



IRISH ELEMENTARY SCHOOL – A Dual Language School
PRIMARIA IRISH – Una escuela bilingüe

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Irish Elementary School Name Change Proposal

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August 27, 2019

The Irish Elementary school community respectfully requests that the Poudre School District Board of Education approve a change from the current school name Jean Irish Elementary School to Irish Elementary Escuela Bilingüe. Such a change would preserve the heritage of the school and the legacy of its namesake, Jean Irish, as well as adequately describe the dual-immersion program available to students and the diverse community it serves.

Irish Elementary was built in 1968 and named in honor of Mrs. Jean Powell Irish. According to our school historians, Mrs. Irish served as a well-respected teacher and principal for the Poudre School District for over 30 years. She felt it was important to work to the best of one's ability and always encouraged her students to find satisfaction in doing their best. The Irish school community, as it exists today, felt it imperative to preserve her legacy for a growth mindset and high expectations for Poudre schools. This not only honors the work we have done for over 50 years, but it continues to describe the work that we still do to this day.

The addition of “Escuela Bilingüe” to our name serves several purposes. First, it accurately describes the program that students experience when they come to Irish (“escuela bilingüe” meaning “bilingual school” in Spanish). This is appropriate because all students are taught to be bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural in our school. Secondly, by using the descriptor in Spanish, the name makes clear that the target language for the bilingual program is Spanish, rather than Gaelic as one might assume when entering a school named “Irish.” Finally, by having some components of the name in English, and others in Spanish, it communicates the culture of our school — that all of us are learners, and that we are all working to understand the culture, language, and intrinsic strengths of one another, especially those different from ourselves.

At Irish, students learn to read, write, listen and speak in both Spanish and English beginning in kindergarten. They are taught 50% of the day in Spanish and 50% in English, allowing them to learn phonemic awareness, phonics, vocabulary and comprehension from an early age. This is called “dual immersion.” For English language learners (ELLs), or any student learning a second language, dual immersion is the most effective way for students to reach grade-level proficiency in both languages. Research shows this is because they can use both their first and second languages for “meaning making” and application of abstract concepts, allowing them to use more of their brain to learn (August & Shanahan, 2006; Riches & Genesee, 2006). Learning in a dual-immersion program also reveals, in an authentic setting, how culture and language affects 21st Century skills, such as collaborative communication, global economics, strategic problem solving, and systematic thinking. Because most families that live within the Irish boundary either come from a low-income household or are English language learners, this program effectively empowers students and families, who historically are underserved, to lead in our collective greater understanding of learning and communication in the context of a global society.

Over the years, Irish has established systems of assessment to not only inform the school of the growth and achievement of students in English, as the state requires, but also in Spanish. These Spanish measurements not only inform us about the effectiveness of the instruction in Spanish, but also tells us how a student is accessing and understanding content in their first language. This approach is extremely helpful to our multi-tiered system of support, because we can better understand how a students' language proficiency in English and in Spanish is affecting their academic progress. Irish has also developed an exam we call called "Spanish ACCESS," which mirrors the English state-required language assessment that our ELL students are required to take. This exam helps us measure the effectiveness of the program for our Spanish language learners (SLLs) students as well, helping build capacity in both groups of students and accurately assess their language growth over time. In the coming years, students in fifth grade will also be taking the AAPPL (Assessment of Performance toward Proficiency in Languages) to determine their qualifications toward the middle school program currently offered at Boltz, and the biliteracy certificate offered by all PSD high schools upon graduation.

The process of arriving at our decision to change the name was thorough. The dual language program began in 2004 with kindergarten only, then progressively added a grade level each year, completing the school-wide program in 2010. In 2015, the staff and School Accountability Committee went through a process of revising our vision and re-norming our practices, which included daily literacy in both languages for all students. After the new mission, vision, philosophy and goals were agreed upon, the school community had a guiding question for our school — how will the community at large know who we are?

The staff and SAC agreed that we needed a new name but finding a name that was acceptable to all takes time. First, we had a general staff meeting and two teacher leadership meetings to brainstorm and provide the list to the SAC for its input. We were able to compile a long list of possible names, which communicated our dual immersion identity, from "Jean Irish Dual Immersion Academy/Academia Primaria Jean Irish Escuela Bilingüe" — a mouthful to be sure — to "Dual Language Academy." The SAC did not like the use of the word "academy" in the name; they felt it did not adequately represent the close community and the neighborhood feel of the school, and made Irish sound like an elitist or exclusive school, which they most vehemently agreed it was not. They also insisted that Mrs. Irish's name be included in the final product and that some of the name be in Spanish, but they had no clear recommendation of which name to choose. The feedback went back to the teacher leadership team, which agreed on the name "Irish Elementary Escuela Bilingüe." The new name was presented to the SAC at the January 2019 meeting, and was agreed upon unanimously. A survey was sent to the rest of the school community explaining the decision-making process and asking whether parents and staff supported the name. We were extremely pleased that there was no dissent. One hundred percent of respondents were in support of the new name. After conferring with the assistant superintendent of elementary schools, the Irish community made the decision to appeal to the Board of Education for an official name change.

The Irish staff and families are committed to fulfilling our brand promise with the name change, and we plan on taking steps to further market our brand to the community at large. Working with district graphic designers, we developed a new logo that would honor the history of the school and incorporate the bicultural nature of which our new name implies. We asked the jaguar and the type set in the logo reflect the magical realism genre so prevalent in Hispanic art, literature and film. The new jaguar was designed to resemble an "alebrije," a type of Mexican folk art representing the spirit animals that guide and protect their families in the living world. Irish currently does not have a marquee in front of the school, so we included in our bond improvements an addition of a marquee that can prominently display our new name and logo, as well as communicate with our community bilingually. We are excited to implement other marketing strategies for our brand, including prominently displaying our new logo and name on clothing items available for the public

to purchase, continuing touring with our baile folklórico and bilingual choir (Flor Antigua and Estrellitas, respectively) and we recently received a grant to begin the district's first ever Mariachi after school club.

Further confirmation of the inclusive nature of this change was received from Hispanic families that took the time to approach the principal and staff to show their appreciation. One mother said, "Finalmente, el nombre refleja a todos nosotros, la comunidad entera." That means, "Finally, the name reflects all of us, the entire community." The Irish community is proud of our work and what we do for students and families. Our vision states: "Irish Elementary students will transition to middle school bilingual, biliterate, and bicultural with a strong foundation of 21st century learning skills to be successful in a diverse, multilingual, global society." We are excited at the opportunity we have to share this vision with our greater PSD community through a name that truly represents who we are.