



*COMMONWEALTH of VIRGINIA*  
*Office of the Governor*

Ralph S. Northam  
Governor

July 6, 2020

Dear School Board Chairs of the Commonwealth,

While these times have been challenging for our country in many ways, they also have shined a light on inequities that currently exist in the Commonwealth, especially as a result of our history as the former capital of the Confederacy. In early June, amidst local and national protests against police brutality and systemic racism in America, I announced the removal of the Robert E. Lee monument in Richmond, Virginia. I noted, “When a young child looks up and sees something that big and prominent, she knows that it’s important...it sends a clear message: This is what we value the most.”

Today, I come to you with a similar request. Like the statues we see displayed across Virginia, the names of public places, streets, and schools send messages to our children about what we value most as a society. When those names reflect our broken and racist past, they also perpetuate the hurt inextricably woven into this past. When our public schools are named after individuals who advanced slavery and systemic racism, and we allow those names to remain on school property, we tacitly endorse their values as our own. This is no longer acceptable.

It is time to change school names and mascots that memorialize Confederate leaders or sympathizers. As with the Confederate statues, these school names and symbols have a traumatizing impact on students, families, teachers and staff of all backgrounds. The financial costs of changing school names are minimal compared to the generations that suffered through American slavery, the Confederacy, the Jim-Crow era, massive resistance, and contemporary manifestation of systemic racism, like the school to prison pipeline.

Recognizing the harmful impact these school names have on our children, I am calling on school boards to evaluate the history behind your school names. Now is the time to change them to reflect the inclusive, diverse, and welcoming school community every child deserves, and that we, as leaders of the Commonwealth, have a civic duty to foster.

I look forward to working with each of you to create a Commonwealth that is reflective of the values Virginia now holds most true.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ralph S. Northam".

Ralph S. Northam