

Justification for Harriet Tubman (Washington-Tubman High School)

Historical Background

I compiled the information below from the [National Park Service](#) and [PBS](#) (note: much of it is copy/pasted – would need to be rewritten if used in justification to present to Board).

While I would not rely on Wikipedia when deriving an actual justification to present to the board, the [page](#) on Harriet Tubman is very comprehensive and is good background reading.

Seminal scholarly works on Tubman:

- Catherine Clinton. *Harriet Tubman: The Road to Freedom*. 2004.
- Kate Clifford Larsen. *Bound for the Promised Land: Harriet Tubman: Portrait of an American Hero*. New York: Ballantine Books, 2004.

Tubman was born into slavery on Maryland's Eastern Shore in 1822. While she was still in her early teens, she suffered an injury that would follow her for the rest of her life. Always ready to stand up for someone else, Tubman blocked a doorway to protect another field hand from an angry overseer. The overseer picked up and threw a two-pound weight at the field hand. It fell short, striking Tubman on the head. She never fully recovered from the blow, which subjected her to spells in which she would fall into a deep sleep.

She escaped to freedom in 1849 when her enslaver died and she was to be sold. One hundred dollars was offered for her capture. Vowing to return to bring her family and friends to freedom, she spent the next ten years making about 13 trips into Maryland to rescue them. She also gave instructions to about 70 more who found their way to freedom independently. During a ten-year span she made 19 trips into the South and escorted over 300 slaves to freedom. She once proudly pointed out to Frederick Douglass, in all of her journeys she "never lost a single passenger." The famous abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison called her "Moses," and the name stuck. By 1856, Tubman's capture would have brought a \$40,000 reward from the South (scholar Catherine Clinton notes that the total was likely a sum of all of the various rewards offered for her capture). On one occasion, she overheard some men reading her wanted poster, which stated that she was illiterate. She promptly pulled out a book and feigned reading it. The ploy was enough to fool the men.

A lifelong humanitarian and civil rights activist, she formed friendships with abolitionists, politicians, writers and intellectuals. She knew Frederick Douglass and was close to John Brown and William Henry Seward. John Brown, who led the raid at Harper's Ferry, and others called her "the General." She was particularly close with suffragists Lucretia Coffin Mott, Martha Coffin Wright, and Susan B. Anthony. Intellectuals in New England's progressive circles, such as Ralph Waldo Emerson, William Lloyd Garrison, Bronson Alcott, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Franklin B. Sanborn, and Mrs. Horace Mann, befriended her, and her work was heralded beyond the United States.

During the Civil War, she served the United States Army as a spy, scout, nurse and cook. In

early 1862, Tubman traveled to South Carolina to provide badly needed nursing care for African-American soldiers and civilians. Working with Major General David Hunter, Tubman also began spying and scouting behind Confederate lines.

On June 1, 1863 she joined Colonel James Montgomery and his 2nd South Carolina Infantry, composed of emancipated slaves, in an assault on several plantations along the Combahee River. This raid rescued more than 700 enslaved people, many of whom later enlisted in the Union army. These actions weakened the Confederate economy while providing the Union army with more soldiers. Her role in the raid was celebrated in the press, increasing her fame.

Tubman also stood up to racial segregation after the war. According to scholar Kate Clifford Larsen, during a train ride to New York, the conductor told her to move into the smoking car. When she refused, citing her government service, the conductor and other white passengers forced her into the smoking car, breaking her arm in the process. Despite her service, Tubman never received a regular salary and was for years denied compensation. Tubman eventually received a small pension for her service in the Civil War.

Tubman showed the same zeal and passion for the campaign to attain women's suffrage after the American Civil War as she had shown for the abolition of slavery. Harriet Tubman died in 1913 in Auburn, New York at the home she purchased from Secretary of State William Seward in 1859, where she established the Harriet Tubman Home for the Aged. She was buried with military honors at Fort Hill Cemetery.

Application of APS Policy

Below is the copy-and-pasted policy we were given at the start of our committee process. I included my specific justifications for Tubman in highlighted italics.

1. Based on the Name of an Individual
 - a. The individual played a critical role or contributed to society in ways that supported the success and well-being of the individuals who live in Arlington County, the Commonwealth of Virginia or the United States, now and in the future.
 - i. *Tubman was a key figure in leading the Underground Railroad, leading hundreds to freedom, fighting in the Civil War to free slaves, and participating in abolitionist and women's suffrage movements.*
 - b. The individual's "principal legacy" (i.e. the key activity, advocacy or accomplishment for which the individual is most known) aligns with or reflects the APS mission, vision, and core values and beliefs.
 - i. Core values:
 1. **Excellence:** Ensure all students receive an exemplary education that is academically challenging and meets their social and emotional needs.

2. **Equity:** Eliminate opportunity gaps and achieve excellence by providing access to schools, resources, and learning opportunities according to each student's unique needs.

Tubman stood up to injustice wherever she saw it – as a teenager when she intervened in the attack on another slave (injuring herself in the process); escaping to freedom and then returning to rescue her own family; leading the Underground Railroad; fighting in the Civil War; protesting segregation despite great personal risk – She is the embodiment of the fight for equality.

3. **Inclusivity:** Strengthen our community by valuing people for who they are, nurturing our diversity, and embracing the contributions of all students, families, and staff.

Harriet Tubman has not been honored in the same way as other heroes of American history, likely because of her status as a woman of color. While the federal government several years ago planned to place her on the \$20 bill, that process has stagnated under the current administration.

Placing a person of color – and a woman – on the school would be symbolic of the fact that the school is majority-minority, as well as acknowledge the contributions of women. Very few APS schools (if any?) are named for women.

I particularly like the placement of Tubman next to George Washington. Washington as the founder of our nation was a hero, but had his own moral blindspots, particularly when it came to slavery. That the Declaration of Independence declared “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal,” while ignoring women and people of color (and later protecting slavery in the U.S. Constitution) is deeply ironic. It took another war and over 200 years for us to realize the Declaration's sentiments. Harriet Tubman was a key figure in our reaching a real understanding of equality. Washington never would have considered her on equal terms to him given his own moral blindspots of the time, and yet she is the embodiment of everything good our country has to offer. I love their placement next to each other – symbolizing the past, future, and realization of equality.

4. **Integrity:** Build trust by acting honestly, openly, ethically, and respectfully.
5. **Collaboration:** Foster partnerships with families, community, and staff to support the success of our students.
6. **Innovation:** Engage in forward-thinking to identify bold ideas that enable us to be responsive to the expectations of our organization

and community while cultivating creativity, critical thinking, and resourcefulness in our students.

7. **Stewardship:** Manage our resources to honor the community's investment in our schools; create safe, healthy, and environmentally sustainable learning environments; support civic and community engagement; and serve current and future generations.

- c. Deceased for 5 years

2. ...

3. Other Naming Criteria:

- a. School/facility names may articulate aspirations of the educational outcomes for Arlington's students;

APS students should aspire to be like Harriet Tubman: standing up to others who threaten harm. This is particularly important given the prevalence of school bullying.

A school name should be both aspirational and inspirational; it should inspire students to emulate positive conduct.

- b. School/facility names may also reflect the instructional focus of the school;

- c. School/facility names should consider the diverse community that they serve, and *See above - Placing a person of color – and a woman – on the school would be symbolic of the fact that the school is majority-minority, as well as acknowledge the contributions of women. Very few APS schools (if any?) are named for women.*

- d. Proposed names should avoid duplicating names of other schools in the region to prevent possible confusion with those schools.

No conflict.