



June 23, 2020

Dr. Lewis Ferebee  
Chancellor  
District of Columbia Public Schools  
1200 First Street NE  
Washington, DC 20002

Dr. Ferebee,

As members of the DC State Board of Education, we urge you to move quickly to change the name of Woodrow Wilson High School.

As you are aware, there is a longstanding request to change the school's name, and the petition asking you to make that change now has nearly 15,000 signatures. This request has heightened urgency for us given our country's and city's broad examination of race and racism — and their connection to our schools. Whatever one might think of Wilson's efforts in international affairs or on other matters, as president, his role in Washington DC was ugly and civically corrosive—he worked systematically to demote and segregate DC's African-American civil servants, who had previously built a thriving middle-class community. It is time to change the name.

In a recent communication to the DCPS community, dated June 1, you wrote: "Our community will not tolerate any actions or policies that sanction or perpetuate racism and racial violence." You went on to say: Our schools should be "welcoming" to "all who walk through the doors" and a "refuge." We couldn't agree more. This is precisely why we urge you to move swiftly to call for the name change and to put in place a process for selecting a new name with community input. We further urge you to identify a process through which other school names may be reconsidered as well.

The campaign to change the Wilson name is led by The DC History and Justice Collective and is backed by current students, Wilson alums, Wilson neighbors, DC residents—and the ward 3 members of the DC Council and State Board of Education. The campaign has demonstrated, with many steps, the broad support for this name change. Over the past months, a community forum has been held at the high school, with more than one hundred attendees (see attached articles), and an educational program was held with and for students at Wilson. Last week, DC residents attended a vigil at the high school and planted posters with the names of their proposed new name for the High School. The support for the change is high.

This effort has been underway for some time. We note that in the last week, the Superintendent of the Camden City School District has acted decisively to rename Camden's own Wilson High School. We ask you to act with equal urgency to change the name of our Wilson High School,





especially given that the former president's segregationist actions were greatest here in the nation's capital and were most damaging to the African-American community here in Washington D.C.

Sincerely,

Ruth Wattenberg, President, DC State Board of Education  
Markus Batchelor, Vice President, DC State Board of Education  
Emily Gasoi, Ward 1 Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Jack Jacobson, Ward 2 Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Frazier O'Leary, Ward 4 Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Zachary Parker, Ward 5 Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Jessica Sutter, Ward 6 Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Karen Williams, Ward 7 Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Dayja Burton, Student Representative, DC State Board of Education  
Alex O'Sullivan, Student Representative, DC State Board of Education

**CC:** Phil Mendelson, Chairman  
David Grosso, At-Large Councilmember and Chairperson of Committee on Education  
Mary Cheh, Ward 3 Councilmember  
Anita Bonds, At-Large Councilmember  
Elissa Silverman, At-Large Councilmember  
Robert White, At-Large Councilmember  
Brienne Nadeau, Ward 1 Councilmember  
Brooke Pinto, Ward 2 Councilmember Elect  
Brandon Todd, Ward 4 Councilmember  
Kenyan McDuffie, Ward 5 Councilmember  
Charles Allen, Ward 6 Councilmember  
Vincent Gray, Ward 7 Councilmember  
Trayon White, Sr., Ward 8 Councilmember  
Paul Kihn, Deputy Mayor for Education  
Kim Martin, Principal, Woodrow Wilson High School  
Judith Ingram  
Timothy Hannapel  
Brian Doyle  
Melody Molinoff



## Attachments



“Woodrow Wilson High School considers namesake’s racism in mulling name”, *The DC Line*, February 12, 2019, <https://thedcline.org/2019/02/12/woodrow-wilson-high-school-considers-namesakes-racism-in-mulling-name-change/>

“Residents Queue Up to Speak on Changing Woodrow Wilson High School’s Name”, *Washington City Paper*, February 13, 2019, <https://www.washingtoncitypaper.com/news/city-desk/article/21047232/residents-queue-up-to-speak-on-changing-woodrow-wilson-high-schools-name>