



1200 Ala Kapuna Street • Honolulu, Hawaii 96819
Tel: (808) 833-2711 • Fax: (808) 839-7106 • Web: www.hsta.org

Corey Rosenlee
President

Osa Tui Jr.
Vice President

Logan Okita
Secretary-Treasurer

Wilbert Holck
Executive Director

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE HOUSE COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION

RE: HR 148, URGING THE SUPERINTENDENT OF EDUCATION TO REQUEST
HCR 179 THE BOARD OF EDUCATION TO CHANGE THE NAME OF
PRESIDENT WILLIAM MCKINLEY HIGH SCHOOL BACK TO THE
SCHOOL'S PREVIOUS NAME OF HONOLULU HIGH SCHOOL AND
TO REMOVE THE STATUE OF PRESIDENT MCKINLEY FROM THE
SCHOOL PREMISES.

THURSDAY, MARCH 18, 2021

COREY ROSENLEE, PRESIDENT
HAWAII STATE TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

Chair Woodson, Vice Chair Kapela, and members of the House Committee on Education:

The Hawaii State Teachers Association **supports HR 148 and HCR 179** in urging the Superintendent of Education to request the Board of Education to change the name of President William McKinley High School back to the school's previous name of Honolulu High School and to remove the statue of President McKinley from the school premises.

As educators, we are deeply committed to supporting our keiki and our community. We are proud to live in a vibrant tapestry of cultures with shared values rooted in 'ohana and 'āina. We lift our students with knowledge, awareness, skill, and confidence; creating an environment of equity that allows every student to thrive.

Here, we explain why the name President William McKinley does not honor this commitment.

The school's name glorifies a man who illegally annexed a country against the will of her queen and people.

On Jan. 16, 1893, U.S. troops invaded the Hawaiian Kingdom, which led to a conditional surrender by the Hawaiian Kingdom's executive monarch, Her Majesty Queen Lili'uokalani. An investigation initiated by President Grover Cleveland called this invasion "an act of war."

President Cleveland agreed to restore the Hawaiian Kingdom if Queen Lili‘uokalani granted amnesty to the provisional government that overthrew her. She ultimately agreed, but unfortunately, President Cleveland did not get elected to a second term and could not restore her to her rightful position.

When McKinley took office, he proceeded to annex Hawai‘i, ignoring protests by Queen Lili‘uokalani, two Hawaiian political organizations — Hui Aloha ‘Āina and Hui Kālai‘āina — and a petition of more than 21,000 signatures from Hawaiian citizens and residents submitted by Hui Aloha ‘Āina. Hui Kālai‘āina collected an additional 17,000 signatures.

When he could not obtain a two-thirds vote in the Senate to ratify a “treaty” of annexation with the illegal Republic of Hawai‘i, McKinley pushed for a joint resolution in the U.S. Congress, a domestic measure that required a simple majority, but had no lawful authority beyond U.S. borders. McKinley signed the resolution into law on July 7, 1898.

The name reflects an indoctrination of Hawaiian students and a movement that obliterated Native Hawaiian identity in favor of American patriotism.

To enforce the annexation, the government implemented a “methodical plan of Americanization” that “sought to obliterate the national consciousness of the Hawaiian Kingdom in the minds of the school children throughout the islands. It was developed by the Territory of Hawai‘i’s Department of Public Instruction and called ‘Programme for Patriotic Exercises in the Public Schools.’”

The government made it illegal for anyone to have a Native Hawaiian first name, or even speak the Hawaiian language in public. Native Hawaiians were forced to suppress their Hawaiian cultural and national identity in favor of American allegiance.

If students weren’t “Americanized” enough, they weren’t allowed to attend high school and entered the workforce instead. In 1907, Harper’s Weekly correspondent William Inglis noted the “astounding” difference in student body from grade school to Honolulu High School: “Below were all the hues of the human spectrum, with brown and yellow predominating; here the tone was clearly white.”

Honolulu High School was the former name of what is now President William McKinley High School. The school itself was originally established in 1833 as the Oahu Charity School. Its name was subsequently changed to Honolulu Town School then Fort Street School. In 1895, it moved from Princess Ruth Ke‘elikōlani’s former residence to its current location and was renamed Honolulu High School.

The change from Honolulu High School to President William McKinley High School in 1907 and the installation of McKinley’s statue in 1911 reflect the government’s targeted indoctrination in schools.

An article published in The Hawaiian Star on Nov. 22, 1901, said: “It is believed that the project of erecting a local memorial to Mr. McKinley, if carried out by all classes of the Hawaiian population, and participated in by the school children, will tend to develop patriotism (sic) and

go to strengthen the interest of our people in American institutions and principles.”

This indoctrination also impacted teachers, many of whom were Native Hawaiian women forced to teach curriculum that handcuffed their personal beliefs and identity. According to a 2017 Office of Hawaiian Affairs report, Native Hawaiian teachers made up 41.1 percent of the total number of teachers prior to 1893. “The combination of non-Hawaiian teacher recruitment, lower pay for Native Hawaiian teachers, and the mandate of using only the English language in schools led to the decline of Native Hawaiian teachers,” the OHA report concluded.

The devastating loss of Native Hawaiian identity, culture, and language has yet to fully recover.

Though the overthrow and annexation occurred more than a century ago, their destructive impacts continue to fester. Those who did not live through this era may never fully understand the far-reaching damage and trauma colonization has on its people.

Americanization and the denial of Native Hawaiian names, language, and learning made many Native Hawaiians ashamed of their cultural identity. They believed they were worth less — a mentality that has been passed down and continues to cripple successive generations.

The Office of Hawaiian Affairs stated, “The practice of using Western standards to validate Hawaiian culturally-based activities and behaviors led to the devaluing of the traditional Hawaiian system and caused shame and embarrassment among Native Hawaiians. Navigating the immense cultural shifts and the depreciation of Hawaiian values and traditions caused internal moral conflicts between preserving the old and embracing the new. These effects can still be seen today.”

Public schools were established by the Hawaiian Kingdom in 1840 by King Kamehameha III. As of 1834, the literacy rate among Hawaiians was estimated between 91 percent and 95 percent. Now, one in every six adults in Hawai‘i, or more than 16 percent of the adult population, cannot read or write at a basic level.

This statistic, while not isolated to the Native Hawaiian population, indicates a disconnect from language and education. In 2016, Native Hawaiian reading proficiency percentages ranged from high of 41.2 percent in grade 5 to a low of 29.2 percent in grade 7, far below the non-Hawaiian range of 60.3 percent in grade 5 through 50.5 percent in grade 7; and the largest proficiency gap of 20.8 percentage points occurred in grade 11. This loss of literacy leads to higher dropout rates, unemployment, low wages, poverty, homelessness, and incarceration.

Continued suppression of Hawaiian culture and identity further exacerbates the challenges Native Hawaiians face today in areas including sustainability, land use, and resources management. No group should be forced to prove themselves on their own land, or left to struggle and fail.

It is our kuleana (responsibility) to restore pono (righteousness).

Changing the name of McKinley High School back to Honolulu High School restores pono and

pride to Hawai‘i, our ‘āina, and our people, especially our youth. We must teach our keiki to fully embrace their true history and identity if we want them to thrive.

This need is not exclusive to Native Hawaiians. Staying true to our values and righting our wrongs heals our ‘ohana and uplifts our entire community. We must brave the first step by removing a prominent figure who was instrumental in the harm and trauma of our collective history.

A similar change occurred in Alaska in 2015 when President Barack Obama and Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell restored the name Denali to what had been called Mount McKinley for nearly a century. Denali, or “deenaalee,” means “the tall one” in the Koyukon language, spoken for thousands of years by an indigenous Athabaskan group.

“Denali’s name has long been seen as one such slight, regarded as an example of cultural imperialism in which a Native American name with historical roots was replaced by an American one having little to do with the place,” according to The New York Times.

“There’s no denying that for some Americans, the deck’s been stacked against them, sometimes for generations, and that’s been true of many Native Americans,” said President Obama. “But if we’re working together, we can make things better.”

Names have great significance to us. A school’s name should honor its greatness.

Names are a cornerstone of our identity. In Hawaiian culture, names are chosen with great deliberation to imbue their possessors with sacred story and energy.

Eōmailani K. Kukahiko, Ph.D., a University of Hawaii at Manoa faculty member in the Curriculum Studies Department who specializes in Hawaiian language immersion, wrote, “Hawaiian names tell the stories of our people. Names are usually given by kūpuna, or to honor kūpuna. Sometimes names appear in a dream, inoa pō, yet other times as a recording of a specific event.”

McKinley High is an incredible school with impressive accomplishments and prominent alumni. It serves and supports our community. Its halls are steeped in spirit, honor, and pride. It’s important that we recognize the true source of this excellence: the students, the educators, the community, the ‘āina.

This great school deserves a better name.

McKinley High School is located in the ahupua‘a of Honolulu, in the moku of Kona, on the moku of O‘ahu. Changing the school’s name back to Honolulu High School honors its life source, the land that feeds it.

We are joining an ongoing movement across Hawai‘i and the U.S. continent.

Kahuku High and Intermediate in Windward O‘ahu: The school community council is currently vetting an independent facilitator to help change its mascot. The Hawaii State Department of

Education’s Civil Rights Compliance Branch confirmed in November 2020 “that the use of a Native American as the mascot of KHIS, the term ‘Red Raiders,’ and the ‘tomahawk chop,’ is, in fact, discriminatory, as it mocks protected classes (race, color, ancestry and national origin).” In an attempt to address concerns, KHIS made its mascot Polynesian, but the branch found the overall use of an ethnic figure problematic for the same reason. The school is also actively discouraging use of the “tomahawk chop” as a fan cheer, but will keep the name Red Raiders, according to the SCC’s Feb. 4, 2021 meeting minutes.

Central Intermediate in Honolulu, O’ahu: In an opinion piece for Civil Beat, Kukahiko, a University of Hawaii at Manoa faculty member, calls for Central Intermediate to be named Ke’elikōlani School. “Those unfamiliar may think that this school is located in Anywhere, USA. In fact, it is built upon the ‘āina of Akopua where once stood the grand home of Ruth Keanolani Kanāhoahoa Ke’elikōlani, Keōua Hale,” she wrote. “As a people whose majority is several generations removed from native speakers and disparately dispossessed of land, we have accepted these insidious changes and desecration of ‘āina as commonplace.”

Ka’ōhao Public Charter School in Kailua, O’ahu: Lanikai Elementary Public Charter School became Ka’ōhao Public Charter School (aka Ka’ōhao School) on July 1, 2017. Ka’ōhao is the true name of the area between Kailua Beach and Waimanalo Beach, which a developer called Lanikai in an incorrect attempt to say heavenly sea. “We believe that our name change represents much of what we stand for as a school. In many ways, we are tying and joining together the past, the present, and the future. We do this humbly, with cultural respect and understanding; and applying knowledge from awareness to action, the chief aim of education,” according to the school’s website.

It’s not just schools. There is a community movement to restore other place names to their inoa ‘ōiwi, such as Pu’uloa instead of Pearl Harbor, or Maunalua instead of Hawai’i Kai.

Kīlauea Fissure 8 was named Ahu‘ailā‘au through a process that involved the community in thorough, meaningful conversations. “Ahu‘ailā‘au, which refers to the altar of the volcano deity ‘Ailā‘au, was selected from dozens of community submitted proposals. Hawai’i County Council Resolution 640-18 requested that the Hawai’i Board on Geographic Names consult with the communities impacted by the eruption to ensure traditional, cultural, and family ties were considered in order to establish appropriate names for the Fissure 8 vent and any other features of the 2018 eruption of Kīlauea Volcano,” as explained in a state-issued news release.

The City and County of Honolulu’s Revised Ordinances of Honolulu, Chapter 22, Article 8 stipulates that all street names shall “consist of Hawaiian names, word or phrases and shall be selected with a view to the appropriateness of the name to historic, cultural, scenic and topographical features of the area.” This law has been in effect since 1978.

According to the Alabama-based Southern Poverty Law Center, 168 Confederate symbols, including 94 monuments, were removed across the United States in 2020, virtually all of them following the killing of George Floyd by Minneapolis police officers. “Critics argue that removing or renaming tributes to Confederate figures amounts to erasing history, the SPLC points out. But many historians — and public opinion polling — reject this concept, saying it’s time for the symbols to go, and possible to engage with this period of history in other ways,”

according to a National Public Radio report.

We ask that you support HR 148 and HCR 179 so we can right a devastating wrong, honor this school's true legacy, and move toward a better, equitable future that ensures our communities are whole and every student thrives.

Mahalo for hearing this important issue.