Greater Essex County District School Board

Title: School Naming and Renaming
Category: Policy
Responsibility: Superintendent of School Operations and Information Technology and Board of Trustees
Effective Date: November 2, 1999
Review Date: October 20, 2026
Next Review Year: 2031

Policy Statement

The GECDSB regards a school name as an integral aspect of the identity for, and in, the school community.

When selecting a name for a new school (or while renaming a currently operating school or board facility) the objective is to reflect excellence in public education, the diversity of our region, and a safe, positive and welcoming school environment – while highlighting the expressed values of the GECDSB and its character education principles.

The primary interest in the name of any school or Board facility is retained by the Board. A name is a primary branding element and allows the Board to promote its objectives in the community and communicate its mission, vision and values. Appropriate branding also assists the Board in the development of a strong identity for the school community.

A school name should be distinctive and readily identifiable as a public school within the Greater Essex County District School Board.

Generationally, the nature and identity of communities in which any school exists, changes. Schools are built to overlap generations. Naming schools based on the character of a community as it is currently constituted, or once was, will not always be relevant to the present residents or users.

Ideas (concepts) – based on the Board's ongoing, foundational, operational and philosophical criteria are encouraged to be the fundamental consideration of a new, or revised, school name.

Names to be considered should be thoroughly examined so as not to perpetuate or represent a legacy of discrimination, oppression or harm to members of this or any GECDSB school community.

Definitions

New School Name: The name for a school constructed on or after November 20, 2025, that has a Capital Priorities project identification number including replacement schools that will use the same name.

School Name Change: The process of changing the name of an existing school.

Minor School Name Change: A minor school name change is an adjustment to an existing school name that is strictly technical, administrative, or a formatting change. A minor school name change may include changes to abbreviations in a school name, spelling corrections, or adjusting descriptors.

Policy Guidelines

Before going for approval from the Minister of Education, the Board of Trustees will approve the new school names, school name changes, and minor school name changes. Specific details regarding the establishment of a Naming Advisory Committee, the Naming Criteria, Costs Associated with the Process for Naming a School or Changing the Name of a school, and the Timely and Efficient Process for the Naming of School or Changing the Name of a School.

A. Naming Criteria

A school board's process for naming a school or changing the name of a school shall ensure that any proposed names for a school fall under one of the following categories:

- Name of a geographical area or local feature, such as the location, community, or street where the school is located. Local features can include plants or trees.
- Name in commemoration of an event of significance to the area, province or country, if at least ten years have elapsed since the event.
- Name to commemorate a person, living or deceased, provided the person has made a demonstrable contribution to the legacy of the area, the province, or country.
- Name that honours the significance of communities who have helped shape Ontario's rich and diverse history (e.g., First Nations communities, Francophone communities).

School names should not:

- Promote commercial interests (e.g. include the name of a business or brand).
- Commemorate a person with an unpardoned criminal record.

B. Costs Associated with Process for Naming a School or Changing the Name of a School

The process for naming a school or changing the name of a school must be completed cost effectively and in compliance with school board expense policies and directives.

For example:

- leveraging free or low-cost venues for any community discussions
- only paying reasonable travel related expenses relevant to participation in the meetings
- avoiding high-cost consultant fees for facilitation and other services

School boards should also limit indirect costs (e.g. staff time and operational expenses) tied to school naming processes and undertake these activities in the most efficient manner possible.

School boards are encouraged to leverage in-kind support such as common meeting spaces, partnerships with community organizations, and board staff capacity to minimize costs while ensuring meaningful participation.

C. Timely and Efficient Process for Naming a School or Changing the Name of a School

School boards are expected to treat school naming and renaming as routine administrative business and to conclude decisions within a standard decision-making cycle, consistent with the timelines they apply to other standard board matters.

Processes must:

- Include community engagement. School boards must include a summary of community engagement in their application.
- Result in a clear rationale for the school's name.
- Be concluded as timely and efficiently as possible to minimize disruption to school operations.

D. Roles and Responsibilities

Board of Trustees:

- Approve the appointment of the members to the Naming Advisory Committee.
- By majority vote, approve one of the proposed names, provide an alternative name or refer the matter back to the Naming Advisory Committee with a rationale.

Chief Executive Officer:

- Authorize the initiative to name or rename a school.
- Along with the area trustee(s) and the Chair of the Board, determine the makeup of committee members and make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for approval.

Superintendent Responsible for School Operations:

- Provide interpretation of this process.
- Support understanding and implementation of this process across the Board and GECDSB schools.
- In collaboration with board staff as appropriate, is responsible for overseeing the process for naming a school.
- Establish the agendas for meetings, ensure that properly prepared agenda materials are circulated to the members with sufficient time for review prior to the meeting, chair the committee meetings, and be responsible for reporting to the Board of Trustees.
- Present a report to the Board of Trustees on the Naming Advisory Committee's discussions and recommendations, including a shortlist of suggested names (2 to 4 suggestions) with rationale for trustees to consider.

Communications Department:

- Appeal for applicants for the committee through media release, social media and communication to the school community.
- Develop, issue and review survey to the broader community.
- Research and collect historical/cultural information on the area, community and neighbourhood in which the building will be/is located. The report will help establish suggestions or concepts, names and/or themes for the committee to discuss.
- Be a resource to the committee.
- Facilitate focus group discussions with students and/or staff and/or community members.
- Facilitate consultation with Equity groups.

Committee Members:

- The committee will evaluate suggestions and the information provided based on the naming criteria provided.
- The committee will vote using a system outlined at the first meeting by the Committee Chair to determine a short list of school names to recommend to the Board. The Committee will recommend 2 to 4 names, with a rationale for each, to the Board of Trustees for approval.

E. Process

1. The Chief Executive Officer will bring forward to the Board of Trustees a report requesting a Naming Advisory Committee be established once land has been purchased and the design and budget have been approved by the Ministry.

2. Through a media release, social media and communication to the school community, an appeal for applicants for the committee will be solicited. Once the applications are received, the area Trustee(s), Chief Executive Officer and the Chair of the Board will determine the makeup of the committee and make a recommendation to the Board of Trustees for approval. (See Appendix A for application.)

The Naming Advisory Committee shall, where applicable, consist of at least:

Voting Members:

- One school administrator
- Two staff members
- One school council member from each school being named or renamed
- Four student representatives (elementary student accompanied by parent/guardian)
- Two community representatives who are public school supporters

In the case of a school consolidation, the listed membership would include individuals from each school involved in the consolidation.

Non-Voting Members:

- Two members of the Board of Trustees, including the area Trustee(s) whenever possible
- The Chief Executive Officer
- The Superintendent responsible for School Operations (serving as Chair)
- The area Superintendent
- Member of the Communications Department
- A staff appointed recording administrative assistant

Prior to the first naming committee meeting:

a) A Member of the Communications Department will collect historical/cultural information on the area, community and neighbourhood in which the building will be/is located. The report will help establish suggestions of concepts, names and/or themes for the committee to discuss.

b) Following the guidelines set out in this process for the selection of a school name, community input will be sought through an open survey, which will be promoted through a variety of mediums (i.e. News Release, on social media platforms, websites, etc.)

F. Committee Meetings

The purpose of the Naming Advisory Committee is to assist the Board of Trustees in the naming of a school.

The committee will hold a minimum of two (2) meetings, which will be open to the public to attend, but not to provide any direct input at that time.

Quorum, for the purpose of convening an official meeting, shall be defined as the majority of voting members. The decision-making process will be considered and determined by voting members who are present. Ideally, the committee will use consensus when voting. Majority voting will be used if the committee cannot reach consensus.

Prior to the first meeting committee members will be provided with the following documents:

- Board Policy
- Board's Strategic Priorities
- Complete list of suggested names gathered through the community survey
- Communications Department report
- List of current and former school names and themes in the GECDSB

1. The purpose of the first meeting will be for the committee to review the information provided and, if desired, ask questions of the Communications Department for clarification. Members will then assess any ideas/suggestions which have already come forward or provide one of their own. A list of potential names will be created.

2. The list will then be reviewed through an equity lens and for propriety and adherence to the GECDSB name selection criteria. Consultation will take place with, but not limited to, various GECDSB advisory committees. All appropriate names will then be submitted to focus groups of students and/or staff and/or community members for their impressions and preferences. The results of these sessions will be summarized and provided to the committee prior to their second meeting.

3. At its second meeting, the committee will consider the feedback from focus groups and select a minimum of 2 and a maximum of 4 possible names that will be forwarded to the Board of Trustees for their consideration.

4. At a public meeting of the Board of Trustees, the Superintendent responsible for School Operations will present a report on the deliberations and actions of the Naming Advisory Committee. This will also include the short list of suggested names. The Board of Trustees will then vote to choose one of the suggestions, provide an alternative name or refer the matter back to the Naming Advisory Committee with a rationale. If the Trustees vote to refer back to the Advisory Committee, the Committee shall reconvene to select up to three new names for consideration.

5. Following the selection of a name, the school community will then be engaged in a process to determine its branding elements (colours, logo, mascot and motto) as per Operational Procedure: Naming and Renaming School Mascots. A member of the Communications Department and the area Superintendent responsible for School Operations will supervise the proceedings to ensure that they conform to the GECDSB standards for justice, equity, inclusion and diversity as well as for distinctiveness and marketability.

6. All meeting notes on the determination of a school name or renaming of a school are to be kept in the school archives.

G. School Name Review and Reconsideration Process

In consultation with equity groups, school names across the district are to be reviewed every 5 years to allow for evolving and enlightened understanding of justice, inclusion, equity and diversity to be considered.

If there is a concern of a school name prior to the review date, concerned members of the school community or general community should complete the School Naming Request Form (see Appendix C).

Executive Council will review submissions. If deemed appropriate, the Chief Executive Officer will prepare a report for the Board of Trustees' consideration. Should the Board pass a motion to proceed, a Naming Advisory Committee will be established, in accordance with this process.

The naming of internal facilities is the responsibility of the school community. The school will consider the Naming Criteria in A.

H. School Naming Application and Approval Process

Application Approval Streams

There are two streams for seeking school naming or school name change approvals from the Minister:

1. School Name Related to a Capital Priorities Program (CP) Project Approval:
   - The school naming process should commence only after the ministry has approved a capital project.
   - After an application form is submitted, the minister has 60 days to respond to a school naming application. School boards should consider the approval timeline in preparation for the school project opening. If a new school name is not approved before opening, boards must use the municipal address until a school name is approved.
   - School boards are encouraged to submit their naming application as part of the existing Capital Priorities milestones, for example, the request for the approval of a school name can be submitted at the Pre-Tender Check-in milestone.

2. Existing school name changes – not associated with a Capital Priorities Project, including minor school name changes
   - The process to change the name of an existing school should commence well in advance of the proposed date the name change would be intended to come into use.

Application Form

The Ministry's school naming online application form must be completed for any school name approval, including new school names, school name changes and minor school name changes. For new school names and school name changes, school boards must provide the ministry with the below information:

a) a clear, well-documented rationale as to why a school naming process has been initiated (i.e., name a new school or to change the name of an existing school); including the proposed name's relevance to the community (as appropriate) and the anticipated reaction to the name from the community; potential positive and negative reactions should be identified.
b) a brief description of the community engagement that has taken place, timelines and costs related to the engagement, and a summary of community feedback (include community meeting minutes).
c) for school name changes, an outline of the benefits of changing the name of an existing school including confirmation that the change will not negatively impact or divert resources from other school operations (e.g. identifying which operational funds would be used to support the name change).
d) Confirmation that the proposed name and naming process complies with the policy requirements.

Comprehensive records are to be maintained by the school board demonstrating that the school naming or name changing process has met the cost effectiveness and efficiency requirements.

The Ministry may request and review this documentation at any time to verify compliance. Applications will be rejected if they:

- do not comply with the policy, or
- are incomplete.

Minister's Response

Once the application is submitted to the ministry, it will be assessed, and the Minister has 60 days to respond, as set out in O. Reg. 244/26.

The Minister has the authority to approve, approve with conditions, or reject a school name within the prescribed time.

If a school name is rejected, the school board shall not use the rejected name. Please refer to subsection 174(6) of the *Education Act* on how to proceed.

There is no appeal process for school naming decisions made by the Minister.

After School Boards Receive Approval

If a new school name or school name change has been approved by the Minister, the ministry will make updates to the Ontario School Information System (OnSIS) to reflect the approved name.

Reporting Requirement

A policy review cycle of every five years has been established to ensure regular review of Greater Essex County District School Board policies, unless otherwise required by system need or legislation.

Reference

Section 174 of the Education Act
Subsection 174(8) of the Education Act
O. Reg. 244/26
Bill 33: Supporting Children and Students Act, 2025

Appendix

Appendix A: Application to Serve on the Greater Essex County District Board Naming Advisory Committee
Appendix B: Script/Guide for the Chair of the Naming Committee

Appendix C: School Renaming Request Form

Greater Essex County District School Board

Title: School Naming
Appendix A: Application to Serve on the GECDSB Naming Advisory Committee

Name of Applicant: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Contacts: Home: _____

Work: _____

School Council Member: ☐ Community Member: ☐ Staff: ☐ Student: ☐

I am an English Public School Supporter: Yes ☐ **No** ☐

Briefly describe your interest in the School Naming process and the reasons why you would like to serve on the committee.

Please declare in detail any conflict of interest pursuant to the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, 1990

Submit completed application form to the Principal of a school involved in the naming process.

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Title: School Naming

Appendix B: Script for Chair of the Naming Committee

We are here to choose 2 and no more than 4 possible names for this school, as outlined in our School Naming process.

These options will be submitted to the Board of Trustees, which will determine the final selection during a public meeting.

Review the list of the Naming Criteria.

Our task will be, using the Board's strategic goals as our guide, to suggest names which help form an identity for and in the school community.

When selecting a name for the new school (or the renaming of a school) the objective should be to reflect excellence in public education, the diversity of our region and a safe and welcoming school environment.

We will hold a minimum of 2 meetings.

During this initial meeting we will review research compiled about the history, geography and demographics of the (new school's area / neighbourhood) plus the input from a community survey that was conducted (dates).

We will then develop a short list of at least 2 and not more than 10 potential names.

The short list of names will then be vetted for appropriateness, cultural sensitivity, accuracy and historical relevance.

During the second meeting, we will use the approved shortlist to achieve a consensus on at least 2 and no more than 4 names to submit to the Board of Trustees. The name selected will be provided to the Minister of Education to apply for the Minister's approval.

As chair of this committee, I will request that all members put aside personal biases or preferences and objectively help determine the name(s) which we feel, as a committee, will create a strong identity for the school community and represent the character and the brand of the Greater Essex County District School Board.

Greater Essex County District School Board

Title: School Naming
Appendix C: School Renaming Request Form

Name of Applicant: _____

Address: _____

Telephone Contact: _____

Email Address: _____

School Council Member: ☐ Community Member: ☐ Staff: ☐ Student: ☐

I am an English Public-School Supporter: Yes: ☐ **No:** ☐

Current Name of School: _____

Please provide a detailed rationale for your application.

Please submit form to feedback@publicboard.ca

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