

2019 Special Town Meeting Article 28: Rename the Coolidge Corner School the “Robert I. Sperber School”

ARTICLE 28

Submitted by: Lee L. Selwyn, TMM13

To see if the Town will change the name of the former Edward Devotion School, now known as the Coolidge Corner School, to the “Robert I. Sperber School.” or act on anything relative thereto.

Petitioner’s Explanation

At the Annual Town Meeting in May 2018, Town Meeting adopted the following Motion with respect to Article 23:

SUBSTITUTE MOTION OFFERED BY STANLEY SPIEGEL, TMM2

VOTED: That the Town hereby requests that the School Committee propose a new name for the Edward Devotion School after receiving public input through a process to be determined by the School Committee, and hereby requests the Naming Committee to consider the name so selected by the School Committee and make a recommendation to Town Meeting with respect thereto at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting. In the interim, the name of the School shall be the Coolidge Corner School.

However, no recommendation was offered by the School Committee at the 2019 Annual Town Meeting.

Following the adoption of Article 23, the School Committee initiated a process for selecting a new name for what was then being referred to as the Coolidge Corner School. Nominations were solicited “from all Public Schools of Brookline students, families, and staff; members of the Brookline community; and former students and staff of the Devotion School.” A set of specific “Criteria to consider when nominating a person” was provided to those offering nominations:

- (1) A person of excellent reputation and character who has set an example of outstanding citizenship and/or has made an exemplary contribution of time, service, or resources to the Brookline community;
- (2) A national noteworthy public figure or official who represents one or more of the core values of the school (Work Hard, Be Kind, Help Others);
- (3) A person who has made a significant donation or bequest to the town;
- (4) A noteworthy artist, writer, public figure or official who represents Brookline's core values of racial equity and restorative justice;
- (5) An individual who contributed to racial and/or gender justice and equity.

Approximately 104 nominations were submitted, including the name of Dr. Robert I. Sperber. With the exception of item (3), Robert Sperber easily satisfies all of these criteria. The Boston Globe noted just some of his accomplishments in a lengthy obituary: "As superintendent in Brookline from 1964 to 1982, Dr. Sperber was instrumental in the founding of the Metropolitan Council for Educational Opportunity, or METCO. He also implemented innovative curriculum and support programs, including the Brookline Early Education Project; Facing History and

Ourselves, a Holocaust education program; and the town's Extended Day Advisory Council and Education Foundation."

Robert Sperber was the Superintendent of the Brookline Public Schools for eighteen (18) years and remained active in Brookline school and national public education affairs for more than three decades following his retirement as Brookline Superintendent. He was a Town Meeting Member from Precinct 6, and regularly attended Town Meeting and frequently spoke on matters relating to school affairs up until his death in 2017. For many years, Dr. Sperber served as founding chair or 50 co-chair of Brookline's Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB), a primary objective of which was to provide for a healthy tax base to support Town and School services. Following his retirement from the Brookline School System, Dr. Sperber spent the next 20 years at Boston University as a specialist in urban education and as a professor of urban education.

Dr. Sperber was a nationally recognized leader in the field of public education and made lasting contributions to the Town and to our Schools. The Boston Globe described an event in April 2016 when Dr. Sperber was honored for his Lifetime Achievement at the Brookline Teen Center, where he was a board member. "He was an inspiration to me and many others," said community activist Anne Turner, who chaired the event. "It was a special and poignant thank you, and it meant a lot to us and to him." The event highlights some of Dr. Sperber's core beliefs: a commitment to equality for all students, the importance of creating innovative ideas that last, and using education as an instrument of social justice. Barbara Senecal, who had chaired the Brookline School Committee during Dr. Sperber's tenure (she is currently a Precinct 13 Town Meeting Member), was quoted by the Globe as recalling that "people were standing in line to just have a moment with him" at the celebration, and that "he was the most ethical and moral straight-talking person I ever knew."

The scope and extent of Dr. Sperber's intimate connection with the Public Schools of Brookline is without parallel, and it is fitting and appropriate that he should be honored by naming the school for him.

Brookline has a long tradition of naming our schools in honor of people who have made significant and permanent contributions to the nation and to public education in Brookline. For example, the Runkle School is named for John Daniel Runkle, who was Chairman of the Brookline School Committee and an early advocate of mathematics and technical education. Runkle was also a founder of the Massachusetts Institute of Technology and served as MIT's second president. The Lincoln School's namesake, William H. Lincoln, was a trustee of both Wellesley College and MIT. Lincoln had a great impact on the Town of Brookline. He had a passion for education and contributed to it through his involvement with the Brookline School Committee, both as member and Chair. He served as a member and was chosen chairman for sixteen consecutive elections, serving on the Brookline School Committee for 22 years in all. Both William Lincoln and John Runkle were strong advocates for manual studies/industrial education (i.e., "shop" and "domestic science"), and the Lincoln School was the site at which this course of studies was inaugurated in 1888. The Driscoll School is named after Michael Driscoll, who served on the Brookline School Board (later the School Committee) from 1874 until his death in 1926. During his 52 years of service to the Brookline Schools, Driscoll oversaw the

construction of four new school buildings, and played a key role in the rapid expansion of the Brookline schools that occurred in the first few decades of the 20th century.

The extraordinary contributions of Dr. Robert Sperber to public education, to the Brookline School System, to racial equality and diversity, and to the Town of Brookline are easily comparable to the achievements of the namesakes of other Brookline School buildings. These contributions and achievements on behalf of our Town and our Schools easily exceed those of others whose names are being recommended for this honor. It is both fitting and appropriate for the Coolidge Corner School to bear the name of Robert I. Sperber.