



# THE SUMMIT

ELEVATING EDUCATION AT BLAINE COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

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## SCHOOL SPOTLIGHT - Alturas Elementary



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*Principal Brad*

### Dual Immersion Changes Lives

The first day of school can be a challenge for any student. For Luke, it was overwhelming. Not only was he starting second grade, but half of his day was in a language he didn't understand - Spanish. Fast forward eight months, and you'll find Luke not only speaking two languages with ease, but asking to teach the other students how to solve a math problem...in Spanish.

"As time went on, he moved from translating the language in his head, to being a truly bilingual student," said Gaby Ruiz Meza, his Spanish language teacher. "It's the way that this program has been built - with students in mind."

You hear these types of stories a lot at [Alturas Elementary](#), Blaine County School District's magnet school for Dual Immersion Language Learning. Using a best practices 50:50 language model approach, students learn academic content each day from teams of two teachers - one English speaker and one Spanish speaker - to cultivate bilingual and biliterate learners.

"The students are thriving in our Dual Language world. Not only are they continuing to build skills in their native languages, you see them open up and be joyful learners of a new language. Bilingualism impacts all our students in amazing ways," said Alturas Principal Brad Henson, known by all as PB for Principal Brad. He mentions two students from Peru who are really "rocking it" on the English side.



Their teachers are rocking it too.

Teiss arrived half-way through first grade. She was extremely shy and only spoke Spanish. "She is amazing. She has taken every opportunity she can to learn English, opting for English when she could be asking questions in Spanish. She will stay in English and ask me every single word and make sure she says it right and wants to spell it right. She wants to learn and she challenges herself, and she's just so cool. She's such a hard worker," said Brooke Hand, second-grade teacher.

Second-grader Dianna was also initially quiet and reserved, and a silent learner. She now raises her hand to join in the lessons and participates in every activity. "I've never seen someone learn English so quickly. She is so determined and so positive," said Kristen Cassalia, also a second-grade teacher. "She'll come to the board in front of a group of students and when she gets stuck, she'll ask for help. The kids are just always willing to help support her and her learning, and she's willing to help support them."

Collaboration, encouragement and vulnerability are hallmarks of the program. "I think the coolest part about our program is the community it builds because everybody's vulnerable. Each person is a language learner. The kids can see that we're all going to make mistakes and we're all here to learn," Brooke added.

Spanish language teacher Rosa talks about another student, Darby, who she has "seen his fluency and confidence really increase over the years. It's really magical to see what's happening. He likes to be the student who helps others translate. He has such a great heart, and I feel like he's not just acquiring the language, but he's also becoming this very inclusive person. His heart is so big."

