

Scan of Selected School Boards and Other Jurisdictions: Naming of Schools and Special Purpose Areas

Summary

The TDSB's [Naming Schools and Special Purpose Areas Policy](#) (P047), which establishes rules for the naming and renaming of schools, special purpose areas of schools and new additions, was adopted in 2001 and last reviewed in March 2012. According to the Policy, naming or renaming of a school is initiated as a result of site consolidations, re-designations, school closures, re-openings, expansions and sometimes as a result of school or community requests. Consultation with the school and local community is an integral part of the process, with the Board of Trustees ultimately approving school names and name changes.

Key Themes

Through a scan and subsequent review of twenty (20) organizations, all policies and procedures reviewed include a similar process for naming or renaming public assets. Across district school boards and municipalities, a name contributes to creating a culture and sense of identity for the community and promotes public awareness including the ability to locate the property quickly and effectively. In several organizations, names of schools are aligned with the names of streets or can be based on geographical area, while in other examples, numbering is used independently or in conjunction with a geographical name. Though some organizations (e.g., City of Burlington, City of Calgary, City of Grand Prairie) include revenue generating strategies as part of its naming through naming rights in exchange for financial support, this scan primarily focuses on honourific naming dedication.

In light of recent events such as the Black Lives Matter movement, cities and school boards are now reviewing naming of civic assets to more broadly understand and respond to how systemic racism and discrimination are embedded in public assets, commemorative programs and naming policies.

Naming Conventions (People, Places, Events, Geography)

All organizations included in this scan use naming conventions for their public buildings, streets and public spaces. While individuals and organizations are often recognized through dedicated naming to honour their past contributions to the organization or community, each organization uses its own yet similar criterion to determine naming recognition. Most organizations (e.g., City of Burlington, City of Toronto, City of Vancouver, Santa Rosa City Schools) give consideration to persons who have exceptionally dedicated or demonstrated excellence in service in ways that made a significant contribution to the community, city, province/state, or nation.

While many organizations require alignment to their mission, vision and values (e.g., City of Burlington, City of Edmonton, City of Vaughan, York Region DSB) or naming that is reflective of a “positive image” (e.g., Upper Grand DSB), one school board (i.e., Orleans

Parish School Board, New Orleans) also requires that individuals must have been of such outstanding character and distinction that naming a school facility, private drive or street after them would honour both the school district as well as the individual and would provide educational or motivational value to the students served at the school. At one Catholic school board (i.e., Halton Catholic DSB), schools can be named after deceased local exemplary Catholics. However, due to a recent instance of sex abuse allegations against a school's namesake which required renaming, the school board is proposing to limit all future schools from being named after anyone but saints, popes or divine persons of the Holy Family. In order to maintain integrity and practice due diligence, another organization (i.e., Princeton University) requires that honourific naming must advance the organization's values and policies and that requested names not belong to a person or organization that has a record of malfeasance of a character that would make the name inappropriate. In addition, the policy includes a presumption against names honouring countries or political bodies because they may undergo dramatic change and commit dramatic injustice.

Given that distinguishing noteworthy people or commemorating history, places or events can be subjective in nature and may not always be able to "stand the test of time," which one school board (i.e., Upper Grand DSB) refers to as a requirement in its policy, the majority of organizations also consider names which reflect the unique location, geography, or community of where the property is located, including cultural, aboriginal or social significance. This can also include native wildlife, flora, fauna or natural feature in the geographical area (City of Calgary, City of Edmonton, City of Toronto, City of Vancouver). Although a geographical naming system may help avoid future controversies, the problem still lies in understanding how the geographical areas came to exist and whether it was through colonialist methods.

Several organizations (e.g., Orleans Parish School Board, Santa Rosa City Schools) have rules that prohibit schools to be named after a living person or similar to the name of any existing district school to avoid confusion. In another organization (i.e., Ryerson University), no naming should infringe on academic integrity or be deemed to imply the University's endorsement of a partisan political or ideological position or of a commercial product or service. To protect an organization from potential controversy, one organization (i.e., Santa Rosa City Schools) reserves the authority to terminate naming rights if it is determined that the name could bring the district into disrepute, while at another institution (i.e., Ryerson University), no naming will be approved or (once approved) be continued if such a naming will call into question the integrity or reputation of the organization.

The TDSB's current policy includes similar requirements for the naming of schools and in the case of alternative or specialized schools, may also have a name symbolic to the unique program focus of the school. Special purpose areas can sometimes also be named in exchange for sponsorship or donations.

Numbering System

Though not widely used, some organizations throughout the world (i.e., New York State Schools, Russia) use a numbering system for buildings, schools and other public spaces. In Russia, formats include School No.1, School No. 775 and are grouped by geography. In North America's largest school system (i.e., New York State Schools), numbering is used with either a geographical area or name attached to it within its [various school districts](#). Schools usually follow the number and name format (e.g., PS 166 – The Richard Rogers School of the Arts and Science) or geographical area and number (e.g., Geog District #15 – Brooklyn). When creating new schools in this board, an allocation code management system assigns schools with a number or code for state approval. While a numbered building or school may be seen to lack character, personality, connection or “belonging” in its community, the advantage it has is that there can be little criticism with most of these organizations citing no record of objections to its numbering system.

Under the TDSB's current policy, a numbering system is not utilized.

Process and Community Engagement Methods for Naming/Re-Naming

Naming requests can come forward for various reasons including: anniversaries of significance, heritage significance, death of a significant person, honouring residents with exemplary public or community service, or the construction of a new school or civic-owned property. Across all jurisdictions scanned, the naming of schools, buildings and other civic assets could either be driven by the community through a request or application process, or facilitated by the organization which includes staff recommendations, various community engagement processes such as feedback opportunities or community meetings, and input/approval by the Board.

When soliciting input and suggestions from the community, one municipality (i.e, City of Vancouver) allows members of the public to suggest names for streets and lanes, sidewalks and cycling infrastructure, bridges and city owned properties such as buildings and associated exterior spaces, using a dedicated [web page](#). Although each organization has its own criterion, most organizations (e.g., City of Toronto, City of Vancouver, City of Grand Prairie, Orleans Parish School Board) require the rationale, relevance of the proposed name to the asset, a biography and documented support including petition and support letters as part of the application process. In Vancouver, the support of 75% of property owners that abut the street, place or building is required, whereas in Toronto and Grand Prairie, these support letters can come from recognized organizations or the general public. Similarly, in a United States municipality (City of Harrisonburg, VA), sponsors must accompany the application with a petition of at least 100 signatures of city residents. If the application is to rename a street, the application must contain signatures of at least 51% of residents or owners of properties on that street. At another organization, (e.g., City of Greater Sudbury) naming request applications are processed at a \$900 fee to cover the cost of city-wide advertising to measure the level of public community support.

Naming appropriateness is considered by staff before a name can put forward to committee/board or council for approval. As part of the process, staff are responsible for

recommending or reviewing names provided by the general public. In an effort to best understand the history of the person or naming convention, many organizations (e.g., City of Edmonton, City of Vancouver) engage experts including in-house archivists or historians to research and review names and keep an inventory of name requests and names currently in use. An online naming inventory with applicable background history is routinely used at one organization (i.e., City of Ottawa).

Most organizations (e.g., City of Grand Prairie, City of Edmonton, City of Ottawa, Santa Rosa City Schools) also engage with their advisory committees responsible for naming and renaming, which includes citizen, staff and elected official representation.

As part of a general engagement strategy, virtually all organizations conduct some form of public consultation and outreach. At one organization (e.g., Santa Rosa City Schools), the board requires a public hearing at which members of the public are given an opportunity to provide input before the board approves naming recommendations. This would be similar to the TDSB's delegation process. In another organization (City of Boulder, Colorado), the city issues a press release to announce naming efforts, followed by a collection of feedback from social media and various city run platforms. Targeted outreach is another strategy employed to ensure that all voices are heard. For example, one organization (i.e., City of Boulder) engages with its "racial equity email listserv" and works with local partners and interested organizations, while another organization (i.e., Hamilton Wentworth DSB) carefully takes into account the input from underrepresented groups (defined as "groups that are typically underrepresented and underserved and whose voices are often not included in planning or heard on issues"). Canada's largest city (i.e., City of Toronto) follows similar steps and involves certain communities such as the aboriginal community and adherence to appropriate aboriginal protocols when naming portrays aboriginal significance.

While every organization requires approval from their governing body, one organization (City of Edmonton) offers an appeal opportunity for applicants when their name is not approved whereby the matter is brought forward to the executive committee.

Under the TDSB's current policy, consultation with the school and local community is an integral part of the process, with the Board of Trustees ultimately approving school names and name changes.

Current and Future Equity Considerations

Most policies include equity considerations when naming or renaming facilities and civic assets. For example, at one organization (City of Toronto) names of city properties cannot result in or be perceived to confer any competitive advantage or benefit to the named party, or be or be perceived to be discriminatory or derogatory of race, colour, ethnic origin, gender identity or expression, sex, sexual orientation, creed, political affiliation, disability or other social factors. Other organizations (e.g., City of Edmonton, City of Ottawa) include as part of its criterion that individuals can be nominated and receive naming dedication for their community work to foster equality and reduce discrimination. At a neighbouring school board (i.e., York Region DSB), consideration is

given to the principles of equity and the culture, history and accomplishments of the school(s) affected. This includes consideration to local Indigenous communities and the contributions of Indigenous peoples to the Canadian mosaic.

In acknowledging that most organizational policies related to naming are dated and have not been reviewed in recent years, recent public pressures, the Black Lives Matter movement and protests worldwide has led nearly all organizations included in this scan to review its naming policies, statues and naming conventions. While one organization (City of Vancouver) is undertaking a process of naming and renaming several existing City-owned public spaces as a fulfillment of its broader policies and approach to Reconciliation and redress regarding its Aboriginal peoples, many organizations both locally and globally (e.g., City of Toronto, City School District of Albany, Pennsylvania University, Princeton University, Ryerson University) are reviewing and/or revising its policies to ensure that all names reflect the organization's commitment to eliminate systemic and institutional barriers that result in racially disparate outcomes. As one school board (Santa Rosa City Schools) explains, the Board is conducting a comprehensive review of its naming program given that "names placed on those institutions may not have reflected an honest understanding of the history of those people." On September 15, 2020, a neighbouring school board (York Region DSB) decided to initiate the process to rename one of its schools, Vaughan Secondary School, due to the namesake's history with racism.

Using another local example, the City of Toronto has conducted a review and will release its report on September 23, 2020 to assess options for the renaming of Dundas Street in order to respond to the community at large, Black and Indigenous communities. While it is anticipated that the costs related to education, changing signage, maps and service directories will be quite significant for a major arterial street like Dundas (which will be provided in the September 2020 report), the City plans to take a constructive and symbolic step toward disavowing its historic associations with persons who have actively worked towards preserving systems of racial inequality and exploitation. Importantly, the City will be also be outlining a community engagement strategy and change management process that simultaneously addresses in an integrated manner all civic assets (streets, parks, public monuments, civic awards and honours, TTC, Toronto Public Library, and Yonge-Dundas Square) by the end of 2021.

Several organizations have taken immediate steps. Until a full review can take place, one school board (Orleans Parish School Board), has amended its policy to include the following directional statement: "The Orleans Parish School Board believes all schools should be welcoming, inclusive, and inspiring places for all students, and desires to ensure that the names of our school facilities and the people that we honour through naming reflect the values of the school district. The School Board is fundamentally opposed to retaining names of school facilities named for persons who did not respect equal opportunity for all." Similarly, in response to complaints about certain names across the community, another organization (i.e., City of Calgary) is reviewing its naming policy/program and approved the following provision to be added as a criterion of the

policy as an interim measure: “Names should not be divisive in nature. When an individual or group is identified by a name, best efforts should be taken to ensure that the name is not seen as linked with discrimination, oppression and systemic racism nor in violation of community standards as they exist today.”

At the TDSB, an equity lens is applied under its Equity Policy (P037) but the current policy does not document equity considerations in the [Naming Schools and Special Purpose Areas Policy](#). The equity principles are recommended to be included in the revised Policy.

Organizations Reviewed (20): California Department of Education, City of Burlington, City of Grand Prairie, City of Harrisonburg, City of Ottawa, City of Toronto, City School District of Albany, City of Vancouver, Halton Catholic DSB, Hamilton Wentworth District School Board, Orleans Parish School Board, Los Angeles Unified School District, New York State Schools, Princeton University, Ryerson University, Russia, Santa Rosa Public Schools, Toronto DSB, Upper Grand DSB, Wisconsin Department of Instruction, York Region DSB.