



17 September 2020

Dear Epworth community

Decision to change Epworth's competitive house names

Over the past few years, the subject of Epworth's competitive house names and their place in post-Apartheid South Africa has been raised in a number of forums by different stakeholder groups.

The four houses, Athlone, Buxton, Rhodes and Somerset, which were introduced by Miss ES Church, one of the early Epworth principals, in 1926, were named after prominent, white males imported from Britain. Any connection to Epworth is not apparent and it seems that Miss Church chose these names because they resonated with her and the era in which she lived.

In 2019, the question of changing Epworth's house names was brought to the attention of the school's Transformation, Diversity and Inclusivity (TDI) Task Team, which comprises representatives of the Board, Trust, management, the staff and pupil body and the Epworthians. As a school that values inclusivity and belonging, embraces diversity and has the courage to live counter-culturally, the TDI Task Team felt that the house names were not in keeping with this ethos and with Epworth's fundamental values.

Following a thoughtful period of debate and reflection, it was agreed to survey current pupils (Grades 5 to 12), staff, Epworthians, Board and Trust members concerning the re-naming of our competitive houses. A survey was conducted in January of this year and the results were in favour of changing the house names. Forty-four percent of the survey respondents agreed to the name change, 39 percent disagreed, and 18 percent were undecided.

The Board and the school management have decided to endorse the survey results and, guided by the Naming Committee and the TDI Task Team and Journey Manager, who is still to be appointed, they will plan a process for generating new house names that reflect the true spirit of contemporary Epworth. In the interim, we will remove the current house names and each house will be known by its colour: red, green, yellow and blue.

While many members of the Epworth community will embrace the decision to change the house names, we respectfully acknowledge that others, especially some of our Epworthians, may feel aggrieved and disappointed by it. The school assures those for whom the house names hold a special memory, that its intention is not to “edit” or attempt to rewrite history. These original house names will still have a place in the annals of Epworth.

As we move forward, we are excited about the opportunity this “name change” project provides for us to nurture Afrocentrism and become more relevant and inclusive of our diverse pupil body. We must continue to create an educational environment in which all our pupils feel respected and empowered.

I trust you will support us as we proceed with this initiative, knowing that we have the best interests of the school at heart and remain committed to our motto of faith, compassion and courage, which has been a powerful guiding light throughout our history.

Yours sincerely

Ms Laura Bekker
Head of School