

Adams 14 Community Advocating for Bilingual Education & Equity (ACABE)

Hello, my name is Joanna Rosa-Sáenz and I am proud to be a community organizer and active member of the Latino community. I am passionate about bringing the truth to light and advocating for Latino families so that their voices can be heard. I come today to ask for your support with a community initiative focused on the need for bilingual education and equity in Adams 14.

Overview of the issue :

- In 2010, Adams 14 signed a Resolution Agreement with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR) to comply with Federal law. Per this agreement, the district is obligated to provide all students adequate services to ensure meaningful participation in the district's instructional program. This includes high quality English language development (ELD) instruction for all students identified as English language learners. In addition, in 2015 the district started a bilingual education program in four elementary schools to support not only students' English development but also their home language development of their home language (Spanish) to high levels of proficiency. This program is now offered K-2 in all elementary schools, with Pre-K and Grade 3 biliteracy classrooms at some schools.
- In 2016, Superintendent Dr. Abrego promised to "expand the biliteracy programming" in Adams 14 and provide support for any student who masters two languages (reading and writing, as well as speaking) so they can graduate with the Seal of Biliteracy in their high school diploma.
- This year, several actions and decisions in the district are giving the Adams 14 community reasons to believe that parts of the agreement with OCR are being violated:
 1. Parent teacher conferences during school hours were eliminated, which is halting effective communication with parents who speak a language other than English. Although the district now offers a menu of communication options, the only option for in-person meetings with teachers is after school. This is not considered an "effective" way to communicate with parents as it adds an extra burden to already overworked teachers and to parents who would have to secure childcare.
 2. Report cards for the first quarter were sent only in English, despite the district's civil rights obligation to send parents key information in a language and format accessible to them.
 3. There's a growing concern in the community about the future of the bilingual programs. While superintendent Dr. Abrego in his letter to the community (November 30, 2017) stated that he doesn't intend to eliminate the bilingual program in K-3, he doesn't address whether it will continue in 4th grade and above. In K-3 bilingual programs (also known as Early Exit or Transitional Bilingual Education programs), English proficiency is the goal, NOT proficiency in two languages.

4. There's also a growing concern that the supports for students to enroll in Spanish language, Spanish language arts, or Spanish literature (including AP Spanish) in middle school and high school may be jeopardized.

5. Many parents are hearing from teachers that ALL students will be forced to take the English version of the PARCC test, despite the state giving school districts the opportunity to offer the test in Spanish. As a result, Spanish literacy instruction is being reduced in some third-grade classrooms, affecting students' meaningful participation in the district's educational program.

What we can do:

- Ask the board of education and superintendent Dr. Abrego to build an ELD and Bilingual Education committee that serves as a link between parents and the district. While parents are happy that there's a Parent Superintendent Forum and DAAC, it seems that what these two forums have been doing has not been enough to address the concerns stated above, and I believe that the Adams 14 community needs additional support to tackle these large issues.
- Specific actions you can take: Attend the next Board of Education meeting on January 9, 2018, which starts at 6:30 pm. It is very important that as many parents as possible attend. Also, it will be very powerful if 2-3 parents speak to the Board of Education during that meeting (people willing to speak must arrive at 6 pm and fill out a card). Even if you don't plan to speak, arriving early at 6 pm also helps ensure you have a seat in the boardroom and that we have as many people visible as possible. It's important that parents are united to send a strong message to the district leadership.
 - Some key questions you can ask at the board meeting are:
 1. What is the plan to continue the bilingual education program after third grade?
 2. How will middle school and high school students continue to receive support in order to obtain the seal of biliteracy?
 3. What is the reason for mandating PARCC administration in English, even for students currently in the bilingual education program?
- Identify parents who are willing to be involved in the ELD & Biliteracy committee and represent other parents.

Potential allies:

- Representatives from the Colorado Association for Bilingual Education and the BUENO Center for Multicultural Education have expressed support for the bilingual programs in the district. In addition, I have reached out to Padres y Jóvenes Unidos, an organization based in Denver who has supported parents with similar issues, and they may be able to help as well.

Visit acabepadres.org and invite other community and family members to express their concerns and support for our bilingual education program in Adams 14. For any questions or further information, please contact at info@acabepadres.org