What you need to know

- Spanish names conventionally consist of one or more first names, no middle names, and two last names.
- Some Spanish first names have two or more parts (Rosa María); this is one name, not a first name and middle name.
- Spanish last names usually consist of two parts (Lucero Cárdenas); this is the last name, not Cárdenas alone.
- First names and last names are sometimes combined with articles and prepositions, such as de (of) and el or la (the). These articles and prepositions should be included with the names and should not be capitalized.
- Spanish uses accents on vowels and the letter ñ.
- Children's last names are usually a combination of the first of each of their parents' last names.
- Women do not typically adopt their husband's last name, so married parents may have different last names.

Registering students

1. Include all names in databases and documents.
2. Place all parts of the student's first name into the first name field of your database, and all last names in the last name field. Leave the middle name field blank, unless the parents indicate otherwise.
3. Include accents and the letter ñ on names in databases and documents. If you cannot include these marks, just record the vowel and the letter n. If possible, include a note about the change.

Example

A father introduces himself as José Demetrio Morales Vizcarra, the mother introduces herself as María del Socorro Tirado González, and their daughter is Genoveva Morales Tirado. (First names are in red and last names are in blue throughout this guide.)
Remember

Naming practices vary greatly among Spanish speakers, and this guide provides only a general overview. In addition, some Spanish-speaking students may have names that follow English naming conventions.

If the names are longer than the fields, enter only the first name in the series. In the example below, enter only Martha in the first name field and Rodríguez in the last name field.

More examples

Student: Martha Lorena Rodríguez Salvatierra  
  First name: Martha  
  Middle name:  
  Last name: Rodríguez

Student: Juan Carlos de la Toba Manríquez  
  First name: Juan Carlos  
  Middle name:  
  Last name: de la Toba Manríquez

Addressing parents, students, and families

- Address parents as “Mr.” and “Mrs.” using their first last name. José Demetrio Morales Vizcarra should be addressed as Mr. Morales, and María del Socorro Tirado González as Mrs. Tirado. It is also acceptable to refer to parents with the husband’s first last name, as in Mr. and Mrs. Morales.

- Shake hands when greeting and departing.

- Students with composite first names are often referred to using only one of these names, so Juan Antonio may be addressed as Juan and María Luz may be called Luz. Ask the individual or the parents which name is preferred.

- When sending written materials to families, address them as follows:
  - To the parents of Jorge Raúl Fernández Rivera
  - To the Fernández Rivera family

Use a qualified translator if you are not able to communicate clearly with the parents and student.

School staff members who register students should come to an agreement with parents on a name that respects both their cultural patterns and the constraints of the database. That name should be written out and provided to the families and students in a notice written in the family’s home language, indicating that this is the name that will be used officially at school. Doing so will help students and families remember to use the modified name in school settings.

More information about this and other reference sheets can be found on the Education Northwest website: http://educationnorthwest.org/resource/3130.

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