

Date: February 8, 2018  
 For ACTION \_\_\_\_  
 For INFORMATION   X    
 Board Agenda: Yes   X    
 No \_\_\_\_

**FROM:** West End Elementary School Naming Committee

**THROUGH:** Lois F. Berlin, Ed.D., Interim Superintendent of Schools

**TO:** The Honorable Ramee Gentry, Chair, and  
 Members of the Alexandria City School Board

**TOPIC:** Naming Recommendations for new West End Elementary School

**SUMMARY:**

**I. Naming Committee Process**

On October 26, 2017, in accordance with Policy FF: Public Dedication of Facilities, the School Board appointed an ad hoc Facilities Naming Committee to develop naming recommendations for the new West End Elementary School. The committee is chaired by the School Board Vice Chair, and is structured to include nine Alexandria residents selected by the Board and one resident selected by City Council. However, the City-appointed representative was unable to serve and was not replaced. The committee and its staff liaisons, the Clerk of the Board and the Director of Communications, were tasked with a robust community outreach effort to solicit and review naming recommendations for the new school, and to ultimately submit at least three names to the School Board for its consideration.

West End Elementary School Naming Committee:

School Board Member	Committee Appointment
Cindy Anderson	Gerald File
Bill Campbell	Blanche Mays Maness
Ronnie Campbell	Carlos Alfaro
Hal Cardwell	Karen Dunkley
Ramee Gentry	J-Lynn Van Pelt
Karen Graf	Jim Henson
Chris Lewis	Keenan L. Cooper
Margaret Lorber	Kristen Weber
Veronica Nolan	Janese Bechtol
City Council	

The Naming Committee met six times, from November 2017 through January 2018. It embarked on a significant community outreach effort in English, Spanish, Arabic and Amharic, and included paper letters, online fillable forms, email, social media, YouTube, ACPS Express and Insider postings, student projects, numerous large and small group community meetings, etc. (A summary of the avenues and methods of communication used in this effort are attached.) This process will culminate with the February 15, 2018 Public Hearing on the committee's recommendations, and the Board's action on them, currently scheduled for February 22, 2018. The committee's work resulted in 355 online and paper recommendations being submitted between November 13, 2017 and January 3, 2018. They included 132 different names for the new school. The committee selected 22 of these for further research, and is recommending four names to the Board.

During the course of its collaboration, the committee made two determinations:

1. The naming guidelines in Policy FF are written using permissive language, not prescriptive language. Therefore, the language was interpreted as offering *possible* parameters for naming recommendations, instead of comprehensive boundaries. This is evidenced by the frequent use of the word "may" when discussing potential names, instead of using "shall," as is used in other sections of the policy. Policy FF states:

"Such new school facilities *may* be named after Presidents of the United States, Virginia historical figures, or specific persons, business, or corporations that have made a significant and extraordinary contribution to the City of Alexandria in terms of education, public service, or involvement in civic or cultural activities over an extended period of time. Appropriate names *may* also include places or events in history that are related to the school facility or its location. Names that could cause confusion with other public facilities in Alexandria or with other schools in adjoining jurisdictions and other areas of the Commonwealth should be avoided."

2. The committee developed seven criteria that taken together, members felt created a lens through which all naming recommendations should be viewed. (They are not ranked and are in no particular order.)
  - Does the name represent the diversity of the school's projected student population?\*
  - Naming the school for a woman is preferred, as it would lessen the current imbalance in Alexandria of schools being named predominantly for men.
  - The name should be meaningful to students and recognizable.
  - The name should provide inspiration and be age appropriate for elementary students (e.g., naming the school for a person that is inextricably linked with slavery, even someone as admirable as Harriet Jacobs, may not be desirable).
  - What is the person known for?
  - What obstacles did the person overcome?
  - What is the lasting memory of the person's success?

(\*West End School projected student statistics are attached.)

Committee Note: It is readily apparent that the seven criteria almost exclusively lend themselves to naming the new school after a person instead of using an inanimate term, like simply calling it “West End Elementary.” This is a reflection of the fact that out of the 355 submissions received, only 13 recommended names that did not refer to actual individuals. In addition, some of those 13 suggestions were unlikely to be selected, like “Blue Diamonds Paradise,” “Little Fairy,” and “Queen Bee.”

**The committee is hopeful that the School Board will also choose to use this “lens” as it reviews the four recommendations and makes its final selection.**

## II. Naming Committee Recommendations\*

**The committee recommends that the School Board consider the four names below for the West End Elementary School. They are not ranked and are in no particular order.**

(\* For further details on each name, please see the attached biographies.)

**Katherine Johnson Elementary School**

**Day-Ochoa Elementary School (for Ferdinand T. Day and Dr. Ellen Ochoa)**

**Sonia Sotomayor Elementary School**

**Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary School**

### ➤ Katherine Johnson Elementary School

- NASA mathematician who performed calculations that sent astronauts into orbit
- Human “computer” relied on by John Glenn
- Shattered stereotypes for women and African-Americans in STEM
- Overcame obstacles of racism, sexism and poverty through hard work
- Desegregated West Virginia University graduate school
- Represents unknown heroes who have helped the entire nation

Committee Notes: Katherine was raised to count everything. Her parents so believed in her education that they moved their family 120 miles away so that she could attend high school. Until recently, she was largely unknown, but she made huge contributions in math that helped our entire country. Although she broke barriers for women and African-Americans, she is also an example of grace and is known for being humble. She is inspiring for students, and reflects the diversity of the new elementary school. Finally, she is an example to both girls and boys that math can be “cool,” and can be a pathway to success, even when you are a minority and female.

### ➤ Day-Ochoa Elementary School (for Ferdinand T. Day and Dr. Ellen Ochoa)

Ferdinand T. Day

- 1<sup>st</sup> African-American School Board Member in Virginia
- 1<sup>st</sup> African-American School Board Chair in Virginia
- 1<sup>st</sup> Alexandria Living Legend
- Worked tirelessly to transition Alexandria’s schools from desegregation toward meaningful integration

- Provided lifelong moral leadership and vision to guide Alexandria toward a better future
- Civil rights advocate; overcame multiple educational and professional obstacles; worked for fairness and equality for all

Committee Notes: Because Alexandria had no public high school that African-Americans were allowed to attend during his youth, Ferdinand went to high school in Washington, D.C. However, he considered Alexandria his city and had great pride in it, and worked hard to improve its education system his whole life. He often spoke to groups of students and believed in giving back. He was a strong advocate for civil rights during segregation, and was a member of the “Secret 7,” a group of African-Americans working to integrate Alexandria in the late 1950s and early 1960s. He served on the Boards of the Urban League, the NAACP, the Departmental Progressive Club, and the Boys Club, to name a few. He lived to be 96 years old and was always a gentleman.

#### Dr. Ellen Ochoa

- 1<sup>st</sup> Latina Astronaut
- Applied to astronaut program 3 times before being accepted
- 1<sup>st</sup> Latina Director of NASA’s Johnson Space Center
- Pilot, engineer and inventor; holds 3 patents in optical systems
- Spent almost 1,000 hours in space on 4 missions
- Talented musician who almost majored in music; switched to physics after being told it was “not a woman’s field”
- Raised to value education & earned academic scholarships

Committee Note: Although Dr. Ochoa is not from Virginia, she broke barriers as the first Latina in space and would resonate with the school’s diverse population. Her life story complements the school’s STEM focus. Although the committee is mindful of the fact that a female’s identity may get lost in a hyphenated name and may better stand alone, the Day-Ochoa pairing is a purposeful one. To the committee, Day represents an African-American leader who fought for civil rights and helped Alexandria move past segregation toward purposeful integration of its schools. He helped break down barriers to bring us to the present, and is an example (as are *all* of the individuals recommended by the committee), of the fine traits encapsulated in VDOE’s character education curriculum – “respect for self and others, responsibility, integrity, and self-discipline.” Ochoa is a female, Latina, STEM role model, pushing the boundaries for our future. In addition, although the committee supports recognition of Mr. Day, members are concerned that recommending his name on its own would cause confusion, as there would then be a Ferdinand Day Elementary School as well as another elementary school on Ferdinand Day Drive (Samuel Tucker Elementary). Finally, the committee feels strongly about the benefits of recognizing a woman and a Latina.

#### ➤ **Sonia Sotomayor Elementary School**

- 1<sup>st</sup> Latina Supreme Court Justice
- Raised by Puerto Rican single mom in the Bronx who emphasized higher education and who sacrificed to buy encyclopedias for her children

- Diagnosed with diabetes at age 7
- Became fluent in English at age 9 after her father died
- Earned academic scholarships to Princeton and Yale
- Dedicated pro bono work led to recognition and eventual appointment as U.S. District Court judge

Committee Note: Justice Sotomayor struggled through a difficult upbringing and broke barriers as the 1<sup>st</sup> Latina Supreme Court Justice. She is an example for the students of what can happen in life, even with limited opportunities and coming from modest means. Not only is she representative of the diversity of the student population, but she has reached the pinnacle of her profession by taking her education seriously and working with integrity. As an entrée to learning about the three branches of government, the students could read about her and discuss her court opinions.

➤ **Barack and Michelle Obama Elementary School**

Barack Obama

- 44<sup>th</sup> President of the United States; 1<sup>st</sup> African-American President; Attorney
- Difficult childhood; overcame racism and absentee father
- Through hard work and academic excellence, rose to become 1<sup>st</sup> African-American editor of Harvard Law Review
- Elected to Illinois State Senate
- Defeated in run for U.S. House of Representatives, was undeterred and later elected to U.S. Senate and two terms as President

Michelle Obama

- 1<sup>st</sup> African-American First Lady; Attorney
- Modest upbringing on Chicago's South Side
- Learned to read at age 4; skipped 2<sup>nd</sup> grade
- Graduated cum laude from Princeton; J.D. from Harvard Law
- As First Lady, championed education, military families, working women, volunteerism, healthy eating, and fighting childhood obesity

Committee Note: Both President and Mrs. Obama have grace and compassion. They are relevant to the students and are recognizable. It was important to the committee to be responsive to the high number of recommendations from the community in their honor (53 submissions). They have both overcome obstacles in their lives and have achieved their success through hard work and dedication. They represent the idea that anything is possible.

Finally, the committee would like to communicate that **all** of the recommended individuals perfectly represent “**Every Student Succeeds.**” Those words don’t just refer to the success of individual students, but to the idea that we all have an obligation to each other. All those recommended for the honor of having the school named for them have not merely experienced success on an individual level, but have been involved in changing communities and systems for the better. They did not become successful by

fitting some previously existing image of what success looked like, but by modeling respect for themselves and others, responsibility, integrity and self-discipline – all the while working to lift everyone up together. Children don't always think about the road to success, especially when facing their daily challenges. These individuals represent excellence and compassion, and are models for what Alexandria is looking for in its future leaders.

**BACKGROUND:**

In 2017, the Alexandria City School Board purchased the properties located at 1701/1705 N. Beauregard Street to convert them for use as an elementary school, outdoor play space and parking garage. The new elementary school is projected to open in September 2018. Considered a “newly constructed school facility,” under Policy FF: Public Dedication of Facilities, the School Board appointed the West End Elementary School Naming Committee to develop recommendations for the Board. The final decision for naming the new elementary school is made by the Board. Following such a process not only adheres to Policy FF, but also to Policy BCF: Advisory Committees to the School Board, and Policy KC: Community Involvement in Decision Making.

**RECOMMENDATION:**

The Superintendent recommends that the School Board review the West End Elementary School Naming Committee's proposed names for the new school.

**IMPACT:** By ensuring the facilities naming process adheres to Policy FF, the School Board ensures that ACPS operations are aligned to support equity and community engagement.

**ATTACHMENTS:**

1. Presentation: West End Elementary School Naming Committee Recommendations
2. Biographies of Recommended Individuals
3. Naming Recommendations - Summary Spreadsheet (as of 2/1/18)
4. Naming Recommendations - Full Submissions (as of 1/5/18)
5. West End Elementary School Projected Student Statistics
6. Outreach Summary
7. ACPS Methods of Communication
8. School Board Policy FF: Public Dedication of Facilities

**STAFF CONTACT:**

Jennifer Abbruzzese, 703-619-8314