

## School at Coppermine Site Could Be Named After Beloved Educator

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Lutie Lewis Coates Elementary School was the top choice for a name for the new school at the Coppermine site in Herndon. After the vote at the Wednesday night meeting, held at McNair Elementary School, the choice drew an excited shriek from Sheila Coates, daughter-in-law of the deceased educator.

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Mary Weadon, who taught at Floris Elementary School for 10 years, first brought the idea for the name to area community members just two weeks prior to the meeting. While teaching at Floris she came across information about Floris Colored School, a school that area black students attended before the county school system was desegregated. A few years ago Weadon tried to save what was left of the two-room schoolhouse but eventually the building was torn down, she said.

While flipping through television channels recently she came across a school board meeting and Hunter Mill school board Representative Stu Gibson reminded area residents to attend the meeting to help offer naming suggestions and vote for the new school. Weadon said she had to move quickly and decided that naming the new school for beloved teacher and principal Lutie Coates would honor the memory of the Floris Colored School.

Ricci Gibbs, who had Coates for a teacher at Luther Jackson Middle and High School after the schools were desegregated, said she was a very inspiring teacher. "She was a powerhouse," she said. Gibbs said every morning in her homeroom class Lutie Coates would talk about civil and women's rights. She said Lutie Coates taught her to love all people no matter what color their skin is.

Joseph Carpenter, who had Lutie Coates as a teacher at Floris Colored School, said she was a fixture in the neighborhood and in other area neighborhoods as well. "She was a teacher, a principal and a mother to all of us," he said. Many who spoke in favor of naming the school after Lutie Coates said they would like to see a name that would connect the school to the community and to local history.

Yvonne Johnson, historian with Frying Pan Farm Park, said she learned a lot about area history through its residents' lives while completing research for a documentary about the area and Floris Colored School a few years ago. "I really believe it's the everyday heroes, the everyday people, that inspire us," she said. She said it is caring individuals such as Lutie Coates who people do not always hear about that make America special.

After two rounds of voting the name Lutie Lewis Coates, the frontrunner, received 21 points and the runner-up name, Coppermine, received 9 points. Each participant picked their top three choices and assign priority to them with points—top choices received three points, second choices received two points and third choices received one point. Although about 30 people attended the meeting only five who attended were eligible to vote. Voters had to live within the new Coppermine school site boundary to be eligible.

During the first round voters narrowed down choices that were presented to them, which included Lutie Lewis Coates, Lutie L. Coates, Coppermine, Dulles, Albert Einstein and Horace Mann. The two top choices will now be forwarded to Fairfax County Schools Superintendent Jack Dale who will make a recommendation to the school board. The school board will make a final decision on the name of the school on April 2.

Family of Lutie Coates attended the meeting, including her niece Diane Lewis. Lewis said she hoped to include her aunt's full name in the naming of the school because it was her upbringing that inspired her career in education. She said Lutie Coates' parents helped fund the original Jennie Dean Elementary School in Manassas. Lewis said this would be the first time since schools have been desegregated that a county school is named after a black woman.

Sheila Coates said, "I am thrilled about this, absolutely thrilled." She said she never expected a total stranger—Weadon—to approach her with the suggestion that a school be named for her mother-in-law. "It's not because she was my mother-in-law, it's because she was deserving," she said. Weadon said she feels like she has helped make an important contribution to the community. Karen Siple, principal of the new school, said, "I thought it was very moving and I think it's inspirational to name a school after an educator who meant so much to her family and her students."