

SEL Workshops: Lovely Feelings en Familia

Paris Elementary School

Aurora, CO



At Paris Elementary School, having parents as the ultimate community partners is the best path to student wellness. As a Community School in Aurora, the presence of community members and families wanting to support their students is palpable during any given school day. Parents and guardians are always invited to community meetings to discuss what initiatives students may need to help them thrive. Staff and guardians routinely work on projects together and families often talk about their students over lunch with staff members. During one meeting, a family member communicated to the Family Liaison, Melissa Ortiz-Vargas, that her child had been talking with her about different Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Tools that she had learned at school. The parent indicated that while she was excited that her student was gaining tools to support her wellbeing, giving parents access to these tools as well would further support student mental health.

Excited by the idea of aligning social emotional learning practices at school and at home, Melissa and the Community School Coordinator, Susan Gershwin, coordinated efforts to secure grant funding that would cover the cost of a series of four workshops. The costs of the training included translation into Spanish, refreshments, and materials for students to take home. Melissa then reached out to a community partner, Be Well, for support in planning activities and practices for each session.

To begin each of the four workshops, families were invited to have refreshments and chat with other workshop participants, creating a safe space for people to share ideas and experiences. Students and families were then split into separate groups to allow for meaningful conversations surrounding mental health. Families discussed their personal practices, if any, with breath work, yoga, music, art, journaling, and physical activity. These practices included activities that students learn about in school to support their wellness. Students and families were then reunited to practice each activity as a family. At the end of each session, families were able to take home relevant materials so that they could continue focusing on wellness as a family. Their materials included yoga mats, physical activity cards, personal journals, writing utensils, art supplies, and customizable kites.



Throughout the course of the workshop series, families and staff members were able to learn from one another about different ways to support their students while creating a community. Though the activities were guided by Paris staff, families also provided insights into what schools and fellow guardians could do with their students. The practice was evaluated through anecdotes and observations from participants. A survey will also be sent out to follow up with families to gauge if they have or will engage in the activities together outside of the training, as well as what the effects were on student mental wellness.

Staff and families at Paris Elementary School are partners. There are no greater experts on students than their families, and the success of this program is largely due to the equal partnership educators and guardians share. To best replicate such a workshop series, opening conversations to families at the beginning, middle, and end of the series is important to ensuring success and, most importantly, showing students that they are cared for by all members of their school community.