



**HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES**

STATE OF HAWAII  
STATE CAPITOL  
HONOLULU, HAWAII 96813

**March 19, 2021**

**TO:** Superintendent Christina Kishimoto, Hawai'i State Department of Education, and Assistant Superintendent Randall Tanaka for the HIDOE Office of Facilities and Operations

**FROM:** Rep. Jeanné Kapela, Hawai'i State House of Representatives

**RE:** Requesting that the HIDOE immediately initiate proceedings to change the name of McKinley High School and remove the statue of President McKinley from school grounds

Aloha,

I am writing to you today to request that the HIDOE immediately initiate proceedings to change the name of McKinley High School back to Honolulu High School and remove the statue of President McKinley from the school's grounds.

While I understand the reluctance on the part of McKinley alumni to change the name of their alma mater, this issue is, at its heart, about advancing racial equity. We have to ask ourselves: what kind of society do we want our keiki to grow up and learn in?

Over the past two years, we've watched our nation engage in a reckoning with its troubled racial history. As part of that reckoning, we've seen racially insensitive monuments and symbols be taken down, so that we can fully acknowledge the stories and histories of subjugated people that too often go unspoken.

For many members of the Native Hawaiian community, the McKinley school name and statue are no different than the confederate monuments that have been dismantled on the continental U.S. to pave a path toward a more egalitarian future. The people who we choose to honor reveal whose history we care about and what kind of future we want to create for the generations to come.

The time has come to reassert racial equity in our school system. Recently, HIDOE used the Acellus Learning Accelerator to facilitate virtual learning during the COVID-19 pandemic. After reviewing the material, teachers, parents, and community members

found that the Acellus curriculum contained content that engages in racial, sexual, gender-based, and religious discrimination. Teachers and parents also expressed concerns that content provided by Acellus is historically prejudicial and scientifically inaccurate. In October of 2020, these concerns prompted the Hawai'i Board of Education to direct HODOE leaders to phase out the Acellus curriculum by the end of the 2020-2021 school year.

Social justice issues are a growing concern for Hawai'i and the rest of the United States. Last year, large protests were coordinated in the islands and throughout the nation to highlight systemic racism, economic inequality, and police abuse faced by minority communities, especially people of color.

These demonstrations spoke to the urgency of establishing structural reforms to address socioeconomic inequality in our society, including in the public education system that serves as the foundation of our democracy. To prepare our keiki to create a more just and equal society, it is important to establish educational spaces that are culturally sensitive, nondiscriminatory, and respectful of the historical injustices endured by marginalized and indigenous populations, including Native Hawaiians.

Opponents of the name change say that the wrongs of the past do not shape the present. **As a Native Hawaiian woman, I will not be enlisted in that lie.** We need to restore cultural dignity to our schools, so that we can decolonize our children's minds. We need to engage in a much-needed discussion about racial justice and the historical trauma endured by Hawai'i's indigenous people. We need to build learning centers that reflect our goal of not only understanding, but responding to historical trauma and preventing it from being repeated on our shores.

Returning McKinley High School to its former name and removing the statue that sullies its grounds would begin to heal the wounds that the Hawaiian people have been suffering for centuries. Mahalo for considering this request.

Sincerely,

*Jeanné Kapela*

D-5 (Naalehu, Ocean View, Capt. Cook, Kealakekua, Kailua-Kona)

Vice Chair, Hawai'i State House Committee on Education