

COOLIDGE CORNER SCHOOL NAMING PROCESS

September 11, 2018 - Final Draft

BACKGROUND

In May 2018, as part of the Town of Brookline's continuing commitment to diversity and inclusion and its efforts to remain "vigilant against all practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people," Brookline Town Meeting voted to change the name of the Edward Devotion School.

Through its May 2018 vote, Brookline Town Meeting temporarily changed the name of The Devotion School to The Coolidge Corner School, with instructions that the School Committee determine a process to select a new, permanent name. The name identified by the School Committee would then be referred to the Town's Naming Committee before being voted on by Town Meeting in Spring 2019.

The effort to rename the school grew from the understanding and acknowledgement that Edward Devotion was a slaveholder and that part of his wealth resulted from holding another human in bondage. In the context of Brookline's stated values and its recent efforts to address institutional and structural racism, Town Meeting decided that it is no longer appropriate for the school to be named after him and to continue to do so would undermine the core values of equity and mutual respect that our public schools strive to impart on our students.

Renaming the Devotion School should be viewed as another step in the Town's continuing efforts to recognize the strength of its diversity and the contributions of people of color to the town's rich history. Since 2006, when the Hidden Brookline Committee was established, community members have been working to better understand and bring to light the history of slavery and freedom in Brookline. Hidden Brookline's work led to Town Meeting's passing, in 2012, of a warrant article called "A Resolution Regarding Slavery in Brookline: that acknowledged the history of slavery in Brookline and pledged "vigilance against all practices and institutions that dehumanize and discriminate against people." Also as a result of Hidden Brookline's work, the Public Schools of Brookline's 3rd grade social studies curriculum contains a unit about slavery in Brookline that includes the history of Edward Devotion being a slaveholder. More recently, in 2017, the Town entered into a compact with the Government Alliance on Race and Equity (GARE). This compact commits the Town to strive toward racial equity in all facets of its operations and policies and to work with community partners in reducing racism in all of its forms.

The School Committee and Superintendent fully support Town Meeting's affirmative vote that it was no longer appropriate to have a school named after a person who held another human in bondage. This is one important step in the Town's ongoing work to address structural racism and promote human and civil rights. The continued efforts must be the collective work of all appropriate bodies and committees within the Town of Brookline.

OVERVIEW OF THE NAMING PROCESS

Renaming an existing school is a rare and special opportunity. Naming a school requires a high standard; one that is above and beyond naming a street or another type of public building. In our schools, we ask students to assume the identity of the building's namesake. For example, we ask a 1st grader to say, "I am a proud student at the Baker School", we prod Lincoln students to root for their school's basketball team, we encourage Lawrence students to show their pride for classmates during the 5th grade spelling bee, and we urge Driscoll students to cheer for their classmates at Math League tournaments. A school name is an important part of a child's identity and that connection stays with them for years, if not decades.

The Town's by-laws state that the new name of a school building must be recommended by the School Committee to the Town's Naming Committee. If approved by the Naming Committee, the proposed name is submitted to Town Meeting as a Warrant Article and is voted on by Town Meeting. It is up to the School Committee to determine the process it uses to identify a recommended name for a school building.

The School Committee and Superintendent Bott would like the town to take this unique opportunity and use it to not just pick a new name, but to thoughtfully identify a name that reflects the school's past, present and future, embodies its core values, and inspires students for decades to come. The process needs to be guided by the school's core values, allow for naming suggestions from the current school community and the broader public in Brookline, and consider closely the issues raised during the Town's decision to change the school name including the history of slavery and the need to more accurately recognize the contributions of people of color to the town's rich history.

In developing a process for naming, Superintendent Bott has gotten input from the School Committee, the petitioners involved in the Town Meeting warrant article, the Coolidge Corner School principals, the educators who serve on school's Access and Equity Team, and the PTO leadership. As a result of this input, the School Committee is supporting an approach that will put students at the center of the nomination process. With support from teachers and administrators, a group of Coolidge Corner students will be selected to form the Nominations Committee. The Nominations Committee will review all names that are suggested by members of the public and will be responsible for selecting up to 10 names to be considered further by the School Committee. Members of the Nominations Committee will also work with the School Committee on the public process that will result in the full School Committee ultimately voting on a name to recommend to the Town's Naming Committee.

While it is not conventional for students to play such a significant role in an important town decision-making process, the Coolidge Corner School principals, Superintendent Bott, the School Committee and the Coolidge Corner teachers who are serving on the school's Equity and Access team are confident that with the right adult support, a group of committed students will be able to participate fully and help manage a process that will be inclusive, open, and thorough. Involving students in critical decisions about their school reflects a core part of our educational mission in Brookline -- fostering meaningful student engagement in their learning and developing students' skills and knowledge so they can participate thoughtfully in a

democracy. This approach builds on the proud history of decades-old institutions like School Within A School at Brookline High School and other important examples of student activism in our schools and in Town throughout the years.

To help identify a name that represents the aspirations and vision of the school community, the Coolidge Corner School community must first do some work to name the characteristics that embody its core values of Work Hard, Be Kind, Help Others. This work to identify a common vision is especially important given the reunification of the upper and lower schools after three years of being separated. Once this initial reunion is complete, the school community's common vision will help guide the Nomination Committee's work in reviewing names and ensuring they fulfill the established criteria of the Town's Naming process.

While students will take a significant role as part of the Nominations Committee, adults will continue to be a major and necessary part of the process by providing guidance to the students, submitting nominations, providing input through public meetings and hearings, and participating in Town Meeting. Also the already established Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names will provide guidance to the Nominations Committee and work with the School Committee's Capital Subcommittee to identify the finalist names. As is dictated by the Town's by laws, the School Committee members will ultimately decide on the recommended name and the members of the Town Naming Committee will have to vote on whether or not to approve the School Committee's recommendation before it goes to Town Meeting for final consideration.

STEPS OF THE NAMING PROCESS

1. Coolidge Corner School community works together to identify the characteristics of a name that will reflect their school community.
2. Significant public outreach so parents, guardians, community members, students, Town Meeting Members, and others understand the naming process and can submit nominations for a new name. Names submitted by completing online or paper submission with explanation of how the suggested name fits the selection criteria.
3. Nominations Committee of 12 students supported by staff from Coolidge Corner School and from the Superintendent's Office lead a process with the Coolidge Corner School community to narrow down all nominations. Nominations Committee selects no more than 10 names as "semi-finalists." The School Committee's Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names will serve in an advisory capacity to this Nominations Committee.
4. The School Committee Capital Subcommittee, student members of the Nominations Committee, and the School Committee's Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names hold public meetings and gather input on the semi-finalist names before recommending a small number of finalists to the full School Committee.
5. School Committee holds a Public Hearing and considers the finalists before selecting one name to be recommended to the Town's Naming Committee.

6. Town Naming Committee holds public hearing and considers School Committee recommendation for school name. If Town Naming Committee approves recommendation, Warrant Article is submitted for May 2019 Town Meeting.
7. Town Meeting considers and votes on Warrant Article.

COOLIDGE CORNER SCHOOL NAMING PROCESS

SUMMARY TIMELINE

August

- Outreach about Naming Process to staff and families in the Coolidge Corner School community, members of the Town Naming Committee, the Select Board, the Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names, and the petitioners who created Warrant Article 20 to rename the school, and Devotion School alumni to get additional input on the process before it is finalized.

September 1 - October 15

- Finalize Naming Process after review of input
- Finalize process for submitting nominations for the new school name
- “Who Are We” - The Coolidge Corner School community works together to identify the characteristics that embody the school’s core values of Work Hard, Be Kind, Help Others
- Creation and Organization of the Nominations Committee
- Public Outreach about Naming Process and solicitation of nominations

October 15 - November 15

- Nominations submitted by public, PSB students, Coolidge Corner School community

November 15 - December 15

- Nominations Committee considers all nominations and selects semi-finalists

December 15 - January 15, 2019

- Joint Committee made up of School Committee Capital Subcommittee, members of the Nominations Committee, and the Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names reviews semi-finalist names, seeks public input, deliberates and decides on a small number of finalists to be forwarded to the full School Committee

January 15 - February 1

- School Committee holds Public Hearing on finalists names, deliberates, and decides on one name to recommend to the Town’s Naming Committee

February 1 - March 1

- Town Naming Committee considers name recommended by School Committee
- Warrant Article submitted for Town Meeting to consider and vote on a new, permanent school name

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**COOLIDGE CORNER SCHOOL NAMING PROCESS**  
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**1. Will students be able to play such a significant role in such an important process?**

Yes. Just like our students are supported and guided to do incredible and inspiring work in Brookline's schools everyday, these student leaders will be fully supported to do the work of the Nominations Committee. Students will take the work very seriously. They will be fair and thoughtful, and they will inspire us with their commitment and judgement.

Adults will provide support to these students in the following ways:

- Principal Jennifer Buller and Vice Principal Saeed Ola will facilitate the Nominations Committee, mentoring the students, providing structure and guidance, and helping them figure out how to make difficult decisions when necessary.
- Principal Buller and Vice Principal Ola are very experienced and skilled educators and facilitators. Before becoming administrators, they were accomplished and well respected teachers at the Heath and Runkle schools respectively, leading students in exploring complex and enriching learning experiences. As administrators they have had training on leading conversations on equity and anti-racism and have led teams and groups for years.
- As needed, the Equity Collaborative will provide further support and training to the facilitators on leading the difficult conversations that may arise during the work with the Nominations Committee
- In addition, the School Committee's Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names will serve as an advisory board to the Nominations Committee helping to answer questions, providing the committee with the larger context of the naming effort, and providing counsel as needed.
- Students from local universities will be tapped to provide pro-bono research support on nominated names to help the students understand the context and/or significance of specific nominations.

**2. The rationale for changing the Devotion School's name was rooted in the fact that Edward Devotion held another person in slavery. How will this fact be addressed during the naming process?**

Openly and honestly in a way that educates both students and adults in the community. At the Coolidge Corner School, all students will learn about the process by which Town Meeting decided to change their school name including presentations made by the original petitioners of the warrant article. Students will also learn about slavery in Brookline, the extent of it, and the efforts by townspeople to eradicate slavery. Adults in the school community who are current or past parents of the school's students or alumni will be able to participate in forums about the name change and the impetus behind it.

**3. If students make up the Nominations Committee, what role will adults have in identifying and selecting a name?**

Any person in town will be able to nominate a name or names to be considered for the school. Like any naming process or policy decision made by the School Committee,

community members will be able to advocate, support, and share their ideas during public meetings. The Ad Hoc Task Force on School Names will provide support to the Nominations Committee and also work with the School Committee Capital Subcommittee to identify the finalist names. At Town Meeting, Town Meeting Members and other community members can speak in support of or in opposition to the warrant article. Also, depending on the nominations, significant research may be needed on some of the proposed names to ensure they support the values of the Coolidge Corner School community and the criteria established in the Town's Naming Process.

**4. How will community outreach be done so a wide variety of community members including those from typically underrepresented groups are aware of and can participate in the naming process?**

The public schools and the Town's Office of Diversity and Inclusion will work together to communicate as clearly as possible with many community members including those who do not typically participate in town or school processes. In addition to using email and social media, we will work with the Office of Diversity and Inclusion to reach out via the Brookline Interactive Group; print and online media; groups of community members such as neighborhood associations, local clergy, PTOs, Devotion School alumni, and others. Full information will also be posted on the PSB. We will also post information about the naming process at public events and public offices such as the libraries, Park and Recreation Facilities, and Town Hall.

If you have additional ideas for outreach, please email them to [ccs\\_naming@psbma.org](mailto:ccs_naming@psbma.org)

**5. How many students will be on the Nominations Committee?**

There will be up to 12 students on the Nominations Committee and it will include as many as nine students across grades 3-8 and two or three Brookline High School students who attended the Devotion School.

**6. How will students be selected for the Nominations Committee?**

Any Coolidge Corner student who is interested will complete an application that will be reviewed by a group of school administrators and interested teachers. Each student will be asked to explain their interest and answer a few questions in writing or through video. The group of administrators and interested teachers will select the students. The goal is to have a diverse group of students who represent the Coolidge Corner student body.

**7. Will other students have the chance to participate in the selection of a name?**

Yes, students from across town will have the ability to participate in a variety of ways. All students will be able to nominate names. Each class at the Coolidge Corner will work in age appropriate ways to nominate a name or names. Students can also advocate for a name they support during the public meeting process and with the School Committee as it considers finalists.

**8. What role will the Brookline High Schools students who are on the Nominations Committee have?**

While the specific work and function of the Nominations Committee are still being worked out, in addition to being full, participating members of the committee, the BHS students would also work with the faculty/staff advisors to help facilitate and organize the committee. They could support the other students and also be a conduit to students at BHS to keep them informed of the process.

**9. Why is it important for students to play such a significant role in this process?**

At the May 2018 Town Meeting Ada Goldstein, who was then a 3rd grader at Devotion stood up and spoke in support of the name change. She also made three requests on behalf of her classmates:

1. Give us students a chance to talk about all our feelings around the name change. We may feel excited, happy, sad, angry, annoyed, or stressed about the change. Help us manage our feelings.
2. Teach us more about Edward Devotion and slavery and racism, and why taking his name off our school now is important.
3. Give us students a humongous say in what the new name will be. I don't want random grown-ups coming into our classrooms, and announcing, "Hello students. Your school is now named 'The Swedish Chef School.' Goodbye." Give us the right to explore, offer, and vote on a new name.

All three of Ada's suggestions are wise, and the school is already working on incorporating the first two into the beginning of the school year. Including students and the school community in the process will help to identify a name that is based on the values of the school community, allow the school community and students have ownership in the process, and lead to a name that can be celebrated and honored going forward.

**10. What if the Town's Naming Committee or Town Meeting rejects the name recommended by the School Committee?**

If either the Town's Naming Committee or Town Meeting do not approve the name recommended by the School Committee, then the school remains named Coolidge Corner School until Town Meeting approves a new name.



## **COOLIDGE CORNER SCHOOL NAMING PROCESS**

### **Process for Selecting Coolidge Corner and BHS Students to the Nominations Committee**

The Selection Process for students requires the following documents

1. How students are nominated (draft below)
2. Questions they have to answer (draft below)
3. Call to students to submit nominations with brief overview
4. A tool to help the selecting team decide on the members

#### **Steps in Selecting the Nominations Committee**

- Students can nominate themselves or can be nominated by a teacher to join the Nominations Committee
- Students will complete application form, name one staff member who can be their “reference” and answer three questions about why they should represent the Coolidge Corner School community on the Nominations Committee
- Students can either answer the questions in writing or by making a short video
- A principal, vice principal, teacher and/or a guidance counselor, and a parent will review the applications, confer with the named “references” and select the members of the committee
- As the students on the Nominations Committee will be representing the Coolidge Corner school community they need to be a diverse group that reflects the diversity of the Coolidge Corner student community.
- Applications will be due

#### **Questions to be answered by students on the Nominations Committee Application**

1. Why do you want to participate on the Coolidge Corner School Naming Nominations Committee?
2. Why do you think you would be a good member of the Nominations Committee?
3. Please give us an example of when you worked with other students to solve a problem or a challenge? What did you do to help the other students find a solution?
4. What teacher or adult in school would you like us to talk to to learn more about you? (If you are new to Coolidge Corner School, it is okay to give us the name of a teacher and at a previous school and the school name and location.)
5. Please have a parent or guardian sign the attached form that explains that you are applying to be on the Nominations Committee and the commitment necessary if you are selected.

## **COOLIDGE CORNER SCHOOL NAMING PROCESS**

### **Process for Nominating School Name**

#### **The process for nominations requires the following documents and resources**

- Guidelines for Submitting Nominations
- Questions to be answered for each submission
- An online form and a paper form

#### **Guidelines for Submitting Nominations**

- Nominations for the new name of the Coolidge Corner School can be submitted online form or by using a paper form.
- Nominations will only be accepted from students attending the Public Schools of Brookline and their families, community members living in Brookline, and former students or staff of the Devotion School.
- It is okay for groups to submit nominations
- Each individual or group can submit no more than three nominations
- Nominations do not have to be a person's name
- People will include their name, address, connection to the community, and email or phone number so we can contact them if we want to learn more about their nomination. This has the added benefit of reducing the possibility of getting many external submissions that are unnecessary, irrelevant or pranks.

#### **Questions to be Answered for Each Submission**

1. How does this name reflect one or more of the Coolidge Corner School's core values of Work Hard, Be Kind, Help Others?
2. Over the years, thousands of Brookline's school children will attend this school and take ownership of its name. In what ways does this name serve as a positive example that students can aspire to, be inspired by, and/or learn from?
3. If you are nominating a person's name, please explain how the person fits one or more of the following criteria?
  - 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.
  - 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)
  - A person who has made a significant donation or bequest to the town.
4. If your nomination is a name other than that of an individual, please explain how that name could be used by the school families, students, and staff to inspire, connect, and build community.