

Graduation Rose Ceremony

Poudre High School

Fort Collins, CO



Poudre High School has the highest Hispanic student enrollment in Poudre School District and hosts a newcomer program. The Graduation Rose Ceremony provides an opportunity for English Language Learners (ELL) students to be recognized for their accomplishments, as well as a space for graduating seniors to thank people in their lives that helped them achieve their academic goals. When this practice began a few years ago, attendance was fairly low. Fast forward to 2019 and it was standing room only in the high school's Events Center.

The ELD Department and counselors take the lead on planning and implementation. They begin by making a list of seniors who at some point in their K-12 education were an ELL. This team asks those students to write a 'thank you' note to any person—teacher, staff, or family member—who helped them achieve their graduation goal. The ELD Department makes a PowerPoint presentation with each student who is going to attend. The PowerPoint includes future plans, awards, recognition, clubs, activities, or anything else that relates to the students' high school career.

Guests who attend the Rose Ceremony includes ELD teachers, other Poudre High School educators, the leadership team, counselors, graduating seniors, and their families. The ELD team calls each student to the stage. The student then picks a rose in a vase and reads the 'thank you' note to their mentor. At the end of the ceremony, attendees enjoy a Tres Leches cake and Ponche. In all, the ceremony lasts about two-and-a-half hours. The first 90-minutes is dedicated to student recognitions and the last hour is all about the celebration!

In addition, younger students have the opportunity to watch the ceremony by video or attend in person. What these younger students see are their older peers who have faced the same struggles, some even greater than their own, standing in front of an audience proudly honoring the influential people in their lives. They see and hear about the achievements of ELL students and it plants the seed that they too have what it takes to finish high school.

The ceremony also honors the hard work and sacrifices that parents and relatives have made for their children and highlights the partnership between families and school. Poudre High School families are not always able to attend traditional school events, like Back to School nights and parent teacher conferences, because they are often working many jobs to support their children. That does not mean that they don't care or are not involved in their student's success. This ceremony acknowledges that ALL families are important and gives our English learners a chance to directly say thank you for the support. What better way to support the student outcome of receiving a high school diploma?

Poudre High School's family liaison explains how the Rose Ceremony still took place in 2020, despite COVID-19: "We brought two roses to each house of our senior graduates also with a letter from the team in charge of the event. One rose for the student and the other one for who they decide to say thank you. We went in a caravan and toured where our English language learner students reside and enjoyed seeing them with their families celebrating this achievement."