

# Revised and Expanded School Naming Criteria

dvm, 01-09-08, 01-15-08

## A. MMSD Board-generated criteria

A policy adopted by the school board on June 10, 2007 (6700 Operation) requires that acceptable school names have certain qualities:

1. The new school name must fall into one of three categories: a person; a place/site; or an idea/concept.
2. If the school is named after a person, the person must be:
  - a. “deceased”
  - b. a “prominent national *or* local figure.” Prominent is defined as “widely and popularly known.
  - c. significant to the MMSD. District relevance should be clear and compelling. (The language in “c” is the CNC’s interpretation of board intent.)
3. If a name is a place, it must be “a locally significant geographical site” or “a place of local significance.”
4. If a name is an idea or concept, it must be a “broadly representative civic virtue” or, “value.”

## B. CNC supplemental criteria

### Initial Cutting Criteria

1. *Local rather than national* Whenever possible, the CNC should give preference to the name of a person with *local* significance. Our civilization finds a myriad of ways to honor important national figures, but few ways to memorialize distinguished locals. A corollary quickly comes to mind: a person with Madison roots and/or a Madison career who achieves state, national, or even international status should be given special consideration. Conspicuously missing from board-generated criteria is *state* prominence. This will surely create a problem for the committee because some nominees are prominent at the local *and* state level or *primarily* at the state level.

2. *Remembering teachers and educators* Opinion leaders routinely praise the singular role played by teachers and educators in shaping our future. But the newspapers, plaques, and speeches containing these words are quickly forgotten. To name a school after an outstanding teacher or educator is one of the few highly visible, wonderfully appropriate, and enduring ways to honor them for their invaluable service to society.

3. *Not pejorative* The CNC will reject a name if it appears to have been nominated to embarrass, slander, or ridicule the MMSD. There can be little doubt that “The Brain Dead Madison Metropolitan School Board Memorial Far West Side” was suggested for this reason.

4. *No new naming system* The CNC will reject a name that appears to have as its goal the creation a new school-naming *system*. The nomination “MMSD #1” would logically require all subsequent schools to be consistent with this concept, or, conceivably, could even require all elementary schools to be renamed with an MMSD-number designation. Surely this would not be acceptable and we would delete this name for this reason.

5. *Does not duplicate or sound like another well-known local name*  
To select such a name, would create two problems: enshroud the new school in ongoing, unnecessary confusion and make the name vulnerable to charges of “overkill.” Therefore, the committee will avoid naming the school for persons, places, or idea-concepts if the name appears in any of the follow conditions:

- a. if a portion of a school building in the MMSD such as a gym or library already bears the name;
- b. if an entire school in Dane County bears the name;
- c. if a street, park, or neighborhood, or other public facility or entity bears the name; and
- d. if another public facility or entity bears a sound-alike name.

6. *No embarrassing double meanings when the name is used in its short form* For example, if we named a school after Richard Bong, a Wisconsin World War II hero, the school would be universally known as Bong Elementary and nearly everyone would snicker when they encounter it. People would ask: Why did they name a school after a pipe used to smoke illegal drugs? A second example is “WayWord.” When spoken, the word would often be understood as “wayward,” a quality of a person who willfully and perversely deviates from desirable norms to gratify impulses. Names with such double entendres are hardly suitable for a school.

7. *Simplicity, brevity, clarity, and originality* To avoid unnecessary confusion and complexity, the committee will favor names that are based on a single person or single idea-concept. More specifically the committee will avoid names that:

a. require two or more unrelated persons. For example, if the committee accepted the suggestion that we name a school after Richard Bong and Lance Sijan, two military heroes, people would typically use one of two methods to abbreviate the name: insert a hyphen (Bong-Sijan) or drop one of the names. Better we think to name a school for a single person and avoid the complexities of struggling with some compromised short form. Married couples with the same last name are less of a problem because a single last name could be used. For example, if a school were named after Philleo and Edith Nash, it would be commonly known as Nash Elementary School.

b. require two concepts or ideas. For example, if a school were named Peace and Prosperity Elementary School, it wouldn't be long before one of the names got dropped, thereby defeating the intent of the name coiner.

c. include adjectives such as “medal of honor” and “memorial.” Such words unnecessarily clutter and lengthen a school name and would be quickly dropped in popular usage.

d. would be perceived as a cliché.

*Place* names with two words are less problematic because in common usage the adjective would be needed for the noun. Examples include “Owl Ridge” and “Valley View.”

8. *A relatively recent contribution over one from the distant past.* Several of the nominations are persons whose lives fell primarily in the nineteenth century. All made significant contributions to their respective fields. However, we will favor names of persons whose contributions fell primarily in the twentieth century. Our reasons are as follows:

a. Many nineteenth century persons have enjoyed their time in the sun. For example, James Duane Doty, Louisa Brayton, and Cordelia Harvey once had Madison schools named after them.

b. Persons who lived in the twentieth century would be better known and provide fresher, more relevant inspiration to today's citizens.

9. *Clean slate* The CNC was formed because a board-naming process generated a name that proved to be very controversial. The board's rejection of this name and creation of a new process requires us to give fair-minded attention to *all* new names.

### **Final Round Cutting Criteria**

10. *Balanced and representative* Taken together the names of current schools and the name of the new school should constitute a balanced and reasonably representative composite of the MMSD. Representative and balanced should be defined with the following dimensions:

- (a) gender;
- (b) ethnicity;
- (c) the classification system approved by the committee; and
- (d) coverage of all three name categories: persons, places, and ideas/concepts.

In applying this criterion to proposed school names, the committee will strive to avoid tokenism.

11. *Overwhelmingly exemplary and inspiring* Naming a school is one of the most auspicious teaching opportunities civic leaders can have. The picked name will become a

household word for a century or more. This is why the name we pick should be overwhelmingly exemplary and inspiring. A school name should exert an enduring appeal. The appeal may be limited to a particular community.

12. *Recognition of school's eco-qualities* The committee will give special consideration to salient qualities of the school that have compelling naming implications. For example, the school we are being asked to name is unique among Madison schools for its aggressive eco-friendly design. More specifically the school will showcase a geothermal heating system, solar hot-water heating panels, electricity-generating fuel cells, and an east-west alignment of classroom wings to allow optimal use of day lighting. These qualities are sufficient to cause the building to be the first LEED certified public school in Wisconsin, a singular distinction. Consequently, the names of persons whose lives were associated with eco-friendly fields such as the environmental movement, conservation, and nature education will be given careful consideration.

13. *Possession of meritorious qualities* When comparing person names across or within categories, the committee will favor those who possess the following qualities:

- a. have served the longest period of time
- b. have compiled the most distinguished records
- c. have pioneered in noteworthy ways
- d. best exemplify admired qualities and traits
- e. other?

14. *A pleasing and poetic sound for place names* In addition to being site-appropriate, the committee will favor place names that have a pleasing, even poetic sound.

15. *Well-researched* Names of persons we recommend to the board should be carefully screened to determine that their life history does not contain an incident, pattern, or quality that fails to meet the overwhelmingly exemplary and inspiring test. The committee's goal should be to identify and analyze closeted skeletons now, not later.