

BALTIMORE CITY PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Brandon M. Scott
Mayor, City of Baltimore

Linda Chinnia
Chair, Baltimore City Board
of School Commissioners

Dr. Sonja Brookins Santelises
Chief Executive Officer

Baltimore City Council Ordinance 21-0108 Renaming James Mosher Elementary School to Billie Holiday Elementary School

September 30, 2021

Baltimore City Public Schools (City Schools) strongly supports Council Bill 21-0108, which seeks to change the name of James Mosher Elementary to Billie Holiday Elementary.

The name change process for James Mosher was initiated to coincide with the programmatic shifts in the school as a result of the 21st Century School Buildings Plan, and to create an opportunity for the school to be named after someone who more accurately represents the background of the students and families served by the school. As a part of 21st Century School Buildings Plan, the school's grade bands have changed to serve all students in grades pre-k through 2nd grade in an expanded zone that includes 2 other school communities. Creating a shared identity representative of this expanded community is an important part of bringing students and families together. The school has chosen to adopt an arts integration focus in its 21st century building.

The renaming process was conducted in accordance with Baltimore City Public Schools' Naming/Renaming School Facility Regulation (FFA-RA). School leadership along with City Schools' Office of New Initiatives and staff from the 21st Century School Buildings Program ensured neighborhood community groups and organizations, students, teachers, elected officials and other interested citizens were engaged in all aspects of the renaming process, including nominating new names to be considered, voting on a preliminary list of names, and a final voting process to determine the new name. The renaming process was shared, and community members were engaged in discussion of names being considered, in many virtual meetings throughout winter and spring of 2021.

Students discussed the name options and voted virtually during class, while teachers, parents, and community members voted virtually via an online survey. The name Billie Holiday received the most votes from students, staff, parents, and community members on the final voting survey, which was conducted from March 1 – March 19, 2021

Having met the necessary committee and engagement requirements of the Naming/Renaming policy, on April 13, 2021, the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners (Board) voted to approve the change of the James Mosher Elementary School program to Billie Holiday Elementary School and now respectfully requests that the Baltimore City Council change the name of the James Mosher Elementary School building to Billie Holiday Elementary School.

Additional background and context can be found in the attached document, "*Understanding the Difference between School Names and Building Names*". In addition, City Schools will be pleased to testify further on this issue upon request.

Understanding the Difference between School Names and Building Names

It is important to understand that within City Schools, school names and facility names are not necessarily synonymous. The power to rename a school program lives with the Baltimore City Board of School Commissioners. School Board Policy FFA states that “The Board of School Commissioners is responsible for the renaming of all school programs,” whereas the power to rename a school facility lives with the Baltimore City Council. School Board Policy FFA, Section F.1 states “Real property owned by the City is named or renamed by an ordinance of the City.”

Approximately 30 schools are housed in facilities with school names that differ from the facility – for example the Stadium School is located at the Coldstream Building, National Academy Foundation is located in the Thomas G. Hayes building for the middle grades program and the Paul Laurence Dunbar Middle building for its high school program.

In recent years, with increased mergers between elementary and elementary/middle programs, more schools have been going through renaming conversations. However, City Schools does not always seek to change a school facility name. For example, when the Board voted to approve the renaming of Sandtown-Winchester Achievement Academy in 2019, the name of the building remained the Kelson Building; and when the Board voted to approve the renaming of Park Heights Academy in 2020, the name of the building was not changed and remains Edgecombe Circle.

This can sometimes lead to confusion and so, for newer facilities, City Schools has begun to request facility name changes, particularly with 21st Century School Buildings.

Background and Context:

As part of the 21st Century School Buildings Plan, James Mosher Elementary School, Calverton Elementary/Middle School, and Alexander Hamilton Elementary School merged to form two school communities in 21st Century buildings that serve the neighborhoods through an expanded zone. Part of effectuating that change was the Board’s approval of the recommendation to close Alexander Hamilton at the end of school year 2020-21. Because multiple school communities were coming together to form new school communities with new programming and academic focuses, renaming was considered by the community and pursued to ensure a new shared identity reflective of what the new schools offer. James Mosher Elementary, now Billie Holiday Elementary serves all students in the zone in grades pre-k through 2nd, and Calverton Elementary/Middle, now Katherine Johnson Global Academy serves all students in the zone in grades 3 through 8 as well as continuing to serve as a middle grades placement for several elementary schools.

City Schools Renaming Process:

- School leadership along with City Schools’ Office of New Initiatives and staff from the 21st Century School Buildings Program ensured neighborhood community groups and organizations, students, teachers, elected officials and other interested citizens were

engaged in all aspects of the renaming process, including nominating new names to be considered, voting on a preliminary list of names, and a final voting process to determine the new name.

- The renaming process began with a request in December 2020 and concluded with Board approval on April 13, 2021.
 - The school started the community engagement process for renaming in January 2021 with the establishment of a renaming committee. The renaming committee consisted of school staff, parents, and community partners. Following this initial meeting, this group started regular meetings and assisted the school and district staff members with outreach to parents and additional community members and engagement of the school community in an initial renaming survey to generate ideas for new school names.
 - The process, timeline, and opportunity to suggest names was shared in January through March at community-wide 21st Century Building update meetings, impacted schools' community budget meetings, at community and neighborhood meetings, at Principal Logan's community meetings and meetings at other affected schools such as Alexander Hamilton Elementary School and Calverton Elementary/Middle School (now Katherine Johnson Global Academy), in virtual classrooms and in virtual schoolwide assemblies.
 - The President of the James Mosher Baseball League was a part of the Renaming Committee and helped distribute ballots and information to this organization and others in the community. Examples of community groups that participated in this process include the Rosemont Community Interfaith Coalition, Coppin Heights CDC, parents, staff and students at nearby elementary schools – including Alexander Hamilton Elementary and Calverton Elementary/Middle (now Katherine Johnson Global Academy.)
 - Understanding the background and rationale behind finalists for the new name are part of the process as well as reconciling that with the existing school name and origins. School communities also consider school names of programs that have closed as required by Board Policy FFA.
 - In the final selection process there were 417 votes overall representing students, staff and community members. The final name, Billie Holiday Elementary School, was approved by the Board of School Commissioners on April 13, 2021.

City Schools is hopeful for support in renaming the building to match the school name. Otherwise, without ultimate approval from the Baltimore City Council, similar to other schools, the facility will remain as it is named today, (James Mosher Building), and the school name will be Billie Holiday Elementary.