

Topic 4.13: For Whom Is and Could Your School Be Named

Every one of the nation's 130,930 public schools has a name. While many are named for the town or street where they are located (e.g., Boston Latin School; Pleasant Street School) or a nearby geographic feature (e.g., Monument Mountain School), thousands are named for historically important individuals.



San Diego High School is the Oldest Public School in California Still on its Original Site
[San Diego High School](#) by [Conquerist](#) is licensed under [CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

Many schools are named after former Presidents ([see list of educational institutions named after presidents](#)). Some schools are named for other prominent historical figures. For example, Dunbar High School in Washington, DC, the first public high school for Black children in the United States, is named for the poet [Paul Lawrence Dunbar](#).



[Dunbar High School DC \(new building\)](#) by DC Public Schools | Public Domain

School names express not only the history of the school but of the country. In 2020, there were approximately 300 schools in 20 states named for men associated with the Confederacy during the Civil War ([Mitchell, 2020](#)). Dozens of those schools are in Texas, Georgia, and Alabama. Robert E. Lee is the most frequently named former Confederate figure. Some of these schools have been renamed following the death of George Floyd and the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

For whom is your school named and for whom might it be renamed to? The question is both timely and complicated. The online activity [When Should a School Be Renamed?](#) from [KOED Learn](#) poses the following questions for students and teachers to consider:

- What should be done if the person for whom a school is named engaged in problematic activities or undemocratic activities?
- What other names for a school might more closely reflect the values of a school's curriculum?

In this activities, you will research the name of your school. Then you will design a proposal for changing the name of your school or another school in your state.

Activity 1: Research and Present the History of the Name of Your School

- Do you know the history of the name of your school? Do other students? Do teachers?
- Engage in critical research to learn more about the history of the name of your school:
 - Conduct an Internet search to see what you can find about the history of the name of your school.
 - Look at digital and print materials, such as your school website and brochures.
 - Survey and/or interview members of the school (e.g., classmates, school librarian, administrators, PTA members) and broader community (e.g., family members, local librarians, town or city government officials) to see what they know about the history of the name of your school.
- Then, **design a video** to educate your school and local community about the history of the name of your school. Make sure to present a critical perspective that dives deep into the history of the naming of the school and discusses the social, historical, and political contexts of the time in which the school was named (e.g., was the school named in the 1960's when many individuals were fighting for civil rights? How might that have influenced the naming decision?).

Activity 2: Propose the Renaming of a School

In New York City, an activist named Jacob Morris led an effort to rename city streets after Black New Yorkers ([Boyer-Dry, 2021](#)). Gold Street is now Ida B. Wells Place and there are 40 other roadways renamed for individuals including singer Paul Robeson, civil right activist Ella Baker, lawyer Charles Hamilton, and Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall.

Not everyone in the African American community appreciates the efforts of Mr. Morris who is White and works alone. They urge a more collaborative approach that involves more community members in renaming streets to more accurately convey the history of the city and its peoples.

In this activity, you will take a collaborative approach to proposing the renaming of a school by collecting and analyzing data from school and community members.

- First, read the picture book [Who Came Down That Road?](#) by George Ella Lyon (illustrated by Peter Catalanotto) that tells the story of a mother and child imagining all the people who traveled down an old, old road in their community.
- Then, conduct extensive research to identify diverse individuals who should be recognized in your community, including African Americans, Native Americans, Hispanic Americans, women, LGBTQ individuals, disabled individuals, and other traditionally marginalized groups of individuals whose lives encompass the American ideals of liberty and justice for all. Make sure to:
 - Examine Internet articles, videos, and resources.
 - Survey classmates, friends, family members, and individuals in the broader school community.
 - Interview at least three people.
- Identify a school in your local town or region of the state that you think should be renamed.
- **Curate a digital collection of artifacts from your research and design a multimodal proposal** for town or city officials making the case to rename that school. Make sure to

showcase the collaborative approach you took to developing your proposal.

Additional Resources

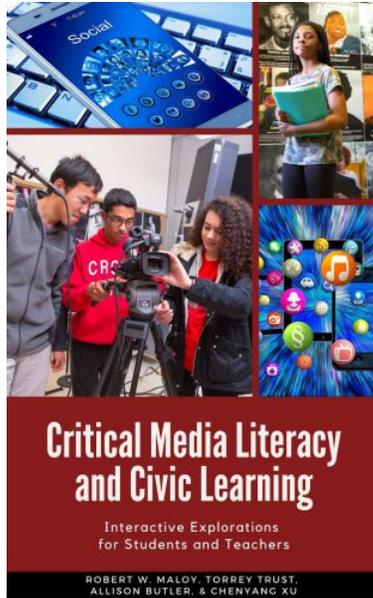
- [Under proposal, two Guilford schools could be renamed after A&T Four, Carolyn Coleman](#)
- [MMSD outlines renaming process for Thomas Jefferson Middle School](#)

Connecting to the eBook

[Building Democracy for All: Public Service as a Career](#)

Connecting to the Standards

- [Massachusetts Civics & Government Standards](#)
 - *Explain the importance of public service and identify career and other opportunities in public service at the local, state and national levels.* (Massachusetts Curriculum Framework for History and Social Studies) [8.T4.9]
- [ISTE Standards](#)
 - Knowledge Constructor
 - 3a: Students plan and employ effective research strategies to locate information and other resources for their intellectual or creative pursuits.
 - 3d: Students build knowledge by actively exploring real-world issues and problems, developing ideas and theories and pursuing answers and solutions.
 - Creative Communicator
 - 6a: Students choose the appropriate platforms and tools for meeting the desired objectives of their creation or communication.
 - 6b: Students create original works or responsibly repurpose or remix digital resources into new creations.
 - 6c: Students curate information from digital resources using a variety of tools and methods to create collections of artifacts that demonstrate meaningful connections or conclusions.
 - 6d: Students publish or present content that customizes the message and medium for their intended audiences.
- [DLCS Standards](#)
 - Digital Tools (DTC.a)
 - Collaboration and Communication (DTC.b)
 - Research (DTC.c)
- [English Language Arts > History/Social Studies Common Core Standards](#)
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.1
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.6-8.7
 - CCSS.ELA-LITERACY.RH.11-12.7



Maloy, R. W., Trust, T., , & Xu, C. (2021). *Critical Media Literacy and Civic Learning*. EdTech Books. <https://edtechbooks.org/mediaandciviclearning>