

# BOOKER T. WASHINGTON EMPOWERMENT NETWORK, INC.

Founded by the great-granddaughter of Booker T. Washington.

Designed to encourage, inspire, enlighten, and inform.

August 8, 2008

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Dr. Michael Hinojosa and  
Dallas ISD Board Members  
3700 Ross Avenue  
Dallas, TX 75204-5491

Greetings Dr Hinojosa and ISD Board Members:

It has come to the attention of the Booker T. Washington family that a name change is being considered for the Booker T. Washington High School for the Visual and Performing Arts.

As one of the great-granddaughters of Booker T. Washington, and on behalf of the entire Washington family across the nation, including his two living granddaughters, Gloria Washington Baskin of Los Angeles, CA and Margaret Washington Clifford of Atlanta, GA, I respectfully request that you reconsider changing the name of the school.

For the past several years I have been working to improve the lives of youth across socio-economic and ethnic backgrounds. The one factor I find that the vast majority of them have in common is that when they feel connected to a well-known individual who has achieved success by overcoming adversity, their spirits are positively uplifted. Who better to reflect this type of accomplishment than Booker T. Washington?

The Booker T. Washington name is synonymous with education on many levels. He went from beginning his life as a slave to graduating from Hampton Institute (today known as Hampton University) with honors, to opening Tuskegee Institute (today known as Tuskegee University) at the age of 25, to receiving an honorary master's degree from Harvard, and an honorary Ph.D. from Dartmouth University. The late great historian, author, and journalist, Carter G. Woodson compares Washington's educational philosophies to the 18<sup>th</sup> century European pioneers of education, Pestalozzi, Froebel, and Herbart.

His name is synonymous with achievement. He was advisor to presidents McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft. He was the author of many books, including "Up from Slavery," a bestseller, which was translated into over 17 different languages, and has never been out of print. And he was the first African-American to be commemorated on a U.S. postage stamp and a fifty-cent coin.

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His name is significant to many of the principles that students across the country can benefit from today – the development of high moral character; not giving up or giving in; leading by example; taking personal responsibility; and not just searching for, but finding the silver lining beneath every dark cloud.

His name stands for excellence. Hundreds of organizations across America have adopted the name of Booker T. Washington, especially those serving youth – from schools, community centers, and parks, to housing developments and neighborhoods. More than 90 years after his death, his name continues to promote betterment.

Martin Luther King, Jr., who coincidentally graduated from Booker T. Washington High School in Atlanta, Georgia, once said of Booker T. Washington, “He lit a torch in Alabama, and darkness fled.” He lit torches from the North to the South as he responded to the desperate pleas of parents and educators who asked him to help them open schools modeled after Tuskegee Institute. One such school is Laurinburg Institute in North Carolina. I had the privilege of speaking there during their centennial celebration in 2004. This is one of the only four remaining private black boarding schools open today in America.

Eliminating the Booker T. Washington name from an educational institution in Dallas, a city so significant to the fabric of this country, would be like removing the spirit from the body.

Again, with the highest regard for the commendable work that all of you do on behalf of all of the students in your district, I ask on behalf of the Booker T. Washington family that you please seriously rethink this possible name change. It is our hope that the name, Booker T. Washington High School for the Visual and Performing Arts, will remain unchanged, and that the student body will forever aim to live up to the remarkable achievements of its most honorable namesake.

Very respectfully yours,

Sarah O’Neal Rush, M.A.  
Great-granddaughter of Booker T. Washington  
Founder and Executive Director, BTWEN, Inc.