

Special Meeting  
South Orange-Maplewood  
Board of Education  
June 20, 2022

A Special Meeting of the Board of Education of South Orange-Maplewood was held in the District Meeting Room at the Administration Building, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, New Jersey as well as utilizing the online video conference platform on June 20, 2022.

Board President Thair Joshua called the meeting to order at 6:32 p.m.

Adequate written notice of this meeting of the South Orange-Maplewood Board of Education was sent to the Township and Village Clerks, The Star Ledger, the News Record, TAPintoSOMA.net, villagegreennj.com and the District website.

PLEDGE OF ALLEGIANCE

ROLL CALL

Present: Board Member Bergin, Board President Joshua,  
Board Member Malespina, Board Member Siders,  
Board Member Vadlamani, Board Member Winkfield,  
Board Member Wittleder, Board Member Wright,  
Student Rep. Previlon

Absent: Board Member Telesford

*EIGHT VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT*

BOARD PRESIDENT'S STATEMENT

The school board meeting is a business meeting in public and not a meeting with the public. Oftentimes it may appear to members of our audience that the Board of Education takes action with very little comment and in many cases a unanimous vote. Before a matter is placed on the agenda at a public meeting, the Administration has thoroughly reviewed the matter with the Superintendent of Schools/Chief School Administrator (CSA). If the Superintendent of Schools/Chief School Administrator is satisfied that the matter is ready to be presented to the Board of Education, it is then referred to the appropriate Board Committee. The Members of the Board Committee work with Administration and the Superintendent to assure that the members fully understand the matter. After the committee discusses the matter, it is then shared with the other Board members for consideration. Only then is it placed on the agenda for Board discussion and action at a public meeting.

**BOARD MEMBER TELESFORD JOINED THE MEETING AT 6:35 P.M.  
NINE VOTING MEMBERS AND ONE STUDENT REPRESENTATIVE PRESENT**

## JEFFERSON SCHOOL RENAMING UPDATE

### Background

August 2021 the Board of Education passed resolution 4190 which was a commitment to renaming Jefferson Elementary School; that came after a discussion during New Business in both the June and July regularly scheduled Board meetings. The Board passed this resolution unanimously in August 2021. The Resolution called for a student led process and have names recommended to the Board in June 2022.

### Recent School Name Changes in other Districts

- West Orange, NJ
  - 2016, Pleasantdale Elementary School renamed Kelly Elementary School in honor of twin astronauts Mark and Scott Kelly who attended the school.
- Montclair, NJ
  - 2016, Hebron Middle School renamed Buzz Aldrin Middle School in honor of one of their most famous alums.
- Princeton, NJ
  - 2020, John Witherspoon Middle School renamed Princeton Middle School
- Elizabeth, NJ
  - 2020, Ronald Regan Academy renamed Chessie Dently Roberts Academy in honor of lifelong resident, teacher and activist
- Camden, NJ
  - 2022, Woodrow Wilson High School renamed Eastside High School

Board President Joshua provided a brief overview of the renaming process.

Board Member comments/questions included but were not limited to the following:

Board Member Vadlamani - Please clarify the process that the Board will use to approach the renaming.

Dr. Taylor - When the Board first made this consideration our solicitor confirmed that it is within the Board's rights to rename any school within the District for any reason and a simple majority vote at a former Board meeting would make that happen. Once that occurs, our Jefferson team would begin all of the steps to make the renaming possible, including formal notifications to the State so the name change corresponds when submitting state reports, testing, attendance etc., internal system changes to district databases and learning platforms as well as rebranding of Jefferson PTA and school gear, signage etc. We want to make sure the renaming receives the celebration that it deserves.

Board Member Telesford - If we rebrand Jefferson School, what will we do to retire the name?

Dr. Taylor - I've observed locations where historical items remain in the school to honor former students and staff members. This would be a conversation for the FFT committee to further discuss what is possible and the Board's will on the matter.

Board President Joshua - Although we call this location the Administration Building the original name Fielding School is still etched in stone on the front of the building and the same is true for the Annex which still displays the Newstead School on the building. The signage on the door will change but maybe in this same manner the Jefferson School name will remain etched on the building to recognize the historical precedent, while also moving forward.

Board Member Winkfield - I would like to express gratitude to the entire Jefferson community and administration for creating such a thorough and inclusive experience for young people to get to delve into the exploration of these really worthy candidates. It seems like it was a great process all in all and to create a process where every single child had the opportunity to participate and have their voice heard is no easy feat. I am grateful for how this process was carried out. These are all very worthy and exciting candidates and of the candidates Winnie Delia Bolden stood out to me as a candidate that was not only inspiring but really revolutionary. We talk a lot about the importance of representation and to be not only the first African American woman to graduate from Columbia High School, but to do so in 1912, 110 years ago and to read an essay like the one that was shared with us at her graduation at that time really embodies what we are trying to instill in all of our students in the district.

Board Member Bergin - I was on the committee that heard from the team at Jefferson and I feel so fortunate that I got to hear their presentation. They took the idea of involving students in the renaming and implemented it in such a beautiful way, turning it into a lesson plan for the entire school, where students had the opportunity to write and share stories of their own name and we could feel the excitement of the staff and students listening to them speak about this project. I would also like to thank them for giving us five great candidates. I do prefer that it be an alum of the district and I love the idea of the Winnie Delia Bolden School or the Winnie Delia Bolden Legacy School. The essay that she wrote is still relevant today and she demonstrated such bravery writing, publishing and reading it at her graduation. To put things in perspective she graduated from Columbia High School less than 50 years after Juneteenth and a few decades before Brown vs the Board of Education. She is like our district's Ruby Bridges and it would be amazing to name our school after her and celebrate her. My second choice would be the Amalya Lyle Kearse School.

Board Member Wittleder - Did the students who came up with the five candidates have the opportunity to sort of circle back on the project and present to the Jefferson students to bring it full circle? Can we extend this lesson and bring it one step further and bring the final voting or determination to the community to make the final decision on what the name should be out of the five candidates presented?

Dr. Taylor - Whatever the Board decides is what will happen next. When we discussed this in the fall, the idea to make this a student led civics experience came from this discussion and this is the result of that. So, what happens next is up to the Board. There is no mandate that the Board does anything. If there is a motion to make this a vote of the community and it is supported then it can occur. On slide 22, where it says students presented their arguments in favor of their candidates and students selected one favorite candidate overall and one favorite candidate from within the SOMSD community, I do not see any notes about a representation of the results. We were very careful in discussing with the principal that we had to be honest in telling students that we want to hear your voice, but ultimately it is the Board's decision. I think they will be very excited if the Board chose one of their candidates but again it is a Board decision.

Board Member Siders - I want to commend the building leadership, teachers and students for this process. I thought the process was very thoughtful, very deliberate and that the students came up with some fantastic options. No matter who is chosen or if we go with something else, I would like us to be able to acknowledge these choices in some way, whether it is commemorated somewhere in the building or assigned as project where other schools also learn about these five options. I do not have a favorite at this time, but I want to acknowledge the work that was done and that the students did an amazing job.

Board Member Malespina - I would like to echo the statements that I too am impressed by the amazing job of students. Administration took this and ran with it making it a great project.

I would like to make a motion to have the SOMSD community make the decision. All of the options are so good that I do not feel that the Board should make the decision. I feel like this can be a learning lesson, even if it is not just the community or the students who make the decision, then we can take that and move it forward, so everyone will understand why these were the people chosen making this something that the community can get behind. I personally would not have asked to change the name, I was not at the meeting when this was decided, but we are where we are now and I would love for this to be decided by the community voting.

Board President Joshua - The name that stood out to me was Amalya Kearse, a black woman who was very successful very early as the First African American woman and second African American person to be appointed as a justice on the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Her story resonates with where we are now having just confirmed the first black woman Supreme Court justice, 41 years after Kearse was appointed to her position. Board President Joshua also commended Jefferson administration, staff and students for a well planned and executed process.

The Board continued the discussion on the renaming of Jefferson Elementary School.

HEARING OF INDIVIDUALS AND DELEGATIONS

James Nathenson - Reiterated his opposition to the renaming of Jefferson Elementary School.

Leslie Kearner - Urged the Board to make a swift and decisive next step in the renaming of Jefferson School. Students and staff worked hard on the renaming project and the process should not be changed to make this a community decision.

Motion made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Siders to hold this meeting in a hybrid setting. Motion passed unanimously.

FUTURE MEETINGS

Board President Joshua made the following motions seconded by Board Member Siders:

The Board of Education will meet in Closed Session on Monday, June 27, 2022 at 6:00 pm in the Superintendent's Office, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ, as well as using an online video conference platform to discuss personnel and legal issues, negotiations, and other matters to be announced at a later date. Immediately following the Closed Session, the Board of Education will meet in Public Session at 7:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ in person and utilizing an online video conference platform which will include Hearing of Individuals. Action will be taken. Motion passed unanimously.

The Board of Education will meet in a Special Public Meeting on Wednesday, June 29, 2022, at 6:30 pm in the District Meeting Room, 525 Academy Street, Maplewood, NJ, as well as using the online video conference platform, which will include Hearing of Individuals and Delegations. Immediately following the Public Session, the Board of Education will move to go into Executive Session, in person and utilizing an online video conference platform to discuss the Chief School Administrator's evaluation. Action may be taken. Motion passed unanimously.

MOTION made by Board President Joshua, seconded by Board Member Winkfield to adjourn to Executive Session to discuss the Chief School Administrator's evaluation.

Motion unanimously approved at 7:28 p.m.

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Eric Burnside, Board Secretary