

**COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE
COMMITTEE REPORT**

1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW, Washington, DC 20004

DRAFT

TO: All Councilmembers

FROM: Chairman Phil Mendelson
Committee of the Whole

DATE: October 19, 2021

SUBJECT: Report on Bill 24-286, “Jackson Reed High School Designation Act of 2021”

The Committee of the Whole, to which Bill 24-286, “Jackson Reed High School Designation Act of 2021” was referred, reports favorably, with amendments, and recommends approval by the Council.

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I. BACKGROUND AND NEED

On May 28, 2021, Bill 24-286, the “August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021”¹ was introduced by Chairman Mendelson at the request of the Mayor to officially designate the school in Lot 009 in Square 1772, bounded by Nebraska Avenue, NW, Chesapeake Street, NW, and Fort Drive, NW as August Wilson High School. As amended by the Committee, the bill would rename the school as Jackson Reed High School.

Renaming Public Buildings in the District

It will be hard to forget the summer of 2020. Not only because of the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, but also the murder of George Floyd in Minneapolis, Minnesota. That summer ignited a wave of increased activism in the battle for inclusion, equality, and justice; calling into question who we honor with our public spaces and the values they hold. In the District, monuments, memorials, statues and parks are named after national figures and in District-owned facilities, students attend schools, senior citizens receive services, families reside in housing complexes, residents conduct business and visitors enjoy parks and libraries named after some of these same figures. In July, Mayor

¹ Now updated to be the “Jackson Reed High School Designation act of 2021.”

Muriel Bowser formed the working group District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) to ensure that the individuals for whom government buildings are named reflect contemporary DC values.²

Through this process, the DC FACES Working Group in combination with the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) recommended 21 schools be renamed in an effort to better reflect the aforementioned values. Wilson High School was on the list, though there already had been ongoing discussion about changing the school's name. Similar to other school naming processes, DCPS engaged with parents, students, school alumni, and community members through conversations, surveys, and petitions.

Although the process was comprehensive and the proposal of August Wilson resulted from a plurality of survey respondents picking August Wilson, the Committee does not agree with DCPS's proposal to change the school's name to August Wilson High School. The Committee received a significant amount of opposition to the August Wilson High School designation. On the other hand, there is significant support for naming the school after Edna Jackson, Vincent Reed, or the "Jackson Reed High School". Both figures played significant roles in the integration of Wilson High School and hold close connection to the school, the community, and to the District of Columbia.

Opposition to August Wilson High School

An August Wilson High School would honor the Pulitzer and Tony award-winning playwright who chronicled the African American experience in the 20th Century. August Wilson's work is part of DCPS' high school curriculum, allowing students the opportunity to explore the enduring themes represented in his works. His works delve into the African American experience as well as examinations of the human condition, the systemic and historical exploitation of African Americans, as well as race relations, identity, migration, and racial discrimination.

However, when we name schools in the District, it is an opportunity to honor someone or something, or an opportunity to inspire. More broadly, the name of a public building, space, or street should: (1) be one that the community supports; (2) honors a person, event, or place for a clearly articulated reason, and (3) be inspirational, such as to the students in a school. August Wilson's work, we're sure, continues to inspire DCPS high school students across the District, but the August Wilson High School designation was not met with wide community support, with many stakeholders describing the proposal as "convenient" and "safe". In addition, August Wilson had no particular connection to the high school or the District.

August Wilson is notable and has had a profound influence. He is a complete contrast to Woodrow Wilson in terms of his work to advance African American people. However, the school will still be known as "Wilson High School" - clinging to the past under the shadow of the former President. Instead of embracing a new future for the school, with a connection to the DC and school community. Again, August Wilson has no direct connection to the District of Columbia or the high school to be renamed.

² DC FACES Working Group Report. July 2021.

Jackson Reed High School Proposal

Edna Jackson was born January 25, 1911, in Washington, DC. As a young woman, she attended Dunbar High School, a public school for African American students. She graduated in 1928, valedictorian of her class. She would go on to study at Harvard University, Howard University, Cornell, and Catholic University.³ Ms. Jackson taught in Tulsa, Oklahoma for six years and then was hired at Cardozo High School here in the District. After Cardozo, Ms. Jackson was hired as the first African American teacher to work at the prestigious, all-white Woodrow Wilson High School, a year after *Bolling v. Sharpe* desegregated the schools.

Vincent Reed became Wilson High school's first African American vice-principal then Principal at Wilson High School. As superintendent of the DC Public Schools in 1975-1980, he oversaw the creation of Banneker High School and School Without Walls, now two of the top performing high schools in D.C. Thereafter, Mr. Reed was named by the D.C. school board to be the State Superintendent of Education in 1975. He has had a lasting effect on the District of Columbia schools. His engagement with the DC schools, students, parents, and alumni was broad-based, and his accomplishments within the District during his tenure remain pillars of greatness in the DC school community.

Both Jackson and Reed were beloved figures in the history of Wilson High School. The Beacon, Wilson High School's student newspaper, endorsed Edna B. Jackson to be the school's new name. The Beacon writes "Following the *Brown v. Board of Education* ruling in 1954, Jackson became one of the first Black teachers at an all-white Wilson. She continued as a dedicated teacher here for over 20 years. Jackson's advocacy for integration, Advanced Placement, and Black studies courses had a direct impact on Wilson. Her association with our school represents a sense of community that cannot be achieved by naming it after a one-dimensional dignitary or exclusive location."⁴ The Beacon also wrote "in favoring Jackson for her connection to our school, we recognize that Vincent E. Reed deserves an honorable mention. Like Jackson, the connections and changes created by Reed during his time as Wilson's first Black principal (1968-69) made a profoundly personal impact on the community, forging lasting progress that continued into his time as DCPS's superintendent of schools. Renaming Wilson after Reed or Jackson would be a powerful move in celebrating the influence and accomplishments of our school's Black educators."

Both of these individuals had a profound effect on many in the Wilson community and the District as a whole. They were excellent educators who provided the students in the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) with courageous leadership that inspired many. Many community and stakeholder groups have emailed and testified before the committee, urging the Committee to name the current Wilson High School after Edna Jackson or Vincent Reed. Changing the name of the school now is an opportunity to lift up the names of two people who were deeply connected to the city and to Wilson High School; to honor their work and their lives – all of which had an enormous and enduring impact on their students and the school itself. Notably, Reed and Jackson also combined to take first place in the city's public survey on the name change, winning 36% of votes compared to August Wilson's 29%.

³ "DC's Edna Burke Jackson: Educator and activist". Chalkboard Champions. June 9, 2021.

⁴ "The Beacon endorses Edna B. Jackson for Wilson's new name". The Beacon Staff. December 2, 2020.

For these reasons, the Committee of the Whole rejects the name “August Wilson High School” and instead recommends the approval of “Jackson Reed High School” as reflected in the Committee print for Bill 24-286.

II. LEGISLATIVE CHRONOLOGY

May 28, 2021	Bill 24-286, the “August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021” is introduced by Chairman Mendelson at the request of the Mayor.
June 1, 2021	Bill 24-286 is referred to the Committee of the Whole.
June 4, 2021	Notice of Intent to Act on Bill 24-286 is published in the <i>Register</i> .
September 17, 2021	Notice of Public Hearing on Bill 24-286 is published in the <i>Register</i> .
October 6, 2021	A Public Hearing is held on Bill 24-286 by the Committee of the Whole.
November XX, 2021	The Committee of the Whole marks up Bill 24-286.

III. POSITION OF THE EXECUTIVE

Shanita Burney, Engagement and Partnerships Officer at the District of Columbia Public Schools, testified on behalf of the Executive in support of the “August Wilson Elementary School” designation under Bill 24-286. Her testimony is summarized below.

IV. COMMENTS OF ADVISORY NEIGHBORHOOD COMMISSIONS

N/A

V. SUMMARY OF TESTIMONY

The Committee of the Whole held a public hearing on Bill 24-286 on Wednesday, October 6, 2021. The testimony summarized below is from that hearing. Copies of written testimony are attached to this report.

Ruth Wattenberg, SBOE Representative, Ward 3 testified in support of the “August Wilson High School” designation, and urged the Committee to move quickly in adopting the new name of the school. Representative Wattenberg pushes back against the view that choosing the name August Wilson was convenient but not desired by the current students and alumni. She notes in her testimony that what is important to Wilson alumni is that they lose the name Woodrow, but not lose Wilson, and describes August Wilson as someone who exemplifies the important role of humanities and literature.

Corinne McIntosh-Douglas, Board member DC Habitat testified in support of the “August Wilson High School” designation. She noted that August Wilson’s work will inspire creation of a broad, inviting, and inspiring curriculum, and she endorsed renaming the school with someone whose legacy can combat the former president’s connection to the school.

Marc Minsker, Wilson High School Teacher testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation, and in support of “Edna Jackson High School.” Mr. Minsker testified that survey data shows that Wilson teachers were against changing the name of the high school to August Wilson High School and in favor of Edna Jackson High School. He notes that Edna Jackson is a model for exemplary education, inclusion, and equity as she was the school’s first African American female teacher. Mr. Minsker urged the committee to not approve the name change to August Wilson and to not do what is convenient.

Sally Schwartz, Wilson Alumni testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation and in support of “Vincent Reed High School.” Ms. Schwartz noted that the name August Wilson does not meet one of the stated criteria of the school naming process – having a strong connection to the District of Columbia. She testified that she believes the intention in choosing August Wilson is to keep the connection with the past and to save money.

Joseph Riener, Former Wilson Teacher testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation and in support of “Reed-Jackson High School.” Mr. Reiner testified that August Wilson has no connection to the District of Columbia. Edna Jackson and Vincent Reed, combined, received more votes on the recent public poll than August Wilson, and he stated that the names of teachers, principals, and school superintendents should appear on our public buildings as a way of honoring them.

Alex Wilson, Director of Academic Development at Wilson High School testified in support of the “August Wilson High School” designation. He testified that August Wilson is “one of America’s finest playwrights and literary historians” and should be honored with a school in his name.

Paula Duckett, Public Witness testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation and in support of “Edna Jackson High School”. Ms. Duckett is the niece of Edna Jackson. She noted that during her 36-year career, Edna Jackson “made a lasting impact on every life she touched,” and inspired many to pursue careers in education. “Renaming Woodrow Wilson High School in honor of Edna Jackson will memorialize her place in DC history and preserve the educational values to which she devoted her life. Most importantly, it will provide the District of Columbia a unique opportunity and a first – to name a high school after a highly regarded, local African American female educator.”

Guy Durant, Wilson High School Alumni testified in support of the “August Wilson High School” designation. Mr. Durant noted that August Wilson is “considered a notable African-American writer and is a great choice for the school”.

Clinton Scott, DC History and Justice Collective testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation and in support of “Edna Jackson High School” or “Vincent Reed High School.” In his testimony, Mr. Scott noted that “both Vincent Reed and Dr. Edna Jackson changed the

world by their positive example. They led by giving us a glimpse of what our world will look like if we encourage and promote the values of integrity, intellectual curiosity, honesty, and hard work.”

Tim Hannapel, DC History and Justice Collective, testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation and in support of “Edna Jackson High School” or “Vincent Reed High School”. In his testimony, Mr. Hannapel noted that “but for his last name, August Wilson would never have made the list of names meaningful to the community. The DC History and Justice Collective “stands with the supporters of two path-breaking Black DCPS educators with strong ties to the school and a unique capacity to inspire the students of today: Edna Jackson and Vincent Reed”.

Donald Graham, Public Witness testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School” designation and in support of “Vincent E. Reed High School”. Mr. Graham highlighted the accomplishments of Vincent Reed and noted Reed’s work with Edna Jackson. Mr. Graham testified that “to have the school named after these two great educators would be a fitting way to honor both.”

Rylie Temple, Public Witness testified in opposition to the “August Wilson High School designation and in support of “Vincent Reed High School.” He testified that Vincent Reed had a notable impact on education in the District of Columbia and exemplified the excellence that the school is known for.

Shanita Burney, Government Witness testified in support of the “August Wilson High School” designation. She testified that changing the name of the school to August Wilson High School had broad support among stakeholders, including current students and families, staff members, alumni, the ANC’s, and the broader DC community. Ms. Burney shared that “August Wilson’s work is a part of DCPS’ high school curriculum, and that Mr. Wilson’s words are an important instrument in the affirmation of our humanity in this often challenging world.”

The Committee received written testimony in support of and opposition to the August Wilson High School designation, and testimony in support of the Jackson Reed High School designation. Copies of the written testimony are attached to this report.

VI. IMPACT ON EXISTING LAW

Bill 24-286, as it pertains to Jackson Reed High School Designation, has no impact on existing law. D.C. Official Code § 9-204.01 authorizes the Council to designate any public space, including parks.⁵ Further, the Act provides that, with limited exception, no public space shall be named in honor of any living person or in honor of any person who has been deceased less than two years.⁶ Edna Jackson passed away on February 21, 2004 and Vincent Reed passed away on October 17, 2017. Both figures passed more than two years ago.

⁵ Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201).

⁶ See D.C. Code § 9-204.05.

VII. FISCAL IMPACT

Funds are sufficient in the fiscal year 2022 through fiscal year 2025 budget and financial plan to implement the provisions of the proposed legislation. Following the DC FACES recommendations, a name change for Wilson High School was anticipated, and DCPS has sufficient funds to cover the cost of signage for the new school name. A copy of the October X, 2021 Fiscal Impact Statement is attached to this report.

VIII. SECTION-BY-SECTION ANALYSIS

<u>Section 1</u>	States the short title of Bill 24-286.
<u>Section 2</u>	Officially designates the school in Lot 009 in Square 1772, bounded by Nebraska Avenue, NW Chesapeake Street NW, and Fort Drive, NW, as “Jackson Reed High School.”
<u>Section 3</u>	Transmits a copy of this Act to the Mayor
<u>Section 4</u>	Adopts the Fiscal Impact Statement
<u>Section 5</u>	Establishes the effective date by stating the standard 30-day Congressional review language.

IX. COMMITTEE ACTION

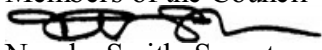
X. ATTACHMENTS

1. Bill 23-286 as introduced
2. Written Testimony and Letters
3. Surveyor’s Plat

4. Fiscal Impact Statement for Bill 24-286
5. Legal Sufficiency Determination for Bill 24-286
6. Committee Print for Bill 24-286

COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington D.C. 20004

Memorandum

To : Members of the Council

From : Nyasha Smith, Secretary to the Council
Date : Friday, May 28, 2021
Subject : Referral of Proposed Legislation

Notice is given that the attached proposed legislation was introduced in the Office of the Secretary on Friday, May 28, 2021. Copies are available in Room 10, the Legislative Services Division.

TITLE: "August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021", B24-0286

INTRODUCED BY: Chairman Mendelson, at the request of Mayor

The Chairman is referring this legislation to Committee of the Whole.

Attachment
cc: General Counsel
Budget Director
Legislative Services



MURIEL BOWSER
MAYOR

May 28, 2021

The Honorable Phil Mendelson, Chairman
Council of the District of Columbia
1350 Pennsylvania Avenue N.W. Suite 504
Washington, D.C. 20004

Dear Chairman Mendelson:

Pursuant to the Public Space Naming Amendment Act of 2016 (D.C. Law 21-161; D.C. Official Code §9-204.01), attached for consideration by the Council of the District of Columbia is the "August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021."

In September 2020, the District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions (DCFACES) working group published its recommendations as to what District assets, including schools, should be removed or renamed, including Woodrow Wilson High School.

I welcome this recommendation. Woodrow Wilson's racist legacy and policies of segregation acutely carried out against Black federal employees in the District and Black residents of Reno City, where the school now sits, make him an unseemly namesake for the school and does not reflect DCPS values of Students First, Equity, Excellence, Teamwork, Courage, and Joy.

Fall 2020 Public Input Survey results from over 2,000 nomination submissions and feedback from over 6,000 individuals indicated August Wilson High School as the overall preferred replacement name. I agree with the community and find that August Wilson better represents Washingtonian principles and the rich legacy and activism of the school community.

August Wilson's dramas have graced the stages of Washington, DC for decades. His work is part of DCPS' high school curriculum, allowing our scholars to explore the timeless themes represented in his words and characters. In addition to the support of DCPS stakeholders, the August Wilson estate also endorsed this proposal in February 2021.


In closing, I also want to thank the Council for passing a Sense of the Council in October 2020, joining us in our efforts. I urge the Council to take prompt and favorable action on this legislation, and I am available to discuss any questions you may have regarding this matter. In order to facilitate a response to your questions, please have your staff contact Alyssa Noth, Director of Intergovernmental Affairs, DC Public Schools, at alyssa.noth@k12.dc.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Muriel Bowser".

Muriel Bowser

Enclosure


Chairman Phil Mendelson
at the request of the Mayor

AN ACT

IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA

Chairman Phil Mendelson, at the request of the Mayor, introduced the following bill, which was referred to the Committee on _____.

To officially designate Square 1772, Lot 0009 bounded by Nebraska Avenue NW, Chesapeake Street, NW, and Fort Drive, NW as August Wilson High School, to honor August Wilson, the Pulitzer and Tony award-winning playwright who chronicled the African American experience in the 20th Century.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this act may be cited as the "August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021."

Sec. 2. Pursuant to sections 401 and 422 of the Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201; D.C. Official Code §§ 9-204.01 and 9-204.22) ("Act"), and notwithstanding section 422(a) of the Act (D.C. Official Code § 9-204.22(a)), the Council officially designates the high school in Square 1772, Lot 0009 bounded by Nebraska Avenue, NW, Chesapeake Street, NW, and Fort Drive, NW, as August Wilson High School.

Sec. 3. Transmittal.

The Council shall transmit a copy of this act, upon its effective date, to the Mayor, the District of Columbia Public Schools, and the Office of the Surveyor.

Sec. 4. Fiscal impact statement.

37 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
38 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
39 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

40 Sec. 5. Effective date.

41 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by
42 the Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review
43 as provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved
44 December 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code § 1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the
45 District of Columbia Register.

Testimony of Ruth Wattenberg, on renaming Wilson High School.

I am Ruth Wattenberg, Member of the State Board of Education from ward 3, home of Wilson high school. I am also the parent of a Wilson alum.

I urge you to rename our high school after the great playwright August Wilson.

As you know, Woodrow Wilson systematically segregated the federal workforce and bolstered DC's segregationists. The careers, incomes, and lives of DC's Black residents were set back for generations, and DC became a far more segregated city. The name must change.

The community voted for a new name. After much discussion and debate, 6000 people voted. In a 7-way race, August Wilson drew nearly a third of the vote, 10 points higher than the runner-up.

The Mayor and Chancellor called for the High School to be renamed August Wilson. The proposal was sent to the DC Council for approval.

The Wilson community was psyched. Graduation ceremonies would include a celebration of the playwright and the school's first-ever "August Wilson" diplomas. Wilson's theater group planned a theater season featuring August Wilson. The stage was set for a great new name backed by lots of community and school energy.

The approval of the new name did not come, graduation plans were canceled, and students got diplomas that said simply "Wilson." The school was in limbo. 130

Apparently, concerns were raised--that the August Wilson name would allow the school to skip hard conversations about race; it was too convenient—and, that the school should honor someone local.

But: These arguments were made last winter. The vote was held. The name August Wilson was chosen. And, for good reason: August Wilson, one of the country's most acclaimed playwrights, is among the writers who has written most beautifully and persuasively about racial inequality and the realities of race in American history. His work exemplifies the important role of literature and the humanities—all ideal for our high school.

A school named after him--with a theater community eager to embrace his legacy—will be a school where the issues of race are alive and discussed. Unlike most schools, where the name is quickly forgotten, at August Wilson High School, these issues will be alive--because his work is alive: His "Seven Guitars" opens at the Arena Stage next month. Denzel Washington is turning each of Wilson's 10 cycle plays into movies; last year's was for Netflix, featuring the late Chadwick Boseman and Viola Davis. The Wilson Players are producing "The Piano Lesson" this winter.

But is it too "convenient," too easy? A high school is a meaningful part of many people's lives, something they share proudly with former classmates and children.

As a member and former president of the Board, I talk with residents across the city about education and have spoken with graduates of DC high schools who deeply lament the closing of their high schools and the loss of those names. It's been years, and they still miss it.

I have talked to Wilson grads of all races and ages who are happy to lose the name Woodrow--but feel it would be a genuine loss to lose the name "Wilson." I don't so quickly dismiss those who want to keep the Wilson part of the name.

What's important is to stop honoring a segregationist--not to disparage that students want a connection to their former high school.

This is not about convenience, it's about serendipity.

Let's move quickly. When the Wilson Players open "The Piano Lesson" this winter, let's be sure they can do so in honor of the high school's new, respected namesake.



Good morning council members,

My name is Marc Minsker and I am an English teacher at Wilson High School.

As a white male teaching in DC's most diverse comprehensive high school, I find myself reflecting daily on how education and our society is so deeply grounded in an inherited patriarchy and a hierarchy based on privilege that we educators have to unpack each and every day. It's hard work. But it's valuable work.

Teaching in a pandemic has added an additional level of stress and anxiety for all of my colleagues and for me, though the rewards of teaching in person and the emphasis on social emotional learning for students certainly outweighs the struggles. That being said, it's hard work. But it's valuable work.

Wilson High School has a venerable and sordid history, being built on land that once belonged to a thriving diverse community known as Reno. As shared with students and with colleagues, it is paramount that we not only recognize black land loss and the displacement of families but that we actively seek positive and lasting actions in our community to counter the forces responsible for the destruction and dismantling of Reno City.

We also need to recognize and champion the unsung heroes who have gone before us: those who have taught in these rooms and given themselves tirelessly to the pursuit of educating the youth at Wilson.

Edna Jackson was the first African-American female teacher at Wilson High School. It may be difficult for us to recognize fully the level of courage and perseverance it took for Ms. Jackson to come to school everyday and teach in a segregated school of all white students. But the fact that she did exactly that and changed the lives of many students by giving so much of herself to make Wilson a more inclusive environment must be acknowledged today and every day. Her dedication over the course of seven years to this institution, from segregated classrooms to integrated classrooms beginning in 1964, speaks volumes about who we are and the potential we have to become better.

Edna Jackson knew it was hard work. And she demonstrated that it was valuable work.

After the proposed "August Wilson" name change was floated back in early 2021, Wilson teachers had an opportunity to participate in a survey in regards to the new name for our school. 122 teachers out of the 145 teachers at Wilson during the 2020-2021 school year cast their votes. As the data clearly shows, 84 teachers voted against August Wilson High School in favor of Edna Jackson High School. 21 teachers were in favor of August Wilson and 17 teachers voted "unsure."

68% of my colleagues recognize the value of Edna Jackson as a model for exemplary education, inclusion, and equity for this institution. I hope you will hear the voices of the faculty and staff, whose dedication and sacrifice every single day make this place what it is.

Let's do the hard work and not what is convenient. It's valuable work and your decisions on the future name of our school will have a lasting impact on generations to come -- those who walk in these halls and learn in these classrooms, long after we are gone.

Thank you for your time.

**TESTIMONY FOR DC COUNCIL
COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE PUBLIC HEARING
B24-0286 - August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021
October 6, 2021
Submitted by Sally Schwartz**

Thank you, Chairman Mendelson and committee members, for this opportunity to testify on a subject that is important to me as a member of the Wilson Class of 1968.

August Wilson would be a fine name for a school – just not this one, at this time. He is a great writer who masterfully uses stories to illuminate the past and help us understand our current condition.

Now we, as a city, are in the middle of creating our own story, as we grapple with our shared history, and work to build a more equitable, inclusive, and humane future for all students. The renaming of Wilson High School is part of this story, and I want it to be a story we can all be proud of. I don't want it to be about moving to the brink of change and then shying away at the last moment. I don't want the new name to be seen as a joke or used as a meme or an emblem of our reluctance to fully embrace change.

There is much to be proud of in the widespread community conversations that led to consensus on the need to remove the name of Woodrow Wilson from the school. It's not easy to let go of a school name. Predictably, there were always people present who argued for finding "another Wilson" for the school's new name - to save money on signage, to maintain the Wilson "brand" for college admission, and to keep a nostalgic connection with the past. We heard calls for John Wilson; Jackie Wilson; Teddy Wilson; Henry, Harriet, William, and even Flip Wilson. And August Wilson.

So it was not surprising to see August Wilson's name on the slate of options in the public survey, even though he didn't meet one of the stated criteria – a strong connection to DC. And it wasn't surprising he received 29% of the votes – with many comments similar to those we

had heard before – touting the benefits of retaining the name Wilson HS. But to say, on that basis, that community sentiment was in support of August Wilson is disingenuous and should be challenged. Most wanted a new name – not another Wilson.

I am a huge proponent of Vincent Reed High School and have been for years. Elsewhere I've shared the many reasons why his character and his enormous contributions to the children of DC make him an ideal choice for the school. For example, he was not only responsible for the creation of Banneker, but also incubated Ellington, School Without Walls, the STAY programs, Street Law, and so much more.

That said, I was impressed with the broad support that emerged – from alumni, current students, educators, and community members - for both Vincent Reed and teacher Edna Jackson (the first Black principal and first Black teacher at Wilson respectively) – who through their personal examples, their ardent devotion to students, and their courageous on-the-ground, day-to-day work as educators, inspired individual achievement and advanced racial equity in a time of enormous social and demographic upheaval. To see people from all segments of the community rally around the legacy of these two pioneering Black educators is profoundly moving.

Naming the school Jackson-Reed or Reed-Jackson would be much more meaningful and emblematic of the change we are hoping to make. These two DC educators combined received 36% of all votes. This is where I believe community sentiment more authentically rests. Please vote no on the August Wilson High School Designation Act.

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR OF NAMING REED-JACKSON HIGH SCHOOL

I have been a DC resident since 1965. I taught English at Woodrow Wilson High School for seventeen years. I am very proud to say I taught critical race theory twenty five years ago. My students read and considered the poems of Phillis Wheatley and Langston Hughes, the novels of Ralph Ellison, Richard Wright, Toni Morrison, Zora Neale Hurston and Alice Walker, the essays of James Baldwin and the speeches of Frederick Douglas.

I would digress from our study of literature, its context and meaning, to seek to have students understand the actions of our school's namesake when he was president of our country. Woodrow Wilson used the full power of the federal government to crush the careers of African-Americans. He, more than any other president before him or since, was responsible for the formal segregation of this city and nation. It is a very good thing for you to remove his name from its place of honor on a school in our city.

But switching only his first name becomes a half measure. It wouldn't do to replace Strom with Bob Thurmond, say, or change out George for Mike Wallace. If we're going to definitely repudiate the evils these people did in the past to the citizens of our country we can't simply substitute one first name for another. Such an action conveys an attitude of convenience or accommodation to the man's legacy. It won't do for us to say, "Oh, he may have been a bad guy, but it's too much trouble to start over again with a new name. Let's just pretend we're going to do something here, change the first name."

We are asking you to make the statement that this man's last name is what also needs to be struck from its place of honor.

We also ought to honor our own people, those who fought and educated our city's citizens. If we're going to take on the responsibilities and duties of an independent state in these United States, we should begin to recognize those who got us here, not someone, like August Wilson, who has no connection at all to this city. He receives many honors as an outstanding playwright. As deserving of honor are our teachers, our principals, our school superintendents. Their names ought to appear on our public buildings.

Edna Jackson and Vincent Reed, combined, received more votes on the recent public poll than August Wilson did, 36% to his 29%. The council decided, in another instance, to disregard the results of a referendum that favored a raise in the minimum wage. You understand that the voters elect you to make public policy. Complex issues are not ones to be made by a simple referendum, based upon the snap judgment of alumni, particularly when faculty and students at this school overwhelmingly endorse Edna Jackson. We are requesting that you decide what name the school has. Base your decision on a complete break with the racist past, honor local heroes. Designate this school the Reed-Jackson High School.

Joe Riener

Oct. 6, 2021

TESTIMONY BEFORE D.C. COUNCIL OF THE WHOLE
SUPPORTING THE RENAMING OF WILSON HIGH SCHOOL
TO
AUGUST WILSON HIGH SCHOOL

Submitted by Alex Wilson

October 6, 2021

My name is Alex Wilson and I'm an Eaton, Deal Wilson parent . I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony today in enthusiastic support for renaming Wilson High School in honor of one of Americas finest playwrights and literary historians., August Wilson. It's all about history and who gets to tell it.

I have worked at Wilson High School for the past 25 years. For 20 of those years, I did not know the history in our own backyard. Just over 150 years ago, a settlement of some 300 recently freed slaves, under the shadow and security of the federal military Fort Reno began. Reno City was situated between Ft Reno and the fort's horse barns and gardens which is where today's Wilson High School campus begins. Remnants of the Reno City settlement are still visible today.

Reno City was methodically destroyed by white developers using all white Citizens Associations concerns about "blight and health". Even public education was used as an excuse to clear out Reno City. Wilson High School and Lafayette Elementary are built on lands that were once settlements of freed slaves. So many of these dynamics have parallels today. Deal Middle School and Wilson High School both teach the history of Reno City, and the segregation of the Rose School and Alice Deal...one African American one white. Today Deal and Wilson represent the largest and most diverse middle and high school populations in the District. How fast might that be changing?

So why August Wilson? You don't know what you don't know. His body of work is arguably the most extensive rich and challenging chronicle of the African American experience. August Wilson's Century Cycle tells stories of African American life throughout each decade of the 20th Century. "Ma Rainey's Black Bottom" and "Fences" hit the big screen in the last three years. Eight more movies are planned under the support and stewardship of Denzel Washington. It tells an often untold story, one that is unfamiliar or misunderstood by white Americans.

It's all about history and who gets to tell it. The Wilson high school community stopped going by "Woodrow Wilson" years and years ago. It's almost poetry that the city is on the verge of proactively renaming the school after August Wilson. In fact, we have already named our visual and performing arts program after him and plan a spring production of the Piano Lesson.

In closing, for the past 25 years, I have had the honor of watching nearly 10,000 Wilson Tigers walk the stage at commencement. Each year, on average, these 400 graduates attend over 200 colleges or

careers sites located in more than 45 states or countries. Our graduates are awesome ambassadors throughout America representing Washington, DC. There is no better recognition for Washington, DC than for these graduates to also represent August Wilson High School.

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Mams [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 3:57 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Bill 24-286 Testimony

Good morning, Chairman Mendelson and distinguished members of the DC City Council —

Trailblazer, pioneer, mentor and most importantly— outstanding educator. These are just a few of the words that describe Edna Burke Jackson. Many knew her as the best History teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School. However, I knew her as “Aunt Eddie”!

I am Paula Burke Duckett, the neice of Edna Burke Jackson and I am asking the Council to reconsider naming Woodrow Wilson High School in honor of my “Aunt Eddie”.

Many of you likely know Edna Jackson was the first Black female educator at Wilson. But I know her as a scholar, a product of DC Public Schools, and Dunbar High School class of 1928 Valedictorian. I know “Aunt Eddie” as a person who completed Howard University Summa Cum Laude in three years. I know her as a young lady who was personally invited by Mary McCleod Bethune to teach at Bethune-Cookman College, but instead chose to continue her education.

During her 36 year career as a teacher she made a lasting impact on every life she touched, especially mine. Perhaps that is why I

became a teacher and administrator in DCPS for more than 30 years.

She began her DCPS career at Cardozo in 1940, but it was the summer of 1954 that altered her path — Aunt Eddie was chosen as one of the teachers to integrate Wilson. She navigated teaching in an unsupportive environment and was ignored by many of her white colleagues. Nevertheless, she persisted, and did not lose her composure or dignity. She used her demeanor, wit and wry sense of humor to challenge her students to think critically. She rose above the racism at Wilson to become respected by students, parents and teachers until her retirement 22 years later.

When asked to identify a person, other than family, who has impacted your life, rarely is the response a playwright. The most frequent response is a teacher, and my Aunt Eddie is that teacher —one who is a product of DC Schools, taught in DC Schools and one who inspired many generations in THIS city. While she may not be a playwright whose only contributions to DC include being part of the curriculum and sharing the last name Wilson, she is one of DC's own trailblazers.

Renaming Woodrow Wilson High School in honor of Edna Jackson will memorialize her place in DC history and preserve the educational values to which she devoted her life. Most importantly, it will provide the District of Columbia a unique opportunity and first — to name a high school after a highly regarded, local African American female educator. It is for these reasons, that I challenge the Council and officials of this city to

reconsider the naming of Wilson High School after Edna Burke Jackson!

Thank you for you providing me the opportunity to speak.

Paula Burke Duckett

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Guy Durant [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, October 4, 2021 9:07 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Renaming Woodrow Wilson Sr. High to "August Wilson" Senior High School

Dear City Council: Here is my written Testimony for the hearing on Renaming Wilson High School this Wednesday 10/6/21. Please copy and paste this email below (indented & bold) as part of my testimony. Thank you.

"My Name is Guy Durant and I graduated from Wilson High School in 1982 and I live in Ward 5 in NE near the Brookland/CUA metro. I am a native Washingtonian and I lived in Ward 3 at the time of attending Woodrow Wilson High School in the early 80's.

I am testifying today to support the Mayor's choice to rename Woodrow Wilson High School, to "August Wilson" Senior High School. August Wilson is considered a notable African-American writer and is a great choice for the school.

We as Alumni have invested a lot into the "Wilson" name and we as Wilson Tigers don't want to lose that moniker. I understand the concerns about keeping the Wilson name and I attended Wilson in the 1980's ignorant of President Wilson's racist past and had I known, I would have chalked it up to "normal racism" for the time (If such a thing exists), since Washington, Jefferson and many other founding fathers were also racists, but I don't advocate for removing all monuments or names of racists, since that would pretty much eliminate most of America's founding fathers. Rather, I think education is the key and when we rename, just remember we have to be aware of human frailties too. A few years ago, we might have named schools after Bill Cosby or a Boy Scout Troop Leader or a Priest with a questionable past, maybe we might have named another future Music School after R. Kelley had we not known about his crimes. Even Dr. King was not perfect, but we love him. My only point is that when we rename, let's also teach about Why we renamed. By keeping the names similar, we will be teaching the reason for the Rename more than if we simply forget about the former President altogether. Since Wilson was a former President, he will never be completely forgotten, but he can be chastised and shamed by renaming the building to a "Better Wilson" (August Wilson) and isn't that what we want?... A Better Version of ourselves and our History? Therefore, to make a "Better Wilson" High School, we need a "Better Wilson" to take over the Name and Legacy of the School.

If your parent or spouse was abusive, you may change the family surname sometimes, but often the children of the Father even after divorce or pain still carry the man's name for better or worse, but sometimes that is also a Reminder to the Children of the Pain they have Overcome and giving them a Chance to Redeem the Family Name and make "Better" legacies for that otherwise hurtful name. I don't think Woodrow Wilson can be redeemed because of his racist past, but August Wilson can make a "Better Wilson" Name and future for our School. Woodrow Wilson was despicable, but he was also elected by a Racist Nation, so I figure it was par for the course at the time. Let's use the Good "August Wilson" name to replace and contrast why we changed the name 10 or 20 years from now. We changed the name not to forget but to remember how a good legacy overcomes a bad name, but symbols don't fix history, only hard work fighting for social justice will fix the future. I am a descendent of Thomas Jefferson and Black and Native American ancestors in Charlottesville. I still have family in Charlottesville, Virginia. I know that Racism is a legacy that lasts, but would I remove Jefferson from my history?... Probably not. I live with that cruel past and move on towards a greater future. I don't feel the need to forget Evil men to transcend beyond them. Renaming may help, but I look forward. Maybe I am too old to ask for wiping out all racist names, but the new generation may wish to think about the fact that "nobody's perfect", instead we must celebrate how "We Shall Overcome" became "We Have Overcome" in the Name of "August Wilson".

-Guy Durant

[REDACTED]
Wilson Class of 1982

My name is Clinton Edward Scott, Jr. I grew up in Washington, D.C. and consider myself a native Washingtonian. I attended Woodrow Wilson High School from 1966 – 1968. From 1963 – 1965, I attended Jefferson Junior High School in southwest D.C. I met Vincent Reed in 1963. Back then Vincent Reed was my print shop teacher and he quickly became my mentor and friend. The 60's were an exciting time to be alive and Vince and I were swept up in all of the turbulence of that era—the fight for Civil Rights, the struggle against apartheid, systemic racism, de facto segregation both here and overseas—in short, all of the burdens and baggage springing from the legacy of America's Civil War and European colonialism.

I was young, impressionable, and passionate about all these things back then and so was Vince. We spent numerous times after school was officially over locked in heated debate, arguing over the merits of “what policies are needed NOW to bridge the racial divide in the United States and how those policies should be formulated. **Heavy conversation indeed for a precocious 13-year-old!** By the time I graduated in 1965, Vince and I found ourselves more in agreement than disagreement and a lasting friendship was forged. Little did I realize at the time, the profound impact our give and take verbal exchanges would have on my life and career choices. A couple of years later, I met up with Vince again when he became the assistant principal at Woodrow Wilson, and we picked up right where we left off. As it turned out, life had great things in store for Vince. As everyone here knows, Dr. Reed went on to become the Superintendent of D.C. Public Schools, Assistant Secretary for Elementary and Secondary Education at the U.S. Department of Education, and Vice-President for communications at the Washington Post.

I met Edna Jackson at Woodrow Wilson in 1966. She was my history teacher. I will not forget her because she, too, made a lasting impression on me. One afternoon, I dropped by her office to ask her a question about a grade she had given me on a quiz. It wasn't a bad grade, a “B” or “B+” if memory serves but I thought I deserved an “A.” I remember her sadly shaking her head and saying “Clinton, people who look like you don't do well here.” Well, if Dr. Jackson's motivation was to light a fire under me, she sure succeeded. When I walked out of her office, I was determined to ace her class no matter what it took! For the rest of the school year, I studied hard but especially hard for her history course. It did not matter if it was a quiz, mid-term or final exam, Dr. Jackson would always give me “A-s” and “B+s,” never an outright “A.”

And yet, here I am at this hearing 55 years later, pleading with you to rename the school after her or Vincent Reed. Why? I'll tell you why. Because it reminds me of a Paulo Coelho quote used by a fellow USCT soldier every time he signs off on a piece of correspondence: "The world is changed by your example, not by your opinion." Both Dr. Vincent Reed and Dr. Edna Jackson changed the world by their positive example. They led by giving us a glimpse of what our world will look like if we encourage and promote the values of integrity, intellectual curiosity, honesty, and hard work.

Now, contrast this vision with the vision of Woodrow Wilson. Woodrow Wilson was a dyed-in-the wool unapologetic racist. He was born in Staunton, Virginia in 1856 and grew up in Georgia during the Civil War. His parents supported the Confederacy. Woodrow Wilson wrote a 5-volume textbook entitled "A History of the American People" that popularized Lost Cause sentiments. From 1966 to 1968, I silently endured the humiliation of entering the doors of a high school every day that bore his name. I could nothing about it in 1966. **Today, I proudly wear my Civil War re-enactor's uniform to implore you to change the name of my high school from Woodrow Wilson to Vincent E. Reed or Edna Jackson.**

The time for talk is over. Now, is the time to act. And to act boldly and swiftly. Thank you for allowing me to say what I could not say 55 years ago. My time is up, and I thank you for listening to this old Civil War re-enactor.

Testimony of Tim Hannapel on Behalf of
The DC History and Justice Collective
DC Council Committee of the Whole, “August Wilson HS
Designation Act of 2021” (Bill 24-286)
October 6, 2021

Chair Mendelson, DC Council Members,

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on behalf of the DC History and Justice Collective. My name is Tim Hannapel, and I’m a resident of Ward 2 and a graduate of Wilson HS, Class of 1977, and one of six brothers and sisters who all graduated from Wilson in the 1970’s and 80’s. Judith Ingram, a Ward 3 resident and parent of two recent Wilson graduates, and I co-founded the D.C. History and Justice Collective in 2018, born out of the conviction that no DC public school should bear the name of a figure who deliberately set back the Black community of Washington and left a legacy of systemic racism that poisons our city and our nation to this day.

We might have called our group the Committee to Change the Name of Woodrow Wilson High School, but we knew that the stakes were much greater than one school in one quadrant of one city.

The decision we make as a community will speak volumes about the values we stand for and want to pass on to our children. We want them to know their history, and to use that knowledge to seek justice not just for themselves, but for the greater community. We want the names of public institutions and monuments to hold meaning. We reject half-measures and compromises to make some of our neighbors feel more comfortable while not facing up to how we got here.

Renaming the school for August Wilson would be a colossal failure. There can be no dispute that – *but for his last name* -- August Wilson would never have made the list of names meaningful to the community. As we have watched renaming processes across the country, we see the regressive attempts to appeal to nostalgia or the need to protect “heritage,” a code word for the racially unjust system we have honored for far too long.

Let’s not forget the history of Wilson High School. It was built to serve the students of the segregated white neighborhoods built on the bones of the thriving, predominantly Black community of Reno City. The residents of that community were evicted, their property seized and their homes destroyed. City planners, real estate developers, financiers and white residents colluded to keep Black residents out. And the school was named after one of the architects of segregation.

Decades later, we still feel the consequences of segregation in and around Wilson High School, not least in the arguments of parents who want to keep the Wilson brand to preserve their

students' advantages. We have spoken with advocates who argue that taking that name away would harm the students' chances of getting into the colleges of their choice.

By insisting that the school's name remain Wilson to continue supporting the students who least need the help, Ward 3 parents perpetuate the inequitable educational outcomes in this city.

They are among the loudest advocates for getting the school renamed with as little friction as possible, by just sticking with the name Wilson. But moving on this way means forgetting, and naming this school after *any* Wilson makes forgetting all that much easier.

Knocking Woodrow Wilson's name off the school entrance is more than a historical correction; it is a statement of our values that should be made loud and clear. August Wilson does not do the job of restorative justice.

The DC History and Justice Collective has been advocating and working on this issue for more than three years. We are students, parents, alumni, neighbors, historians and residents who have put the task of educating the community about our history first. As a collective, we have drawn on the expertise, ideas and passions of many, many people who care about this school.

Today, the Collective stands proudly with the supporters of two path-breaking Black DCPS educators with strong ties to the school and a unique capacity to inspire the students of today: Edna Jackson and Vincent Reed. Students, faculty, and alumni have written eloquently in their favor, recalling the risks they took to pursue equitable outcomes for all their students. The DC Council must not miss this opportunity to honor these two larger-than life heroes.

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Tim Hannapel [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 12, 2021 8:36 PM
To: Mendelson, Phil (COUNCIL); McDuffie, Kenyan (Council); Bonds, Anita (Council); Silverman, Elissa (Council); White, Robert (Council); Henderson, Christina (Council); Nadeau, Brianne K. (Council); Pinto, Brooke (Council); Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL); Lewis-George, Janeese (Council); Allen, Charles (Council); Gray, Vincent (Council); White, Sr., Trayon (Council); Committee of the Whole (Council)
Cc: Judith Ingram
Subject: Fwd: Supplement to Record of "August Wilson HS Designation Act of 2021"

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the DC Council:

Supplement to Record of "August Wilson HS Designation Act of 2021" Bill 24-286

Thank you again for holding the hearing last week on the "August Wilson HS Designation Act of 2021" (Bill 24-286). We are writing on behalf of the D.C. History and Justice Collective to supplement the record with media links that document the strong public sentiment and community support in favor of renaming the school for Vince Reed and/or Edna B. Jackson. Specifically, Chair Mendelson asked about the Wilson Beacon opinion piece endorsing Mrs. Jackson, as well as evidence of the Wilson faculty petition that strongly supported Mrs. Jackson.

We also include other links to a sample of Washington Post Op-eds, and Letters to the Editor. We note that we are aware of no similar public expressions of support for August Wilson.

Sincerely—

Judith Ingram and Tim Hannapel
D.C. History and Justice Collective

Wilson Beacon Endorsement of Edna B. Jackson, Faculty Petition, and Related Items

Wilson Beacon, [The Beacon Endorses Edna B Jackson for Wilson's New Name](#) December 2, 2020, by The Beacon Staff.

Washington City Paper, [Wilson High School's Student Newspaper Endorses Edna B. Jackson for School's New Name](#): The Beacon's staff is striving to make the Voices of Woodrow Wilson High School Students Heard, December 11, 2020 by Ella Feldman

Wilson Beacon, [Faculty Survey Shows Strong Support for Edna Jackson](#) January 6, 2021, by Anna Arnsberger.

Wilson Beacon, [Good But Not Great: Wilson's Proposed Name Doesn't Do Justice To The Community](#) April 21, 2021, by Sarah Ghirmay-Morgan (endorsing Edna B. Jackson)

Washington Post Op-eds and Letters to the Editor Endorsing Vince Reed and/or Edna B. Jackson

Washington Post, [The Complicated Racial History of the High School D.C. is Renaming: The Best Choice to Replace Woodrow Wilson is his Antithesis: The School's First Female Black Teacher](#), December 28, 2020, by Stefan Fatsis (endorsing Edna B. Jackson).

Washington Post, [Woodrow Wilson High School is No More. Here's Who the School Should Be Named After](#) October 20, 2020, by Colbert King (endorsing Vince Reed).

Washington Post, [Vincent Reed Devoted His Life to Students. Renaming Wilson High is the Best Way to Honor His Legacy](#) December 8, 2020, by Courtland Milloy (endorsing Vince Reed).

Washington Post, [A New Name for Wilson HS? How About Honoring One Very Brave Educator](#) March 30, 2019, by Jay Mathews (endorsing Vince Reed)

Washington Post (Letters to the Editor) [Rename Wilson High For These Two Educators](#) December 6, 2020, by Judith Ingram and Tim Hannapel (endorsing Vince Reed AND Edna B. Jackson).

Washington Post (Letters to the Editor) [Here's Whom We Should Rename Woodrow Wilson High School After](#) October 25, 2020, by Patricia Eanet, Don Graham, and Jack Koczela (endorsing Vince Reed).

Washington Post (Letters to the Editor), [Rename Woodrow Wilson High for Edna Jackson](#) March 13, 2019, by Andy Moursund.

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Donald Graham [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, October 4, 2021 5:39 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Proposed testimony CORRECTED

Hello. I am Donald Graham, a lifelong DC resident now living in Ward 2. I sent proposed testimony earlier and send this revised version to correct two obvious errors. Thank you.

The DC Public Schools should honor one of its own greatest exemplars by renaming Woodrow Wilson Senior HS in honor of Vincent E. Reed. Vince was the first Black principal of Wilson, the greatest superintendent of the late 20th century, and the creator—not one of the creators, the creator--of an institution of lasting importance to the city, Benjamin Banneker Senior HS.

Vincent spent an entire career at the DC Public Schools. The 14th of 17 children in a family in St. Louis, he was captain of the football team at West Virginia State before coming to Washington as a graphic arts teacher. He was smart, hard-working and a born leader; he worked his way up through the system and became the first African-American vice-principal and then Principal at Wilson. You will hear from many Wilson students of those years describing the wonderful way he led the school. In a few years, he became the deputy superintendent of schools. After a period of turmoil, when eight superintendents came and went in 12 years, Vince became the superintendent in 1975.

Addressing everyone who worked in the school system, Vince made clear that he would focus on simple goals: every school would focus on teaching reading, writing and math above all else. For all the flaws of standardized tests, he was willing to have his superintendency judged by test results.

The public face of the school system he inherited was chaos. Books and supplies were not being delivered to classrooms on time; teachers went unpaid. Vince once told me that one of his predecessors had hired teachers without giving them a test of any kind, more or less on a first-come first-served basis. Vince quickly address the chaos and somehow solved it. Quickly, the administrative problems were addressed. Complaints about teachers' pay fell almost to none.

And then, miracle of miracles, city-wide test scores started to rise, three years in row.

By now, Vince had a city full of admirers and only one group of detractors—the DC school board. This long story centered on Vince's refusal to place board members' relatives and political supporters in DCPS jobs.

It became pretty clear that the board—with the exception of Vince's perennial champion,

Carol Schwartz, was trying to get him to resign by turning down his favorite projects. And there's no question what his favorite was. Vince wanted to create a college prep high school in D.C.—Benjamin Banneker Senior High School. The school board repeatedly turned him down.

After a last turndown—the third, I believe--Vince resigned. He quit the job he loved—and did it to call attention to what he believed could be a great school for future generations of DC students. It was a stunning act of principle—and it worked. What ensued was the closest thing to a spontaneous political uprising I have ever seen in Washington. Ordinary citizens called, wrote, and picketed the school board, demanding that they approve Banneker and re-hire Vince.

Then, reluctantly and narrowly, the board approved Banneker. Vince went on to become the Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Education and then, thank goodness, joined The Washington Post (where I worked) for 15 wonderful years during which he started the Agnes Meyer Teachers Awards for outstanding teaching in the DC, Maryland and Virginia school systems, another award honoring principals, and a principals' training institute the Post named for him. He started a scholarship program at Eastern High School, the Eastern 500 Club, whose successful graduates are everywhere in DC and in the country today.

But Vince's monument is Banneker. As you know well: every year since its creation, the school graduates about a hundred motivated and well-prepared students, almost every one of whom enrolls in college the following fall.

But that isn't Vince's only monument.

Vince Reed was loved. You couldn't walk a block with him; it would take half an hour as students and friends greeted him. He was tough enough to be a great superintendent, but loved for his smile and approachable manner. His widow Frances is still alive and a Ward 4 resident.

I did not have the honor of knowing Ms. Edna Jackson the first Black teacher at Wilson, who was beloved and deserving of honor. Vince did know her; since he was assistant principal and then principal at Wilson, they worked together for some years. To have the school named for these two great educators would be a fitting way to honor both.

It speaks volumes to me that Judith Ingram, who led the DC Collective that succeeded in renaming Wilson HS, favors the name of Ms. Jackson and is happy to have the school named for both of them.

It would be the first senior high school in Washington named for Black educators.

I revere the work of August Wilson; I believe I own every play he ever wrote and I have seen

most of them. He is a truly great writer.

But: what does it mean to re-name Woodrow Wilson High School? We are renaming it because the late former President was an out and out racist and does not deserve the honor of having a DC public school named for him. You, the council, and those who advocate keeping the Wilson name know better than I why the city would keep the last name of Wilson on the building. I would guess there are alumni who are proud that they went to Wilson HS, even if they do not admire Woodrow Wilson. They want to keep saying they went to Wilson. They have every reason to be proud of their school. But we, the city, have every reason to rename it. Actually rename it. Do we want it still to be Wilson HS; Woodrow Wilson up to 2020, August Wilson thereafter?

If we are renaming the school to get rid of Woodrow Wilson's name, should we not get rid of his name? All of it? In many of the Virginia counties near Washington, schools named for Robert E. Lee, Stonewall Jackson and J.E.B. Stuart are being renamed. I don't know a single instance where the local government has sought to keep the last name of this school by naming it for another Lee, Jackson or Stuart.

When the former Woodrow Wilson High School opens next year with a new name, the most important people in it will be the students. The next-most-important will be the teachers, the principal and the other people who work for the DC Public Schools.

Why not honor their work by naming DC's largest public senior high school after two great career educators: Wilson's first Black teacher and its first Black principal. Let one of those names be that of Vincent Reed, who cared enough about DC students to resign the job he loved so that a great public school would be created. What a lesson for DC's high-school students: you can stand on principal and that stand can make a difference.

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS (DCPS)**



Public Hearing
on

Bill 24-286, August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021
Bill 24-339, John Lewis Elementary School Designation Act of 2021

Testimony of
Shanita Burney
Engagement and Partnerships Officer of DC Public Schools

Good afternoon Chairman Mendelson, members of the Committee of the Whole, and staff. I am Shanita Burney, Engagement and Partnerships Officer of the District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS). I am proud to share that I'm in my 13th year at DCPS, a District resident, and have a 10th grader at Roosevelt High School. Thank you for the opportunity to speak before you today and thank you for your interest in and support for our work.

DC Public Schools operates over 100 schools, and our mission requires us to deliver education in a school environment that provides the conditions for student success, close the achievement gap, and ensure schools are community anchors that reflect the communities they serve. Schools are named after people, places, or services provided at that location. School names serve to identify the school community, establish a legacy, and develop a sense of pride among students and families in their schools and the traditions of DCPS. Some of these names, however, have perpetuated a history that is not reflective of the values of our school communities and city at large. In summer 2020, Mayor Bowser formed the District of Columbia Facilities and Commemorative Expressions ([DCFACES](#)) Working Group. She charged the group with evaluating named DC government-owned facilities and making recommendations as to what, if any, actions need to be taken if the person the facility is named for is inconsistent with DC values and in some way encouraged the oppression of African Americans and other communities of color or contributed to our long history of systemic racism. In the group's [executive summary](#), released in early September 2020, they recommended renaming 21 DCPS schools and school buildings, including Woodrow Wilson High School and West Elementary School.

Community Engagement

DCPS intends to carry out the 21 name changes over the next four to five years for schools whose namesakes are not reflective of current DCPS values. Any individual for whom a DC Public School is to be named must have made a significant contribution to society and must exemplify DCPS' mission, vision and values. The individual must not have enslaved other humans, supported the institution of slavery, furthered systemic racism, supported the oppression of persons of color and/or women, been a member of any supremacist organization, or committed any acts that violate the DC Human Rights Act. In this process, DCPS understands that community engagement is crucial at every step.

Thus, there were similar public engagement processes for both Wilson and West. These processes follow the public engagement strategy that DCPS employs for school renaming. The public engagement included an online nomination form for the new school names, which was shared with school staff, students, families, alumni, community groups, citywide listservs, and via social media. DCPS representatives also attended several stakeholder meetings, including Parent Teacher Student Organization meetings (PTSO) and Local School Advisory Team Meeting (LSAT), and met with Student Government Association (SGA) members to discuss the name change process, share the nomination form, and answer questions. A group of DCPS and school stakeholders were selected to vet the nominated names and decided on a short list to be published for final public input. The public input form was shared through the same channels as the nominations form and directly with individuals who submitted a nomination. Both forms received substantial amount of community input. Through this process, DCPS supported and engaged these schools' community members and considered their input in the decision-making process. At the same time, this process empowered all members of the community – but especially students – to look closely at their school's history and community identity.

Woodrow Wilson

Wilson's situation was unique because there had been ongoing public discussion about changing the name, which had broad support among stakeholders, including current students and families, staff members, alumni, the Advisory Neighborhood Commission (ANC), and the broader DC community. Woodrow Wilson's racist legacy and policies of segregation acutely carried out against Black federal employees in the District, and particularly Black residents of Reno City, where the school now sits, make him an unseemly, continued namesake for the school and do not reflect our city's values. There were over 2,000 nomination submissions and feedback from over 6,000 individuals on the Public Input survey in Fall 2020. From the seven finalists, August Wilson received the most votes of those who indicated a preference – 29%. The proposed rename from Woodrow Wilson High School to August Wilson High School honors the Pulitzer and Tony award-winning playwright who chronicled the African American experience in the 20th Century.

August Wilson's ten plays, together entitled The American Century Cycle, have graced the stages of Washington, D.C. for decades. His work is part of DCPS' high school curriculum, allowing our scholars to explore the timeless themes represented in his words and characters. The August Wilson Legacy strongly holds Mr. Wilson's words as an important instrument in the affirmation of our humanity, in this changing, and often challenging world.

West

In the case of West, Joseph R. West, the school's namesake, is found to have ordered the torture and murder of an Apache chief, prompting the decision to change the school's name. There were 140 nomination submissions and feedback from over 600 individuals on the public input survey in spring 2021. DCPS and school stakeholders met multiple times in March 2020 after the public survey was launched to decide on six final names for additional public input. From the six finalists, John Lewis received the most votes of those who indicated a preference – 31%. Survey results indicated John Lewis Elementary School as the overall preferred name and the most popular among almost all respondent subgroups. The proposed rename from West Elementary School to John Lewis Elementary School honors the legacy of a longtime Georgia congressman and champion of civil and human rights and civic engagement. Congressman Lewis was a leader of the civil rights movement, during which time he suffered arrest and police brutality, and he helped to organize the 1963 March on Washington. Throughout his long career in public service, Congressman Lewis was also a staunch supporter of DC statehood, cosponsoring legislation to make Washington, DC the fifty-first state every term he served in Congress. Known for powerful speeches, he advocated for getting into "good trouble" all his life. Congressman Lewis was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2011. Lewis's extraordinary life provides lessons for activists today on how to confront racial violence, forge productive alliances and transform American democracy.

Moving Forward

DC Public Schools will continue our commitment to ensuring that the names of our schools reflect the mission and values of our community. We're proud to celebrate and honor the legacy of the late Congressman John Lewis and the legacy of the award-winning African American Playwright August Wilson. At DCPS, where a majority of our school leaders and students, and nearly half of our teachers, identify as Black, we are committed to ensuring that the names we

call our schools reflect our values, our community, and our commitment to social justice. DCPS is committed to diversity and recognizes the barriers faced by marginalized and underrepresented groups, and we will honor these groups throughout our renaming process.

I want to close by recognizing the contribution of our school communities through their advocacy and dialogue at this pivotal moment in the District's history. I'm happy to answer any questions you have at this time.

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: John Friedson [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, October 13, 2021 10:50 AM
To: Mendelson, Phil (COUNCIL); McDuffie, Kenyan (Council); Bonds, Anita (Council); Silverman, Elissa (Council); White, Robert (Council); Henderson, Christina (Council); Nadeau, Brianne K. (Council); Pinto, Brooke (Council); Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL); Lewis-George, Janeese (Council); Allen, Charles (Council); Gray, Vincent (Council); White, Sr., Trayon (Council); Committee of the Whole (Council); 'Cc: Judith Ingram'
Subject: Renaming of Wilson HS

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the DC Council—

As a 1969 graduate of WWHS, I write this in support of the renaming of WWHS to Vincent Reed HS. During turbulent times in our city following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., many racial tensions overflowed to our beloved high school. The Class of 1969 witnessed a surge in African American students that remarkably increased the percentage of Black students from all over the western parts of the city. It is through the leadership and teaching of Vincent Reed that I have become the person that I am today in terms of racial awareness and respect. You see, Mr. Reed is the first person of authority that I ever encountered in my life having grown up in Ward 3/Forest Hills being largely White and affluent. I found Mr. Reed to be compassionate, understanding, and a great teacher. As a result, I participated in an exchange program with Anacostia HS, and then went on to educate myself on the history of African American history and obtained a MS in Sociology from the New School For Social Research in NYC. In addition, in my senior year 68-69 I was selected to be co-captain of the WW football team. On a personal level, Mr. Reed and his leadership serves me well to this day and therefore I sing his praises.

In addition to my personal story, Mr. Reed went on to have an enormous impact on the city, serving first as DCPS Superintendent, then for many years at the Washington Post as a community liaison and Don Graham's right hand man.

In my mind there is no other choice other than to rename WWHS in the name of Vincent Reed!

Thanking you all for your consideration.

John Friedson

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Freedman, Jay W. [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 3, 2021 6:43 AM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Renaming Wilson High

As a graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School ('60), I support the renaming. I do not, however, support bestowing the honor on August Wilson, a remarkable playwright, who is a native of Pittsburgh, with no connection to Washington, other than the frequent production of his plays (as is the case everywhere in the country). It simply makes no sense.

What I do support is "Jackson-Reed" in honor of Edna Jackson, who was the first Black to teach at Wilson and was beloved and respected by her students, and Vincent Reed, the first Black Principal at Wilson, and later the first Black Superintendent of DC Public Schools. These two would be worthy and relevant honorees. They represent scholarship and achievement in a way that would make the current students proud of the heritage of the name.

As an aside, I also believe that there should some lobby display (plaque?) acknowledging the former name and explaining the good and questionable aspects of the Wilson Presidency, including the historical context. I can assure that Edna Jackson, an extraordinary history teacher would prefer that to a complete erasure.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sent from my iPhone

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Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Carolyn Flanagan [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 3:02 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Cc: Cash, Evan W. (Council); dchjcollective@gmail.com
Subject: Renaming of Wilson High School

To Whom It May Concern:

As a member of the class of Wilson High School of 1960 who was taught Modern European History by Edna Jackson, I agree with many of the testimonials concerning her exceptional ability to teach and to connect with students. I remember feeling that I didn't want to let her down by not living up to her expectations. She was, as many others have stated, my most influential high school teacher.

The point of combining Jackson with Reed, to avoid the problem of Jackson being assumed to refer to Andrew Jackson is well made. They both exemplify the influence of outstanding black educators, and since schools are not often named for educators, even though they should be, this would be a way to right two wrongs.

August Wilson deserves his own honors, not the backdoor honor of having the same last name of the person being displaced from an honorary position.

I hope the council will consider the opinions of so many of the former Wilson High School students who thought this issue so important that they gave you their thoughts.

Carolyn Hubbard Flanagan, Class of 1960

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Leslie Pace <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Wednesday, October 6, 2021 2:42 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Renaming Wilson High School

Hello,

Although August Wilson is a worthy name, Edna Jackson is better.

I graduated from Wilson in 1986. I am definitely in favor of changing the name, but I feel that August Wilson is not the right change. He was a fine playwright and would be an okay name, but he has no personal connection to Washington, DC. If we lived in Pittsburgh, August Wilson's hometown, I would be all for his name on our school, but we do not.

Edna Jackson is a far superior name choice. She was a local and part of the actual school history. Although I attended Wilson too late to have had her as a teacher, from comments I have read, she was an excellent teacher and citizen. I also think it is important to note that current Wilson students chose her name as their preferred candidate. And possibly most importantly, the name Edna Jackson would make the school the first public High School in DC to be named after a woman.

Changing the school's name to August Wilson is a bit of a cop-out. We have an opportunity to make a great change, please don't settle for a mediocre one.

Thank you.

Sincerely,
Leslie Pace
1986 graduate of Wilson High School

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 3, 2021 6:38 AM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council); Cash, Evan W. (Council)
Cc: dchjcollective@gmail.com
Subject: Jackson-Reed High School

Dear DC Council,

My name is John Miller, Wilson High School class of 1960.

I've been following the name story from my vantage of living here in South Africa for nearly 25 years. You won't be surprised to know that here, names (schools, institutions, streets, cities, etc.) are often controversial. The issues that arise from name changes are in one way or another a political interpretation of history (whether long ago or modern). There is always one group who seeks to change the name (the person) and another who defend the name (the person). Thankfully, that doesn't seem to be the case in the high school name before you.

BUT -- it seems you've already made up your mind, is that possible?? I see on your coming agenda Bill 24-286, August Wilson High School Designation Act of 2021. No alternative bill proposed?? Just yes or no on this bill?? That's not right at all!!

DO NOT APPROVE THIS BILL.

As far as I am aware, Edna Jackson, Vincent Reed, and August Wilson were all exemplary human beings. But one of them – August Wilson – had nothing at all to do with Washington DC, much less the high school. That he was such a notable playwright is not debatable.

Edna Jackson and Vincent Reed, however, had everything to do with Washington DC and the education of its residents. They were both remarkable and distinguished.

When people talk about “**the right thing to do**”, most of those ‘things’ require great courage, political and personal. In the decision before you now, however, it doesn't take much courage at all to do the right thing: name the school after Edna Jackson and Vincent Reed. Honor their work and their lives – all of which had an enormous and enduring impact on their students and the school itself. And then – use them and this whole process as a teaching opportunity not only for the current and future students and faculty, but also for the entire city of Washington. Lessons to be taught, lessons to be learned. Including the lessons of all the issues that arise in name changes – emotions, politics, history.

Regards,

John Miller



Virus-free. www.avast.com

To Chairman Mendelson and members of the Committee

I am pleased to testify on behalf of renaming Wilson HS after August Wilson. I so rarely testify on matters before Council Committees; the last time was in connection with the Wilson pool and access for the community that surrounds it. But I find myself testifying today on no less significant a matter.

Woodrow Wilson was a progressive Democrat, a brilliant internationalist, and a rabid segregationist. His position with respect to the federal work force left a legacy that is still being undone in the present day.

As such, the community, our community with its diverse student body has agreed that it is unseemly to have one of DC's preeminent secondary schools carry his name. But in removing his name, and replacing it, we should seek to replace it with the name of a person whose stature is sufficiently great to eradicate the former president's connection, whose name is magical in the theatrical anthology, whose body of works, the Century Cycle, revered the everyday man, common laborer, folks that the former President despised. We should seek to rename the school for a person whose canon of works, as is befitting a secondary school, will inspire creation of a broad, inviting, and inspiring curriculum; whose accolades are sufficiently numerous to wipe the legacy of the former president from our memory with minimal disruption to the institution and the building itself. I endorse renaming the school August Wilson HS.

Corinne McIntosh-Douglas



cmmdouglas@gmail.com

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Martin, Kimberly (DCPS) [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 7:42 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: August Wilson- Council Testimony

October 5, 2021

Dear City Council Members:

Years ago, the dedicated and civically minded teachers at Wilson High School began a process for renaming the school. Over the years, the staff have used petitions, class discussions, and surveys to both educate and inform students and the community about the racist legacy of President Woodrow Wilson. The DC History and Justice Collective catapulted the sentiment of teachers and students and articulated not just the obvious reasons why the name of the school should change, but also the history of land acquisition and theft in Reno City, which for many, personalized the call for change.

In response to our nation's reckoning with racial injustice, the city began a process to change the name of Woodrow Wilson High School. As our nation continues to wrestle with the injustices perpetrated by institutionalized racism, it is clear that an individual responsible for implementing racist government policies is not deserving of having an educational institution named for him. In the most diverse school in DCPS, where racial justice and activism are as much a part of the curriculum as Math and English, the school's name must represent a person more deserving of the honor; a person whose life and career worked for the benefit and not the detriment of people of color.

I am proud to be a part of a community-wide process to bring about racial and social justice to our school. Now, every member of our community can proudly say "Wilson High School," without carrying the heavy weight of the racist legacy of President Woodrow Wilson.

As a former English teacher, I could not be prouder to celebrate the new name of our high school. For decades, August Wilson's words have inspired pride, hope and determination for African American students especially, but for all students who study his work. His scholarship, career and legacy are ones to which every student can aspire. Please accept the proposed new name for the school, a name that was decided upon after considering input from over 6,000 students, staff, families, alumni, and others.

Kind regards,
Kim Martin (former Wilson principal)
Instructional Superintendent, DCPS

Kimberly Martin
Instructional Superintendent, Cluster VIII
C: 202-[REDACTED]



DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Joan Lubar [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 2:33 AM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Renaming WWHS

Dear Council members,

I understand you are voting to rename WWHS and I am all for that. I would like to share my choice of Edna Jackson, a beloved Wilson teacher for many years.

She was one of 2 African American teachers, hired to “integrate” Wilson. As my all time favorite high school teacher, she was inspiring, caring, knowledgeable and kind.

I did not know that she was also treated poorly by white teachers and staff. Never did we, as students, have any idea of the nastiness and disrespect she suffered.

Today you have a chance to honor her for her amazing bravery and accomplishments by renaming WWHS to Edna Jackson High School. Although it will mean extra costs, it is a small price to pay for the disgraceful behavior she received.

Thank you for your time,

Joan Lubar, class of 1960



Joan Lubar

The Sassy Sage



Author - [Rock & Roll at Any Age - rockandrollatanyage.com](http://rockandrollatanyage.com)

for details

Speaker, writer, nutrition and wellness consultant

My mission — To help people create strategies for Life, Health & Spiritual Wisdom

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: [REDACTED] t
Sent: Sunday, October 3, 2021 3:14 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council); Cash, Evan W. (Council)
Subject: In support of "Edna Jackson" for the new name for Woodrow Wilson High School

As a Woodrow Wilson H.S. student class of 1960, inspired by science and math, not only was I not then interested in history, I was intimidated by it and self conscious. When I was given the opportunity to be in Edna Jackson's U.S. history class I was drawn by the quiet consistency of her style. She had a compelling soft spoken poise and grace which pervaded the classroom with tranquil calm, putting students at ease. I had some great aunts like that with a sense of propriety, etiquette and kindness. I don't think it had much to do with race. It was a generational thing. She came from a generation that knew genuine self respect and showed respect for each individual that seems rare today. Perhaps it was that dignity which inspired her students. It is for that quality that our school should honor her name.

I have since learned of the many other remarkable contributions of Edna Jackson to our community. The other finalist names for our school are an accomplished school administrator in the D.C area and a recognized author whose affiliation is the coincidence of his name. But Administrators and writers, as important as they may be, are sometimes driven by less altruistic motives than teachers. It is the selfless teaching of the individual student performed so well to our school community over a career like Edna Jackson's that is deserving of the honor of the name of our cherished school.

Thank you for your consideration,
Richard Jacoby, M.D. '60

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Ann Ingram [REDACTED]
Sent: Thursday, October 7, 2021 10:00 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Renaming Wilson High School

Dear DC Council-of-the-Whole:

>> I think it's great that Wilson High School is going to be renamed, but DO think that choosing August Wilson as the namesake is missing the boat. Yes, it's convenient in that we don't have to change THAT much and it would save money. Alums and parents would still be able to refer fondly to "their" Wilson without having to differentiate theirs from the new.

>> But isn't that the whole point of renaming the school: to relinquish the hold of the old name and embrace the name or names of people who have not only had a connection to the school (which August Wilson has not) but who have had a positive effect on the education offered and the now more diverse population of students and faculty in that school? I would be happy with either Edna B. Jackson High School, named after a long-serving, popular teacher in the school, (would be the first high school in D.C. to be named after a woman, and an African-American woman at that!) or Vincent Reed High School, named after a beloved Principal of the school and DC Public School's Superintendent. OR celebrate both names! "Jackson - Reed High School" has a nice ring to it!

>> Sincerely yours, Ann Ingram, Grandmother of a 2018 and a 2021 graduate of the to-be-renamed High School in Ward 3.

>
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Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Sandra Hunnicutt [REDACTED]
Sent: Sunday, October 3, 2021 1:40 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Cc: Cash, Evan W. (Council)
Subject: In Support of Edna B. Jackson Name for Renaming of Woodrow Wilson High School

Dear City Council Members -

Edna Jackson was an outstanding educator and a lifelong inspiration to her students, including me. Her influence led me to develop a deep interest in history that I've continued to cultivate through the years.

Beyond her personal influence, I am also deeply impressed by Miss Jackson's work as a journalist for the Oklahoma Eagle, an African-American publication in Tulsa, Oklahoma, just a decade after the 1921 Tulsa race massacre, considered to be one of the worst acts of racial violence in American history. By joining the Eagle, she chose to fight racism on its very turf.

I strongly believe that Miss Jackson's passion for education and her trailblazing career at Wilson, where she was hired as one of the school's first Black teachers, make her the ideal candidate for the school's new name. It is an appropriate and fitting tribute that will bring attention to her life and career, inspiring many who have yet to learn about this outstanding woman, teacher and activist.

Sandra Sprague Hunnicutt, Class of 1960
Los Angeles, CA

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: THORVAL HICKMAN <[REDACTED]>
Sent: Monday, October 4, 2021 2:26 AM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council); Mendelson, Phil (COUNCIL); McDuffie, Kenyan (Council); Bonds, Anita (Council); Silverman, Elissa (Council); White, Robert (Council); Henderson, Christina (Council); Nadeau, Brianne K. (Council); Pinto, Brooke (Council); Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL); Lewis-George, Janeese (Council); Allen, Charles (Council); Gray, Vincent (Council); White, Sr., Trayon (Council); Cash, Evan W. (Council); [REDACTED]
Cc: [REDACTED]
Subject: The Renaming of Woodrow Wilson High School
Attachments: Attachemnt #1 - Edna Jackson Testimonials.pdf

Monday, October 3, 2021

Dear Mayor Bowser and City Council Members:

CHARACTER TESTIMONIALS - Attached is a trove of gathered testimonials from the Class of 1960 for Edna Burke Jackson regarding her insightful teaching, compassion and tolerance of racial slurs and ostracism. Her name honors a woman, an African American woman and an educator all her professional life par excellence.

Edna Burke Jackson also had great wisdom. One of the testimonials from a classmate, Professor Leland Barrows of Voorhees College, gives the following insight:

"I have recently learned that many of Mrs. Jackson's former students sought her out for advice on personal and academic matters well after they had graduated from high school. I understand that one or possibly two inter-racial couples contemplating marriage came to her for advice. She, it seems, "talked to [them] about how love was so rare that it should be treasured when found." Here is wisdom.

ACADEMIC / LITERARY BACKGROUND - Mrs. Jackson has an extensive record of her writings and would be an exemplar to all with her name on our high school. Professor Barrows wrote in his attached testimonial that Mrs. Jackson "taught high school in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1934 to 1940. While in Tulsa, Mrs. Jackson wrote a weekly column for the leading Black newspaper in that area, the *Oklahoma Eagle*... In 1940 Mrs. Jackson returned to Washington D.C. to teach history at Francis Cardozo High School until 1954 when she was selected to become the first Black teacher at Woodrow Wilson High School... From 1959 through 1970, she completed book reviews for the *Journal of Negro History* (now the *Journal of African American History*.)" She retired from teaching at Woodrow Wilson High School in 1976. (Material from these two publications will be an excellent source for high school student research.)

RATIONALE FOR THE JACKSON-REED COMPROMISE -There is only one irrational and non-substantive consideration for not having the sole name of Edna Burke Jackson as the school's eponym. To wit: With her sole name on our High School, it will become known as "Jackson High" just as our high school now is known as "Wilson High". Since numerous high schools are named for past U. S Presidents, the name of Andrew Jackson may immediately come to the local public and national minds. Andrew Jackson, the slave owner, should never be associated with our high school. The "Reed" name associated with "Jackson" will point the public mind to the broad prevalence of the Jackson name in our culture and take away the stigma of a slave owning Andrew Jackson.

We trust that Mr. Reed has an academic and literary background sufficient to complement Mrs. Jackson's stature in education. We can view this joint-naming as expressing the educational leadership balance needed in management and execution: Vincent Reed, the manager, can be seen as "leading from the front" and Edna Jackson, the educator, can be seen as "leading from behind", which style has been championed by Barack Obama during his administration.

DISSERVICE TO AUGUST WILSON'S MEMORY - And as to the disservice to the memory of the highly regarded playwright, August Wilson, a classmate, Professor Patricia Vigderman of Kenyon College, wrote that "the decision simply to alter the first name of the school's honoree is an insult both to the good faith in which the name change has been called for and to the Black playwright, whose name has been plugged in, in what seems an almost derisive way."

Sincerely,

Thorval Hickman

Thorval L. Hickman, Jr. (Class of 1960)

50 W. Bellmeade Place

The Woodlands, Texas 77382

832-663-5765



**TESTIMONIALS REGARDING THE CHARACTER AND PERSONAL NATURE OF
MRS. EDNA BURKE JACKSON,
WHOSE NAME IS IN CONTEST TO BE THE NEW EPONYM IN PLACE OF THE CURRENT NAME OF
WOODROW WILSON, A SCHOLAR AND POLITICIAN IN A RACIST SOCIETY**

The following are letter excerpts from alumni of Woodrow Wilson High School Class of 1960 regarding their experiences and memories of Edna Burke Jackson. They are edited by Thorval Hickman, who has added in bold italic font summary captions of many of Mrs. Jackson's qualities, honors and interests.

From Dale Jacobs Ugel, Woodrow Wilson High School Class of '60

Key Qualities – Wonderful teacher, great dignity and intelligence.

This was a very informative article [referring to the Stefan Fatsis article at the end of these testimonials]]. I get the impression [some] did not have the pleasure of knowing Mrs. Jackson. Once you had been in her class, you stopped noticing her race. She was a wonderful teacher and a woman of great dignity and intelligence. It was an honor to be in her classroom. I had her for two years.

From:

Frances (Fran) Stearns Nelson, Woodrow Wilson High School Class of '60

Key Qualities – Pleasure to have a great teacher, Senior class advisor, deserves honor

I had the pleasure of having Mrs. Jackson for Modern European History, I think it was, in 10th grade, and really liked her, a great teacher. She was also our senior class adviser, and I worked with her as a graduation planning committee member. She deserves some honor.

[Some have complained] that there is reverse racism at play by minorities, but in a way we do deserve it.

I can understand how for so many years blacks, many of whom are from families that trace their heritage way back to before most of the white people were here, and who made such a huge contribution to the success of America by their hard labor and forbearance of intolerable treatment, have had to watch as whites exercise their power and get all the recognition.

There are certainly many people of color who deserve to be honored for their accomplishments and contributions to this country.

From Sam Friedman, Woodrow Wilson High School Class of '60

Key Qualities – Admired her in our encounters, a giant in standing strong against evil comments

I would be very happy with the school being re-named for Edna Jackson. I had little contact with her, but admired what I did encounter. And for years afterwards, comparing my historical ignorance to those who took her European History class, I regretted not taking the opportunity.

And I remember the racism of some of the teachers we had. What a giant Edna Jackson was to be able to withstand all that evil bile. The other thing that I remember whenever we discuss this issue is that a number of Wilson students took part in the picketing (and a few in the merry go round sit-in) at Glen Echo in the summer of 1960. This included members of our class as well as people who graduated in 59, 61 and 62.

I also remember that there were a few members of our class who drove by the picket lines and called us names like "Communist" and "deluded"

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: michael harry [REDACTED]
Sent: Monday, October 4, 2021 9:05 PM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: Renaming of Woodrow Wilson High School

Good day Council members:

My name is Michael Harry, I am a 1969 African American graduate of Woodrow Wilson High School. I write this letter to urge you to "do the right thing" and replace the name of Woodrow Wilson with the new name of Vincent E Reed High School or as I have previously suggested Reed/Jackson High School. This is a great opportunity to honor two individuals who exemplified the excellence that our school is known for.

This is in no way meant to downplay the the important contributions of August Wilson, but Mr Wilson simply put was not a part of the Wilson High School family and did not have an impact on the students who came through Wison during their era.. So again I implore you to name our beloved school either Vincent Reed or Reed Jackson High School.

Thank you for your consideration.

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Tim Hannapel [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 12, 2021 8:36 PM
To: Mendelson, Phil (COUNCIL); McDuffie, Kenyan (Council); Bonds, Anita (Council); Silverman, Elissa (Council); White, Robert (Council); Henderson, Christina (Council); Nadeau, Brianne K. (Council); Pinto, Brooke (Council); Cheh, Mary (COUNCIL); Lewis-George, Janeese (Council); Allen, Charles (Council); Gray, Vincent (Council); White, Sr., Trayon (Council); Committee of the Whole (Council)
Cc: Judith Ingram
Subject: Fwd: Supplement to Record of "August Wilson HS Designation Act of 2021"

Dear Chairman Mendelson and Members of the DC Council:

Supplement to Record of "August Wilson HS Designation Act of 2021" Bill 24-286

Thank you again for holding the hearing last week on the "August Wilson HS Designation Act of 2021" (Bill 24-286). We are writing on behalf of the D.C. History and Justice Collective to supplement the record with media links that document the strong public sentiment and community support in favor of renaming the school for Vince Reed and/or Edna B. Jackson. Specifically, Chair Mendelson asked about the Wilson Beacon opinion piece endorsing Mrs. Jackson, as well as evidence of the Wilson faculty petition that strongly supported Mrs. Jackson.

We also include other links to a sample of Washington Post Op-eds, and Letters to the Editor. We note that we are aware of no similar public expressions of support for August Wilson.

Sincerely—

Judith Ingram and Tim Hannapel
D.C. History and Justice Collective

Wilson Beacon Endorsement of Edna B. Jackson, Faculty Petition, and Related Items

Wilson Beacon, [The Beacon Endorses Edna B Jackson for Wilson's New Name](#) December 2, 2020, by The Beacon Staff.

Washington City Paper, [Wilson High School's Student Newspaper Endorses Edna B. Jackson for School's New Name](#): The Beacon's staff is striving to make the Voices of Woodrow Wilson High School Students Heard, December 11, 2020 by Ella Feldman

Wilson Beacon, [Faculty Survey Shows Strong Support for Edna Jackson](#) January 6, 2021, by Anna Arnsberger.

Wilson Beacon, [Good But Not Great: Wilson's Proposed Name Doesn't Do Justice To The Community](#) April 21, 2021, by Sarah Ghirmay-Morgan (endorsing Edna B. Jackson)

Washington Post Op-eds and Letters to the Editor Endorsing Vince Reed and/or Edna B. Jackson

Washington Post, [The Complicated Racial History of the High School D.C. is Renaming: The Best Choice to Replace Woodrow Wilson is his Antithesis: The School's First Female Black Teacher](#), December 28, 2020, by Stefan Fatsis (endorsing Edna B. Jackson).

Washington Post, [Woodrow Wilson High School is No More. Here's Who the School Should Be Named After](#) October 20, 2020, by Colbert King (endorsing Vince Reed).

Washington Post, [Vincent Reed Devoted His Life to Students. Renaming Wilson High is the Best Way to Honor His Legacy](#) December 8, 2020, by Courtland Milloy (endorsing Vince Reed).

Washington Post, [A New Name for Wilson HS? How About Honoring One Very Brave Educator](#) March 30, 2019, by Jay Mathews (endorsing Vince Reed)

Washington Post (Letters to the Editor) [Rename Wilson High For These Two Educators](#) December 6, 2020, by Judith Ingram and Tim Hannapel (endorsing Vince Reed AND Edna B. Jackson).

Washington Post (Letters to the Editor) [Here's Whom We Should Rename Woodrow Wilson High School After](#) October 25, 2020, by Patricia Eanet, Don Graham, and Jack Koczela (endorsing Vince Reed).

Washington Post (Letters to the Editor), [Rename Woodrow Wilson High for Edna Jackson](#) March 13, 2019, by Andy Moursund.

Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Hanks, James J. [REDACTED]
Sent: Tuesday, October 5, 2021 5:08 AM
To: Committee of the Whole (Council)
Cc: Cash, Evan W. (Council)
Subject: Woodrow Wilson High School

Ladies and Gentlemen: I graduated from Woodrow Wilson High School in 1960. I was proud to go there and I was proud that the school was named after a president who was then generally regarded highly; but more information has since emerged and I am happy that the school will be renamed. Woodrow Wilson's achievements do not outweigh the invidiousness of his racist actions. In considering for whom to rename the school, I think that far and away the most worthy and deserving candidate is Edna Jackson. I am sure that by now you have informed yourselves about Mrs. Jackson's early life and education and thereafter her many significant contributions as a teacher and example in the early years of desegregation in the DC public schools. Mrs. Jackson projected calmness, reflection and wisdom. When confronted with some irritating situation, I still think to myself – What would Mrs. Jackson do? More even than those fine qualities, it is no exaggeration to say she was beloved by her students during her years at Wilson. The more celebrated nominees have already been recognized in other ways. Mrs. Jackson deserves her turn, which is not only the right thing to do for her but will be an important signal to other devoted teachers as well. Thanks. Jim

James J. Hanks, Jr.
Venable LLP
Suite 900, 750 East Pratt Street
Baltimore, Maryland 21202
Direct dial telephone: [REDACTED]
Fax: [REDACTED]
e-mail: [REDACTED]

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Committee of the Whole (Council)

From: Edith Gralla [REDACTED]
Sent: Wednesday, October 13, 2021 2:36 PM
To: Bonds, Anita (Council); Silverman, Elissa (Council); White, Robert (Council); Henderson, Christina (Council); Nadeau, Brianne K. (Council); Pinto, Brooke (Council); Lewis-George, Janeese (Council); Allen, Charles (Council); Gray, Vincent (Council); White, Sr., Trayon (Council); Committee of the Whole (Council)
Subject: New name for Wilson HS should be Jackson or Reed

I am a graduate of Wilson High, class of 1969. I support the name change, but the choice of August Wilson is a poor one. He has no connection to our high school other than the accident of his name. Additionally, in the poll of stakeholders that was done months ago, it was clear that more people supported either Jackson or Reed than A. Wilson. That is, a majority preferred a name associated closely with the school to a black person chosen for the convenience of not having to change the stationery or signs.

So, please reconsider, and rename our school after Edna Jackson or Vincent Reed, or both.

Edith Butler Gralla '69

[REDACTED]
Los Angeles CA 90025

[REDACTED]
Sent from my iPhone

Don't share your air!

7 A BILL
8

9
10 24-286
11

12
13 IN THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA
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16

17 To officially designate the school in Lot 009 in Square 1772, bounded by Nebraska Avenue, NW
18 Chesapeake Street NW, and Fort Drive, NW, as “Jackson Reed High School.”

19 BE IT ENACTED BY THE COUNCIL OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA, That this
20 act may be cited as the “Jackson Reed High School Designation Act of 2021”.

21 Sec. 2. Pursuant to sections 401 and 422 of the Street and Alley Closing and Acquisition
22 Procedures Act of 1982, effective March 10, 1983 (D.C. Law 4-201; D.C. Official Code §§ 9-
23 204.01 and 9-204.22) (“Act”), and notwithstanding section 422(a) of the Act (D.C. Official Code
24 § 9-204.22(a)), the Council officially designates the school in Lot 009 in Square 1772, bounded
25 by Nebraska Avenue, NW Chesapeake Street NW, and Fort Drive, NW, as “Jackson Reed High
26 School.”

27 Sec. 3. Fiscal impact statement.

28 The Council adopts the fiscal impact statement in the committee report as the fiscal
29 impact statement required by section 4a of the General Legislative Procedures Act of 1975,
30 approved October 16, 2006 (120 Stat. 2038; D.C. Official Code § 1-301.47a).

31 Sec. 4. Effective date.

32 This act shall take effect following approval by the Mayor (or in the event of veto by the

33 Mayor, action by the Council to override the veto), a 30-day period of congressional review as
34 provided in section 602(c)(1) of the District of Columbia Home Rule Act, approved December
35 24, 1973 (87 Stat. 813; D.C. Official Code §1-206.02(c)(1)), and publication in the District of
36 Columbia Register.