

# CANADIAN INSTITUTE FOR HISTORICAL EDUCATION

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06 February 2025

To: Neethan Shan, Chair  
Toronto District Public School Board  
[Chair@tdsb.on.ca](mailto:Chair@tdsb.on.ca)

Re: TDSB Staff Report 01-25-4830  
Proposed renaming of Dundas Junior Public School, Ryerson Community School, and Sir John A Macdonald Collegiate Institute

The above report dated 27 January 2025 recommending the renaming of Dundas Junior Public School, Ryerson Community School, and Sir John A Macdonald Collegiate Institute has come to our attention.

The report bases its recommendations on a concern for the “potential impact that these names may have on students and staff based on colonial history, anti-indigenous racism and their connection to systems of repression.” It includes an appendix said to be “a brief literature review” outlining the basis for embarking on the renaming process.

Although expressed in terms that create the appearance of a well-considered and thoroughly researched document, we regret that even the scantest examination reveals the report to be, in essence, an exercise in urging the TDSB to jump on the same bandwagon that has become a recent fashion amongst other Canadian institutions that should know better.

The report amounts to a synopsis of decisions and declarations made elsewhere by others on grounds as flimsy as the ones offered to you. It fails to address the questions essential to establishing either the truth of the specific allegations set out concerning the three individuals in question or exactly what adverse “potential impact on students and staff” their names are having.

In short, the report leads with a quick conclusion concerning the guilt of the three historic individuals as to the sins cited and the dangers to society posed thereby, and trains its primary focus on implementation of the recommended next steps. In a court of law, it would amount to commencing with a verdict of guilt and proceeding straight to sentencing. The verdict itself is defended largely by reference to news clippings that report on similar conclusions arrived at by other bodies but which shed no light on the rigour or impartiality of the process underlying any of them.

Citing as authority, unexamined, the conclusions reached by others would appear to be akin to copying someone else's homework.

As to the culpability assigned to the three historical figures involved, we are all too aware of the unfounded accusations that have become accepted as fact in some circles in recent years. This letter does not propose to canvass each of them thoroughly. But we do ask the Board to consider the following:

*Re Henry Dundas:* A committed abolitionist and ally of William Wilberforce in that cause. As colonial secretary, appointed John Graves Simcoe to serve as governor of Upper Canada (Simcoe abolished slavery in Upper Canada, making it the first jurisdiction in the British Empire to do so and making it, incidentally, the destination of the Underground Railroad.) Dundas stands accused by some of having delayed implementation of the abolition of slavery in the Empire by inserting a timing element into an abolition motion introduced by Wilberforce; the record confirms that the intervention by Dundas was directed at securing political support from those with concerns over practical and militarily strategic implications of immediate abolition – concerns that had caused each and every one of Wilberforce's previous abolition motions to fail. In any event, the motion by Wilberforce was not legislation, and its modification by Dundas did nothing to delay abolition.

*Re: Egerton Ryerson:* Founder of public education in Upper Canada, founder of public libraries in Upper Canada, and founder of Victoria College. Lived with the Mississaugas of the Credit, learned their language, and taught in their community in English and Ojibwe. Collaborated with Indigenous leaders to establish industrial schools in order to secure a sustainable future for their community, which was at risk of dying out. Falsely accused by some in recent years of being the "architect" of Canada's residential school system (the facts are that residential schools predated Ryerson's birth, and the system that is a present-day concern was not established until well after his time.) Signage on display at the university that until recently was proud to bear his name features the oblique accusation of Ryerson's having being "associated" with residential schools – a peculiar but evidently influential accusation which, if true, has far more to say about the accusers than the accused.

*Re: Sir John A Macdonald:* More than any other one individual, was responsible for leading British North America out of its colonial origins and into full nationhood – and thwarting the very real threat of American annexation in the bargain. A social progressive in his day; protected Indigenous populations in Canada's western regions, resisted political demands for a Chinese head tax, and gave Indigenous Canadians the right to vote. (Particularly odd that a School Board report that reflects disapproval of colonialism attacks the very individual who, more than any one person in the history of the country, brought colonial rule to an end in Canada.)

We believe the recent epidemic of historic statue removal and renaming of roads, buildings, and institutions to be on the whole ill-considered and driven more by popular opinion and prejudice than by thorough research and analysis. The report before you is one more document that supports our view. We urge you to stop it in its tracks when it comes before you for consideration.

If it is the will of the Board to proceed with consideration of the report's recommendations, we urge you to return it to committee with instructions to adopt a process based on defensible principles, and to follow those principles to the conclusion to which thorough, rigorous, and fair-minded analysis leads.

We have prepared a set of principles that we believe provide valuable guidance in such an exercise; they are set out here:

<https://cihe.ca/on-naming-and-renaming/#clear-principles>

Our recommended principles build on a process adopted by Yale University that we also commend to your attention, and which is set out here:

<https://news.yale.edu/2016/12/02/report-outlines-principles-renaming-campus-buildings>

We urge you and your board colleagues to resist the temptation to follow the easy path of catering to the popular trends of our day by basing a decision on the feeble grounds set out in the staff report.

We urge you also to give some thought to the potential impact that implementing the report's recommendations may have on your students' understanding of the foundations of their country.

Respectfully,

Canadian Institute for Historical Education

Per:

[signed]

John L. Parker

Secretary

cc: All TDSB trustees  
Stacey Zucker, Interim Director of Education