



February 25, 2021

**TO: York Region District School Board Trustees**

The Toronto & York Region Labour Council represents 220,000 unionized members who work in every sector of the economy. This includes many of our affiliates who work and live in York Region in fields such as education, municipalities, and the private sector. We advocate for better conditions for all working families, and fairness and equity in the workplace and community. Our approach is always driven by the need to achieve equity and racial justice in a region as diverse as ours.

We are deeply disheartened by the actions of the York Region District School Board in regards to the renaming process of Vaughan Secondary School. As elected representatives, Trustees are charged with upholding the mission statement, vision and values of the third largest school district in Ontario. It states that the YRDSB operates based on the values of *“inclusivity”* and *“relationships,”* demonstrating equity and inclusivity in all that you do, demanding an environment in which all students, staff, parents and the community feel valued and a sense of belonging.

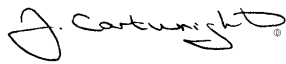
The call to rename Vaughan Secondary School, named after an 18<sup>th</sup> century slave holder, is due to the tireless organizing efforts of local Black leaders, residents, students and allies. It is not merely the renaming of a new school - it is an act of healing for those who face systemic racism. We were pleased that the Board of Trustees voted to change the name of the school and set a process for public consultation involving students and community members voting based on a selected group of potential names. Voting results indicated overwhelming support (more than 42%) for renaming the school after Hodan Nalayeh, a Canadian-Somali journalist with a legacy of social activism who was tragically killed in a terrorist attack in 2019. The student and community voices were clear - the school should be named after an icon who used her voice in an unwavering pursuit of social justice, who reflected the student body, and who had community ties to Vaughan.

Instead, the process for renaming the school has unnecessarily pitted communities against one another at a time when students, parents and education workers need to band together to address mental health issues and engage in meaningful conversations regarding the elimination of racism in our schools.

The name Hodan Nalayeh is the choice of the majority, the choice of healing and the choice of moral reparations. To ignore the results of this democratic process and the reason for the name change is to further hamper the building of positive, meaningful relationships with Black students, staff and parents – a core value identified in the values and mission statement of the York Region District School Board.

We call on you to honour the vision of the York Region District School Board and to uphold the oath of your office by honouring the wishes of the York Region community you serve.

Sincerely,



John Cartwright  
President



Jennifer Huang  
Senior Organizer