

### Warrant Article 13: Rename the Heath School the “Roland Hayes School”

The Schools Subcommittee of the Advisory Committee held a public hearing on Zoom on Wednesday 9/27/2023 at 7pm on Warrant Article 13: “To see if the Town will vote to change the name of the school located at 100 Eliot St, Chestnut Hill, MA 02467 from the ‘Heath School’ to the ‘Roland Hayes School.’” In attendance were: Petitioners David Gacioch (TMM P14) and Dr. Asa Sevelius (Heath School Principal); Harry Friedman (TMM P12); and Subcommittee Members Ben Birnbaum (acting Chair), Perry Grossman, Stephen Reeders, and Carolyn Thall, and other members of the public, Carla Benka, Susan Granoff, Martin Rosenthal, Sean Lynn-Jones, Tom Schneider, and Jonathan Golden. Chair Cliff Brown was absent.

**Recommendation:** Favorable Action by a vote of 1-0 with 3 abstentions.

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| <b>Executive Summary:</b>          | This warrant article asks that the Town consider renaming the Heath School, named after the street on which it was established, which was itself named for Brookline resident John Heath (1732-1804). Heath is known to have kept slaves. With the backing of the School Committee, the petitioners propose that the Heath School be renamed for Roland W. Hayes (1887-1977). A longtime Brookline resident, Hayes was a distinguished singer and teacher of opera and gospel music. The determination to honor Hayes was the product of a two-year process within the Heath School community culminating in a vote by students, school community members, and staff in June 2023. |
| <b>Voting Yes will...</b>          | Voting yes will change the name of the “Heath School” to the "Roland Hayes School.”                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
| <b>Voting No will...</b>           | Voting no will leave the Heath School name as is.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| <b>Financial impact [if any]</b>   | TBD. Heath Principal Dr. Asa Sevelius has asked for estimates but not yet received them Expenses would include new mats for the gym and a new scoreboard and school sign. A plaque, referencing Hayes, is also being considered. The petitioners believe the costs would be less than \$100,000.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |
| <b>Legal implications [if any]</b> | None                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               |

#### Link to Recording

<https://brooklinema.zoomgov.com/rec/share/cU6cOTk4ZRSCZLT7rarmIfwCSRswsmorU441juFIrYs9PSx5CegiRQ87k3r-2Yfx.XAU2hICILlviVuGx>

#### Introduction

This warrant article asks Town Meeting to consider renaming the Heath School in honor of the distinguished musician and Brookline resident Roland W. Hayes.

#### Evaluation Methodology/Research

There was no formal evaluation or research conducted by the Subcommittee, whose members did, however, reference a range of resources:

- The Heath School name change website:

<https://www.brookline.k12.ma.us/domain/938>

- The Heath School name change mission statement:

[https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JuPSxey6XkzUkC6vgylUo2j\\_GL7SSz2c2BdWy\\_e8Efo/edit](https://docs.google.com/document/d/1JuPSxey6XkzUkC6vgylUo2j_GL7SSz2c2BdWy_e8Efo/edit)

- The School Committee's naming criteria:

A person / organization of excellent reputation and character who/which has set an example of outstanding citizenship and/or has made an exemplary contribution of time, service, or resources to or on behalf of the community A national noteworthy public figure or official. An event of historical or cultural significance. A significant donation or bequest, establishment of a trust, or other similar action.

The Town Naming Committee

<https://www.brooklinema.gov/677/Naming-Committee>

- Information about the Heath family:

<https://hiddenbrookline.weebly.com/heath-the-school--the-family.html>

- Profile of Hayes from “Afrocentric Voices in Classical Music”

<http://afrovoices.com/roland-hayes-biography/>

## **Discussion**

The discussion centered on these topics:

- The reasons for, and consequences of, renaming a school.
- The processes and outreach that were conducted.
- The potential costs.
- Criteria used in choosing the school name.
- The AC’s role in school renamings

In a presentation to the subcommittee, Principal Sevelius said that following the Florida Ruffin Ridley School naming in 2021, and having learned that John Heath and his family had kept slaves, he began testing the matter of a name change with staff and parents in the Heath community. A mission statement was subsequently devised, and several committees were formed, including a student committee. The school’s focus was eventually fixed on choosing a person of color and an individual who’d excelled in the arts or the humanities.

Twenty-four individuals were nominated by Heath community members. The nominees included, among others, former Heath School art teacher Bernard Pendleton, Michael Dukakis,

Francis Ouimet, Massasoit, Eunice Kennedy Shriver, Bill Russell, Ruth Bader Ginsburg, and Frederick Law Olmsted

Four finalists were identified: Ruth Batson, founder of METCO; the sculptor John Woodrow Wilson; the artists and educators Ellen and William Craft; and Hayes. In early June 2023, Hayes was selected in a vote participated in by students (421), Heath community members (215) and staff (97).

Among the matters raised by the subcommittee were, as noted above, the Advisory Committee's appropriate role—if any—in naming schools. The moral standards to which individuals considered for school namings should be held. How ethnic identities should be considered in the naming or renaming of schools. How much community input or alumni engagement should be properly sought when new names are considered for public schools. The effect that renaming procedures could have on drawing attention away from more significant operational needs and commitments. In reference to the last mentioned, Principal Sevelius responded that a name change could be implemented without interfering with other work within the school.

**Recommendation**

On a motion of favorable action, and with three members abstaining, the Schools Subcommittee recommends passage of Warrant Article 13 by a vote of 1-0-3.

YES:

Perry Grossman

ABSTAIN:

Ben Birnbaum

Stephen Reeders

Carolyn Thall