

FAQs: High School Name

When will the School Board decide on whether to keep or change the name of the high school?

The School Board anticipates taking action on the name of the high school sometime this year. No decision will be made at the School Board's August and September meetings.

When the Board is ready to discuss the issue, the information will be provided in the Board's regular meeting agenda, which is always posted on the Staunton City Schools' website in advance of its monthly meeting.

The Board will first review and evaluate the Virginia Center for Inclusive Communities' (VCIC) findings from focus groups and community listening sessions on the topic of the high school name before making a decision. The VCIC is expected to present its report to the Board at an upcoming meeting. Notice of the VCIC's presentation will be in the Board's meeting agenda.

What is the estimated cost to change the name?

Because Staunton City Schools is expecting to break ground on a major high school renovation in 2019, costs for indoor and outdoor signs and other physical features could be absorbed in the renovation expenses. It is unclear what those costs would be at this time, given fluctuating prices for construction materials and no finalized blueprints for school construction.

However, Staunton City Schools can provide a reliable estimate of \$200,000 to replace all athletic uniforms and coaches' gear. This cost represents less than one percent of the school division's current operating budget of \$31.8 million. Additionally, athletic uniforms are reordered every four years due to natural wear and tear.

Can the School Board conduct a referendum so that citizens can vote on the matter?

There is no legal requirement or authority that a school board seek or pursue a special ballot question on the name of any school building. Virginia law grants complete and sole authority to individual school boards to name school buildings in their respective school divisions.

In this instance, just as the Staunton School Board independently voted to change the name from Staunton High School to Robert E. Lee High School without a referendum in 1914, the Staunton School Board today has the authority to make an independent decision on the high school's name.

Although the Board is not obligated to seek a special ballot question or poll the public on this issue, it does see value in hearing a wide variety of perspectives from the public before making a decision.

That's one of the reasons why it chose to engage citizens through a facilitated process that included focus groups and community listening sessions, to gather citizen input before deciding on the matter. Citizens have had manifold opportunities over the last year to share feedback with the Board via open and facilitated forums, emails, letters and in-person via public comment at monthly School Board meetings.

Will the Staunton City Council vote on the name of the high school?

No. It is not the duty of the Staunton City Council to make decisions on the names of Staunton's school buildings, and Virginia law does not sanction City Council exercising oversight of the School Board. The Staunton School Board is a separate, independent, elected, corporate body. Virginia law vests all powers as they relate to school governance and operations in the School Board, and charges it with all school duties, obligations and responsibilities imposed by law. Staunton City Council's only obligation to the school division is to allocate funding to Staunton City Schools.

Why is the School Board considering whether to keep or change the name of the high school?

Approximately three years ago, the former superintendent and the Staunton School Board were approached by a group of Staunton citizens who expressed concern about the city's public high school bearing the name of a Confederate general and requested that the original name of Staunton High School be reinstated. Another group of Staunton citizens then approached school leaders expressing a desire to leave the name as is.

The School Board has been committed to listening to both perspectives.