

The Regional District 13 Board of Education School Naming Committee met in special session on Wednesday, January 28, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. in the library at Coginchaug Regional High School.

Committee Members Present: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Eddinger, Ms. Kahnke and Mr. Padilla (arrived late)

Committee Members Absent: Ms. Lynch

School Members Present: Ms. Marteka and Mrs. Schlicker

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Petrella

Mrs. Cowan called the meeting to order at 4:00 p.m.

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

There was no public comment.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Schlicker made a motion, seconded by Ms. Kahnke, to approve the agenda as presented.

All in favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Moore, Mrs. Eddinger, Ms. Kahnke, Ms. Marteka, Mrs. Schlicker and Mr. Padilla. Motion passed.

Introductions & Overview

Mrs. Cowan provided an introduction and overview of the purpose of the committee. The Board of Education is initiating the process of naming a new school as part of the upcoming Memorial project. The board intends to form a collaborative committee with two community members from each town, board members, and school representatives to help generate potential names. The goal is to engage the broader community in the final decision rather than having the board unilaterally select a name. Mrs. Cowan presented that the survey responses indicate three main naming preferences: keeping the current "Memorial" name, combining elements from the existing Brewster and Lyman Memorial schools, or choosing an entirely new name. The naming decision is time-sensitive, with April set as the deadline, because architects need it to finalize school colors, mascot, and other design elements that contribute to a welcoming environment for students.

Survey Results

During the conversation about naming the new school, one suggestion, Julia C. Bryant School, prompted questions about whether it was serious or tied to a local historical figure. It was clarified that she was a teacher, though there was uncertainty about her significance, and any person considered for a school name would need to be deceased for at least 5 years. Another suggestion, Betsy Bascom, was also discussed, but she is still living, so that name was ruled out.

The group explored approaches to generate new names. Options included keeping the current “Memorial” name, integrating the histories of the previous Brewster and Lyman schools, or creating a completely new name. One idea was to involve students in naming mascots rather than the main school name, which would allow for historical connections without restricting creativity. Mrs. Petrella also suggested that since the new building will not incorporate the names of Lyman or Brewster that rooms inside the school could have those designations to preserve the historical connections; for example, the Lyman Library or naming the cafeteria or gymnasium after Brewster.

The committee agreed the first step is to narrow the list to three potential names: one retaining the Memorial theme and two new options. Once these names are set, a community vote or open input process could determine the final selection, balancing accessibility with fairness and avoiding the risk of vote manipulation.

The committee discussed potential school names inspired by local history, nature, and symbolic ideas. Some suggestions referenced Native American heritage, like Algonquin, though concerns were raised about accuracy, duplication, and state restrictions (e.g., using a state park name). Three Oaks emerged as a strong, sentimental choice symbolizing unity and roots coming together, which resonated with several participants. This was a suggestion from an anonymous person from the survey. Other suggestions included Wadsworth Falls Elementary School, Apple Elementary (reference to Lyman Orchard), or Twin Falls Elementary School, though historical research was suggested before committing to a person’s name. Committee members also noted logistical considerations, like changing the engraved “Middlefield Memorial School” on the building if a new name is chosen, and avoiding overly impersonal names like RSD 13 Elementary.

Mr. Roraback identified choosing a name that would have a strong connection to the land, as the mission of the district has been and continues to be to utilize the environment and instruct students in the land that is native to the community.

Mrs. Cowan also discussed community involvement, with a potential subcommittee reaching out to students and townspeople for feedback, while keeping the focus positive. The committee established that when they have names to be voted upon, the reasoning behind the names would be presented so the community understands the meaning behind each presented name.

The committee decided upon Memorial Elementary as the first school name option. The next meeting the committee will finalize the second and third name choices. Members discussed once three names are finalized, a vote can be set at the town halls where people can go in-person to vote on the decided name. Other members also discussed having students vote at the schools, while adults would vote in the town halls. The committee will meet in a couple of weeks at the set day of Wednesday at 4:00 p.m. to review community feedback and determine the final two names.

Adjournment

Ms. Kahnke, made a motion, seconded by Mr. Padilla, to adjourn the meeting.

All in favor of adjourning the meeting: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Mr. Moore, Ms. Eddinger, Ms. Kahnke, Ms. Marteka, Mrs. Schlicker and Mr. Padilla, Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio