

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY OF THE REPORT OF THE GEORGE FOX MIDDLE SCHOOL HISTORICAL RENAMING EVALUATION COMMITTEE

February 24, 2021

On July 8, 2020, the Anne Arundel County Board of Education requested that a committee be formed to research AACPS' first superintendent, George Fox, and recommend whether AACPS should consider renaming the current George Fox Middle School. Board member Julie Hummer moved "that the Board request the Superintendent form a committee of parents, students, community members and staff to study the name of George Fox Middle School and make a recommendation to the Board by March 2021 as to whether the school should be re-named." Board member Dana Schallheim seconded. The Board voted 9-0 to approve.

The Committee

A committee was formed and included:

- Anthony Spencer, Chair (former Vice President, AACPS Board of Education)
- Eve Case (AACPS Social Studies Coordinator)
- Amanda Harper (Member of Anne Arundel NAACP)
- Jamie Hurman-Cougnat (Vice President George Fox Middle School PTSA, Northeast Cluster Representative on the Superintendent's Parent Involvement Advisory Council)
- Valerie Mills Cooper (Community Member; Former George Fox Middle School Teacher; Retired AACPS Administrator)
- Rhonda Pindell-Charles, J.D. (Annapolis Alderwoman; AACPS School-Community Liaison)
- Dr. Shannon Pugh (AACPS Director of Community and School Programming)
- Janice Hayes Williams (Local Historian)

Five of the committee members attended AACPS and are parents of students or former students in AACPS. The committee first met on September 25, 2020, and then met two times per month through January 2021.

Guiding Questions:

At the first meeting, the committee discussed how to narrow its work and agreed to use the following five questions to frame the committee's work. The belief was that these questions would promote an objective review of not only the name of George Fox Middle School but would also guide any other similar work in the future.

The five guiding questions are:

1. Did the individual make an extraordinary contribution or sacrifice to local, state, or national society, history, or culture? What was their primary legacy?
2. Does the individual's primary legacy align with or reflect the current mission, vision, and values of Anne Arundel County Public Schools?
3. Does the primary legacy of the individual inspire current students to strive for individual and collective excellence?
4. When considering the individual's primary legacy, would students from all backgrounds feel accepted and included in a building named for this individual?
5. What impact did the individual's actions/decisions have upon different groups of stakeholders in the community?

Analysis:

The committee met two times per month since September. At these meetings, we examined various historical documents and written testimony provided by community members. We used this evidence to answer our five guiding questions.

Did the individual make an extraordinary contribution or sacrifice to local, state, or national society, history, or culture? What was their primary legacy?

George Fox was the first person to hold the title of “Superintendent of Schools” in Anne Arundel County and as the first person to hold this title, he was successful in organizing the various aspects of the district including building construction and revising curriculum. However, the committee found that Fox “neglected to invest the same efforts and funds toward advancements in the education of black students...” Fox supported the building of schools for white students while relying on the Rosenwald program to privately fund the maintenance of one- to two-room schools for black students. These efforts laid the foundation for decades of segregation that forced many black students and families, in the years prior to district-transportation, to choose to find ways to attend the couple of all black schools that took hours to travel to or to give up on education.

Fox’s primary legacy is traced to the 1939 lawsuit filed by the NAACP on behalf of Walter Mills and the AACPS black educators who were paid less than those of white teachers. Beginning in the 1920s, surrounding school districts began to remove race as a determining factor in salary scales but AACPS, under the direction of Fox, did not choose to follow other districts. At the time of the lawsuit, the average pay for white teachers in AACPS was \$1,100 while the average pay of black teachers was \$800, with black educators with more credentials (education levels) paid less than white teachers with less credentials. As the case made its way through the court system, Fox was adamant that he was not going to propose raising the pay of black teachers as that would mean reducing the pay of white teachers. In response to pressure concerning the pay issue, Fox is reported to have said that he would not pay any “colored teacher” as much as he paid any white teacher because his, “poorest white teacher was a better teacher than his best colored teacher.” The lawsuit, argued by attorney Thurgood Marshall, was successful and AACPS was ordered to equalize pay between black and white teachers. AACPS discontinued using race as a factor in the educator pay scale in 1941 and was one of the last surrounding school districts to do so.

Although, Fox and the school board did abide by the order of the court (2 years after it was issued), Fox’s primary legacy is that he actively fought against equalizing the pay of white and black educators and he minimized efforts by the district to treat the education of black and white students equally. Fox was a “product of his time” but “his time” also included school districts around Maryland and the country who were making strides to address racial inequities and Fox did not choose to advocate for the fair treatment of black and white teachers and students in an equitable manner.

Does the individual’s primary legacy align with or reflect the current mission, vision, and values of Anne Arundel County Public Schools?

The current AACPS Strategic Plan identifies “All Means All” and “Ready, Set, Launch” as two values central to the mission of AACPS. Within these two values are the explicit statements that in AACPS, “All students, families and community members feel welcome, diversity is invited, nurtured and celebrated, and that all students are prepared for college, career and community.”

The primary legacy of George Fox, as explained previously, rests with a legacy of inequity. A legacy of inequity goes directly against the mission, vision, and values of Anne Arundel County Public Schools.

Does the primary legacy of the individual inspire current students to strive for individual and collective excellence?

Due to George Fox’s documented stance on the value of black educators and black education, he would not inspire current students to strive for individual and collective excellence. If anything, his legacy could drive students apart as he repeatedly modeled a lack of inclusion and acceptance and a lack of appreciation for diversity within his work. Policies established under George Fox and perpetuated by future educational leaders in Anne Arundel County did not allow for African American students to reach their individual excellence.

When considering the individual’s primary legacy, would students from all backgrounds feel accepted and included in a building named for this individual?

Approximately 20 percent of the students who attend George Fox Middle School today come from diverse backgrounds. Almost 10 percent of the students are African American. These students would have experienced marginalization and a lack

of priority under the leadership of George Fox. Examining this legacy would not bring a sense of acceptance or inclusion to these students but instead continue to build the web of systemic racism that they have already experienced. According to the values of Anne Arundel County Public Schools, no member of the student body would feel pride in the legacy of George Fox.

What impact did the individual's actions/decisions have upon different groups of stakeholders in the community?

The actions and decisions of George Fox helped some stakeholders to progress and kept some stakeholders oppressed. This division was along racial lines through his direct actions and testimony as superintendent. George Fox's decisions advanced the education and economic well-being of whites at the expense of blacks. The priorities that he had as he led the school system directly contributed to generations of segregationist policies and practices that continue to have an impact today as we work together to address the opportunity gap that exists.

Recommendation:

The Committee was tasked with researching the name of George Fox Middle School and to make a recommendation as to whether the school should be renamed. Based upon the review of the available evidence and the answers to our guiding questions, the committee's unanimous recommendation is that George Fox Middle School should be renamed.