

# Bilingual Parent-Teacher Organization Monroe Elementary School Loveland, CO



COLORADO  
Department of Education

Monroe Elementary School created a Bilingual Parent-Teacher Organization (Bilingual PTO) in order to increase communication, encourage the participation of its bilingual families in school events and activities, and to foster a more inclusive community environment. This group of family members works closely with the Non-bilingual PTO and both mirror their agendas, school activity, and event communication.

Monroe's Bilingual PTO started three years ago, but really took off during the 2017-18 school year. The group is comprised of mostly mothers, aged 25-45. About 40% are Spanish and English bilingual and about 60% are Spanish speaking only. Each meeting brings in an average of nine members, which may seem small, however there has been a big increase in participation this year of bilingual family members volunteering at school events and activities.

The Bilingual PTO meets once a month in the morning, right after school starts. The Non-bilingual PTO meets once a month in the evening. The meetings were purposefully scheduled this way to accommodate both groups with attendance options and provide an overlap of communication. Each Bilingual PTO meeting agenda is coordinated with the Non-bilingual PTO agenda, and vice-versa, so that a seamless track of communication is given to all families about school events and activities. The meeting also gives time to parents for questions on school-based topics such as testing, grading, and any other topic where a communication barrier may exist.

A big part of creating this collaboration and effective organization is the fact that Monroe has an onsite bilingual Family Engagement Specialist. As school districts look for solutions in bridging the gap between bilingual families and non-bilingual families, Monroe Elementary sees the importance of having an onsite bilingual support staff person that is not only experienced in supporting our English language learners, but who is also supporting the whole family engagement structure of the school for all families.

Monroe is definitely reaping the rewards of the Bilingual PTO. Teachers have reported that their English learning family members are asking more questions related to their child's educational progress. English learning families are not afraid to ask questions, because they know they can go to the Bilingual PTO and get answers through a warm and welcoming avenue. Staff has also seen a big increase in volunteerism within their Spanish speaking families.