

Naming Customs From Around the World

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Immigrant students in the United States have already suffered the trauma of leaving behind their extended family, friends, teachers, and schools. They enter a U.S. school and can also [lose their name](#). Their name may be deliberately changed by parents or school staff, or an error may be made in the order of the name or its spelling. These mistakes can have lasting effects on students.

A person's name is part of his or her cultural identity, and it is up to schools to get it right. In order for teachers, administrators, or office staff in your school to enroll students with the correct the name, they need to understand the naming conventions of different cultures. Here are seven naming customs from different cultures.

- [Korean names](#) are written with the family name first. If Yeon Suk has the family name "Lee," his name will be written Lee Yeon Suk. The given name usually has two parts, and it follows the family name. Either part of the given name can be a generation marker: Two-part given names should not be shortened—that is, Lee Yeon Suk should be called Yeon Suk, not Yeon.
- [Russian names](#) have three parts: a given name, a patronymic (a middle name based on the father's first name), and the father's surname. If Viktor Aleksandrovich Rakhmaninov has two children, his daughter's name would be Svetlana Viktorovna Rakhmaninova. (The "a" at the end of all three names shows that she is female.) Her brother would be Mikhail Viktorovich Rakhmaninov.
- It's hard to generalize naming conventions for children from [Spanish-speaking countries](#). These students have a given name (often a two-part name) and two surnames: the father's family name followed by the mother's. For example, if a child registers as Ana Lorena López Ramírez, the school should retain both López and Ramírez in the child's records. The child should be called Ana Lorena. Schools often drop the father's name, which leads to confusion. Always ask parents if you aren't sure which names to use.
- In India, Hindu names are usually based on the child's raashis, which is determined by the position of the planets at the date and time of birth. The resulting names are often shortened by family and friends. For example, teachers may call brother and sister Aditya and Aarushi by these formal names, but family and friends may call them Adi and Ashi. Remember that India has many religions and languages, and naming practices will be influenced by them.
- [Chinese names](#) are made up of three characters: a one-character family name followed by a two-character given name. The child's official name is used for the birth certificate and for school. Chinese children often have a different name that is used among friends, schoolmates, and colleagues.
- [Afghan names](#) traditionally consist of only a first name. Last names are often chosen, when needed, using tribal affiliation, place of birth, profession, or honorific titles. This may result in people within the same family having different last names. Male given names are compound or double names and often include an Islamic or Arabic component such as Ahmad or Mohammad, and women are generally given Persian or Pashto names.
- [Somali children](#) have three personal names and no family name. In order to identify someone, all three names must be used. Names are a combination of a child's personal name, the father's personal name, and the paternal grandfather's personal name.

Many school districts are faced with immigrant children from a wide variety of countries from all over the world. We should not apply the format of naming conventions from the United States on children from other areas of the world. There is an abundance of information on naming conventions on the Internet. An excellent resource to give teachers a background on naming practices is [A Guide to Names and Naming Practices](#).