



**Andrew J. Bott**  
Superintendent

**The Public Schools of Brookline**  
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May 30, 2018

Dear Brookline Families, Educators, and Staff,

Last night, Brookline Town Meeting voted to change the name of the Edward Devotion School. By a vote of 171 to 19, Town Meeting approved the temporary renaming of the school as the Coolidge Corner School and initiated a process to identify a permanent name that will be voted on at Town Meeting in spring 2019. I believe that this is a positive development and a powerful decision for our schools and the Brookline community.

While the name of the Devotion School has now changed, the school community remains the same vibrant and inclusive community we have come to know and love. This is a community in which families and educators are deeply committed to the success of each and every student. It is my belief that as we move through the process of selecting a permanent school name, the school community will grow even stronger.

Listening to the public debate and hearing from the many people who spoke for and against this warrant article at Town Meeting last night, one point rang true to me and captures the importance and urgency of renaming the school.

We ask our students to form a deep connection to their school and school community: to root for its sports teams, to wear the school's name on their clothes, and to take pride in representing their school to the larger community. The name of the school is the symbol of this pride and, as such, the name should represent the spirit, virtues, and soul of the community. We can no longer ask our students to take pride in the school's name knowing it is named for a person who held another human in bondage. According to Hidden Brookline, one fourth of Brookline households in the 18th century held enslaved people. While Edward Devotion was one of these slaveholders, not all Town residents participated in this injustice. There were other town residents who opposed the institution of slavery and actively worked to abolish it. They upheld the individual dignity of every human. When considering this, it is clear to me that we need to move forward from honoring Edward Devotion and, instead, identify a person worthy of the honor of having the school named for them.

We can and should name our schools for people of whom we are proud, and whose accomplishments and example we can ask our children to emulate. With the vote of Town Meeting, Brookline now has a unique opportunity to choose a name that children and community members can honor and use as an example of the lifelong lessons we want children to learn and connect to.

There is much work to be done in order to ensure that the process of renaming the school is done thoughtfully.

The transition to the new, temporary name - Coolidge Corner School - will be complete by June 29, 2018. By that date the school signage, official records, and the website will be updated.

In the remaining weeks of the school year and during the fall of next year, we will work with school staff and school leaders to support students in understanding the reasons for the name change and the process by which it was changed. We will give students the opportunity to process this change and to express their thoughts and feelings in a variety of ways.

While our first responsibility is to the students in our care, we also need to provide avenues for staff, families, alumni, and others in our community to express their thoughts and feelings. We will hold a series of meetings for students, educators, families, and community members between May 31 and the last day of school on June 26 to inform people about the temporary name change and share information about how they can participate in the process to identify a new permanent name. The school leadership will communicate details about these steps with the Devotion School community and I will also share this information with the broader community.

Over the course of the next year, the School Committee and School Department will lead a community-wide process to identify a permanent name. We will include students, staff, and community members in this public process. The School Committee, after holding public hearings, will recommend a name to the Town's Naming Committee. In accordance with Town of Brookline By-Laws, the Brookline Naming Committee is charged with reviewing all requests for the naming of public buildings. After their public review, they will make an official recommendation of a new name to be presented to Brookline Town Meeting in spring 2019. The final authority for naming public facilities rests with Town Meeting.

As we transition first to the temporary name and then to a new permanent name, I urge community members, staff and students to keep in mind that there is a diversity of opinion about this decision. Many people have a strong attachment to the Devotion School name, not because of what it represents historically, but because of what it means in terms of the community that they or their children grew up in, or where they spent many years as students or educators. I urge us to respect these different points of view and understand that while many will celebrate this decision, others may grieve a loss. It is our collective responsibility to honor this diversity of opinion as we come together to select and transition to a permanent school name.

As we begin this process, it is my hope that we can all see the Town Meeting vote as a powerful decision that upholds our community values. I look forward to our work together over the next year as we identify a new name for the school that reflects these values.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'A. Bott', written in a cursive style.

Andrew J. Bott  
Superintendent