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## FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### Learning With a Dual Purpose: Lancaster ISD's Bilingual Education Program Benefits Students, Families and Communities

**Lancaster, TX/Lancaster ISD** – When Lancaster ISD Houston Elementary fifth grade student, Yareli Vasquez, heads to sixth grade next school year, she will be dually prepared for success. As a student who participated in the district's Bilingual Education programs since Pre-Kindergarten, she has become proficient in both the English and Spanish languages.

“It is kind of hard at first because some words are similar and other words are very different. With the grammar in Spanish, you spell it as it sounds, and in English you don't because sometimes there is an *H* and *S* or a *T*,” Yareli said when reflecting on her journey of mastering both languages as an elementary student. “At first, it was really confusing and hard for me to understand why I could not pronounce these little words and why a ‘T’ sounds like an ‘S.’ But, now I understand.”



Now, at almost 11 years old, a confident Yareli understands the concepts of both the English and Spanish languages and can read, write and speak both languages well. She has developed a love for school, her teachers, learning, numbers, math, words and reading books of various types of genres, such as adventure, horror and graphic novels.

Lancaster ISD uses a language of the day approach in the bilingual classes and teachers are attentive and meet the students where they are to help them grow to the desired learning levels. This supportive learning environment was a benefit to Yareli.

“We even have activities with prizes and that motivate me to get better,” Yareli said. “The teachers are always there to support me and don't get mad when I ask for extra work to do. They give me books that are on my grade level, but may be a little easier to understand.”

While Yareli's family native language is Spanish, though at a young age, she was also very familiar with English. Upon enrollment in the early learning programs in Lancaster ISD, her parents made a critical decision when her mother, Eva Vasquez, chose to enroll Yareli in Lancaster ISD's Bilingual education classes where the

teacher instruct students in both languages instead of the English as a Second Language (ESL) courses that focus strongly on English proficiency.

“I wanted her to have more opportunities when she grows up. There are better opportunities for bilingual people in this country because we have a lot Hispanic people who need help” she said. “If you live in this country, you will always have the English language with you, but not so with Spanish. If you are Hispanic and Spanish language is your first foundation, you build on it, but you should speak your language too. You can help more people when you grow up and have better opportunities.”

Vasquez is following the same path with Yareli’s two younger siblings who are currently third grade and pre-kindergarten students in the same program. She is very proud of the decision that she made for Yareli because of the growth that she sees in her daughter and the benefit that it is having on her family today.

“This year, she translated for other students in the class and she helps my sister when she goes to the store because she doesn’t speak English,” she shared. “She can help more people in the community. I told her that she has the capacity to learn more languages — the more languages, the better. I told her that anything that she can dream, she can be.”

According Lancaster ISD Director of Bilingual Programs and School Improvement Dr. Tonia Howard, the components of the educational programs are designed for the student and the parent to grow and succeed.

“The goal of our bilingual program is to create bilingual, bicultural and bi-literate students who can graduate with academic honors and be bilingual. This will better prepare and market them for future job opportunities,” Dr. Howard said. “Our families make sacrifices so their children can have what they need to get a quality education. When our children are successful, then it benefits the whole family.”

For the last five years, students who participated in the Lancaster ISD Bilingual and ESL Education programs excelled to become the valedictorian, salutatorian, or ranked in the top five percent of their high school graduating class. Additionally, in 2017, 91% of students passed the STAAR Math and 83% of students passed the STAAR Reading exams, respectively.

Currently, Lancaster ISD offer Bilingual learning options for students in Pre-Kindergarten to fifth grades and students can participate in the English as a Second Language Program in all grades, Pre-Kindergarten to twelfth. The students learn in a safe and supportive environment from highly-qualified and certified Bilingual and ESL teachers and enjoy a culturally diverse learning environment with a rigorous curriculum approved by the state.

There are also free courses for parents to complete their GED in English or Spanish along with ESL classes. Parents can also gain access to continuing education, pathway to citizenship and better employment opportunities through the district’s partnership with the Dallas County Community College District.

“In Lancaster, we have opportunities. We can put our children in school in Pre-K at three years old and in Pre-K 4, they have all-day programs,” Vasquez said. “I don’t have anything [but good things] to say about Lancaster ISD, it is a good program in this county.”

For more information on the opportunities available through the Lancaster ISD Bilingual Education programs and ways the district can serve and empower the families in the upcoming 2018-2019 school year, please contact the Special Programs Department at 972-218-1400 or visit the district’s website at [www.LancasterISD.org](http://www.LancasterISD.org) and search for Bilingual Education.

*The Lancaster Independent School District serves more than 7,000 pre-kindergarten through grade 12 students in 11 schools. Our vision is that all students achieve self-sustaining success and leave a lasting legacy. And our mission, in collaboration with parents and communities, is to ignite learning that translates into sustainable success for all students in an ever-changing society.*