

March 20, 2023

TO: Dr. Carlton Jenkins, Superintendent, Madison Public Schools

FROM: Betsy Abramson, Community Member  
Alan Klugman, Executive Director, Jewish Federation of Madison  
Andrea Richichi, Principal of Lindbergh Elementary School; and  
Katie Hoel, Lindbergh Elementary School parent representative;

RE: Proposal to Re-Name Charles A. Lindbergh Elementary School pursuant to **MMSD Policies and Procedures 6700 – Proposal for Naming a MMSD Building**

In recent months we have learned more about Charles Lindbergh, largely from the sources listed as an Appendix to this memo, most notably the PBS Ken Burns 3-part “The U.S. and the Holocaust,” and a lecture by Brandeis University Professor Daniel Breen.

In brief, while Lindbergh was an aviation expert who was well-known for being the first person to fly across the Atlantic Ocean, he was also a Nazi sympathizer, an isolationist and nationalist. He praised Germany for their “experiment” against increasing minorities and the mentally ill. Lindbergh took a very public stance in favor of neutrality in WWII and created the America First organization. He made speeches professing that Jews had an outsized role in public life and in a 1941 speech in Iowa stated, “We must preserve that most priceless possession, our inheritance of European blood.” Wendell Wilkie, the Republicans’ 1940 candidate for President, called the speech the most un-American speech he’d ever heard by a national public figure. Lindbergh’s advocacy and political pressure on FDR resulted in huge numbers of Jewish refugees not being admitted to the U.S. and therefore killed by the Nazis. Lindbergh also lived a double life; he used a false name (Mr. Careu Kent) and fathered seven children with three different women in Germany, none of whom knew of each other’s existence, nor did his American wife, Anne Morrow Lindbergh and their four children.

We are at a moment in history of significant racial reckoning while simultaneously seeing the rise of white supremacist, antisemitic and other hate groups. Historians are working to update our knowledge of Lindbergh beyond his aviation successes and acumen to acknowledge his racist beliefs and actions. In the capital city of Wisconsin, known for its progressive history and commitment to diversity, we do not believe we should have a school named for a white supremacist. Lindbergh was unquestionably a major reason that legions of individuals died, due to his involvement in the America First movement and his political pressure to close America’s borders to refugees. There is definitely a movement in the U.S. to replace Lindbergh as the name of schools and other buildings. See APPENDIX.

To be respectful to the Lindbergh community, community member Betsy Abramson met with Lindbergh Principal Andrea Richichi before beginning this process. Principal Richichi shared that her staff is well-aware of Lindbergh’s ugly history and want very much for the name to be changed. They have removed displays and pictures of Lindbergh in the building and rarely use the school’s name with the children. Instead, they call themselves “flyers” and refer to the community as Flyer Families.

We have communicated with many organizations in the district to explore these organizations’ interest in signing on to this effort. We are very pleased to share with you that the following organizations, in alphabetical order, have authorized us to include their name in this request to re-name Lindbergh Elementary School:

1. African American Council of Churches Madison, WI
2. African American-Jewish Friendship Group
3. Beth Israel Center
4. Congregation Shaarei Shamayim – expect response early March, by vote of Steering Committee
5. Fountain of Life Covenant Church, Rev. Dr. Alexander Gee, Jr.
6. Jewish Federation of Madison
7. Lindbergh Elementary School Faculty
8. Madison Teachers Inc. – Retired (MTI-R)
9. NAACP – Dane County Branch
10. Temple Beth El
11. Urban League of Greater Madison
12. Wisconsin Council of Churches
13. Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
14. Wisconsin Jewish Conference

We understand that proposals to name or re-name a school must contain up to four recommended names. The policy indicates that schools may be named for:

- (a) a prominent national or local figure who is deceased;
- (b) a place of local significance; or
- (c) an idea or concept that represents a broadly respected civic virtue.

Please note that our interest in this proposal is in *removing* the LINDBERGH name and as such we do not have strong opinions about a proposed name. We believe the process should defer to the preferences of the current Lindbergh community. As such, the Lindbergh faculty met several times and discussed possible names to recommend. They recognize that there are risks involved in selecting an individual after whom a school is named: no person is infallible and our values about the quality of a good role model change over time. Thus, while the Lindbergh community considered the names of many prominent individuals, they ultimately determined it most prudent to select a name for the school that relates to its geography and location in Madison rather than proposing it be named after a specific person. (We recognize that through the public input process, individual names may be considered.) Pursuant to the policy, which permits the submission of up to four names, the community proposes consideration of the following names to replace “Lindbergh”:

1. Northport Elementary
2. Yahara Elementary
3. Marsh Elementary
4. Sandhill Elementary

According to the MMSD policy, we understand that you are required to appoint a Citizens Naming Committee. We respectfully ask that you appoint at least one staff member of Lindbergh Elementary School and one Lindbergh parent representative to this committee. Betsy Abramson would also be honored to serve on the committee.

Thank you for the opportunity to submit this proposal.

## APPENDIX

- Ken Burns 3-part, six hours, The U.S. and the Holocaust, Episode 2, “Yearning to Breathe Free” (1938-1942) <https://www.pbs.org/kenburns/us-and-the-holocaust/>
- PBS, American Experience: FALLEN HERO - <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/lindbergh-fallen-hero/>
- Minnesota Historical Society – Charles Lindbergh House and Museum <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/lindbergh-fallen-hero/>
- Inside history Newsletter: <https://www.history.com/this-day-in-history/lindbergh-to-congress-negotiate-with-hitler>
- Britannica: <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Charles-Lindbergh/Germany-and-the-America-First-movement>
- BBC News – June 2013 - <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/magazine-22684773>
- Wikipedia: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles\\_Lindbergh](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Lindbergh) See especially sections 6-8
- A. Scott Berg biography: **Lindbergh**.
- Charles Lindbergh: The Complicated Story of an Infamous Life – by Daniel Breen – Brandeis University, One Day University – Monday, 12/12/2022 - <https://www.onedayu.com/videos/charles-lindbergh-the-complicated-story-of-an-infamous-life/>
- Information about Lindbergh’s three secret families in Germany: <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/11/29/world/dna-proves-lindbergh-led-a-double-life.html> .
- *Movement to remove/rename buildings, streets, parks, schools named for Lindbergh:*
  - Elementary school in San Diego, California*
    - <https://clairemonttimes.com/why-rename-lindbergh-schweitzer-elementary-school/>
    - <https://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/communities/san-diego/story/2019-12-15/push-afoot-to-rename-lindbergh-schweitzer-elementary-school>
  - Park in Minnetonka, Minnesota*
    - <https://kstp.com/kstp-news/top-news/hopkins-public-schools-votes-to-form-committee-to-consider-new-name-for-lindbergh-center/>
    - <https://ccxmedia.org/news/hopkins-school-district-starts-process-to-rename-lindbergh-center/>
  - Park in Milwaukee renamed to Berrien Park – after a local activist.*
    - <https://www.jsonline.com/story/news/local/milwaukee/2021/10/24/milwaukees-lucille-berrien-park-renamed-after-being-lindbergh-park/6151630001/>
    - <https://shepherdexpress.com/news/features/milwaukee-alliance-organizes-to-rename-lindbergh-park/>
    - <http://www.milwaukeeindependent.com/articles/lindbergh-park-moves-one-step-closer-renamed-local-activist-lucille-berrien/>
  - School in Peoria, Illinois*
    - <https://www.chicagotribune.com/news/breaking/ct-aud-peoria-school-names-thomas-jefferson-20210324-dpdjaaju6fesjhrq5gvkqbxqyq-story.html>