



39 of 166 DOCUMENTS

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HEADLINE: OUR SAY PROVIDENCE IS WRONG NAME FOR NEW SCHOOL

BODY:

EVERYONE KNOWS the query of Shakespeare's lovestruck Juliet about why the last name of her sweetheart is such a big deal: "What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet." But no one agrees with her. Authors _ Shakespeare included, no doubt _ agonize over what to name their characters; parents debate what to name their children; corporate lawyers swoop down if you use a copyrighted brand name in vain.

And Providence Center is appeal

ing to the state bureaucracy to try to reverse the county school board's decision to name the new county high school for disruptive students the Providence Academy.

Providence Center's point of view is set out in the letter by Lorraine M. Sheehan elsewhere on this page. The 35-year-old community non

profit organization, which provides services to about 500 developmental

ly disabled adults, is afraid that any confusion between it and the new Crownsville school could damage its reputation and its fund-raising efforts.

This may sound like nitpicking, but you can see why Providence Center's officials would be worried. Fund raising is absolutely crucial to any nonprofit organization. Provi

dence Center doesn't want to lose a single potential donor who might not return a phone call or might toss out a solicitation because he vaguely remembers hearing some

thing unfavorable linked with the name "Providence," or because he wonders why he should be expected to contribute to a public high school.

They were concerned enough to take the matter to the state Board of Education, which last month ruled that the center has standing to make an appeal. The case has now been forwarded to the state Office of Administrative Hearings.

The naming of the new high school has been snake-bitten from the first. The board's first tentative choice was

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Arundel Academy, which sounds safely generic, but drew objections from Millersville residents because it was the same as the historic boarding school _ the ancestor of Arundel High School _ that operated between 1854 and 1924.

The board asked the school's students to pick a name, but then overruled their choice _ Crowns

ville High School _ because it didn't want to imply any associ

ation between the school and the nearby Crownsville Hospital, a state psychiatric facility.

The board then passed over dozens of suggestions from the pub

lic and settled on Providence Acad

emy, named after the county's first settlement. As school board Vice President Paul Rudolph notes, the name is historic and in the public domain, and no one has any right to its exclusive use.

From a legal point of view, Mr. Rudolph is absolutely right. From a practical point of view, it was dumb of the board to get into this avoid

able fight with a well-established and well-liked community insti

tution, and would be even dumber for the board to pursue it.

Unlike most of the issues facing the county schools, this one should be easy to resolve. The school board should change the name of the school _ preferably to something that no one else is using.

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