

Not set in stone: the names of schools can change

Time has shown that naming schools after politicians and public officials is not the best decision. Many in Honduras speak of transparency and accountability while preschools, elementary schools and high schools alike immortalize presidents, congressional representatives, and mayors who have been accused of corruption and other crimes.

Multiple communities have proposed changing the names of schools that have been christened after questionable characters. However, community leaders blinded by political passion impede the processes that would dignify the very schools that serve as the source of knowledge for children of the poorest families in Honduras.

But the names are not impossible to change

Officials at the Ministry of Education told *Revistazo* that if communities believe that the name of a school is inappropriate, they can request a change with proper justification.

According to Mayra Dolores Castro, who runs the Technical Support Unit of the Minister of Education, the name is already assigned when the office receives the application to open the school. By then the name has supposedly been accepted and recognized by the decision-makers of the community (Community Trust, Society for Parents of Families, Water Council, etc.). **“Other names are sent by the Minister,”** she said.

However, she clarified that if a community meets and develops a document justifying its motives, the community can change the name of any public school. She stated that the majority of petitions resolved so far were justified due to the lack of collaboration on the part of public officials and politicians that christened schools with their names, a statement which Dilsia Cantareo, a teacher in Santa Rosa de Copán, can confirm.

If the name is beautiful, why change it?

On September 26, 2007, Professor Dilsia carried out the steps to change the name of a school that neither met the minimum educational standards nor did it have its own building. The school did, however, have an enormous sign bearing the name of former president Carlos Roberto Flores.

“The school was named ‘Carlos Roberto Flores’. We made an arrangement with Lizzy (Mary Elizabeth Flores Flores, Flores’s daughter), so that she would help us construct it and since she did not help us, the school is now named, ‘Jorge Alberto Portillo’”, said Professor Dilsia.

At the time, the daughter of former President Flores was a national congresswoman representing the Liberal Party for the department of Francisco Morazán, and she held the vice presidency of the legislative branch.

Jorge Alberto Portillo is the manager of Flor de Copán, a business dedicated to the production of cigars in Santa Rosa de Copán. He signed off on the donation of one million lempiras (about \$42,700) and with that money, the school was built, situated in the Divina Providencia neighborhood on the western side of the city of Santa Rosa, explained the teacher.

She said that to obtain a name change, she met with parents of children in the school and together they decided to submit the petition, which was finally resolved by the **Ministry of Education through agreement 175-SE-08.**

“To authorize the name change of the Carlos Roberto Flores School, located in the neighborhood of Divina Providencia, in the city of Santa Rosa, in the department of Copán, to the name ‘Jorge Alberto Portillo’, from February 1, 2008 onwards,” states **agreement 175-SE-08**, issued by the Ministry of Education on January 22, 2008.

“No, because the politician is a leader of the National Party”

Article 6, Subsection C, of the Law of Education Centers states that schools are obligated to promote habits of patriotism, community and self-esteem, among other traits. However, there are elementary schools, high schools and preschools that by carrying the sullied name of questionable individuals, contradict this legal norm.

Download the Law of Education Centers

Such is the case of the Rafael Leonardo Callejas School named after a former Honduran president who was accused of receiving millions of dollars' worth of bribes for the broadcasting rights of the Honduran national team's soccer games and is now facing a jail sentence. The school is located in the Smith 1 neighborhood of Comayagüela, marginalized neighborhood in the one of the older sections of the capital city. At least one attempt has already been made to change the name, as explained by its director Principal Ana Karina David. In her opinion, the school should carry the name of a person honored and distinguished for his or her support of education and culture.



The principal said that a few years ago, with the intention of giving the school the best image possible, she proposed that the community take the necessary steps to change the name, but local National Party supporters opposed them.

“No, no, no, the name of the school cannot change because the esteemed Callejas is a leader in the National Party,” they told her. Ana Karina David

She claimed that Mr. Callejas is not a good example for children, **“because the law has shown it, in this moment he is being judged in the United States,”** she stated.

In an apparent juxtaposition, the principal maintains a public transparency mural, prominently featuring the name of the former president, tainted by innumerable cases of corruption in Honduras for which he will be tried in a court of the United States.



Transparency mural decorated by students of the Rafael Leonardo Callejas School

The head of the General Secretary's Technical Assistance Unit, under the Ministry of Education, explained that the process for changing the name of a public school should be initiated by the community and should follow the 4 steps that we detail below:

But what can communities do?

The parent association or the community trust meets with school officials and makes a decision, which should be included in a duly justified document in which the name change is proposed from name A to name B.

The association or trust presents the petition before the Departmental Director of Education, which after using legal documents to revise, analyze, and make a ruling, issues the ruling and sends the record of merit to the jurisdiction's Ministry of Education.

The Departmental Director of Education of the respective jurisdiction reviews, analyzes, makes a ruling, and resolves whether or not the petition for changing the name of the public school will proceed.

If selected to proceed, the Departmental Director of Education sends the record of merit to the central level, the Minister of Education, so that the agreement is issued to change the name of the school.