

Doug Haubert
Long Beach City Prosecutor

July 22, 2020

Dr. Jill Baker, Superintendent
Long Beach Unified School District
1515 Hughes Avenue
Long Beach, CA 90810

RE: Renaming Jordan High School in honor of Dr. Felton Williams

Dear Ms. Baker:

The recent examination of the naming of schools and buildings in Long Beach has sparked an interesting discussion. Each generation has the chance to honor its heroes by attaching the hero's name to something that is expected to last a long time, perhaps forever.

We should be cautious when naming a school or a building, and even more careful when removing the name of one generation's leader for another. As we all know, a figure popular today can become meaningless, or even a lightning rod of controversy, for the next generation.

Lynne Lewis-Ehren, a Jordan High School alumnus who has worked for over 20 years in Long Beach schools, has proposed renaming Jordan High School in honor of Dr. Felton Williams. I want to add my support to this idea because such an act will benefit and inspire today's students, especially students of color. It will also send a message that LBUSD values all of its students, and that no student is diminished by the color of their skin, the circumstances of their birth, or the stereotypes placed on them by others. I should add that this letter is sent by me personally and it should not be construed as an official statement on behalf of the City of Long Beach.

Jordan High School, located in North Long Beach and founded in 1933, is named for David Starr Jordan, the first President of Stanford University. Jordan was selected to lead the university by Leland Stanford in 1891 and he served as President until 1913.

Some would also say that Jordan was a racist in the classical sense because of his advocacy for the position that some races and ethnicities are innately superior to others. In 2018, the Palo Alto Unified School District (PAUSD), where Stanford University is located, removed Jordan's name from one of its middle schools, replacing it with the name of a local Black businessman and school trustee. A report commissioned by PAUSD looked at David Starr Jordan's legacy, especially his support for eugenics, and recommended the name change.

Page 14 of the PAUSD report¹ states:

“Jordan’s obsession with the “survival of the Anglo-Saxon/Nordic race” was fueled by his deep-seated racism. In his book, “David Starr Jordan: Prophet of Freedom,” historian Edward McNall Burns dedicates chapter 3.1, “Superior and Inferior Races,” to Jordan’s racism, citing Jordan as saying that “It is easy to recognize that the Irish, the Greeks, the South Italians and the Polish Jews contain largely elements permanently deficient in the best traits we hope for in America,...They are controlled by emotions and animal instincts instead of brains and will. There is in fact no substitute for intelligence”. Mexicans he considered “ignorant, superstitious, with little self-control and no conception of industry or thrift, -lacking, indeed, most of our Anglo-Saxon virtues.” In closing, McNall attributes these assertions to Jordan: “To say that one race is superior to another is merely to confirm the common observation of every intelligent citizen,” and further clarifies that Jordan also “summarily dismissed the argument that differences in intellectual capacity are the result of opportunity and education.”

Jordan’s own book, *Blood of the Nation: The Study of the Decay of Races Through the Survival of the Unfit*, argues against the mixing of races since this leads to the “dissipation” of superior blood lines.² Jordan was notably a founding member of the Human Betterment Foundation which advocated for the forced sterilization of adults deemed to be “unfit” by society.³

In contrast, the fundamental goal of any school, and certainly the goal of LBUSD, is to empower students through education. We should be teaching children that they are the masters of their own destinies, that their intelligence, abilities and worth are not limited by race or heredity. They should be judged and they should judge others, “not by the color of their skin but the content of their character.”

I feel it is only a matter of time before LBUSD removes Jordan’s name from its campus. He was not a U.S. President, a founding father of our nation, or even a local hero. In fact, I know of no link between David Starr Jordan and Long Beach, other than the school named for him. There is even a movement to remove Jordan’s name from buildings on Stanford University’s campus due to “Jordan’s racism, ableism, and active support of eugenics.”⁴

If the school is to be renamed in honor of someone else, LBUSD Board President Dr. Felton Williams seems a perfect choice. His name is synonymous with education in Long Beach, having earned his B.A. and M.B.A. at Cal State Long Beach, before receiving his Ph.D. in Higher Education.

Dr. Williams has worked as both a classroom teacher and school administrator. He has been employed at Long Beach City College, CSULB and California State Dominguez Hills, in a work career spanning over thirty years that has directly benefited local students.

His passion for improving education continued as an elected Trustee for Long Beach Unified School District in 2004. Sixteen years later, and after 6 times as President of the LBUSD Board of Trustees, Dr. Williams will close that chapter in November this year.

Dr. Williams' legacy within LBUSD is especially remarkable. He has pushed to diversify the teaching and administrative staff. He started LBUSD's Advanced Placement Academy, which accelerated the district's effort to reduce the achievement gap between students of color and other students. He has mentored hundreds of students, teachers and administrators, and has served as a role model for many youth, but especially Black youth. LBUSD is known nationally and internationally as one of the best urban school districts in the world, largely due to the efforts of Dr. Williams and others to stay focused on the students.

His national reputation is such that Dr. Williams was selected to serve as President of the Council of Great City Schools, the national organization representing the largest school districts in America. In 2017, Dr. Williams was recognized as the Educator of the Year by the same organization, among the many awards and recognitions he has received during his career.

The Jordan campus itself owes much to Dr. Williams. He was a leader of LBUSD 2008 and 2016 bond measures that resulted in \$1.2B and 1.5B, respectively, to improve and modernize LBUSD's schools, especially Jordan High School.⁵ Improvements include over 400,000 square feet that will be renovated or added to Jordan HS, including 132 classrooms and special needs facilities.

Today's social justice movement only reinforces that this moment is timely and Dr. Felton Williams is the right person to honor. When he was just 19 years old, right after his honorable discharge from the U.S. Army, his brother was taken into police custody in Santa Ana after a traffic stop. His brother died under suspicious circumstances at the hands of officers while in custody, sparking protests in both Orange County and Los Angeles County.


The trauma from the loss of his brother soon turned into action. Dr. Williams became a passionate advocate for civil rights and police reform. He became the President of the San Pedro/Wilmington Branch of the NAACP, and then President of the Southern California Conference. As his activism grew, he took on more responsibility, eventually becoming the Chair of the NAACP's Region I, encompassing 9 western states.

I am one of the many people in Long Beach influenced by Dr. Felton Williams. He shared with me the story of his brother when I first ran for City Prosecutor, and since that time has challenged me to make changes in the justice system. Long Beach's innovative court diversion and alternative sentencing programs have his fingerprints all over them. He was the catalyst for the partnership with LBUSD to address chronic truancy and help the families of students who were falling behind.

I know renaming a school is not a trivial matter, and it is especially complicated to evaluate the legacy of someone who lived long ago and is not around to defend their actions. However, for many reasons, strong consideration should be given to renaming NLB's Jordan High School. If a decision to rename is made, the right person to honor is Dr. Felton Williams. As an educator, a civil rights leader, a role model and mentor to many, his work over the past 50 years is fitting for such a recognition. He is a local hero of our time, and his legacy and example would be remembered and for years to come.

If you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Respectfully,



Doug Haubert

¹ Palo Alto Unified School District, Renaming Schools Advisory Committee Final Report, January 8, 2017. (See [https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/pausd/Board.nsf/files/AK3UVB7B53C9/\\$file/RSAC%20Report%202017-01-08.pdf](https://go.boarddocs.com/ca/pausd/Board.nsf/files/AK3UVB7B53C9/$file/RSAC%20Report%202017-01-08.pdf))

² The Blood of the Nation: The Study of the Decay of Races Through the Survival of the Unfit, by David Starr Jordan, published 1910. See <https://play.google.com/books/reader?id=hfomB9SzXJQC&pg=GBS.PP10>)

³ Forced Sterilization Once Seen as Path to a Better World, *Los Angeles Times*, July 16, 2003. (See <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jul-16-me-sterilize16-story.html>)

⁴ Eugenics at Stanford History Project Calls for Renaming of Jordan Hall, *The Stanford Daily*, February 27, 2020. (See <https://www.stanforddaily.com/2020/02/27/eugenics-at-stanford-history-project-calls-for-renaming-of-jordan-hall/>)

⁵ Jordan High School Major Renovation Project Initial Study, July 2013. (See <http://lbschoolbonds.net/pdfs/JordanCEQAInitialStudy.pdf>)