

# Will Dallas ISD Ever Rename Its Confederate Schools?

By Eric Nicholson

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Stonewall Jackson was a solid general, but is his the right name for a DISD school?

On Tuesday morning, right after an African-American principal and an African-American superintendent had finished predicting a [great future for East Dallas' Lee Elementary and its new International Baccalaureate program](#), a woman buttonholed DISD trustee Mike Morath. After a few complimentary words about Morath's efforts on behalf of the campus, she gestured to the art deco "Robert E. Lee" nameplate etched into concrete above the front door. Same with Stonewall Jackson Elementary a mile to the north. Those name, she declared, are a black mark on the district and need to go.

She didn't have to elaborate, though she did say she sometimes imagines that Stonewall's name is a reference birth of the modern gay rights movement. The incongruity of a large urban school district with a stubborn history of racial segregation, a still-yawning achievement gap and a student body that is 95.3 percent non-white having schools honoring Confederate generals, was already clear to Morath. The Confederate names would also seem to be out of keeping with DISD's [school-naming policy](#), which requires a school's eponym to have made a "significant contribution to society" and be a figure who can "lend prestige and status to an institution of learning." Lee and Jackson's fight to perpetuate slavery would seem to disqualify them under those criteria, regardless of their character or other accomplishments.

***See also:*** [How Dallas ISD Is Working to Attract Middle-Class Families to Another East Dallas School](#)

Morath agreed that it's probably about time for the names to change, but that's not to say he's ready to lead the anti-Robert E. Lee crusade. When I caught up with him outside Lee Elementary, he said he fields the name-change question from time to time but that he has higher priorities than scrubbing DISD of Confederate references, like improving students' educational outcomes.

There is some precedent for ditching distasteful names. In 1999, DISD trustees renamed Oak Cliff's Jefferson Davis Elementary for Barbara Jordan, a civil rights leader and congresswoman. Ron Price, who served on the DISD board at the time, says trustees were responding to a push from the community. The school was overwhelmingly Hispanic and African-American, and a coalition of students, parents, teachers and community leaders, led by Price's pastor, Frederick Haynes, objected to having a neighborhood school named for the slave-owning president of the Confederacy. He recalls that the Daughters of the Confederacy showed up at a board meeting wearing all white to protest the name-change on the grounds that trustees were trying to scrub history, but the measure passed easily.

As for Lee and Jackson elementaries, they were never discussed because "they were never put up [by the community]." For those names to change, there would presumably need to be a grassroots push from the community which, given that neither Jackson nor Lee have substantial African-American populations, would need to come from politically correct white people, like the lady who was talking to Morath.

***Send your story tips to the author, [Eric Nicholson](#).***