


WHY DO STUDENT NAMES MATTER?

Names are the most basic and fundamental building block for creating a welcoming and nurturing environment for students. A person's name may reflect their culture and family history. By respecting and honoring student names, educators and school staff can:


Set a foundation for positive interactions.

Promote respect for diversity.


Support students' social and emotional wellbeing.



What name do you want me to call you?

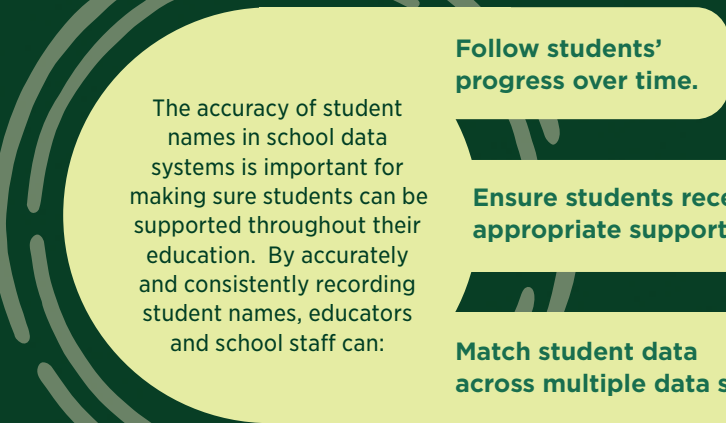


My homework is to learn more about our family's names. What does our clan name mean?



Can you confirm this is the legal name on your child's birth certificate?

Naming and spelling conventions for students with families from the **Freely Associated States (Republic of the Marshall Islands; Federated States of Micronesia; and the Republic of Palau)** may vary from the Anglo-American expectations of first, middle, and last names. Because nicknames or family names are commonly used over legal names, and official documents might reflect different names or spellings, this can lead to miscommunication or inconsistent data tracking. All names a student goes by are important, because their names may reflect whom they were raised by, where they are from, their family's clan, or their relationships within their communities.



The accuracy of student names in school data systems is important for making sure students can be supported throughout their education. By accurately and consistently recording student names, educators and school staff can:

Follow students' progress over time.

Ensure students receive appropriate support services.

Match student data across multiple data sets.

NICKNAMES

- Nicknames or “family names” are common across the Pacific region. Early in life, a child may be given one or more nicknames that they are known by in their families and communities. If addressed by the name on their birth certificate, younger students especially may not respond to that name, and similarly, others who only know the student by their nickname may not make the connection about which child is being referred to. Some students may also have an English/American name or a Christian name they go by.
- Multicultural students raised in the United States are adept at recognizing and responding to names that they go by with educators, their friends, family, and wider community.



CREATIVE NAMES

- Families may follow conventional or traditional methods for naming children as practiced in the islands; however, new parent generations are highlighting the creativity behind names and breaking social norms.
- Students may have seemingly unconventional names that commemorate holidays, important life events, famous people, significant objects, or characteristics. Parents may also combine different names of family members to create a one-of-a-kind name for their child or name all of their children starting with the same letter or syllable.



FAMILY AND COMMUNITY RELATIONSHIPS

- A person's name and the names of their parents are important signifiers of their family connections (kinship) and history, especially in island cultures. For example, someone's last name might be a clan name, indicate land stewardship, or represent their place in the patrilineal (father's) or matrilineal (mother's) line. In addition to given names, an individual may hold a title representing family, clan, or religious leadership roles, which are important for many cultures because they indicate one's position and responsibilities in different social hierarchies.
- In Pacific cultures, adoption and kinship caregiving is held in high esteem, reflecting the collectivist and communal nature of family relationships. A child's name may reflect their birth family or the relatives that raised them, and it is not uncommon for an older child to go by a new name when they start being cared for by extended family. Legal requirements for adoption and guardianship in the United States and the Freely Associated States are changing aspects of this longstanding kinship caregiving culture because of the challenges families face with international travel, legal guardianship, and school registration.



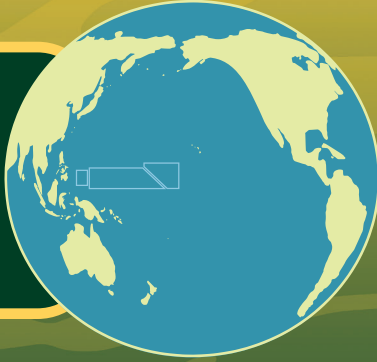
VARIATION IN NAME SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION

- Pacific island communities have strong traditional and contemporary oral cultures, which means practices and histories are passed down through memorized stories, songs, and hands-on experiences rather than in writing. A person's name may be spelled differently on different documents because the way their name or names are used in-person is more important than how their name is represented in writing.
- Students and family members may also have variation in how they or others pronounce their name. An English-looking name may be phonetically adapted into the first language of the student's family, or a non-English name written in the orthography of a Pacific language could prompt educators to learn about the non-English pronunciation.



If you have questions about a student or family member's name, ask a trusted community member or school liaison for context.

The Freely Associated States:
The Republic of the Marshall Islands, the Federated States of Micronesia, and the Republic of Palau



Naming conventions across the **FEDERATED STATES OF MICRONESIA** (Kosrae, Pohnpei, Chuuk, and Yap) reflect the history and cultural diversity of the islands, including unique traditional naming conventions across the islands and colonial influences from Spain, Germany, Japan, and the United States. Families creatively derive names for children from their island culture, religious culture, or pop culture. Current practice in some islands is that the last name given to a child is their father's last name or their paternal grandfather's last name. Last names may also be given to reflect a child's clan or family land connection.

REPUBLIC OF
PALAU

FEDERATED STATES OF
MICRONESIA

REPUBLIC OF THE
MARSHALL ISLANDS

In **PALAU**, children commonly have a Palauan name and a Western/American name as their first names. Palauan culture is matrilineal, meaning that children are a part of their mother's clan line, but many families choose to represent their father's heritage through their last name.

In the **MARSHALL ISLANDS**, children commonly hold their clan name or their grandparent's first name as their last name, as a way to signify their relationship to the larger family.

"What's your name?"

Translations in the national and state languages of the Freely Associated States

- **Etam?** (*Marshallese*)
Pronunciation: eh-tom
- **Ifa itomw?** (*Chuukese*)
Pronunciation: ee-fah tom

- **Suc inem an?** (*Kosraean*)
Pronunciation: suh i-nem ahn
- **Ia edomw?** (*Pohnpeian*)
Pronunciation: ya eh-dome

- **Minii' fithngam?** (*Yapese*)
Pronunciation: mih-nee fith-ngam (ng as in 'sing')
- **Ng techa a ngklem?** (*Palauan*)
Pronunciation: ngte-ahng-klem (ng as in 'sing')

The best way to learn the pronunciation and appropriate use of these phrases is to practice with a student or community member who speaks the language!

PRACTICING CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE EDUCATION

WITH PACIFIC ISLAND STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

Culturally responsive practices are “behavioral and policy actions that acknowledge stakeholders’ cultures and utilize that knowledge to create an optimal learning environment where personal beliefs and assumptions are regularly examined, cultural identities are nurtured, institutional policies and procedures are interrogated for bias, [and] cultural competency is developed,”

(Mayfield & Garrison-Wade, 2015)

IN THE CLASSROOM

- **Ask how to pronounce a student’s name.** Keep in mind that students may not correct you if you mispronounce their name because correcting an authority figure may appear to be disrespectful.
 - Ask if you are saying their name right and repeat it back to them. Then practice on your own!
 - Support other students in using the correct pronunciation of each other’s names.
- **Design activities for students and educators to learn more about names from the Pacific.** Encourage students to connect with family and community members to learn about and share the stories of their own name or family’s names. Keep in mind that a student’s circumstances related to adoption or migration may influence how they participate in these activities.
- **Learn how to address a student’s parents or caregivers.** Ask the students’ parents or a cultural liaison at your school about how to address them or if a certain title is appropriate. In some Micronesian families, it is disrespectful for children to say their parent’s first name out loud, so keep this in mind if you ask your students about their parents or caregiver’s names.



SCHOOL AND DISTRICT-WIDE

- **Provide instructions and translations for school registration forms.** School registration forms are often families’ first introduction to a new school. Reach out to families to ensure the name on the registration form aligns with the name on their child’s birth certificate, and provide instructions on how to fill out the form, especially the first, middle, and last name fields.
- **Keep a student’s legal name and all nicknames and family names in the data system** so that a search conducted by staff can identify the correct student. Ensure that the first name and last name fields align with the student’s birth certificate. Use a student identification number when possible.
- **Include notes about pronunciation and spelling of a students’ name** so that other educators and support staff can correctly and confidently call the student’s name or identify the student across different documents.
- **For students transferring to a new school, request information from parents about the student’s records from their previous school.** Provide families who are transferring with a “data backpack” of student records (including the names the student goes by) to facilitate the students’ transition to their new school.

Pacific naming conventions content for this infographic was compiled through consultation with educators, community leaders, and cultural advisors.



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Complete references, acknowledgements, and additional resources for this infographic series are available on the REL Pacific website.