



July 25, 2022

Hanover County School Board and Hanover County Board of Supervisors

The Hanover NAACP is increasingly concerned about the changes we have seen in the Hanover County School Board over the last few years. The words and actions of certain School Board members directly oppose Hanover County Public Schools' [stated goals and mission](#) to provide a safe, equitable, and inclusive education to a diverse student community. Members of the Board have: 1) failed to show respect and understanding of true and inclusive American and Hanover history and recent current events as they relate to a diverse population, especially Black and Brown students; 2) publicly shared false health information; and 3) shown unwillingness to separate religion from division policy decisions and interactions with stakeholders.

Mechanicsville Supervisor Canova Peterson's appointment of Mr. John Redd to replace incumbent School Board representative Mr. Sterling Daniel continues this disturbing pattern. Mr. Daniel was highly qualified, with recent experience on the Hanover County School Board and children currently enrolled. He is the [third School Board member to be removed through a non-transparent process backed by illogical explanations after supporting the HCPS's name changes to Mechanicsville High School and Bell Creek Middle School](#).

Even before Mr. Redd's official appointment, multiple Hanoverians, including many of our members, expressed serious concerns after Mr. Redd, as a nominee, delivered a message of prejudice, unprofessional zealotry, and ignorance of the needs of a diverse PUBLIC School Division in a written response to a [Richmond Times Dispatch/Mechanicsville Local](#) article. Supervisor Peterson responded to heartfelt and fact-based concerns from his constituents in a [letter to Richmond Times Dispatch/Mechanicsville Local](#) that described these constituents as coming from a "cesspool" and denying the substance of Mr. Redd's own words.

Emails from Mr. Redd to Hanover County School Board and Hanover County Board of Supervisors, obtained through Virginia's Freedom of Information Act, not only confirm the concerns we have raised with Mr. Peterson and the Board of Supervisors, but also show that Mr. Redd's motivation to seek the seat was in part sparked by his anger over the name changes. These emails show that Mr. Redd is unwilling or unable to understand the harm inflicted by the schools' original names during the 50 years' fight to get them changed. Mr. Redd

makes it clear that he is determined to punish the community for his hurt feelings through petty agitation over school names in the future.

These emails further show his contempt and harsh religion-based judgment toward not only those who seek social justice and inclusive, honest history instruction (presumably including members of our Organization), but also toward members of the LGBTQ community, with special venom directed at transgender students.

We appreciate that two Hanover County Board Members — Chairwoman Angela Kelly-Weicek, Chickahominy, and Faye Prichard, Ashland — voted no on Mr. Redd’s confirmation, citing some of the reasons outlined above, which they were aware of in part from being recipients of Mr. Redd’s emails.

We believe Mr. Redd is unqualified to serve on the Hanover County School Board. We believe he is unable and unwilling to comply with the [VSBA Code of Conduct for School Board Members](#), particularly items #4, #6, #8 and the [goals of the Hanover County School Board](#).

Hanover NAACP is also concerned about other actions taken by members of the school board, including but not limited to:

- [Engaging Alliance Defending Freedom](#), a Christian anti-LGBTQ organization, to consult on legal and policy matters
- Suggesting policy consultations with the Family Foundation, another anti-LGBTQ religious group
- Advocating the removal from school libraries of a book of poetry by a Black author that described experiences of Black Americans
- Refusing to draft and approve a policy to support and protect transgender students, resulting in a [lawsuit brought by Virginia ACLU](#)

The current board chair, John Axelle, referred to Black people as “colored people” in a meeting with a parent in 2021. He has stated that he sees no benefit in Hanover students reading stories told from diverse perspectives and that he did not see a benefit in diversifying teaching staff to increase minority representation.

It is difficult to see how the board’s current makeup of six white men and a single woman of color, with the average age of approximately 70, none of whom have children in Hanover Schools, serves the goals and mission of Hanover County Public Schools.

Because Hanover County School Board members serve by appointment, we are asking the Hanover Board of Supervisors members, especially Supervisor Peterson, to review and reconsider School Board members who have acted in opposition to the goals outlined in [The Profile of the Hanover Graduate](#). We also ask that all members of both Boards participate in professional development instruction in diversity, equity and inclusion related to public education-as a needed good faith action.

A new direction is needed. Hanover County's future will be brighter and more successful with a School Division whose Board exemplifies AND prioritizes diversity, inclusion, and equity.

Hanover NAACP

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