

Superintendent's Recommendation Regarding Naming of Sutherland Middle School, August 13, 2020

Matthew Haas recommends that as of July 1, 2021, Sutherland Middle School be officially renamed Lakeside Middle School.

Haas has taken under consideration the Sutherland name review committee's work and recommendation to him in making his recommendation.

The recommendation from the committee of community volunteers follows two public meetings and three community public opinion surveys. Lakeside was the top choice of both parents and of students. In the most recent survey, more than 1,000 responses were received when members of the school community were asked their preference among three names selected by the advisory committee as finalists—Lakeside, Rivanna and Willow Creek.

According to committee leader Jasmine Fernandez, "Dating back to our first meeting in March, we heard from parents that the school's name should be one that is inclusive of all neighborhoods. Naming a school for its geography was a logical way to recognize every member of our school community."

The school's principal, Megan Wood, said the naming review process was an opportunity for the entire community to think about the school's mission, which includes its focus on unity and continual progress. She said, "One of the highlights was the involvement of our students, both in meetings I had with them and in the nearly 500 students who participated in the survey. In the end, our advisory committee supported their top choice."

The advisory committee began its work on March 2 as part of a division-wide review of all schools named for individuals. Sutherland was the second school to be reviewed. The advisory committee included three members of the school faculty, three parents of students who attend the school, three parents of students who attend elementary schools that feed into Sutherland, two community members who do not have children enrolled in the school and a student.

Following the shutdown of school facilities on March 13 to protect against the spread of COVID-19 illness, the committee conducted the bulk of their community outreach through video conferencing.

On June 15, the advisory committee narrowed the list of names under consideration to three, eliminating Mortimer Y. Sutherland as one of the choices. At the time, the committee referenced research documents on Sutherland's votes and actions while a member of Albemarle County's Board of Supervisors. In 1963, for instance, Sutherland was the lone vote on the Board of Supervisors to uphold a ban on all school athletic and social activities that brought together white and black students.

The school division's policy on the naming or renaming of schools for individuals requires a review of the person's personal and professional life to determine if it exemplified the school division's four values of young people, respect, community and excellence.

In summation, Jasmine Fernandez said the following about the committee's decision: "While Mr. Sutherland was a public figure whose career included serving as a teacher and principal in the school division, he took actions that were discriminatory against Black students. In light of our division's strong commitment to equity and anti-racism, the committee thought it was imperative to choose a name that is more inclusive of everyone in our community."

Sutherland Principal Megan Wood said she especially was appreciative of the thoughtful work and dedication of the committee volunteers even in the midst of the public meeting restrictions brought about by COVID-19 health protections. She said, "Our volunteers were determined to get this right as demonstrated in their three public surveys and two public meetings," she said. "I am grateful for their work. We were fortunate to have benefited from such an outstanding team of students, parents and staff and we look forward to the momentum this will provide in coming together to build the future success of our school," she said.

ACPS has created a web page to enable members of the public to track the progress of each school's name review. The page also has information on the relevant School Board policy. There are 14 schools in the division that are named for individuals. More information about this process and the work of the Sutherland advisory committee can be accessed at:

<https://www.k12albemarle.org/acps/division/school-naming-review/Pages/default.aspx>.