

Facility & Mascot Review and Environmental Scan - Summary of Review

The following report and associated tables provide a summary of the Waterloo Region District School Board (WRDSB) facility and mascot naming review and policy environmental scan.

1.0 Scope & Method

1.1 Literature Review - Facility Names, Space Names and Mascots

This phase of the project included the creation of written profiles of the individual(s) or things whom WRDSB schools, mascots and school spaces were named after. The purpose of this preliminary review was to collect, collate and synthesize publicly-accessible and digitally-available information as it related to the item of focus. The data was summarized in table format for ease of reference, and to act as an initial foundation on which to build, review, and fill in gaps. It also gathered perspectives from unheard voices to provide guidance on a path forward. A list of references was compiled by school and mascot/logo for ease of readership. Many other documents were reviewed, but they did not provide sufficient depth of new or relevant information so they were not included.

To provide a multidimensional view, the research followed both a targeted and generalized approach to searching for information. The research process started with a focussed review and search and broadened accordingly, including the WRDSB school website, mapping, neighbourhood review, city review, community context, regional review (including museum data), dictionary, library, biography, encyclopedia, government, academic, and historical documents, as well as cultural and social context searches. The process then reached more broadly with general platform searches leading to any avenues not yet uncovered. Mascot and logo data discovery was directed by the typology of the item of focus, however it followed a

similar targeted to broad search to identify connection and breadth of meaning. Data research also attempted to provide a cursory review of relevance across a broad timespan ranging from ancient to modern-day, as well as considerations from various perspectives, including academia and grey literature, as available.

The mascot review generally did not explore the use of different colours in the school mascots and logos. Colours often have strong meanings, associations, and can evoke certain feelings. As an example, rainbows are now recognized as a symbol of the LGBTQ+ community. A deeper review to evaluate mascot/logo colour choices by leveraging information on colour theory/colour design and symbolism may be informative. Much academic and industry literature is available for reference. The process was completed as an online literature search with no external stakeholder input or consultation solicited.

1.2 Policy Scan

An environmental scan of various Ontario School Boards (collectively referred to as "Boards") was completed by reviewing publicly available digital policy and procedure documents related to the naming and renaming of schools. An initial scan of 42 Ontario English public school boards, as identified through the Ontario Ministry of Education website (<http://www.edu.gov.on.ca/eng/sbinfo/boardList.html>), was compiled with a high-level notation indicating if a naming policy and/or procedure was identified or not, and the year of which it was last revised.

Policies from Peel District School Board (PDSB), Thames Valley District School Board (TVDSB), Hamilton-Wentworth District School Board (HWDSB), and Toronto District School Board (TDSB) were identified to be reviewed in further detail, as well as WRDSB. Seven other Boards were also selected for a more fulsome review choosing a blend of larger and comparable Boards based on their size (number of elementary/intermediate and secondary schools) and consideration given to the age of the policy. The process was completed as an online literature search with no external stakeholder input or consultation solicited.

2.0 Findings

The data collation can be seen in the tables attached to this report. They have been provided to the WRDSB in two formats (PDF and Excel) to allow for preferred ease of use and readability.

2.1 Facility Names, Space Names

Table 1 provides a summary of the WRDSB school and facility names that were reviewed. Many are in tribute to an individual, or a geographic location or proximity. However, even place-based recognitions were often associated with an individual, family, or deeper connection of some kind. Brief surficial analysis often did not prove fruitful in identifying related meanings, so deeper analysis and tracking was necessary, and sometimes still lead to a dead-end due to items such as undocumented historical or local community context, or just an information void. Many of those honoured have made significant and laudable contributions to the area. However, there is little diversity represented in the naming tenure, and some may raise questions with our knowledge of today. As with the mascot/logo review, it proved challenging to obtain diversity in thought and opinion when reflecting on naming. For example, oratory cultures are not yet well-represented in the digital world. Also, the relatively new phenomenon of recognizing the significance and need for a focussed effort to address equity, diversity and inclusion from a broad human rights perspective has led to lagging availability of comprehensive public resources providing understanding from the various viewpoints. Our documented Canadian history is largely colonial, making the breadth of Canadian cultural understanding difficult to uncover. “Since mainstream contact, knowledge has been defined for Indigenous populations through the eyes of a Western/European science that has a limited understanding of Indigenous world views.” (Thunderbird Partnership Foundation, n.d., p. 4).

The attached Table 1 synthesizes the publicly available historical and current knowledge that was identified through this research to evaluate the WRDSB facility names, as well as the associated reference lists.

2.2 Mascots & Logos

Table 1 also provides a summary of the WRDSB school mascots/logos that were reviewed. Logos and mascots are heavily animal-based, but the symbolism is often not about the animal's behaviour itself, but a reflection of us and our cultural stereotypical representations. These have historically been heavily weighted to the strength of masculinity and male dominance instead of being reflective of today's cultural diversity and gender equity (Garcia, 2020). A deeper review of academic literature regarding animal symbolism in human history may prove informative. The WRDSB caricatures range from obscurity to expressions of violence and the assertion of war, to cultural appropriation, right through to simple welcoming warmth. Modern-day connotations and language can change the lens through which we view, and the need to learn from a breadth of demographics, the marginalized, and those with life experience remains critical.

2.3 Environmental Policy Scan

Tables 2 and 3 provide a policy scan of the 42 schools screened and a further detailed review of 12 School Boards. Of the 12 Board policy/procedure documents that were reviewed in further detail, two were older than the five-year guideline given in the scope of work but were nevertheless included as one (Toronto) was requested by WRDSB and the other was included for comparison (Ottawa). A few of the identified Board policies note a pending internal review date, and the PDSB and TDSB have made public their intention to form special working groups to review their school naming policies. TDSB plans to undertake a citywide review of all TDSB names.

It should be noted that the WRDSB Procedure 4865 seems out of alignment with Policy 4020 both in terms of review date (policy updated 2021 versus procedure last revised in 2019) and key inclusions/exclusions. Therefore, for the purpose of this summary only Policy 4020 was considered.

Most Boards have a separate, but related, procedure document to accompany the school naming policy. The following summary outlines the most common policy and procedure inclusions and highlights variations of interest:

- Some Boards include references to external frameworks, constitutional documents, or legal materials;

- Some Boards include terminology or definitions, and are mostly related to school-specific nomenclature. A richer list of definitions, such as included in the WRDSB policy, provides a deeper context to the reader in understanding the school naming initiation guidelines and naming considerations;
- All policies provide some criteria for initiation of school or facility naming, most commonly due to new schools or consolidation/amalgamation of schools, facilities, or programs;
 - Many policies include initiation criteria for renaming a school or facility, which can be at the request of the community or where the school may benefit from the development of a new school identity;
 - Some policies include initiation criteria that more broadly reflect current societal awareness, issues, and climate, and allow for initiation due to historical and cultural appropriation, or to rectify misalignment with the Board's commitment to Indigenous rights, human rights, anti-oppression, anti-racism, etc. This type of initiation criteria provides the Board with more leeway in responding to public interest requests.
- Most policies and procedures call for the creation of a School Naming Committee ("Committee"), and while the title given to such working groups vary, the roles and responsibilities are generally the same:
 - Many Board policies include a transparent list of the committee membership, including typical representation from Trustees, Superintendents, school administrators, school councils, students, etc.;
 - Only a few Boards outline Committee composition which appears to target inclusion of underrepresented groups, or a member to act on behalf of such groups;
 - In some instances, community representatives are Committee members.
- Practices for naming or renaming schools, where outlined, generally follow the same processes:
 - Some Boards provide clear and transparent community consultation procedures;
 - The most mature procedures define the length of the consultation

- period, methodology for gathering public input (survey, submission forms, polling/voting), communication vehicles (social media, press releases, advertisements), and expected outcomes;
- A clearly defined engagement and consultation process may be more time-intensive to follow, but invites different perspectives and is more inclusive. It also provides less room for scrutiny and likely results in broader acceptance of school names.
 - Special consultation processes are defined by only a few Boards. Both WRDSB and TVDSB specifically mention consultation with Indigenous communities and First Nations families (respectively);
 - Where Board policies consider names of individuals, the process generally includes seeking permission from the potential namesake or their representative.
 - Naming guidelines vary little across the Boards, and commonly reference geography, locations, events, and individuals of local, Canadian, or international significance;
 - A notable exception is the WRDSB policy which, as of June 2021, no longer allows schools or facilities to be named after individuals;
 - A few policies exclude names of corporations, sitting/current politicians and Board members. A couple of policies note to avoid similar names or duplication of names within the school district;
 - One Board notes that care should be taken to avoid names of a politically partisan nature;
 - Some policies consider names reflecting diversity and local Indigenous communities and their contributions;
 - A few Boards allow the naming of facilities or parts of a school after significant financial donors and guide the handling of related plaques and signage.
 - The approval processes generally follow a similar approach where the Committee gathers submissions, evaluates names and develops the

rationale for a shortlist of three names, which are submitted to the Board;

- A majority vote by the Board on the name recommended by the Committee is common;
- Some policies provide guidelines for name selection if the recommendation is not accepted, such as Board selection of an alternate name from the short-list;
- Some policies specify that Board approval is required *prior* to the initiation of a renaming process.
- Separate policies and guidelines were available for a few school boards addressing visual identity and logos. However, they were not the primary focus of this review and may be a further consideration for the WRDSB to incorporate such parameters.

Additionally, rooms or facilities named either in honour or as donor recognition may require alignment and corroboration between policies and procedures. For example, Administrative Procedure 4490 includes donations (no mention of naming) (<https://staff.wrdsb.ca/policyprocedure/files/2019/10/4490-WEFI.pdf>), Administrative Procedure 4989, Partnerships and Sponsorships, (<https://www.wrdsb.ca/wp-content/uploads/AP4989.pdf>) indicates advertising of a sponsor's name, logo, or other details will be non-permanent, and Administrative Policy 4020, Naming and Renaming of Board Facilities, (<https://staff.wrdsb.ca/policyprocedure/files/2021/08/4020-Naming-and-Renaming-of-Board-Facilities.pdf>) which highlights that schools and facilities will not be named for individuals.

Given the current climate and attitudes towards inclusiveness, diversity, and reconciliation, it seems imperative that school naming and renaming policies and related procedures are detailed, transparent, and provide maximum opportunity for community engagement.

3.0 Summary & Recommendations

The scope of this research project was a process of data collection and collation,

providing an opportunity and basis from which to review, reflect, and inform while identifying gaps and opportunities as school naming is reviewed. The attached tables present the compiled information. Further internal data analysis on the school, facility, and mascot naming may provide context to the numbers, types, trends, and gaps as a similar example to that completed through the CBC in British Columbia

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-school-names-data-1.6085583>

(McElroy, 2021).

As the WRDSB naming framework develops, regardless of the personalized or place-based context (as often they are intertwined), or the historical, religious, or present-day inclusionary context, there is much to consider. Meaning is subjective and personal, and some may suggest it is either perceived or real. However, it will be important to be open, to be willing to learn, and to understand from the voices of lived experience and those with localized knowledge to gain guidance on a path forward. Guidance and input should be sought from unheard voices.

Naming, renaming, or even keeping an existing name or logo offers an educational opportunity - to understand and learn, to increase awareness, to reflect upon our history and our actions to allow any needed change moving forward, and to celebrate. Some of the WRDSB's school web pages provide great depth explaining the history of their school, while on others it is completely void. Stakeholder consultation and partnerships, including those in the realm of academia with relevant expertise, may provide a more fulsome viewpoint.

When naming a facility, lines of responsibility may impact choices. As an example, if a street name or neighbourhood association is used, those names may also be related to an individual or conflicting cultural connection (i.e., Waterloo Colonial Acres), and these entities are not under School Board authority.

School Boards across Ontario are working to address naming policies and procedures. The WRDSB has made an effort to be at the forefront, although others do have areas from which to draw, including those relating to the specific processes and procedures for community consultation which may include a transparent and clear process specifying the community consultation period (length), process and methods for

collecting input (i.e. surveys, forms, voting, ranking), and standards for communication (social media, websites, newsletters, public notice, etc.). Policies and procedures should also align across the organization.

4.0 Limitations

The author of this report is a 50-year-old white heterosexual female lacking the generational or lived experiences necessary to reflect many of the insights needed to provide specific direction. She does not speak on behalf of those that have been marginalized or whose voices have not been heard.

Only literature publicly available online was reviewed, which dictates there will be gaps in the research identified. Nor were there any personal queries, external stakeholder or expert interviews, or grassroots community input received; therefore, not all perspectives could be accounted for, and historical context and/or name linkages may have been missed. There was also an identified lack of marginalized authored literature so perspectives from available data may not be fulsome.

References

Garcia, E.A. (2020). Gender Perspectives on National and Nation-State Animal Symbolism. *Men and Masculinities*, Vol. 23(5), 889–907. Sage Publishing.

McElroy, Justin. (2021, June 30). We looked at the origins of every public school name in B.C. Here's what we found. CBC/Radio-Canada.

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/british-columbia/bc-school-names-data-1.6085583>

Thunderbird Partnership Foundation. (n.d.) Supporting Collaboration of Western and Indigenous Cultural Practices within NNADAP/NYSAP Services.

<https://thunderbirdpf.org/napf-document-library/>

Closure

Thank you for the opportunity to support you and your team and the continued success of the Waterloo Region District School Board as you move forward with this important

work. Please feel free to let us know if you have any questions or require additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nancy Orr', written in a cursive style.

Nancy Orr, B.Sc., C.Tech, EcDev., M.Sc. candidate

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