From "'Catherine Hill' via BVS Board <bvs.board@bvsd.org>" <bvs.board@bvsd.org>
Subject **{BVS Board} Whittier Elementary: Oldest School in Continuous Operation in the State of Colorado**
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Boulder Valley School District Board of Education

Dear Board Members,

I write to you as a teacher leader who dedicated 22 years to Whittier Elementary International School, as a parent of two children who attended this exceptional institution, and as the Education Director of Growing Up Boulder. From these perspectives, I urge you to keep Whittier Elementary International School open amid rumors of consolidation. Since 1882, Whittier has been Colorado's **oldest school in continuous operation—a 143-year legacy** woven into the very fabric of our state's educational history. This school represents far more than a building—it is a living embodiment of Boulder's history, values, and commitment to innovative, equitable education.

Located in the heart of Boulder, Whittier has served generations of families and stands as a testament to our community's enduring commitment to public education. The school's longevity speaks not just to historical significance, but to its ongoing relevance and adaptability. On June 20, 2013, after years of demanding IB specialized PD, Whittier became an **authorized International Baccalaureate (IB) World School**. Currently, her student population represents a wide range of social, linguistic, cultural, and economic diversity: many races and mixed families attend the school, and over 30 languages are spoken. To close Whittier would be to sever a connection to our collective past while simultaneously undermining a vital community anchor that continues to serve Boulder's families today.

Whittier staff **artfully integrate district curriculum standards with the International Baccalaureate (IB) program** by using the IB framework to teach required local content through inquiry-based, interdisciplinary, and local and global contexts. Teachers align state/district learning objectives with IB units, emphasizing student-centered, critical thinking approaches while fostering international mindedness. Since 1982, CU's Education department has sought out Whittier teachers to serve as **teaching mentors to CU practicum and student teachers**. Further, it functions as a living laboratory for two groundbreaking initiatives: **Growing Up Boulder,** which partners with the City of Boulder and more than 60 nonprofits, to engage children as co-creators of child-friendly city design, and **Classrooms for Climate Action**, which empowers students to address climate challenges through hands-on community engagement. These programs transform students from passive learners into active participants in shaping their world. Through Growing Up Boulder, elementary students conduct research, interview community members, and present recommendations to city planners—skills that build civic agency and democratic participation. Through Classrooms for Climate Action, students don't just learn about environmental challenges; they design solutions, collaborate with local organizations, and see their ideas implemented in real time. This pedagogy develops critical thinking, empathy, and a sense of efficacy that standardized curricula simply cannot replicate.

Whittier's diverse student body reflects Boulder's full community, including those **most marginalized** and provides an educational environment where **children learn alongside peers from varied backgrounds, cultures, and lived experiences**. A highly skilled, **bilingual teaching staff** brings expertise that honors this diversity while maintaining the rigorous academic standards of the IB framework. In an era when educational equity remains elusive in many settings, Whittier demonstrates what inclusive excellence looks like in practice.

Closing Whittier would not simply eliminate a school; it would dismantle a model of what education can and should be. We would lose a historic institution, a hub of pedagogical innovation, and a community cornerstone that actively prepares students to engage meaningfully with the world's most pressing challenges. I respectfully urge you to **recognize Whittier Elementary International School as an irreplaceable asset** to Boulder Valley School District and to our broader community, and to ensure its doors remain open for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Cathy Hill
Education Director, Growing Up Boulder

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