

**West Contra Costa Unified School District
Minutes of the Committee on Renaming Portola Middle School
Fairmont Elementary School Multi-Purpose Room
724 Kearney Street
El Cerrito, CA 94530**

June 17, 2014

Committee Members Present:

Randall Enos, Board Member; James Ghidella, Chair; Charles Ramsey, Board President

Staff Present:

Denise Cifelli, Confidential Secretary; Marcus Walton, Communications Director

1. Welcome and Introductions

Mr. Ghidella opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m., welcomed everyone, introduced the committee members and led the group in the Pledge of Allegiance.

2. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Mr. Ramsey moved approval of the Minutes of June 10, 2014 meeting with two name corrections: public speaker Tom Wilson's first name should be "Don" and a first name spelling correction for Kathy Weinstein to "Kathie"; second by Mr. Enos. Board President Charles Ramsey, Board Member Randall Enos, and Chair James Ghidella voted yes, with no abstentions and no absences. Motion carried 3-0-0-0.

3. Presentation on Name Change Proposal

Mr. Ghidella affirmed he was in favor of the proposed name change citing his personal reasons and presented information on the purpose of the committee. Mr. Ramsey thanked Mr. Ghidella for leading the committee and ensured everyone the committee was there to "listen and learn" so they can make the best choice for everyone and looked forward to hearing what everyone had to say. Mr. Enos was also glad to see everyone and sees this process as a teachable moment to broaden student's thoughts so they can make better decisions.

4. Public Comment

Mr. Ghidella mentioned that he, the Board and the District have received numerous letters and emails with people providing their input. This information is being shared on the district website so that everyone is able to view the comments. He then opened the meeting to public comment.

Public Comments:

Margaret Miché provided a history of the Portola family and felt the name was significant enough to retain. However, she wanted to offer her three choices: 1) Pina J. Barbieri Middle School. As a second cousin she would like to see her family honored, 2) Castro Middle School as the school is located on Castro Ranch land, and 3) leave the name as is and name the gym in honor of Korematsu.

Bill Sato, a history teacher, spoke in favor of renaming the school to Fred Korematsu. He felt his life and court case is very instructive to students and relates to teaching the Constitution, civil liberties and rights.

Reverend Kevin Omi spoke in favor of the name change. He relayed stories of his and his wife's family which included the endurance of their parents in internment and POW camps. He favors the name change as he believes it will serve as a unique opportunity to educate young people for generations to come. *(His comments are also available on the website.)*

Sue Roberts let everyone know that she was in favor of the name change and spoke at the June 10th meeting. Tonight she wanted to introduce her friend, Mary Kamiya, who spoke to the group about her internment experience and life as a Japanese American during and after the war.

Mary Kamiya covered her life experiences. She was moved to an internment camp at age 16 and talked about how Fred Korematsu inspired the people in the camps. She brought along pictures and photos which were displayed for everyone. She is in favor of the name change.

Laura Iiyama spoke in favor of the name change as it will “reflect a national name with a national story”. She read a letter she wrote to the District on behalf of the Contra Costa Japanese American Citizens League (JACL) detailing the history of Korematsu’s lawsuit regarding the mistreatment of Japanese American which reached the U. S. Supreme court. (*Her letter can be read on the District’s website*).

Chizu Iiyama also spoke in favor of the name change. Mr. Iiyama is active in civic affairs and thanked the committee for all that they are doing. He feels that times have changed and there has been a change in views relating to acceptance which makes this change appropriate.

Joanna Pace spoke in favor of the name change. She had attended the June 10th meeting and said there were concerns from some, suggestions on other names from others. Ms. Pace also brought pictures she had in her home and from the El Cerrito Historical Society which she shared with the group. She felt changing the name to Korematsu would help teach students to treat others with respect and kindness.

Toru Saito was one of the first students at Portola and spent time at the Topaz Internment Camp. He talked about his life growing up as a Japanese American after the war. He felt that at the time the Japanese Americans saw Korematsu as a troublemaker when he was sent to the camps as the Japanese beliefs were those of loyalty, obedience and self-sacrifice; Korematsu was not. Mr. Saito felt it fitting at this time to honor the man by giving his name to the school and is in favor of the name change.

Kathie Weinstein spoke in opposition to the name change as she did at the June 10th meeting. She stated that everyone has a story to tell and we’re all here as Americans. She just prefers the name go to a local family. Ms. Weinstein still wants to put forth the names of Sundar Shadi and Castro Middle School for consideration.

Yosh Murakawa has lived in El Cerrito for 50 years and was raised in an internment camp. He stated she is a believer in diversity and believes in the name change to Korematsu.

John Veirs submitted the name of his grandfather, Phillip A. Lee, for consideration. His grandfather grew up in Richmond and was on the first city council. He was also the first mayor of El Cerrito and served 7 terms. Mr. Lee also spent many years on the city council. He built his life, raised his family and began his career all in the Richmond/El Cerrito area. Mr. Veirs felt it more fitting to have a local name associated to the school, especially one with such a long-standing history of community service.

Karley Umoru is a teacher in the district and recommended Castro Middle School as her first choice. She has a strong connection with Castro with fond memories of the school and teachers. Her second choice would be Sundar Shadi Middle School.

Cliff Nuzman has grown up in the area with great memories of his school years. He did not feel a name change is necessary. If the district feels a change is necessary, he prefers to have a local name on the school. His first choice is Victor Castro Middle School; second choice would be Sundar Shadi Middle School.

Kazue Nakahara has lived in the area for 39 years and has a fondness for all the names that have been submitted but favored Sundar Shadi as he put El Cerrito on the map. However, after learning more about Fred Korematsu, she decided that she preferred to have his name on the school. Ms. Nakahara also

wanted to be sure his full name was on the school: Fred Toyosaburo Korematsu, not just Fred T. Korematsu.

Ray Dennen opened as saying he preferred to have the school named after Gaspar de Portola and provided a brief history of his accomplishments. He then questioned how the name change came about to which Mr. Ramsey replied that he will speak to that during his comment portion. Mr. Denin then recommended the name Yuri Kochiyama for consideration. He provided a history of her life as a human rights activist adding that she was nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize in 2005. He ended by again asking, “Why the name change?” He feels the name should stay as Portola and if a change is necessary, name the library or other building for him. Mr. Denin expressed concern that there were not enough names to choose from and that the committee was only considering Korematsu and still did not understand the need to change the name.

Written Comments:

Margaret Miché wrote to submit 3 names for consideration: 1) Pina J. Barbieri Middle School, 2) Castro Middle School, and 3) name the gym only in honor of Korematsu.

Mary Ghidella wrote: “Korematsu as the name of the new middle school. I think today we need to teach about tolerance to all groups. The lessons his struggle shows us are so very relevant today. He fought for his civil rights against great injustices for such a long time.”

5. Committee Comments:

Mr. Ghidella mentioned that he has received a lot of emails and reiterated that they will all be posted on the district’s website. He assured everyone that all written comments will be read and considered by the committee. He then read an email from Martin Lipton supporting the change to Fred T. Korematsu. *(Letter can be viewed on the district website)*

Mr. Enos commented that he’s been continually impressed by everyone who has spoken and anticipates receiving more input over the next 2 meetings.

Mr. Ramsey thanked everyone who spoke and came out for the meeting and that he appreciated hearing everyone’s comments. He explained to the group that he understood them wanting to retain certain aspects of the community. He also stated he didn’t feel the district had the diversity it should. He felt that Korematsu represents us as Americans and that he hoped everyone could relate to that and his fight for injustice. Mr. Ramsey stated that he had not made up his mind and that he’s looking for a name that both inspires and creates a national story.

6. Adjournment

Mr. Ghidella adjourned the meeting at 8:52 p.m.

Next meeting will be held on June 26th at Harding Elementary School. Meeting will begin at 7:00 p.m. Written comments can be viewed on the District’s website at <http://www.wccusd.net/Page/4506>.