

July 7, 2025

NR ITEM NO.: ONE

FILE NO.: NR2025-003

**NAME:** Paul Laurence Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College –  
Additional Documentation

**LOCATION:** 1100 Wright Avenue

**APPLICANT/AUTHORIZED AGENT:**

City of Little Rock  
Planning & Development Department  
723 W. Markham,  
Little Rock, AR 72201

Angie Clifton Thiel  
Clifton Historic Resources, LLC  
Linden, TN 37096

**OWNER:**

Little Rock School District  
810 W. Markham,  
Little Rock, AR 72201



*Figure 1. Front and central façade of the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College.*

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AREA: 2.46 acres

NUMBER OF LOTS: 1

WARD: 1

HISTORIC DISTRICT: Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District

HISTORIC STATUS: Listed in 1980 (local significance), PU3232

CURRENT ZONING: R4, Two-family district, CUP

## A. BACKGROUND

### *Location*

The subject structure is located at 1100 Wright Avenue.

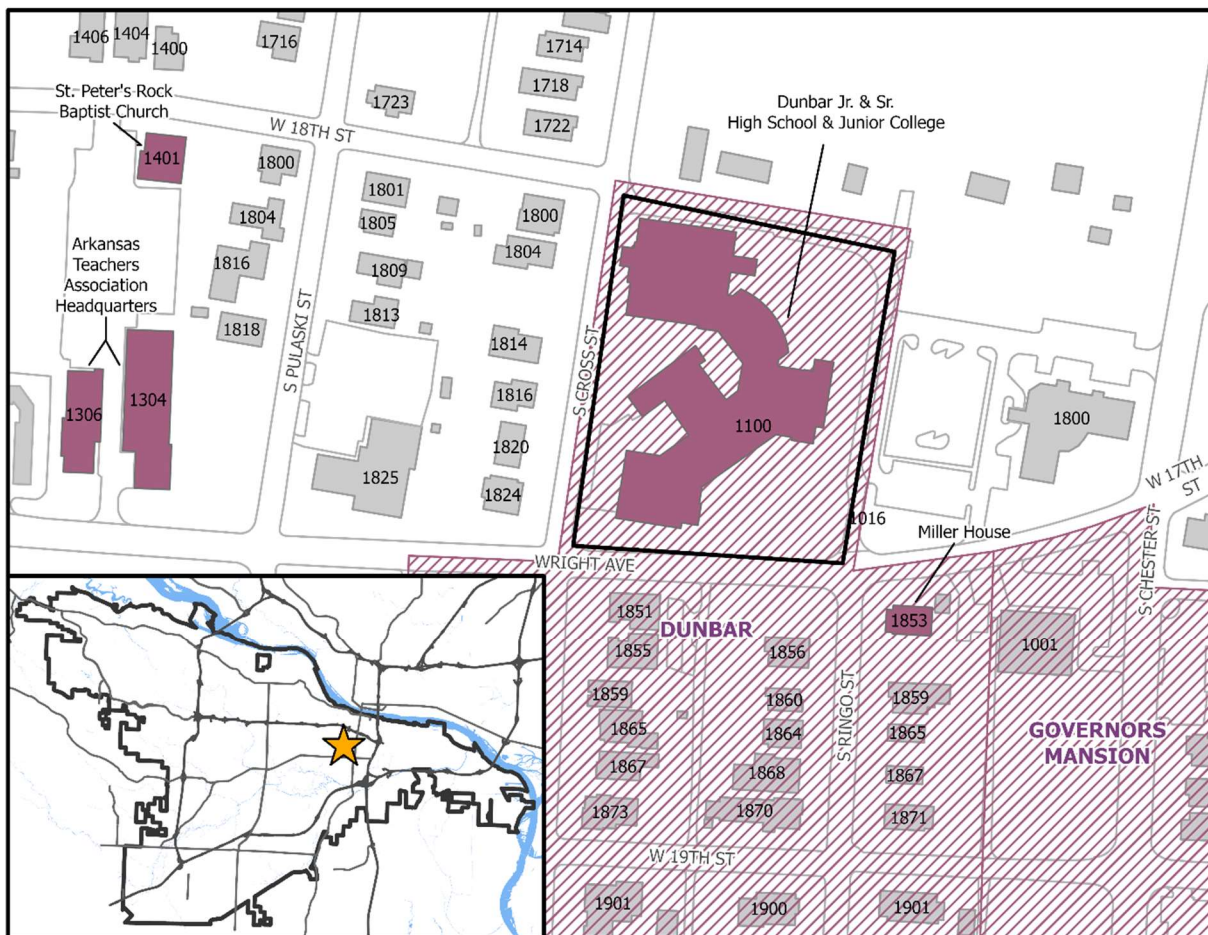


Figure 2. Location of the Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College at 1100 Wright Avenue.

*Context*

This nomination is submitted for consideration by the City of Little Rock, in partnership with the Little Rock School District, the Dunbar Historic Neighborhood Association, and the Quapaw Quarter Association. This project is funded in part by the Underrepresented Communities grant program through the Historic Preservation Fund, administered by the National Parks Service. The City received federal grant funding for the research, preparation, and submission of an updated National Register nomination for the Paul Laurence Dunbar School. The nomination project's aim is to elevate the site's level significance to national significance to reflect the comprehensive themes, significant people, and events of the site related to African American history.

B. PROPOSAL/REQUEST/APPLICANT'S STATEMENT:

The application requests to nominate Paul Laurence Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College – Additional Documentation to the National Register of Historic Places for local and state significance under Criterion A: Law, Ethnic Heritage: Black and C: Architecture, Education—through the submission of Additional Documentation—for its role: in Education as the first of only three Rosenwald urban industrial trade school in the segregated South and the only one with a junior college; as the sole Black high school in Little Rock from 1929 to 1955 and serving as a cultural and educational cornerstone for Little Rock's Black community; for its distinctive Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern architecture, reflecting Little Rock's educational architectural heritage; and for its association with Sue Cowan Williams, an English teach at Dunbar who was the primary plaintiff in the landmark Civil Rights case *Morris v. Williams* (1942-1945) for equal pay for Black teachers.

C. EXISTING CONDITIONS:

See photos in Nomination (Attachment A).

D. DEPARTMENT COMMENTS:

None

E. NEIGHBORHOOD NOTIFICATIONS AND COMMENTS:

All neighborhood associations registered with the City of Little Rock that surround the site were notified of the public hearing.

At the time of distribution, there were no comments regarding this application.

F. ANALYSIS:

The Nomination's Statement of Significance summary section states:

"The Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College holds national significance under Criterion A for its role in Education as the first of only three Rosenwald urban industrial trade schools in the segregated South and the only one with a junior college. Partially funded by the General Education Board, it elevated Black education with a unique curriculum of vocational and collegiate training, reflecting the GEB's mission to advance Black educators. Additionally, the Dunbar School holds national significance under Criterion A in the category of Law with Sue Cowan Williams, an English Teacher at the Dunbar School, being the main plaintiff in the landmark Civil Rights *Morris v. Williams* case (1942-1945) for equal pay for Black teachers. Students at the Dunbar School played a pivotal role in advancing this legacy, as seven of the Little Rock Nine (Ernest Green, Elizabeth Eckford, Terrence Roberts, Carlotta Walls, Gloria Ray, Thelma Mothershed, and Melba Pattillo), and likely all nine, given Minnijean Brown and Jefferson Thomas's probable attendance and ties to the community, chose to be the first Black students to enroll at Central High School in 1957, a nationally transformative event known as the 1957 Crisis at Central High that tested *Brown v. Board of Education* and prompted federal intervention.

Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College also has local significance under Criterion A in the category of Ethnic Heritage/Black stemming from its role as the sole Black high school in Little Rock from 1929 to 1955 and serving as a cultural and educational cornerstone for the city's Black community. Located in the Paul Laurence Dunbar School Neighborhood Historic District (National Register Listed 09/27/13), its Black pride through its renaming to honor poet Paul Laurence Dunbar, its Florence Price Auditorium hosting historical and cultural figures like Eleanor Roosevelt and Duke Ellington, Count Basie, Florence Price, General Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., and its programs fostering Black excellence via athletics, extracurriculars, and a junior college. Community leaders' advocacy for its academic and vocational offerings, alongside its alumni's local impact (e.g., Little Rock Nine, National Dunbar Alumni Association), highlight its enduring role in Little Rock's Black heritage, which reflects its resilience against segregation's constraints, desegregation's challenges, and civil rights violations.

Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College is locally significant under Criterion C for its distinctive Art Deco and Mid-Century Modern architecture,

reflecting Little Rock's educational architectural heritage. The d. 1929 Dunbar School Building, designed by local architects Wittenberg & Delony, exemplifies Art Deco restraint with its smooth brick facade, vertical piers, geometric detailing, and courtyard layout, enhanced by the Florence Price Auditorium's grand design, a testament to the firm's auditorium expertise also seen in Little Rock Central High School. The d. 1950 Physical Education Building, by Little Rock architect Bruce R. Anderson, adds Mid-Century Modern simplicity with its concrete block construction, clean lines, and functional gymnasium, complementing the campus's postwar expansion. Together, these works by prominent local architects distinguish the Dunbar School as a landmark educational complex, its preserved design integrity with the only alterations seen being the d. 2004 addition connecting the two contributing resources at the north end and d. 2024 replacement windows that replaced over 160 ca. 1990 deteriorated windows for new, energy-efficient ones that closely resemble the original d. 1929 windows. The period of significance (1929-1955) encompasses the construction and use of both buildings as integral parts of Little Rock's Black educational architecture, ending when Dunbar transitioned to a junior high school in 1955."

The Arkansas Historic Preservation Program has set forth the "Arkansas Certified Local Government Procedures." In Section V of this agreement, "Certified Local Governments Participation in the National Register Nomination Process," Little Rock Historic District Commission's role is identified:

*"B. CLG involvement in the National Register process*

- 1. Within 60 calendar days of receipt of the nomination, the CLG shall inform the AHPP by submission of a report (see section V-A) as to its opinion regarding the eligibility of the property. The CLG shall also inform the property owner(s) using National Register criteria for evaluation, as to its opinion regarding the eligibility of the property.*
- 2. In the event a nomination is received by the AHPP before submission to the CLG, the AHPP will forward a copy of the completed nomination to the CLG within 30 calendar days of receipt.*
- 3. If both the commission and chief elected official recommend that a property not be nominated because it does not meet the National Register criteria for eligibility, the CLG will so inform the property owner(s) and the State Historic. Preservation Officer, the property will then not be nominated unless an appeal is filed with the SHPO in accordance with appeal procedures outlined in 36 CFR 60. Appeals must be received by*



*the SHPO within 30 calendar days of the date the property owner receives notification by certified mail that the property has been determined ineligible for nomination by both the CLG and the Chief elected official. This is in accordance with Section 101[c] 2 of the NHPA.*

- 4. If the commission or the chief elected official of the CLG recommend that a property should be nominated, the nomination will be scheduled for submission to the Arkansas State Review Board. Scheduling will be in accordance with notification time constraints as set forth in 36 CFR Part 60.*
- 5. The Arkansas State Review Board, after considering all opinions, including those of the commission and the chief elected official of the CLG, shall make its recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer. Either the local preservation commission or the chief elected official may appeal the SHPOs final decision.*
- 6. When a National Register nomination, that has been reviewed by a commission, is submitted to the National Park Service for review and listing, all reports or comments from the local officials will be submitted along with the nomination.*
- 7. The AHPP and the CLG will work together to provide ample opportunity for public participation in the nomination of properties to the National register. All reports submitted by the CLG to the AHPP regarding the eligibility of properties shall include assurances of public input. The CLG shall retain a list of all persons contacted during the evaluation period and note comments that were received. If a public meeting was held, a list of those attending shall be included in the report.”*

Staff finds the nomination meets the National Register criteria for eligibility in the National Register of Historic Places.

The nomination is scheduled to be heard on December 3, 2025 State Review Board meeting at the Division of Arkansas Heritage headquarters at 1100 North Street in Little Rock.

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G. STAFF RECOMMENDATION:

Staff recommends the nomination of the Paul Laurence Dunbar Junior and Senior High School and Junior College – Additional Documentation to the National Register of Historic Places for local and state significance under Criterion A: Law, Ethnic Heritage: Black and Criterion C: Architecture, Education.

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# **Attachment A**

## **Nomination**