

To: Executive Committee, City of Toronto

CC: Councillors Layton, Cressy and Bailão; Andrew Lochhead

**Re: EX25.1 – Recognition Review Project Update and Response to the Dundas Street Renaming Petition**

Meeting Date: July 6, 2021

July 5, 2021

Dear Members of the Executive Committee,

As a citizen of Toronto and as a teacher, I urge you to rename Dundas Street, and to stop honouring a historical figure whose beliefs and actions conflict with our city's inclusive values.

I teach at Queen Alexandra Middle School, at Dundas and Broadview Avenue. As part of our History curriculum this year, my class explored British North America's involvement in the Transatlantic Slave Trade. We learned about Henry Dundas, and his efforts to obstruct the abolition of slavery, which ultimately resulted in a fifteen-year delay of abolition. During that fifteen-year period, it has been calculated that six hundred thousand people from Africa or of African descent were enslaved. Upon learning about this history, my students expressed horror and outrage that Henry Dundas had been honoured so extensively, in Great Britain and its colonies, by having towns, roads and schools named after him. In fact, many of my students had graduated from Dundas St. Public School, which shares the property with Queen Alexandra Middle School.

My students, who have been steeped in the Toronto District Schoolboard's emphasis on equity, empathy and kindness, could not reconcile the values they have been learning with fact that our neighbouring school, and the street many of them lived on, or walked/biked/drove on every day, are named for someone who fought to maintain the British Empire's participation in the Transatlantic slave trade, with its (by then) well-documented harmful impacts on enslaved peoples. Many of my students are racialized, including some who are Black. They appreciate the intergenerational trauma and other lingering effects of racial injustice that the slave trade continues to have on marginalized groups.

In response to their learning, a group of my students decided to speak out against the ongoing celebration of Dundas' legacy. They wanted to draw attention to the harmful effects of Henry Dundas' actions, and so they created a [petition](#) to advocate for the renaming of Dundas St. Public School. These students recognized the inconsistency of a school which values and celebrates diversity, whose student body reflects the racial diversity of the neighbourhood, and naming it for a person who worked to continue the enslavement of Black bodies.

As a teacher, I recognize the importance of teaching our history honestly. I will continue to teach about Henry Dundas, and the effects of his collusion with West Indian plantation interests, and his fight to expand slavery in the Caribbean. However, I also recognize the importance of choosing role models carefully, and being thoughtful about whom we celebrate and honour with street and place names. I understand that renaming all civic assets bearing the Dundas name is a costly and complicated endeavour; however, I also understand that celebrating someone who blocked the abolition of the slave trade sends a harmful message to anyone who values equity, justice and diversity.

As elected representatives, I urge you to make a brave choice, and to consider the impact of your decision on students and children growing up along a street named for a person who believed Black bodies are expendable. Let's make sure future generations grow up in a place where the names of our city's assets reflect our city's values.

Michelle Munk, Teacher (TDSB)