racism policy, an equity checklist, a culturally responsive teaching program, administrative actions to ban the display of hate symbols in our

schools and support for a social studies curriculum that is inclusive of all historical perspectives and experiences no matter how agonizing they are to the comfort of adults.

As we have seen demonstrated across our country, the question of whether a facility or a street or a memorial should be replaced or renamed in the context of current day values is an emotional one, largely because of nostalgia and tradition.

Tradition has a place in history as does positive change. After all, change is the path down which progress is made and society improved.

Schools are meant to be a force for good, a force for progress, a place to bring people together toward a common purpose and a commitment to accomplishment as a community. Let us take a negative time in our county and school division's past and make it a positive time for our future. Let us remain true to our values.

Let this begin by inviting our current Cale students, staff and families to be part of naming of the elementary school they attend.

Changing the school name will set in motion a change process that will align with the mission for Albemarle County Public Schools. The core purpose of Albemarle County Public Schools is to establish a community of learners and learning, through relationships, relevance and rigor, one student at a time. As we often say, we provide education for our children's future, not our past. Imagine how empowering it will be for students to develop and promote ideas for their school's name.

Each Board member has a complete report documenting every piece of information and communication the committee and I considered in our recommendation to you. For the community, an electronic version of this binder can be found with the link attached to this agenda item, and it may also be accessed via a link from the Superintendent's page of the ACPS website.

Thank you for the opportunity to conduct this review and to say, one more time, for clarity,

I respectfully recommend that the School Board change the name of Cale Elementary School.

If you approve my recommendation at your meeting on October 10th, the advisory committee for Cale shall reconvene to work with the Cale community to develop recommendations for a new school name.

Thank you for your time and attention.

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