

Regional School District 13

**Board of Education
School Naming Committee**

April 29, 2026

The Regional District 13 Board of Education School Naming Committee met in special session on Wednesday, April 29, 2026 at 4:00 p.m. in the library at Cuginchaug Regional High School.

Committee Members Present: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Ms. Kahnke, Ms. Lynch (attending virtually), Mr. Padilla, Mrs. Marteka, and Mr. Moore

Committee Members Absent: Mrs. Eddinger, Mrs. Longley, and Mrs. Schlicker

Board of Education Members Present: Mrs. Petrella

Administration Present: Dr. Leggett, Superintendent of Schools

QA+M: Mr. Collier

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

Pledge of Allegiance

The Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

Public Comment

Lori Helmedach criticized the school naming committee for a lack of transparency and respect toward residents in both Middlefield and Durham. She argued that information was not properly communicated, leaving many residents unaware of information unless it was shared informally. She also objected to limited voting hours (9–5), which prevented many working families from participating, suggesting this may have been intentional. The speaker expressed concern about the added cost of the name change and views it as disrespectful to the veterans the school was originally named after. The resident shared a personal connection to military sacrifice, emphasizing that the decision to rename the school feels like an insult to veterans and their families. The resident concluded by stating she has lost trust in the board, calling for more accessible public meetings, and urged broader community involvement. Lastly, the resident also warned that upcoming elections could hold board members accountable and stated she will not support the budget unless the issue is addressed.

Bob Boos, a former board member from 25 years ago, contrasted past values of transparency, integrity, and communication with what he sees as a failure of those principles in the current decision to rename Memorial School. Mr. Boos argued that the decision to rename the school was not made to properly honor those who served and died, particularly in relation to the “Memorial” designation. The citizen raised concerns about potential legal and financial implications of changing the name, noting that keeping Memorial was never presented as an option. The speaker criticized the committee for disregarding community history and public input, calling the process shameful. The citizen concluded by warning that the community will not ignore the issue and will continue to push back until it is addressed.

A veteran spoke against the decision to rename Memorial School and the importance of honoring those who served.

Judi Rand, a Portland resident and Middlefield property owner, spoke against the decision to rename Memorial School. Ms. Rand shared a personal connection to the school property, noting it was once her grandmother’s land sold to the town. Ms. Rand continued and believed there was no real community involvement in the recent decision-making process. Ms. Rand outlined internal communications between town officials and Mrs. Cowan, showing there were plans to inform residents (via newsletter, flyers, and possibly electronic voting), but said these plans were never carried out. As a result, no formal

communication reached most residents. Ms. Rand criticized the process, noting that voting was only open for a few days during business hours, the ballot box was removed early, shortening the voting period, information was mainly shared through Facebook, excluding many people, and official channels like the town newsletter were not used. Ms. Rand concluded that, despite stated intentions, the community was effectively left uninformed and excluded from the decision-making process to rename Memorial School.

Anne Malcolm, a resident from Middlefield and a member of Coginchaug's first graduating class, shared deeply personal experiences with family members who served in the military, including those who died in service. Ms. Malcolm reflected on how these losses shaped her life and emphasized the lasting impact of remembrance within families and communities. Ms. Malcolm argued that the term "Memorial" carries a unique and important meaning: Honoring those who died in service, not just those who served. Mrs. Malcolm expressed respect for veterans, and she believes replacing "Memorial" diminishes that distinction and risks erasing the memory of those who never returned. Mrs. Malcolm describes the school as a "living memorial" and warns that removing the name would be a loss for the community and future generations who may forget these individuals. She urges the committee members to reconsider, preserve the memorial designation, and ensure that children are taught the significance of remembrance.

Approval of Agenda

Mrs. Cowan proposed revising the agenda to remove the discussion of the mascot and replace it with an update on the process of naming the school as well as the opportunity to address the questions and concerns raised from public comment.

Mrs. Kahnke made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Marteka, to approve the amended agenda as presented.

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

Approval of Minutes – March 25, 2026

Mr. Padilla made a motion, seconded by Mr. Roraback, to approve the March 25, 2026 meeting minutes as presented.

All in favor of approving the March 25, 2026 meeting minutes as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Ms. Kahnke, Ms. Lynch, Mr. Padilla, Mrs. Marteka, and Mr. Moore Motion passed.

Discussion of Process

Before the discussion of the Process, Dr. Leggett and the committee members introduced themselves, sharing their connections to their school and local community.

Ms. Lynch is a lifetime resident and attended Regional School District 13. Mrs. Lynch is also the parent of two current students in the district and leads communications for a large med tech company. Ms. Kahnke, a Durham resident, has two children in the district. Additionally, Ms. Kahnke serves as the PTO president at Brewster, she has served on several committees for the district schools, as well as football and basketball, and is a T-ball coach. Mr. Padilla is a Middlefield resident with two children in the district. Mr. Padilla also serves as a volunteer firefighter for Middlefield. Mrs. Cowan serves as treasurer of the Board of Education, in addition to Co-Chair of the School Naming Committee and Chair of the Policy and Finance Committee. Mrs. Cowan is also CFO of a large nonprofit for the state of Connecticut. Ms. Cowan has four children, three of which attend school in the district and one who is outplaced at a special needs school in North Haven. Mr. Moore serves as Chairman of the Board of Education and has

been a Durham resident since 1970. Mrs. Petrella, while not a member of the School Naming Committee, serves on the Board of Education. Mrs. Petrella has been a Middlefield resident since 1987. Her husband Frank, who is also a veteran, taught at Memorial for 30 years. Mrs. Petrella also has grandchildren who attended schools in the district. Mrs. Marteka is a teacher at John Lyman School and a Reading Interventionist. Mrs. Marteka has two graduates of Regional District 13 and has been in the district for 36 years. Lastly, Mr. Roraback has served on the Board of Education for nine years and is the Co-Chair of the School Naming Committee. Mr. Roraback attended Middlefield Memorial School and graduated from Cuginchaug. Mr. Roraback shared his love for his education and the school community as the motivation for serving on the school board, serving on the Student Achievement, Policy, and School District Climate Committees.

Mrs. Cowan explained that the school naming discussion is happening in the context of a larger district change, specifically, the closure of two schools named after important local figures who contributed greatly to their local communities: Frederick Brewster and John Lyman. Mrs. Cowan also noted a previous closure of a school named after Francis Korn, acknowledging community interest in continuing to honor that name in the new school. Because the district is consolidating multiple schools into one, renovated building (Memorial School), the School Board believed it was appropriate to either keep the current name or consider a new one, given that several school identities are being lost in the process. To guide the decision, a School Naming Committee was formed in accordance with policy. The committee includes Board of Education members, staff representatives from each school, and community members from both towns (Durham and Middlefield), ensuring a mix of perspectives in the process. Mrs. Cowan noted that there were committee members absent and a participant questioned who the committee members were. Mrs. Cowan and Mr. Roraback replied that the absent members are Mrs. Eddinger, Mrs. Schlicker, and Mrs. Longley.

Mrs. Cowan continued to explain that the school naming process involved reviewing community survey results and carefully considering suggested names, while also addressing logistical challenges around fair voting. Mrs. Cowan addressed that electronic voting was not feasible due to concerns about verifying residency and preventing duplicate votes, so ballot boxes were instead placed at town halls in both Durham and Middlefield with the support of local officials. Mrs. Cowan clarified that there may have been a misunderstanding about communication, as no district-wide flyer was promised; rather, informational materials describing the proposed names were made available at town halls. Voting was scheduled from Monday through Thursday to ensure fairness between the towns given differing hours of operation. Mrs. Cowan also emphasized efforts to preserve community history by proposing that key spaces within the renovated school be named after Brewster, Lyman, and Memorial, while keeping the existing Memorial plaque in place. Mrs. Cowan stated that the committee is considering which areas, such as the gymnasium or cafetorium, should carry the Memorial name and said the committee is open to additional suggestions for honoring other significant community members, inviting public feedback on these decisions.

Mrs. Cowan addressed several community concerns by clarifying that changing the school's name does not involve any additional cost, calling claims otherwise inaccurate. Mrs. Cowan noted that although there has been discussion of a petition circulating, the Board of Education has not received any such document and therefore cannot respond to it, urging that it be formally submitted if it exists. Mrs. Cowan also corrected a rumor that the school library is being removed, confirming that it will remain unchanged. Additionally, Dr. Leggett emphasized that "Veterans Memorial" was considered as a naming option and that the process has been transparent, with all meetings, agendas, and minutes publicly posted in both towns. Mrs. Cowan stated that the current meeting was scheduled weeks in advance, not last-minute, reinforcing the Board's position that proper procedures and communication channels were followed. Mr. Moore shared that the committee has discussed additional ideas for honoring the history of the closed schools within the renovated building, including using granite or stone markers with names placed in

front of the school and naming major rooms, such as the library or gym, after the former schools, an idea they attribute largely to Mrs. Petrella's suggestions. Mrs. Cowan noted there has also been strong community feedback recommending that one of the rooms be named after Korn. Mr. Moore added that the committee carefully reviewed and vetted the proposed school names for historical accuracy and potential conflicts, including checking the use of "Wadsworth" and researching the "Memorial" designation, as well as considering "Veterans Memorial Elementary School" as an alternative. Mr. Moore also explained that "Three Oaks" originated from a Middlefield community member as a symbol of the three schools coming together into one larger district school, which will serve about 700 students and be the largest in the district's history. Ms. Lynch read the description of the significance of Three Oaks: Three Oaks Elementary School symbolizes the coming together of three former elementary schools in the district under one roof. Like the planting of a young tree, the new school represents the beginning of shared roots, growth, and strength as one community. Oak trees are native to Connecticut and among the most iconic trees in New England forests, with several species found throughout the state. The white oak, Connecticut's official state tree, can live for centuries and is widely seen as a symbol of strength, resilience, and wisdom. The name reflects both the district's history and the promise of a strong foundation for a generation of students to come.

Mr. Moore emphasized that all students across the district were given the opportunity to vote in the naming process. Mr. Roraback reported that the response was enthusiastic in each school, with students actively participating. Committee members also acknowledged the role of teachers in facilitating the process, noting that staff who know the students well helped guide and support the discussions and voting.

Mrs. Lynch remarked that all students in the district, including those in the middle and high schools, were given the opportunity to vote on the naming process. While acknowledging that the feedback was informal and not a quantitative analysis, Mrs. Lynch observed that students appeared to take the process seriously, engaging with the explanations and considering what the decision would mean for their school's future legacy. Mrs. Lynch also shared a personal perspective as a community member rather than a Board of Education member, stating that she was not initially in favor of closing two schools and renovating a new one, but chose to serve on the committee out of a sense of responsibility to contribute. Mrs. Lynch emphasized their belief that students and staff are the most impacted by the changes and therefore should have a meaningful voice in the process, concluding that student participation reflected thoughtful engagement with the decision.

Mrs. Marteka described how student input was gathered across grade levels during the school naming process. In the lower grades at Lyman School (grades 2–4), committee members visited classrooms after teachers had already discussed the proposal and read the provided explanation, and many students had also talked about it at home with their families. The students engaged seriously and were interested in having a voice in a decision affecting their school's future. One classroom discussion included a student who had a personal family connection to the school's history, which added meaningful context to the conversation. For younger grades, staff facilitated in-person discussions in classrooms, while older students (fourth grade and above) participated through a Google Form.

Mrs. Petrella raised concerns about the fairness and accessibility of the voting process for the school naming decision. Mrs. Petrella questioned how meaningful the results can be if the vote was close, suggesting that community influence and uneven awareness may have affected outcomes. Mrs. Petrella stated that she personally would not have known about the vote if she had not attended meetings, arguing that broader community members may also have been unaware and therefore unable to participate. Mrs. Petrella believes this lack of awareness meant the process did not provide equal opportunity for input from residents of Durham and Middlefield. Mrs. Petrella also questioned the inclusion of staff votes,

noting that not all staff are residents of the towns, and suggested this could further complicate whether the results truly reflect community opinion.

Mrs. Cowan responded to Mrs. Petrella's concerns about staff voting and community participation, defending staff involvement and calling staff the district's "most prized possession," while pushing back against the suggestion that they should not have a vote. Mrs. Petrella explained that she proposed naming individual rooms as a way to preserve the identities of the closed schools and prevent their histories from being lost. However, Mrs. Petrella acknowledged that she favored the symbolism of the proposed Three Oak, describing an idea involving a symbolic installation, such as an oak tree mural, plaque, or bronze display with branches representing Lyman, Memorial, and Brewster, to honor the schools within the renovated building. Mrs. Petrella emphasized that the building is a renovation, not a completely new school, and argued that the original school name should remain while the three oak elements could be incorporated into signage, branding, and interior design.

Dr. Leggett replied that she has heard community support for the "Three Oaks" concept, explaining that it resonates with people because it acknowledges the emotional significance of losing the Lyman and Brewster school identities. Dr. Leggett expressed support for viewing the project as a fresh start that combines the three schools and symbolizes the coming together of both towns. Dr. Leggett emphasized that, alongside creating a new shared identity, it is important to continue honoring veterans and preserving school history through naming rooms and other memorial elements. Dr. Leggett established there is broad agreement that these forms of recognition should continue and should not be eliminated.

Mrs. Petrella expressed her concern about the legitimacy and representation in the naming vote, stating that if the vote had clearly supported changing the name, she would feel more comfortable with the outcome. However, she believes the process did not adequately represent both communities, iterating her view that community members were not fully included or aware of the decision-making process. She also mentioned that she requested the vote results from the committee, via email, which she stated she has not seen.

Mrs. Cowan replied that vote counts were previously shared at the last Board of Education meeting, noting that Mrs. Petrella also voted in favor of the new school name at the last Board of Education meeting. Mrs. Cowan emphasized that she supported the school naming vote because staff and students, especially younger students directly affected by the school changes, are most impacted by the consolidation and should have a voice in the process. Mrs. Cowan reflected on the historical significance of closing Brewster and John Lyman schools, noting the emotional impact these closures have had on the community and on past Board of Education decisions. Mrs. Cowan framed the current project as part of a long-term effort to consolidate schools and build a unified district identity, including updated curriculum and a shared "vision of a graduate." While acknowledging that the process was not perfect and could have been handled differently in some ways, Mrs. Cowan still expressed confidence that the committee's work and the naming decision were appropriate. She described the project as a "new beginning" bringing together students from both towns for the first time in one school and emphasized that the goal is to create the strongest possible foundation for the future.

Mr. Roraback echoed that the consolidation of students from Middlefield and Durham into a single school is a major, new beginning that should be handled thoughtfully and in the best interest of students. Mr. Roraback stated that he is not strongly attached to any specific school name, but he emphasized the importance of a healthy and inclusive process that meaningfully involves children. Mr. Roraback questioned the idea of deciding a school name through a referendum, noting that he is not aware of that being a common practice. Mr. Roraback also reflected on the district's ongoing efforts to honor veterans, referencing Veterans' Day activities and changes made over the past several years to better recognize them in schools. While acknowledging the importance of the school name, Mr. Roraback expressed

greater concern with ensuring continued and expanded recognition of veterans and local contributors through school programming and acknowledgments. Mr. Roraback suggested using this transition as an opportunity to more fully honor notable community figures and families within the schools.

Ms. Lynch emphasizes that the process provided valuable lessons for students about civic participation and the importance of having their voices heard, arguing that overturning the outcome would send the wrong message about the value of their vote. Ms. Lynch also rejected implications that the process lacked community involvement, stating that while not everyone may agree with the result, the committee made reasonable efforts to include public input within the limits of what a volunteer group could do. Ms. Lynch pushed back strongly against claims that the community was excluded, saying that she believes those characterizations are inaccurate as she has seen communications and information shared on social media by members of the community, including Mrs. Petrella.

Mr. Moore then referenced the district's official school naming policy, outlining its requirements and explaining that the committee followed the established procedures, including forming an ad hoc group with Board of Education members and community representatives, gathering proposed names and supporting documentation, and advancing recommendations to the full board for final decision. Mr. Moore concluded that the committee not only followed policy but also went beyond its minimum requirements in collecting input and structuring the process before bringing recommendations forward.

Discussion of Naming Rooms

Mrs. Cowan transitioned the discussion to naming interior spaces in the renovated school. Mrs. Cowan suggested there is continued agreement that key rooms, the cafetorium, gymnasium, and library, could be dedicated to the three legacy schools: Lyman, Brewster, and Memorial. Mrs. Cowan also noted community feedback supporting the idea of naming at least one space after Korn, and raised the possibility of honoring additional community members, including local educators, long-serving contributors, and veterans from both towns.

Committee members discussed broader commemorative ideas, including incorporating veterans' recognition more deeply into the school, potentially through expanded memorial elements or dedicating a pergola as part of a veterans' tribute space. There was also reflection on past district practices, such as changing Veterans Day observances from closure to in-school programming and assemblies. Ms. Lynch proposed adding another honoree to consideration: Kathy Currico, described as a longtime educator, former board member, and community contributor, suggesting her name be included as a possible dedication for one of the school spaces.

Dr. Leggett discussed how room naming should be handled within the renovated school, suggesting that any additional dedications should focus on shared common spaces, such as art rooms or music rooms, rather than individual classrooms. Dr. Leggett proposed that naming decisions could be made more meaningful by aligning each honoree's background or contributions with an appropriate space, such as connecting Korn's legacy as a physician to a health-related area of the building. Dr. Leggett expressed interest in further researching the histories of individuals being considered, including Brewster, Lyman, and Korn, in order to make more thoughtful assignments of names to spaces.

Mr. Moore also referenced a previous example in which a room could not be named after an individual due to policy requirements regarding naming after living individuals, but a commemorative plaque was instead installed to recognize his contributions. Mr. Moore also favored recognition of Kathy Currico, noting that it is important to research and understand the history of proposed individuals.

Mr. Moore asked Mr. Collier, an associate from QA+M architecture, how signage could be incorporated into the new school. Mr. Collier replied that there is flexibility in how the school's signage and memorial

elements can be designed, noting that a wide range of approaches could be used to honor individuals and communities. Mr. Collier mentioned options such as wall murals, dedication plaques, and other commemorative installations, both inside and potentially outside the building. Mr. Collier emphasizes that because the school is still under construction, this is an ideal time to incorporate these types of memorial and recognition features into the design.

Mr. Moore added that similar examples already exist in community spaces, such as plaques at the community center, which provide models for how people, like the Malcolms, and historical contributions can be honored.

Mrs. Cowan established that the ideas raised about memorializing individuals and incorporating signage or commemorative elements will be further researched and potentially formalized into a form. Mrs. Cowan suggested the committee would reconvene on May 13 at 5:00.

Public Comment

Anne Malcolm expressed mixed thoughts about the naming discussion, saying that she is not entirely opposed and appreciates some of the ideas shared, including the concept of bringing students from different schools together for the first time. Ms. Malcolm reflected on personal and family experiences within the district, including memories of attending multiple schools and involvement in student council activities tied to school traditions. Ms. Malcolm also mentioned the voting process, referencing the presence of registrars from Middlefield and expressing confidence in their role in supporting the integrity of voting. Ms. Malcolm recalled participating in student voting in the past and connects that experience to the current process.

Ms. Malcolm concluded by agreeing with earlier suggestions about honoring community members through memorialization and strongly emphasized the importance of remembering deceased individuals, asking that their legacy not be forgotten in the decision-making process.

Lori Helmedach criticized the school naming process, arguing that the community was not properly informed or given a fair opportunity to participate in the vote. Ms. Helmedach questioned how the survey and voting process were communicated, stating that many residents outside of ParentSquare and specific Facebook groups were unaware that a vote was taking place. She argued that both taxpayers and the broader community should have had a direct vote and expressed frustration that, in her view, this did not happen. Ms. Helmedach suggests that a referendum would have been a more appropriate and inclusive method for making the decision, allowing full community participation alongside student input. Ms. Helmedach strongly asserts that the process was unfair and expresses anger over what she perceives as a denial of voting rights and proper public notice.

A resident shared a personal connection to the community, describing growing up in Middlefield, attending Middlefield School and Memorial School, and later serving in the Navy. He expressed appreciation for the quality of education provided by the schools. However, he questioned the need to rename the school, arguing that the existing name should remain unchanged. He stated he does not understand the rationale behind the name change and suggests that the school name should simply be left as it is.

Robert Boos warned the board that the school naming controversy could have broader political and financial consequences, including potentially jeopardizing the upcoming budget vote and community support, particularly in Middlefield. Mr. Boos claims the board already faces ongoing trust and credibility issues and suggests that recent concerns, including references to Ethics Commission activity and FOIA-related matters, further damage public confidence. Mr. Boos argues that these issues represent a serious

“credibility problem” for the board and urges members to reconsider their approach carefully. Lastly, Mr. Boos also criticizes the idea of framing budget support around student impacts, implying that it is inappropriate to link children’s needs to securing approval for the budget.

Carol Schilling from Middlefield expressed strong opposition to the school renaming process. Ms. Schilling emphasized her personal commitment to honoring veterans and the families of those who died in service, arguing that the “Memorial” name carries significant historical and emotional meaning tied to the community. Ms. Schilling disputed claims that changing the school name would have no cost, suggesting there are likely hidden or indirect costs such as signage and branding updates. Ms. Schilling also questioned the appropriateness of allowing children to vote on a decision she believes carries deep historical and memorial significance, arguing that younger students may not fully understand its meaning and may base choices on appearance or sound rather than significance. Ms. Schilling further argues that naming the school is an adult responsibility due to its historical and commemorative weight, and notes that many student voters may not even attend the school long-term. Ms. Schilling concluded by questioning whether the decision has already been finalized, expressing frustration and concern that community input may not meaningfully influence the outcome.

At this time, Dr. Leggett addressed the participants and asked them to refrain from clapping, acknowledging that the committee appreciates public comment and verbal feedback but that clapping may inhibit others from speaking freely if they feel intimidated.

Mrs. Cowan also replied to Mrs. Schilling, addressing that the Board of Education voted on the school name and the name of the new school is Three Oaks Elementary School. Mrs. Cowan also addressed the participants, reminding them of the policy expectations to uphold respect, responsibility, honesty, kindness, and courage.

Lori Helmedach expresses frustration that citizens were not properly informed about or included in the survey process related to the school naming. Ms. Helmedach argued that communication about the survey and vote was not transparent or widely distributed, stating that despite receiving other district mailings, she did not receive any notice about the naming survey and only learned about it through a volunteer connection. Ms. Helmedach emphasized a long personal history in Middlefield and previous service as a volunteer firefighter, using that experience to argue that important community decisions should be handled with full transparency, public meetings, and direct outreach to all residents. She believes the current process did not meet that standard and did not provide equal opportunity for participation. Ms. Helmedach called for the process to be reconsidered or redone in a more “informed” and “fair” way, commending Mrs. Petrella and suggesting that students could be involved in naming a mascot instead, while reserving school naming decisions as a more formal, community-wide decision. Ms. Helmedach concluded by asking for clarification about how the survey was distributed, who received it, and how it was originally conducted, questioning the completeness and fairness of the outreach process.

Dr. Leggett explained how the survey process was conducted and distributed to the community. Dr. Leggett stated that both hard copies and electronic versions of the survey were provided, with physical materials placed in a highly visible public location in Middlefield for approximately one month, accompanied by a posted description and instructions. Community members could complete the survey in person, submit responses confidentially in a designated envelope, or complete it electronically. The same process was also implemented in Durham. Dr. Leggett added that information about the survey was included in an early district newsletter sent to both communities and was shared with a request that residents repost it on social media. Dr. Leggett emphasized that the survey was intended to be widely accessible through multiple channels.

Mrs. Cowan explained the voting process. Mrs. Cowan discussed that she coordinated with town officials, including first selectmen, to set up ballot boxes and manage the voting process for the school naming. Mrs. Cowan described using multiple communication methods such as ParentSquare, social media, and other outreach efforts, and acknowledged that while improvements are always possible, she believes the process reflected the best efforts of a volunteer board trying to ensure community involvement. Mrs. Cowan also noted that ParentSquare notifications are available to community members, though others in the room dispute receiving those messages or continuing access after their children leave the district. This leads into broader criticism from Ms. Helmedach about reliance on digital communication, with concerns raised that it excludes residents who are not active online, particularly older community members. Suggestions are made that information should have been distributed more directly, such as through mailed notices similar to the budget mailing.

Ms. Helmedach also argued against staff participation in the vote, identifying that out-of-town teachers do not have a financial stake in the community. Mrs. Cowan stopped the discussion, noting she would not like staff to feel disrespected.

Judi Rand reiterated her concerns about the fairness and transparency of both the survey and voting process for the school naming decision. Ms. Rand questioned how many responses were received. Dr. Leggett stated that approximately 400 total responses for the survey were received across both towns, mostly submitted electronically. Ms. Rand strongly disagrees with the assertion that the community had an equal opportunity to vote, pointing to what she believes were missing or insufficient communications. Ms. Rand contends that many residents were unaware of the voting period and that better use of the town newsletter and broader mail distribution could have ensured full community participation. Ms. Rand also criticized the inclusion of student votes, arguing that many students may not fully understand the historical significance of the name and that the process therefore undermines fairness and equity. Ms. Rand further emphasized the importance of the "Memorial" name, arguing that changing it disrespects military sacrifice and the history of the community. Ms. Rand strongly advocates for retaining or renaming the school as "Veterans Memorial Elementary School" and suggests that the current decision should be reconsidered or reversed by the Board of Education. She closes by proposing additional historical recognition ideas tied to individuals connected to the school's land and origins, and is invited to submit further details by email for consideration.

Emily Kahnke, a parent and member of the committee, shared that she participated as a community volunteer and feels strongly connected to the town through ongoing service and involvement. Ms. Kahnke expressed that the naming process and the surrounding public discourse, especially on social media, has been emotionally difficult and disheartening, particularly when the committee's integrity is questioned. Ms. Kahnke emphasized that committee members are volunteers acting in good faith to serve the community and children. Ms. Kahnke then shares a personal historical connection, stating that she is a direct descendant of Florence Sokolowski, the widow who laid the cornerstone of the Memorial School, which deepens her personal investment in the discussion.

Ms. Kahnke disclosed that she is also a veteran, having served six years in the United States Air Force, and stressed that honoring veterans is meaningful to her. Despite these connections, she expressed support for the "Three Oaks" concept, viewing the renovated school as a new beginning that brings together multiple communities into one K-5 school. Ms. Kahnke concluded by stating that while names like Memorial, Brewster, and Lyman will always remain part of the town's history, she believes those identities can still be honored within the new school structure.

Mr. Moore iterated that the committee will reconvene on May 13 and then information will be brought before the Board of Education following the committee meeting.

Adjournment

Mr. Padilla made a motion, seconded by Mrs. Marteka, to adjourn the meeting.

All in favor of approving the agenda as presented: Mrs. Cowan, Mr. Roraback, Ms. Lynch, Mr. Padilla, Mrs. Marteka, and Mr. Moore. Motion passed and the meeting adjourned.

Respectfully submitted by Meghan Shortell-Fratantonio