

Naming and Renaming of Fargo Public School Buildings and Other Spaces

Fargo Public Schools is committed to maintaining high standards of integrity and to providing a welcoming and inclusive environment for all members of the Fargo community.

The School Board recognizes that the naming and/or renaming of a Fargo Public Schools building or space is of great importance and deserves thoughtful attention.

The Process for Naming New Buildings or Other School Spaces

The process for naming a new building will begin as soon as its construction has become a financial reality, the site has been selected and the architect has been appointed. The School Board, with assistance from the administration, will solicit proposed names from the community. Community by definition includes staff, students and patrons. Administration will develop a process that invites residents within the district to submit proposed names for the new building or space. Individual Board members may also submit suggestions to be included on the list. Names suggested that are defamatory, include profanity, or are inappropriate for the name of a school will be removed from consideration. Administration will review the names submitted and provide the Board the list of names for consideration. The final selection will be made by a vote of the Board.

Each School Board member will choose up to five names from the list of submitted names. Members will then rank these names (up to 45) and the highest-ranking name would be the one selected. In the case of ties, board members will vote for the highest ranked names until a majority supports a proposed name.

In selecting a name, the Board will consider names of national or state significance. Additionally, the Board will give consideration to names that have a special significance to the area or to people who have made a significant contribution to education or to the school system.

Honorary Naming of Buildings or Other School Spaces

Buildings or portions thereof or other school spaces may be named in honor of an individual through two different procedures.

Honorary Naming Through Financial Contribution: A process is outlined in AP 3255, “Sponsorship and School Business Partnerships.” Under this policy a stadium, field, theater, library or gymnasium may be named, given a contribution of 25% of the cost of the project. Application of this policy might result in a facility named for a company or an individual. It is anticipated that this may be appropriate at times when buildings are being built, remodeled or added onto. It is conceivable as well that such honorary efforts might make the difference between a project being realized or not, or between its being merely adequate versus exemplary.

Honorary Naming without Financial Contribution: At times there may be appropriate opportunities to honor individuals who have distinguished themselves through their association with the school district either as alumni, employees or community members. Such honorary naming may be applied to a new school, provided the name is suggested as a part of the process

outlined above for naming a new school, or it may be applied to an existing building or portion thereof.

The Board will apply the following guidelines in considering any individual's name proposed for a facility or portion thereof.

General Guidelines

- Nominee has had a significant, long-term relationship with Fargo Public Schools
- Nominee has demonstrated excellence in their field
- Nominee has achieved local, regional and national recognition for achievements
- Nominee has held local, regional and national leadership roles in field of expertise
- Nominee has widespread support from colleagues, parents and students
- Nominee, if a former Fargo Public Schools employee, will have been retired or gone from district employment for a minimum of 2 years

Naming Authority

The Board has the final authority on the selection of the name of a school building or other school space. The Board has the discretion to name existing facilities to recognize individuals who meet nomination criteria, with or without financial requirements of AP 3255.

Recognition Plaque

In keeping with the practice of recognizing elected officials and others for their efforts and public service in providing new and/or improved buildings, the District will have plaques installed on new construction and major remodeling projects giving the following information as of the time the board approves the project as reflected in the School Board minutes:

1. Name of the building
2. Board approved construction date
3. Names of the School Board members at the time the project is approved.
 - a. President
 - b. Vice-President
 - c. Other members (in alphabetical order)
4. Name of Superintendent and Associate Superintendents
5. Name of Architect
6. Name of Contractor(s)

Process for Rescinding the Name of a School Building or Other Space

Fargo Public Schools will consider rescinding and replacing the name of a school building or other space when there is strong evidence that retaining the name is inconsistent with the Fargo Public Schools' integrity or is harmful to its mission and / or to Fargo Public Schools' commitment to inclusiveness.

Renaming a school building or other space represents a sufficiently serious change to Fargo Public Schools' original decision and should be undertaken only where warranted by consideration of the following circumstances:

- Diligence of process: Fargo Public Schools believes in a careful process for renaming, one which does not oversimplify, revise, or erase history and which acknowledges and

assesses the complexity of human actions and understands historical evidence may be complex and often ambiguous.

- Forward thinking: decisions made today about naming and renaming may become controversial in the future. Thus, today's decision makers should give the same respect to previous decision makers that they would like their decisions to be accorded in the future.
- Proper pace: any person after whom a Fargo Public Schools' school building or other space has been named may have a history that members of our diverse community may find objectionable. The proper pace for investigation of requests for renaming, and the possible responses (including physical alterations and mitigation efforts), will allow for a comprehensive process, neither taken lightly nor ignored.

Initiating the Process of Reconsidering the Name of a School Building or Other Space

Fargo Public Schools will apply a clear process for addressing questions of renaming in effort not only to arrive at a proper conclusion, but to also avoid controversy over whether requests are treated consistently. The process should take into account that Fargo Public Schools is an education institution devoted to the development of students as scholars and citizens and dedicated to the creation of an inclusive and responsible school community.

The Superintendent or School Board President of the Fargo Public Schools may begin the process of reconsidering the name on a school building or other space at his/her/their initiative or in response to a request submitted by members of the Fargo Public Schools community using a process established by administration.

The request should describe:

- the specific behavior(s) or course(s) of conduct by the person after whom a school building or other space is named that violate(s) the Fargo Public Schools' mission and core values;
- the sources and strength of the evidence of that objectionable behavior;
- the nature, depth, and extent of the harm that the continued use of the name may inflict on the Fargo Public Schools' integrity, mission, and communities; and
- how renaming aligns with the guidelines described in this document.

Upon receipt of the request, the Superintendent or School Board President may make further inquiries of its submitters and, at his/her/their discretion, and request the School Board's Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Committee to study the request.

During the time the School Board's Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Committee reviews the request, Fargo Public Schools will develop a process inviting comments from all interested members of the Fargo Public Schools community (including the namesake and/or his/her/their heirs). The School Board's Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Committee, when applying these guidelines to a particular case, will follow this process and ensure that the inquiry itself does not exacerbate the harms that are being considered.

General Guidelines for the Committee's Use

- The harm caused by retaining the name: The critical question is whether the name under review compromises the Fargo Public Schools' mission, including its commitment to

equity and inclusion of all members of the Fargo Public Schools community. This is a question of fact. Among other things, the answer will depend on the nature of the conduct at issue, the prominence and role of the named feature in daily life at the Fargo Public Schools, and the degree to which retention of the name interferes with the ability of Fargo Public Schools community members to teach, learn, work, and live in the community.

- The potential harms of renaming: The committee must ensure that renaming does not establish a Fargo Public Schools doctrine with respect to particular opinions or otherwise inhibit free inquiry. In addition, the committee should recognize that the names of certain Fargo Public Schools' buildings or other spaces may have a positive value for students, faculty, staff, or alumni, who may find renaming disrespectful of their views.
- The relevant factors and how they should be weighed
 - The centrality of the namesake's offensive behavior to his/her/their life as a whole: the case for renaming is strongest where the namesake's offensive behavior is inseparable from his/her/their public persona. The case for renaming is weaker where the namesake's offensive behavior, though publicly known, is not a central part of his/her/their public persona — especially when the namesake's behavior was conventional at the time of the behavior or the naming, and when, despite the objectionable behavior, other aspects of the person's life and work are especially praiseworthy.
 - Relation to the Fargo Public Schools history: the case for renaming is stronger when the namesake is a person without a significant connection to the Fargo Public Schools. (The concern about "erasing" the Fargo Public Schools' history—or any history, for that matter—is diminished to the extent that the relationship between Fargo Public Schools' history and the namesake is incidental to begin with.) The case for renaming is weaker when the namesake has had an important role in the Fargo Public Schools' history.
 - Harmful impact of the namesake's behavior: the case for renaming is strongest when the behavior of the person for whom a school building or other space is named has a significant negative effect on Fargo Public Schools mission of "achieving excellence by educating and empowering all students to succeed." That is, the case is strongest to the extent that retaining the name creates an environment that impairs the ability of students, faculty, or staff of a particular gender, sexual orientation, race/ethnicity, religion, national origin, or other characteristic protected by federal law or Fargo Public Schools' policies, to participate fully and effectively in the mission of the Fargo Public Schools. Further, the case is also strong to the extent that the namesake's behavior is connected to academic fraud or misconduct. The case for renaming is stronger where the name is prominent and encountered in a daily setting (e.g., a school building) and generally is weaker where the school building or other space is a relatively impersonal public place that does not involve daily attendance.
 - Community identification with the name: the case for renaming is weaker where the school building or other space is part of a valuable positive tradition or identification shared by a substantial number of Fargo Public Schools community members, including alumni.
 - Strength and clarity of the historical evidence: the case for renaming is strongest when evidence of the namesake's wrongful behavior is clear and unambiguous and is weakest when the evidence is scant or ambiguous.

- The Fargo Public Schools’ prior consideration of the issues: the case for renaming is stronger when the namesake’s offensive conduct came to light after the naming and/or not the subject of prior consideration. The case for renaming is weaker when the Fargo Public Schools addressed the behavior at the time of the naming and nonetheless decided to honor the person, or when the Fargo Public Schools has already considered and rejected a prior request for renaming, provided the following: decision makers considered the competing interests, relevant facts were not missing, or if the namesake’s questionable behavior at the time of the naming was left unaddressed.
- Possibilities for mitigation: in considering whether to retain or eliminate a name, the Fargo Public Schools should take into account whether the harm can be mitigated, and historical knowledge preserved by recognizing and addressing the individual’s wrongful behavior. When a school building or other space is renamed or when the name is retained but the committee considers it a close question, the Fargo Public Schools should consider describing the history in a prominent way—at the school building or other space, where practicable, or in some other suitable location.

The Recommendation Process

Upon completion of their study, the School Board’s Communications, Engagement and Advocacy Committee will submit a written recommendation to the School Board applying these guidelines to the facts of the case. These guidelines may be elaborated or even modified in the course of their application over time. The Superintendent may, at any time, reconvene a committee to reconsider the guidelines.

The Superintendent and Committee Chair will bring forth a finalized committee recommendation to the School Board.

Rescinding and Renaming Authority

The School Board has the final authority on rescinding the name of a school building or other school space. Should the School Board determine to rescind the name, the naming process herein shall commence immediately.

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References

Stanford University (2020). *Principles and procedures for renaming buildings and other features at Stanford University*. <https://campusnames.stanford.edu/renaming>