

2019 Special Town Meeting Article 26. Rename the Coolidge Corner School the “Florida Ruffin Ridley School”

Article 26

Submitted by: School Committee; Deborah Brown, TMM1; Anne Greenwald, TMM8; Maya Norton

To see if the Town will vote to name the PK-8 school located at 345 Harvard St., Brookline, MA 02446 the “Florida Ruffin Ridley School”, effective September 1, 2020, or act on anything relative thereto.

Petitioners’ Explanation

In May of 2018, Town Meeting voted favorably on a Warrant Article advanced by Deborah Brown and Anne Greenwald to change the name of the Edward Devotion School. Edward Devotion, for whom the school had been named, was a slave holder. It was the will of Town Meeting as reflected by that vote that individuals who held human beings in bondage should not be honored with schools bearing their name. To continue to name a school after a slave holder would violate the core values of equity, respect, and inclusion that our public schools strive to impart to our students.

Since the beginning of the 2018-19 school year, the school formerly known as Devotion has operated temporarily under the name Coolidge Corner School, after the geographic neighborhood in which it is located. In the fall of 2018, the School Committee, the Superintendent, educators, Coolidge Corner School students, Devotion alumni, and members of the community at large collaborated jointly to create a naming process. From December 10, 2018 to January 23, 2019, the student-led "Bee-lievers in Change" accepted over 250 nominations for new names from the public. The student group met regularly with the Principal, Assistant Principal, District Leaders, as well as special expert guests, to thoroughly research the nominees, develop summaries about each one, and discuss the suitability of each name based on a rubric that included the town naming criteria, the school's core values, and restorative justice principles. After providing the students with this general information, the students began the candidate review and selection process.

During the months that followed, the Bee-lievers in Change narrowed the field from 119 unique submissions to 15 finalists. 3 public events were held to learn about the 15 finalists and provide feedback. Based on the feedback they narrowed the finalists from 15 to 4. On May 24, 2019, the final four choices were presented to the School Committee. Another series of public meetings followed, where the School Committee solicited input about what to recommend as a final name. The School Committee voted 7-0-1 on June 19, 2019 to recommend that the Florida Ruffin Ridley School become the permanent name of the PK-8 school at 345 Harvard St.

Of the eleven school buildings in Brookline, only one is named for a woman, and none for a person of color. Florida Ruffin Ridley (1861-1943) was a Brookline resident who became the second African American teacher in Boston. A leading African-American civil rights activists, suffragist, educator, writer, and editor, Mrs. Ridley co-founded the Society for the Collection of Negro Folklore, the Association of Colored Women Clubs (NACWC), and the League of Women for Community Service, Inc. (LWCS), the latter of which still exists today. She served

as editor of the Woman's Era newspaper and worked as an anti-lynching activist. Mrs. Ridley and her husband are believed to be the first African-American homeowners in Brookline. They lived at 131 Kent St. and attended the Second Unitarian Church on Sewall Avenue, which Mrs. Ridley co-founded.

Ridley was a life-long learner and teacher. Through her work, she hoped to connect an understanding of history with social justice. She believed all races deserved an equal place in society.