



MONTGOMERY COUNTY COUNCIL

ROCKVILLE, MARYLAND

**OFFICE OF COUNCIL PRESIDENT NANCY NAVARRO
DISTRICT 4**

February 5, 2019

Ms. Shebra Evans,
President, The Montgomery County Board of Education
Dr. Jack Smith,
Superintendent, Montgomery County Public Schools
850 Hungerford Drive,
Rockville, Maryland, 20850

Dear Ms. Evans and Dr. Smith:

Col. E Brooke Lee Middle School is currently undergoing renovation and is slated to be re-opened in September 2021. I am especially proud of the role I played, working with my colleagues on the Council to ensure that the school is renovated on time. I eagerly look forward to being present on the day the new campus is re-opened. The renovation is long overdue and critical to the wellbeing of our students. As you know, over 90 percent of the children attending that school are children of color. It is also a school with a record of high mobility that is impacted by poverty. Despite the storied demographics of the school, each time I visit the school, I am struck by the boundless enthusiasm and curiosity of the children and their willingness to triumph over the gritty reality of their daily lives.

It is therefore a supreme irony that these children of color attend a school that is named after the late Mr. E. Brooke Lee, a man with a deeply disturbing racist history. The enclosed March 3, 2017 [Washington Post article](#) had this to say about Mr. Lee:

... Lee attached racial restrictive covenants to all his suburban properties. These prohibited African Americans from buying or renting homes in the subdivisions. They could live in these new suburbs only if they were domestic servants. By the time the Supreme Court ruled racial restrictive covenants unenforceable in 1948, most of Silver Spring — from the District line west to Rock Creek and north to White Oak — was covered by racially restricted subdivisions, many of them developed by Lee and his business partners.

It took an additional 20 years for Montgomery County to pass an open-housing law prohibiting discrimination based on race. As County leaders were debating new civil rights measures, Lee was railing against them in local newspapers. As late as 1967, the septuagenarian was calling on residents to reject what he described as “Anti-White laws” that he perceived as a threat to the suburbs he built. “Desegregation is not the answer,” Lee wrote that spring.

Sadly, [the school's website displays a history of Mr. Lee that sanitizes his racist past](#). This is unacceptable. I am asking you as a matter of justice and equity to use your existing processes to bestow E. Brooke Lee Middle School with a name that does not daily remind the children of that school of Mr. Lee’s horrid past. There are many names of transformational individuals that would grace the school and serve as inspiring beacons of what our great County stands for. Board of Education [Policy FFA, Naming School Facilities](#) and MCPS regulation [FFA-RA, Naming School Facilities](#) prescribe a robust process for naming and renaming schools. I note that the regulation states that that the Board “will give strong consideration to names of women and minorities so that these groups are equitably represented among County school facilities or portions of school facilities names.” With the approaching re-opening of a brand new facility, the Board has a unique and exciting opportunity to rename E. Brooke Lee Middle School after a transformational individual that all our students can be proud of. Continuing to name that school after Mr. Lee would be simply wrong.

I would like to acknowledge and thank the many citizens of our County who have been raising this issue for a long time, several of who approached me regarding the specific issue of Col. E. Lee Middle School. Indeed, there is a larger conversation that the school Board and the Superintendent need to have regarding the continued naming of several schools after slave owners and individuals with a documented history of racism. Just as the County Council, the County government and key agencies like Montgomery County Public Schools and Montgomery College are engaging in a conversation about race and equity and its impact on how we conduct business, let me suggest that now is the time for the school system to begin to erase from our children’s spaces offensive reminders of a time past when citizens that looked like them were treated like chattel. I am also working on introducing a resolution at the Council to be on the public record in support of changing the name of this middle school. I look forward to hearing from you on this important matter.

Nancy Navarro

Council President

Cc:

Members of the Montgomery County Council
Members of the Board of Education
Ms. Linda Plummer, President, NAACP