



The State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education (SACPIE) and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is pleased to share this first collection of *Promising Partnership Practices*. The purpose of this book is for schools, districts, and other educational organizations in Colorado to highlight how they partner with families and the community for student success.

Over 50 years of research indicate that students are more likely to succeed both academically and behaviorally when schools, families, and communities work together. This publication includes over 50 practices categorized by the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships (PTA, 2008), a research-based framework with which CDE and SACPIE align their partnering work (Senate Bill 13-193).



We look forward to highlighting more practices each year and to improving outcomes for students through family, school, and community partnering.

In Partnership,

Stacey Zis, SACPIE Chair

Kim Watchorn, SACPIE Vice Chair

Dr. Darcy Hutchins, CDE Family Partnership Director

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Back to School BBQ

Castro Elementary School

Denver, CO



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Staff and leadership at Castro Elementary School believe that family and community partnerships are critical for student success. Several initiatives occur to ensure that families are active participants in their children's education. Recently, the school hosted a Back to School BBQ to start the school year off on a high note.

Most schools hold Back to School Night after the school year has already begun. Administrators at Castro, however, believed it was important for families and staff to meet prior to the start of the year and hosted the BBQ on August 20th during the first faculty work week.

Castro staff each received a school t-shirt to wear at the BBQ to distinguish faculty from families. Castro's principal mentioned this was helpful so families could direct questions to the appropriate people. All teachers introduced themselves to families and helped everyone feel welcome at the event.

Teachers were organized by grade level so that families knew exactly where to go to meet their children's teachers. In addition to meeting Castro staff, families also enjoyed free food and a DJ. Staff gave away over 1,000 books for students to start a home library. The school received donations and used discretionary funds to pay for the event.

Over 500 families attended the Back to School BBQ. Castro staff notified families about the event through fliers, robo-calls, and in person at student registration. As a result of the Back to School BBQ, families and students felt welcome and part of the school community before the school year even began.

Community Collaboration

Kullerstrand Elementary School

Wheatridge, CO



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In order to fully engage in family, community, and school partnerships, it is important to have a variety of practices and activities that are in place. Including all stakeholders will help to strengthen the partnership. Kullerstrand Elementary School works to maintain relationships with all stakeholders by engaging in many different activities.

Kullerstrand partners in activities that provide unique opportunities for learning, community service, and civic participation. Some examples of activities throughout the year include: Family Literacy Night, Math Night, weekly food bags, All Pro Dad's Day, Rockies nights, and a fun run. These experiences and events have helped tremendously in families becoming more engaged with their students and the school.

The school is also fully committed to giving back the community as a way to build relationships. It has hosted volunteer appreciation events, raised money for the Children's Hospital, and has conducted clothing, food, and book drives. They have completely embraced the opportunity to collaborate with the community around them, and see this collaboration as a vital aspect of family, school, and community partnerships.

By engaging in a wide variety of activities through the year, Kullerstrand is able to provide many chances to build and strengthen relationships among school, students, families, and community.

Fall Family Fun Night

Arriba Flagler School District
Flagler, CO



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Engaging families in students' academics is a critical way to support student learning at home and to foster partnerships. However, it is often beneficial to engage families in a fun, academic-free environment in order to strengthen partnerships. For the past ten years, the Arriba Flagler School District has been doing this through their Fall Family Fun Night.

The goal of this evening is to provide a chance for families, students, and school staff to share a positive experience, and to support the district goal of welcoming all families into the community. By doing this, a stronger sense of community and a family-friendly school atmosphere can be achieved. The event began in 2005, and was developed by the Parent Involvement Committee as a way to encourage interactions of school and family in a non-threatening environment.

Since the event was in the fall, the primary activity has been a pumpkin decorating contest. Each family receives a pumpkin and used their own supplies in order to create their masterpieces. Math learning was incorporated into the event through the use of 'estimation stations' where pumpkins' weights were guessed and the number of pieces of candy in a jar was guessed. The decorated pumpkins were awarded prizes at the end of the evening such as gift certificates to the library's book fair.

The implementation of this event is a true collaboration. While the Parent Involvement Committee was primarily responsible for the planning, the Superintendent acted as emcee, teachers ran activity stations, librarians judged the pumpkins, and elementary school classes made posters. Articles were also written and published in the local newspaper.

Hosting the Family Fun Night is an important way to help encourage partnerships. The attendance at past events speaks to its success, and surveys are used to gather feedback. This feedback is used to help improve the event. The Committee decided not to do pumpkin carving one year, but the survey results indicated that families missed this part of the event, so it was used again the next year.

The Fall Family Fun Night is a great time to celebrate school, community, and especially the kids! It also provides time where families and school staff can get to know each other and strengthen relationships.

Family-School-Community Partnering

Wild Plum Center for Young Children and
Families
Longmont, CO



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Beginning family-school partnering activities early in children's lives is important to student achievement, even if children are not yet in a traditional school setting. An example of beginning partnering work early is the Wild Plum Center for Young Children and Families, responsible for delivering Head Start and Early Head Start programs to 263 students (age birth to five) and expectant mothers in Longmont, CO. The program provides a comprehensive and individualized approach to early childhood education and family wellness.

This program is fully committed to a partnership model to support children, families, and the whole community. Wild Plum believes that families are the first teachers of students, and because of that believe that it is critical to develop relationships with families. Teachers and family service staff are assigned to specific families in order to build these relationships, and each family is partnered with an educator who conducts a home visit every week. The program also offers a home-based program for expecting mothers and families with children birth to three.

In addition to the support given by the school staff, Wild Plum invites their families to attend group gatherings twice a month. During these gatherings, educational activities are provided and parent discussions take place. This allows for families to share with each other in a comfortable setting. The group gatherings support the development of family created goals towards health, self-sufficiency, mental health, and relationship building. The program also works diligently to connect their families to outside resources that they may benefit from.

Wild Plum believes that the key to creating lasting benefits for a child is through strong, trusting, school-readiness focused relationships with the family. They maintain that ideal throughout their programming, and strive to support the whole child as well as community and family.

Home Visits

Clifton Elementary School

Clifton, CO



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When working to create lasting home-school partnerships, the first step of the process is often establishing a welcoming environment where parents and families are able to relax and begin to open up to partnering with educators. Clifton Elementary School staff build positive relationships by engaging in home visits with families in their schools.

This work is initiated by the Family Center Coordinator and done in small steps in order to not overwhelm families. The coordinator begins by speaking generally with teachers, students, and their families and presenting herself as a resource. The first individual conversation with families is critical, as it is a time for the Coordinator to show her true interest, sincerity, and desire to build on positive attributes of the families. Once initial contact is made, she follows-up by sending home information, resources, and invitations for school events to the families. After this contact, the Coordinator then discusses a time to come for a home visit.

The home visit itself is very intentional so as to not overwhelm families – it does not last more than 45 minutes, and the Coordinator focuses on ways that home-school relationships can be built, and specific ways that she can support the family. Additionally, the Coordinator brings with her an example of the student's best work in order to showcase his/her abilities and demonstrate pride in the student.

The Coordinator serves a very important role in the home visit process and the progression towards building home-family relationships. She acts as the liaison between the teachers and the families and students, and helps to break through any challenges to partnering. She is the point of contact, and is often the person that begins to build the authentic, positive relationships with the families. She maintains a list of best practices and common mistakes for home visits that she employs in her work.

These types of home visits are important and influential for a variety of reasons. Families who are visited in their homes may be more likely to feel comfortable in building a relationship. As parents and guardians feel included in student learning, success is more likely for the students and all other parties involved. Home visits that are intentional and authentic make a true impact on the entire family and school community.

Parent Teacher Home Visit Program

Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO



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To fully engage and partner with families, Denver Public Schools believes that home visits are a powerful tool. The goal of their home visit program is to establish meaningful relationships between school and family, and to establish the expectation for joint responsibility for student achievement. In the past year alone, teachers and other educators in the district completed 9,437 visits.

The Denver Public Schools home visit program is modeled off a national model for family outreach, but is unique in the fact that it trains and compensates teachers across all grades. Their home visit program allows families and schools to build trust, share hopes and dreams, form relationships, and discuss expectations and resources in regards to student achievement. The program began with five pilot schools and has since expanded to 77 schools. Each school that participates receives professional development from a training team.

This program has shown to be experiencing great success thus far. Teachers report that they have gained new skills in cultural awareness and cultural sensitivity. They report improved relationships with students, and the majority of teachers would recommend the home visit program to colleagues interested in improving relationships. Parents also report success with this program – 91% say they are more comfortable with teachers after a home visit is conducted.

Going forward, to further assess the benefits of this program, the district plans to examine direct correlations between student outcomes and the home visiting. Other student data that will be examined includes reading scores, parent volunteerism, student attendance, and referrals/suspensions.



As students enter high school and become more independent, connecting with families can often become more challenging for educators. This can be very detrimental as students are facing critical issues that impact their futures. In order to work to engage families during these important times, The Classical Academy dedicates two portions of their College and Career Connections newsletter – “Post Chat” and “Table Talk” – to engaging families.

Each semester, the College and Career staff at the Academy organizes two visits to every 9th to 12th grade class to discuss and engage in activities regarding postsecondary preparation. The topics discussed are recapped in the newsletter “Post Chat” section so that families are aware of the discussions that students are having. Follow up questions are also created by the staff, and are put in the “Table Talk” section of the newsletter. These questions are intended for families to discuss at home with their students.

“Post Chat” has been a part of the newsletter for several years, and the school reports that they have seen an increase in parent participation in career and college planning with this section. “Table Talk” is a new addition to the newsletter, and was added based on feedback from parents.

Using these sections of the newsletter helps to support family-school partnerships by sharing information about student progress, and helping families to engage in classroom learning. Additionally, families are empowered to be advocates for their students with the knowledge that they gain, and by knowing how the school system works.

While The Classical Academy believes that these portions of the newsletter are a great way to gain parental interest in topics, they believe that they are only a starting point, and suggest that there is nothing better than a family meeting in order to discuss the priorities of the family!

Family and Community Engagement Standards

Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO



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In order to help guide the work that is done with families and communities, it can be beneficial for school leadership and school personnel to create policies and standards to follow. Denver Public Schools has done this through the creation of their Family and Community Engagement Standards. These standards are based on partnering research, have communication as a foundation woven throughout, and are aligned with the district's core values. Their core values include a student first focus, integrity, equity, collaboration, accountability, and fun.

The district created three standards and each of these standards includes indicators, as well as examples of quality implementation of the indicators. The first standard is focused on creating a school culture that embraces partnering that values family engagement, and is respectful, responsive, and welcoming. Examples of how this standard may be implemented in a quality way include a communication plan for the district, dedicated space for families in schools, identifying and integrating resources and services from the communities that families can access, and using families heritages/language/skills to strengthen curriculum and experiences.

The second standard focuses on removing obstacles to family partnering, and emphasizes the shared responsibility in decision making and collaborating for families. This may be implemented by having an effective engagement plan for the district, maintaining committees for both school and family to be a part of, or having policies and procedures in place that ensure that all families have access to school events and programs.

The third standard involves the joint work between families and schools to support student progress, including keeping families informed and engaging families as partners. To implement this standard, teachers may provide monthly classroom updates to families, ongoing trainings for families can be held, or schools and families can work together to discuss student-learning styles and develop learning goals.

While every district may be different in the way in which they develop plans, it is important to have policies and standards to guide the partnering work that is done.

Family Constituency Services

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



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Denver Public Schools works to create strong family-school relationships utilizing open communication through their Family Constituency Services. This encourages families to call in to the district with questions or concerns that they may have. The process encourages healthy dialogue and the development of a supportive experience within the schools.

Family Constituency Services are provided on three levels. Tier 1 calls are considered inquiries that answer general district questions, can be transferred easily, or that clarify policies. Tier 2 calls are concerns or requests that require more intensive assistance. In these cases, the calls are assigned to specialists who gather additional information, and who then often facilitate a meeting between the caller and appropriate school leaders. In cases where a clear resolution isn't arrived at, a "Mediation" meeting can be scheduled to offer an opportunity for families and school leaders to rebuild relationships or reestablish communication. Tier 3 calls occur when a Specialist isn't able to satisfy the caller's needs or the school leader is not responsive, and must be escalated to the Senior Manager of Family Constituency Services or an Instructional Superintendent.

The district documents all interactions so that proactive measures can be taken to address any repeated questions or concerns, and also gives data necessary to make recommendations to leadership. The data can also be used to inform professional development, trainings, and workshops.

Having these open lines of communication ensure that families have a better understanding of policies and initiatives, and thus are able to more effectively support student achievement. Denver Public Schools believes that family and community partnering is critical to the success of every student and that students with families that are engaged are more likely to succeed academically.

Denver Public Schools has several recommendations for other districts that are considering this type of resource. They believe it is important to have a staff that is skilled in conflict management with a focus on equity and cultural responsiveness. Maintaining strong partnerships with other departments will help to access information quickly and efficiently, and educating other leaders about the service is also important.

Parent Liaison

Lewis Palmer School District
Monument, CO



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Establishing communication and relationships with families whose students receive Special Education services can often be a challenge for schools. To improve the outcomes of students in Special Education and increase home-school communication, the Lewis Palmer School District created the Parent Liaison program. A liaison from the school district is provided to support families of students with disabilities and some families of students in general education who need additional support; these may include families of students who are going through the Response to Intervention process.

The goal of the liaison is to work with families who are experiencing challenges in communicating with their children's education teams, and provide families with additional information they may need. The liaison attends IEP meetings, team meetings, and teacher-family meetings and can provide mediation, facilitate meetings, and work to bring stakeholders together to support students. Additionally, the liaison works with staff to provide guidance about how to communicate effectively with families.

In addition to the individualized support that the liaison provides the families, the program also includes parent support network coffees and Special Education Advisory Committee meetings. The parent support network coffees are monthly events in which family members are invited to share their concerns, find support, and meet other family members. The parent liaison facilitates discussion and provides answers to any specific questions. The Special Education Advisory Committee holds monthly meetings that families are invited to attend in order to learn about initiatives and policies that affect Special Education.

The Parent Liaison helps to support student outcomes through partnering in a variety of ways. The position helps to increase family involvement in education, and also works to increase and improve communication between families and schools. It helps to build capacity within families to work together and with school teams in order to support student behavior and academic outcomes. Additionally, as relationships improve through the liaison's work, better attendance and academic performance can be seen from students. Finally, Special Education meetings and processes become less confusing to families, helping to increase their ability to participate.

In Lewis Palmer, the Parent Liaison is a position that is evolving – what started as a 10-hour per week position is now full-time. As stakeholders provide feedback, the district is able to shift or change the type of support families and educators need.



Establishing positive communication with families can often be a challenge, and this is even truer when working with families who may not speak English as their first language. However, these challenges can be addressed with intentional work with families, as evidenced by the English as a Second Language (ESL) Parent Information Nights held by Academy School District 20.

These information nights are held by the district once per quarter and are open to all families K-12 who have children in the ESL program. They are designed to improve communication and parent collaboration not only through providing information to parents, but also by developing relationships. The information that is presented is intended to help empower families to be able to support the learning of their children. These information nights also encourage relationship building between families, creating an even stronger and larger community of support.

There are many different informational sessions that are provided at the information night, and the topics are determined by feedback from families, or are topics that would impact students. Examples of topics include what to expect in parent-teacher conferences, academic expectations of the district, English Language Proficiency plans for students, the grading scale, State testing, and stimulations of elementary and high school classes. The information sessions are varied, and provide insight and guidance to families on district policy as well as student learning. All of the information is provided to parents in their native languages and interpreters are also present.

Having these sessions provided information on school programs and services that families could use to help them support their students, both academically and socially. The safe and friendly environment ensured that families felt comfortable enough to engage in communication and partnering, and to become an integral part of their student's school community.

Evaluation of the information nights showed that parents greatly value them, especially the sessions that were determined by parent feedback. Changes were made based on suggestions from parents and educators for information nights going forward. Academy 20 sees including parent feedback as vitally important to this process, and will continue to do so in the future.

Superintendent Parent Forums

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



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While much of the interaction that families have with schools is often through teachers, it is important for relationships to be built between families and administrators, as well. One way that this is done in Denver Public Schools is through the 6-7 Superintendent Parent Forums that are held each school year. These forums are meant to engage families and share important information about district initiatives, and discuss how families can be a part of and support these initiatives.

At the beginning of the year, the Superintendent reaches out to all school leaders in the district to select parent representatives from their school that will attend the forums throughout the school year. Parent representatives attend the forums and then bring back information to other families. In Denver Public Schools, an average of 384 parents attend the forums on a consistent basis.

These forums are spread throughout the year, and are focused on topics selected by parents at the end of the previous school year. Each forum has two sessions – one in the morning and one in the evening – so that families have more of a chance to attend. Food, transportation, interpretation, and childcare are offered to parents at no charge. The Office of Family and Community Engagement works with content experts on the presentations and a next steps handout that provides parents with tips and messaging to share with their school/parent community.

Having these forums allows families to learn about important information on what is happening in the district and gives parents tools and strategies to engage with their schools and with their children.

Title I Family Engagement Program

Jefferson County Public Schools
Golden, CO



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In order to establish and maintain true and lasting partnerships between schools, families, and communities, a substantial amount of time and effort is needed. This often requires dedicated family-school partnering staff so that partnering efforts can be the main focus. In the Jefferson County School District, a Title I Family Engagement program has been created that maintains a network of professionals trained specifically on the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships and who are dedicated solely to this work.

The Title I Family Engagement program involves implementing systemic, research-based practices in the school district with the goal of engaging families who are living in poverty, in order to increase student success. This is the first year of the program, and the district has already hired 26 Family Liaisons – one per Title I school – and a Family Engagement Coordinator to support the full team. The first three months of the program were dedicated to surveying family members and staff in the schools in order to identify areas of need. Now, three days per month the team meets for professional development, collaboration, and to develop components of the program.

During these ongoing meetings, Liaisons are able to discuss the events and activities that they are working on, and the team together discusses how they link to student outcomes. The team has identified certain areas that they are focusing on in this inaugural year – creating a welcoming environment and establishing effective two-way communication. In year two, the team will focus on student success and advocacy. This strategic plan was created in order to build a strong partnering foundation and gain understanding of the standards and how to implement them.

The team has also worked with outside partners in order to evaluate their work. Data showed improvements in welcoming environments and two-way communication, and highlighted practices that were really effective – such as Principal Coffee events where families can meet with the Principal regularly. The data also revealed areas where additional work can be done on these topics, and on other partnering standards in the future.

While only in practice for a year, the results from this team are very encouraging. The school district hopes to continue these practices to support partnerships, and in the future plan to look at long term partnering data related to student achievement.

Academic Standards Nights

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



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Knowing what kind of academic support to offer children of different grade levels can sometimes be an overwhelming task for busy parents and families. To make this easier, Denver Public Schools holds Academic Standards Nights that help families understand the skills that students need to learn in each grade level. These nights also tell families how students in the classrooms are progressing, and provide families with activities that they can do at home with their children.

These nights are planned by school Parent Teacher Leadership Teams, and parents of all of the students in classrooms are invited to the presentations. “A Parent’s Guide to Student Learning” was created to outline examples of the Academic Standards that students need to know in Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and Social Studies in each grade level, and a training module was also developed to help families understand the standards.

These nights are significant for family engagement for a number of reasons. Families are given information on what their students are learning in the classroom and how they are progressing. They are also given activities that can be done at home in order to support student learning. Families develop goals to support learning at home, and are also able to access resources and services in the community.

This is a fairly new program that is still being developed, and has been piloted at two schools. The district is working on developing more reading, writing, and math activities with the help of educators, as well as resources that can be used during the presentations. They will be expanding the program to more schools in the future, and also plan to develop an evaluation tool to measure the impact of these nights, both from the perspective of the families and from student outcome data.

Discovery Social Emotional Learning Program and Parent Partnering

Dolores County School District
Dove Creek, CO



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Partnering between families and schools can lead to strong improvements in students' attendance and academic success. However, it is important to note that partnering can also help to support the behavioral development of students as well as school community overall. Through the Discovery Social Emotional Learning Program and Parent Partnering, the Dolores County School District is working to improve school culture through relationship building among staff, students, and families.

Dolores County School District recognized that changes needed to be made in terms of social emotional learning and engagement. The new Discovery program and Parent Partner position were implemented in order for parents to share their concerns to the school, to provide outreach and training, and social emotional programming support. Overall, these programs are also intended to foster more positive relationships in the schools.

All school staff were required to attend a four day training of the Discovery program, and the first week of school students were only instructed in the Discovery program and not traditional classes. Students and staff discussed expectations in the schools, how to resolve conflict, improve communication, manage anger, and effectively work in groups and teams. Later in the school year, the Parent Partner held a family training similar to staff training. The district believes that by improving social emotional learning, student outcomes in academics will also improve.

Having both of these programs working in conjunction is very important. By offering training opportunities to families regarding the social emotional program, the district is able to work to bridge the gap between school and home and improve the relationships with families. Dolores County School District believes that any other districts wanting to use the program should see training as a self-reflection process. By being willing to continually improve partnering practices, families and district staff have formed a strong relationship and work closely together for students' behavioral and academic success.

Each One Teach One

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



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A very powerful way to help engage families in students' education is by having parents support learning. This is the premise behind Denver Public Schools' Each One Teach One program, which recruits parents from the school community to act as tutors for small group tutors. This program believes in raising low academic achievement by fostering rich, intensive, academic-based conversations between students and families.

This program runs for nine weeks, and consists of daily 25-45 minute small group lessons. Approximately 546 children from kindergarten to third grade are currently in the program, and almost all of these students are on the free or reduced lunch program. The sessions integrate vocabulary, phonics, comprehension, oral conversation, and executive functioning skills into the lessons in order to improve reading, writing, and science skills. Many of the volunteers are Spanish speakers and wanted their children to have more English language tutoring, so the district utilized partnerships with community members to gain more English speaking volunteers.

Each One Teach One develops trust and relationships not only between the school and the family volunteers, but also between the family tutors and the families of the students in the program. The program also shows families that they can help develop their students' learning at home, by having tutors who are of similar backgrounds as themselves.

The program has yielded very positive results for the district. Evaluation showed that first grade students in the program are 2.6 times more likely to be at grade level than peers on literacy tests, and that students in the program achieved a 24 point gain in percentile rank after the program, versus their pre-scores. And volunteers have provided an amazing 5,512 hours of tutoring!

If other districts or schools are interested in this type of a program, Denver Public Schools suggests beginning small with parent volunteers who serve one or two classrooms, in order to allow the program to grow and develop and for volunteers to come forward.

Family Reading Night

Wamsley Elementary School

Rifle, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Literacy is an area that is very important to student success, and one that parents and families are critical in helping to support. In order to foster and strengthen family engagement in literacy development, Wamsley Elementary School hosts Family Literacy Night at the local library. The goal of this event is to empower families with the skills necessary to help their children read at home, inform families of the literacy skills that children are learning, and to build relationships within the community.

The event begins with families being welcomed and given information about the night. During the evening, grade level teams create an activity that supports school-wide literacy goals and that parents can complete with their children at the library. Stations are set up around the library, and teachers interact with the families and students during these activities. An example of such an activity would be first grade students choosing books from the library shelves with their parents, reading the books together, and then the students practicing retelling the story.

After the literacy activities, families can enjoy a meal provided by the school. At the end of the evening, families are given materials that they can use at home to support literacy development. Prizes that have been solicited local businesses are given out throughout the evening, and families have the opportunity to sign up for a library card or to have any pre-existing library fines waived.

This event has been very successful, and is important as it allows families to participate in their children's literacy development in a laid-back environment, and it reinforces that learning can certainly occur at home. The materials given encourage families to engage in this learning with their students. Wamsley has a goal that 75% of all students be reading at grade level, and this past year they reached 77%. They believe it is in large part because of these family literacy nights. Additionally, the event allows partnerships to be formed and strengthen among families, school, and community partners.

Math Night

Graham Mesa Elementary School

Rifle, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Math and numbers are part of our everyday lives and activities. However, this can often be a subject that parents find intimidating to help their students with at home. In order to help dispel this intimidation, Graham Mesa Elementary held a Math Night for their students and families to attend.

The purpose of this Math Night is to give students and their families the chance to practice math skills learned in school in a real-life setting. Additionally, this type of an event allows families who may not regularly engage in school events to do so in a relaxed environment.

The event was held in a local grocery store for a two-hour block of time during regular shopping hours. Students received a developmentally appropriate math activity from their grade level teachers to complete in a particular area of the store, with the support of their families. This demonstrated to families how learning can be done anywhere and not just inside the classroom. Examples of activities included determining which of two fruits weighs more for kindergarten students, looking for geometric shapes for first grade students, or a budgeting exercise for fourth grade students. Teachers provided support throughout the activity for students and families. Upon completion, the students and families met with the teachers in the grade level above theirs, so as to begin to form these new relationships.

Families provided evaluation of the event at the end of the evening through survey. While doing this, prize entries could also be filled out, and several entry forms were drawn at random for prizes such as grocery gift store cards or other gifts generously donated by community organizations and businesses. Over 90% of families indicated that they enjoyed the event and liked the opportunity to participate in academic events outside of the school.

For other schools interested in planning this type of event, it is recommended that a strong relationship be built with local businesses willing both to host the event and to donate prizes. Planning is also very important, as this type of event requires particular attention to detail.

Math Night not only helped to reinforce the math skills that students are learning in the classroom in a real world environment, but also helped parents to learn ways that they can support their students' math learning outside of the classroom. This can lead to an increase in student achievement and parent involvement in academics, and ultimately to family and school partnerships.



Helping support students' learning can be an overwhelming task for many parents and families, who are often busy working and maintaining other parts of their families' lives. In order to help parents and families feel better equipped to offer this support, Adams County School Districts (Adams 12, Adams 14, Adams 50, Mapleton and Brighton 27 J) collaborated with the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition to offer a bilingual conference for parents from grades K-12, titled Parent Academy.

This academy was created in order to provide workshops to help parents learn about a variety of topics that they might encounter with their students. Topics included bullying, helping with homework, navigating the school system, transitioning to high school, youth mental health, and talking to children about sexuality. These topics were also broken down by elementary, middle, and high school level.

Months of planning went into this event. The planning committee included members of the school districts involved and staff from the Statewide Coalition. Adams 12 and Adams 14 school districts also held focus groups to solicit parent feedback for deciding what type of workshops to have at the one-day academy. Over 200 attendances participated in the event. Sessions were offered in both English and Spanish.

In addition to the parental education piece of the conference, parents were also encouraged to bring their children. Younger students engaged in a variety of activities including storytelling and craft making. Students 13-18 were part of a youth institute focused on reaching their goals of higher education.

The academy was very impactful for families for a variety of reasons. Not only did the parents gain important information on topics, but participating in this sort of event helped parents to understand the influence that they have on their students' education and lives. Even more significant was the finale of the academy, which included a personal presentation by the students to their families about how much their support meant to them.

While the parent academy took months of planning and many logistics to figure out, it was a very successful venture, as evidenced by the feedback received from parents. The districts found it to be so successful and beneficial that they are planning to do it again in the coming school year.

Parent Engagement Guide

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

When engaging families in the career and college process, it is important to demonstrate to parents how they can be active partners from their children's early ages. The goal of the Parent Engagement Guide: Birth to College initiative is to provide a consistent message to all schools in Denver Public Schools on the critical role that families play in preparing children for their futures.

This Parent Engagement Guide provides information on several important areas. It outlines what families can do at each stage of development to encourage prepared graduation, provides strategies that parents can incorporate into their daily lives, educates parents on the birth to college pipeline, and establishes a parent to parent network for making connections. The guide also builds capacity around parent engagement by providing professional development.

In addition to the creation of the guide, the district also facilitates workshops around the content. Presentations, guides, and workbooks for parents (early childhood, elementary, middle, and high school workbooks) were created to be used in the workshops, which are presented by school staff.

Evaluation of past presentations included reflection by participants on the most helpful aspects of the workshop and places where improvements could be made. Overall, the feedback was positive. The participants were most excited about the specific activities that they could do with their children, and also appreciated learning about child development. A few of the participants did mention that they thought it would be helpful to have larger groups of teachers and parents involved so that they could learn more from one another.

This guide and associated presentations provide strategies that all parents can use to support their students' journey through school and on to college and career, no matter what their ethnic, cultural, or socio-economic background is.

SOAR Awards

Vivian Elementary School

Lakewood, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

At Vivian Elementary School, rewarding the positive behavior of students is recognized as important for student success. Each month, teachers at the school nominate a student to receive the SOAR award. The letters each stand for a particular type of positive behavior: "S" stands for safe, "O" for owning their own behavior, "A" for achieving and academic excellence, and "R" for respectful behavior.

These awards are not just given to students, but are also celebrated publicly in the school. The elementary has a bulletin board in their main entrance hall that features the monthly winners. In addition, a small breakfast celebration is held with the Principal in the library, where the awards are presented to the students and they receive recognition.

Including parents and families is also an important part of this reward, as the parents of the awarded students are invited to attend the congratulatory breakfast and spend time celebrating with their students.

This type of recognition is important when supporting both student success and positive behavior. The students are very proud of their awards, and feel good about having their picture posted on the bulletin board. They are able to demonstrate their success to their parents when they come for the breakfast, and enjoy their success together. The awards process helps to strengthen connections between the families and the schools, and the families' involvement in their students' successes.

Strategic Partnering for Student Success

Cimarron Elementary School
Aurora, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Cimarron Elementary school is a Title I school located in the Cherry Creek School District. Over the past several years, the school staff and administration has focused on cultivating strong family and community partnerships to support student learning. The structure of this partnership program has three main components: resources, interventions, and community building.

Resources. Cimarron staff believes that families are better equipped to support their children's academic and behavioral success when their basic needs are met. With the assistance of the School Nurse and the Title I Family Liaison, the school has worked to remove obstacles for families in needs of medical resources. For example, the school partnered with Essilor Vision Foundation to provide free eye exams and glasses frames to over 30 students in the school.

Cimarron has also partnered with a Denver nonprofit organization to give free dental exams to second graders, the grade at which children are most likely to develop cavities. These students receive a free exam and fluoride sealants when needed. Parents do not need to be present for the exam, though they do sign a permission slip.

Interventions. Students' academic achievement is Cimarron's number one priority. As such, families are actively involved in intervention strategies. The school has used Title I funds and READ Act funds to purchase computer-based reading intervention programs. Families of students with a Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) are invited to attend training sessions about how to support their children's reading at home. Families who do not have access to a computer can borrow one from the school. Cimarron hosts an end-of-year celebration for students and families who participate in this reading intervention. Additionally, Cimarron's school library remains open year-round so students and families continue reading over the summer.

Community Building. The Cimarron Parent-Teacher-Community Organization (PTCO) focuses on equity and inclusive excellence to ensure that every member the school community feels welcomes and valued. The group has "courageous conversations" about the perceived impact of race on academic achievement. The school offers free classes for parents to learn English, held Monday-Thursday from 1-3pm. The school also hosts literacy nights and math nights. On average, 300 families attend each event and leave with armfuls of free books.

Over the last three years, Cimarron has seen a steep incline in the School Performance Framework. The principal attributes this to a combination of universal instruction and strong family-school-community partnerships. To schools interested implementing some of these initiatives, the principal recommends building purposeful relationships with parents and having a three-year vision. Changes in academic achievement through partnering do not happen overnight, but they do happen!



Oftentimes, families feel unsure about forming relationships with schools because they do not have the necessary information about curriculum and learning that is happening. The Classical Academy works to provide their families with this information through their Parent Academy. This initiative not only forms new family-school partnerships, but also strengthens the relationships that already exist.

The Educational Department Leads at The Classical Academy offer courses at the beginning of the year, which are free of charge to families. They are advertised through parent meetings, the newsletter, emails, and posters. These courses help families to connect with the instruction and curriculum that is happening at the school. There are five courses offered: Excellence in Writing (an overview of the writing program), Partnership in Growth (supporting children's maturity development), Parent Spalding Class (for new elementary parents), Working Together in Language Arts (how to support learning in language arts), and Working Together in Math (how to support learning in math).

All of these courses help families to understand the school's unique curriculum, and offers them the tools to be able to help their children with that curriculum. The Classical Academy's mission statement is focused on assisting parents in their mission to develop students' academics and character, and providing these courses is a strong way to do so.

After the Parent Academy, the school solicits feedback from participants and adjusts their courses accordingly. They also look at what types of questions are asked repeatedly by the families, and use the Parent Academy as a way to answer these questions.

Helping families to understand the philosophy and practice of their school can support families at the Classical Academy to more fully become partners in their students' education.

Urban Education Service Corps

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO

Department of Education

When offering individualized support to students and families, schools often benefit from the help of outside personnel. In the case of Denver Public Schools, this outside help comes from AmeriCorps members as part of their Urban Education Service Corps. These AmeriCorps members integrate a two-generation approach to student success by supporting both students and families in the areas of attendance, literacy, and math.

The Urban Education Service Corps is funded through the Corporation for National and Community Service, and members receive a stipend upon the completion of their service. Participants go through a specialized two-week training and are then placed at a school site and supervised by a staff member within the Office of Family and Community Engagement.

The members actively engage students and families in the schools, develop service projects that support student attendance, reinforce academic learning, and work to strengthen the school community. Members have open lines of communication with the families of the students they work with and are able to provide resource information to families who may need additional support.

In order to examine the success of the program, the district works with the OMNI Institute to conduct an annual evaluation that compares data entered into the AmeriCorps system by AmeriCorps members against the district's database, where all student information, including attendance rates, are inputted and tracked at the school level.

This program has been successful for Denver Public Schools, especially when considering school attendance. Since it began in 2009, the Corps has contributed to increases in student attendance, with students demonstrating an average 3% increase in their attendance. Even more impressive, middle school students have demonstrated an average of 5% increase in their attendance, equating to 9 additional days of school, or 63 hours of instruction time.

This type of program can be very beneficial for students and their families, as it allows support to be given to students in a one-on-one manner, and benefits students who may not normally have the opportunity to receive that level of support in the classroom.



As a district, Denver Public Schools has many students and families who do not speak English as their first language. In order to make sure that these voices are represented as equal partners in the schools, the district created the English Language Acquisition District Advisory Committee. The goal of this committee is to equip culturally and linguistically diverse families with the training, information, and support that they need in order to be active partners in district decision-making, events, and initiatives.

This committee holds meetings that are designed to inform families of district information and school processes, and engage them in their children's academics. Information is provided on testing, parent rights and responsibilities, supporting learning at home, and academic standards. Families are also given information on after-school and summer programming to help extend their children's learning outside of the school.

The planning, implementation, and evaluation of the committee meetings is done jointly between the district's English language and family engagement departments. Workshop topics are chosen and developed based on parent and community feedback, as well as the district's mission to keep parents informed of policies and procedures.

The district works to remove any challenges to participation in the committee meetings. Transportation and childcare options as well as varied meeting times are provided, and translation and interpretation services are also provided. At each meeting, staff interpreters representing the 10 most common languages spoken by ELA parents and students are present.

Denver Public Schools believes that by supporting family understanding of policies, procedures, and academic expectations, student achievement will improve. Having the appropriate knowledge allows parents to advocate for their students. These committee meetings also give parents the opportunity to voice concerns or needs that they may have. The district believes in continued transparency, and gives data to families in order to help them make informed decisions.



Speaking a language other than English can present challenges to building relationships between schools and families. In order to remove these obstacles and increase achievement, the Falcon School District 49's English Language Department created a Parent Advisory Committee (PAC).

This Parent Advisory Committee is a place where families can meet and network, and can also learn about grading, testing, school initiatives, resources, and procedures that affect the English Language Department program. The meetings are held quarterly, and include dinner and an agenda where topics from the whole district are shared. The district also provides interpreters. The meetings are continually changing, as the district wants to be sure to meet the current needs of families and students.

Evaluation of the committee meetings is done on both a formal and informal basis; using paper surveys, emailing regarding feedback, and discussing the meetings in person with families. The feedback is used to shape future meetings – for instance, childcare emerged as a significant need, and the district worked to address that by having high school volunteers engage younger children with an activity during the meeting.

Falcon School District 49 believes that these meetings are important because they are able to inform and empower the parent community. In turn, student achievement and success increases through this family involvement. In addition, families have the chance to share their experiences and listen to other families, building the community, and building confidence which influences family involvement in education.

For those who are thinking of holding these types of meetings, this district advises that planning and communicating the event should happen early, so that the topics can be promoted to garner interest from the community. Doing so early also allows planners to get an accurate head count for interpreters and dinner to ensure that all families receive the supports they need.



Empowering families with knowledge is frequently one of the most important ways that schools can work to build partnerships. This year, Pleasant View Elementary School began a Parent Academy in order to empower with knowledge, increase parent-to-parent interaction, and increase support of student learning and success.

For this first year of the academy, membership was by invitation from the school in order to allow for more targeted and specific support. The focus was building literacy for families of Preschool/Kindergarten students. Fifteen families were invited to join, and six of these became regular attendees. Though the meeting was intended to be monthly, it became twice a month because the parents wanted to meet more frequently!

The Parent Academy members meet for 2-hour sessions to learn new strategies, hands-on activities, and crock-pot cooking. Some examples of topics covered include creating a restful routine or students, the benefits of reading to your children, a guest speaker on the SafeCare community program, and taking care of yourself as a parent. The group of six families were encouraged to 'bring a friend' to widen participation. Cooking for group is a responsibility that is rotated among the attendees.

These meetings are also a great place for families to talk about upcoming events, recruit volunteers, hand out flyers and resources, share recipes, and discuss any current concerns. The academy is important for partnerships, as it is a place for parents to connect and build supportive relationships with each other while working to strengthen the support for their students. Parents are open and honest about struggles they're experiencing, and the academy is a safe and supportive environment to get help and build self-esteem on their journey to becoming empowered parents.

Parent Leadership Team Project

St. Vrain Valley School District

Longmont, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

When considering supporting students in schools, teachers and administrators are often viewed as the most important influences. However, it is critical to also remember that parents and families play a significant role in students' education. In order to address the importance of families in partnerships, the St. Vrain Valley School District is currently implementing the Parent Leadership Team Project in five of their schools, with support from the Colorado Statewide Parent Coalition.

This project has two overarching goals: to build teams of parent leaders and educators in order to improve partnerships, and to use these teams to both design and test partnership practices that can be used in the schools. The work of these teams aligns with the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, including implementing the standards of creating a welcoming environment and communicating effectively. Teams also implement strategies to address academic needs of students.

These Parent Leadership Teams are implemented in two phases throughout the school year. In the first phase, the Principal and Liaison for the school recruits a team that represents the demographic of the school. The teams are given orientation and trainings, and then begin their action planning to identify partnership needs. The second phase of the project involves implementing the action plan, meeting monthly, and evaluating the success of their plans.

Evaluating this project overall has shown great outcomes, as well as areas that improvements can continue to be made. While team-training attendance for two of the teams needed improvement, this revealed a need for more support in recruiting team members. Of those that attended the training, 100% reported that it was helpful for creating action plans. Parent surveys were conducted in each of the five schools, with varied rate of return. This also helped to highlight the need for further support in how to involve teachers and principals.

These teams have begun to see encouraging success in St. Vrain, and those involved have advice for other schools that may be considering similar projects. It is important to have support from district leaders in order to implement the project in a variety of schools, and the principal of these schools also needs to be committed to family-school partnerships. Finally, a parent liaison is needed, at least part-time, to coordinate the recruitment and trainings of team members. While there have been some challenges along the way, it is evident that the Parent Leadership Team Project is a beneficial to promote and sustain family-school-community partnering focused on positive student outcomes.

Parent Leadership Training

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

While creating relationships and open communication are very important in family-school partnering, it is equally as important to help families gain knowledge and leadership skills so that they can feel equipped to partner. This is the goal of Parent Leadership Training in Denver Public Schools – to develop strong parent leaders who are prepared with information, knowledge, and skills to serve on decision-making committees.

Leadership in participating schools identifies 10-15 parents who they believe are ready to become active leaders and partners. The training is six weeks long and involves six different topics. The workshops include: Parent Leadership, Understanding the School System, Understanding Data and Assessments, Effective Communication, Public Speaking, and Personal Empowerment. Workshops last between 75 and 90 minutes, with childcare and food provided. Training is done by highly trained staff, with support from the district engagement staff. Interpreters are utilized as necessary.

This training program was developed in response to families expressing frustration at their lack of knowledge about school processes, and hesitation towards being a part of decision-making committees. Once they have taken the leadership training, each parent develops a goal for how they will individually or collectively use their new leadership. The district developed a pre and post tool to assess behavior change and growth in participants. Parents also fill out an overall evaluation of the training upon completion.

The Parent Leadership Training is powerful because it helps parents to become strong advocates for increasing student achievement. Parents acquire knowledge, skills, and strategies to strengthen their role as academic partners to ensure that their children graduate prepared for college and career. Their increased knowledge leads to participants being more active participants in school and community activities, and become strong candidates to represent their schools at district-wide forums, meetings, committees, and focus groups.



In addition to academic knowledge and leadership skills, another area that can be beneficial to offer families support in is parenting skills and positive parenting. The intent of the Parenting Partners program at Denver Public Schools is to help develop parenting skills, provide families with the tools to support children's social emotional needs, and empower families to become engaged in children's education.

Parenting Partners is an eight-week long research-based program that focuses on positive parent engagement, improved student academics, and strong home learning environment. The eight workshop topics include: Parent Roles in Student Achievement and Creating Confident Kids, Positive Parenting – Success Starts at Home, Communication that Works, Creating Structure for Achievement, Discipline – Practice for Success, What Children and Teens Need to Succeed, Parents Engaging for Academic Success, and Graduation.

In this district, a train the trainers workshop is used to teach staff and parents to act as facilitators. Each school has a training kit and materials, and there is district level support that can be accessed by schools. These trainings happen several times throughout the year.

This curriculum strongly contributes to fostering partnering between schools and families. It equips families with tools to support student achievement and student social emotional development. It helps families to establish the type of home positive home learning environment with discipline, expectations, and routines. Additionally, it provides the tools for parents to take on many roles such as supporters of learning, encouragers of identity, advocates for learning opportunities, models of lifelong enthusiasm for education, and collaborators with school staff and community

Denver Public Schools has heard very positive feedback from participants regarding this program, as parents share what an impact it is having on their families. They state that their children are improving in both academics and attendance, and parents who go through this training are becoming more involved in committees and activities, and are the most consistent participants in events such as forums and trainings.

Personal Learning Profiles

Falcon Middle School

Peyton, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

One of the most powerful ways to help students succeed is to actively involve them in their educational experience. At Falcon Middle School, students who are in special education are involved in their services through Personal Learning Profiles. These profiles encourage students to act as their own advocates and understand their services and learning needs. In addition, the project aligns with goals of the Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP).

Students develop these profiles over several months in collaboration with their special education teachers and parents. PowerPoint presentations of approximately 20 slides are created that highlight their own personal learning profiles, and describe their strengths, areas of need, how they best learn, and extracurricular activities. Parents contribute to the project by sending photos that can be used.

Upon completion, students present their projects during their transition IEP meetings. A rubric is used in order to assess how well rounded the presentation is. From the evaluation, important information is also gained for teachers in regards to how to assist with technology and oral presentation skills.

This practice helps students grow by reinforcing skills necessary in our current world, as well as emphasizing self-determination for the students. Students use technology to create and share their presentations, using literacy skills to present their information, and self-advocating by presenting information on themselves.

Restorative Re-Entry Conferences

Manitou Springs School District
Manitou Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

When considering student discipline such as detention or suspension, it can be easy to get caught up in the reasons as to why a student was disciplined. In the Manitou Springs School District, however, the focus has shifted from the negative to examining the systems of support that high school students need in order to be successful.

Prior to re-entering school, a student who is out of school on a “time-out” engages in a re-entry conference with his or her parents/guardians, the assistant principal, Director of Partners for Healthy Choices, the student’s counselor, and any other relevant persons (i.e. friend of the parents, community member). The intent of this meeting is to focus on restoring any harm that has resulted from the student’s action, and restoring relationships.

The effectiveness of the conferences is assessed on a case-by-case basis. In the beginning, some conference attendees find it difficult to work the meeting into their busy schedules. However, once the meeting begins, everyone is able to see the full support of the team and understand that the intervention is meant to provide support for the students *and* the family, in and out of school. In addition, students report that they feel heard and respected, and that the school provides them support even in challenging circumstances.

These conferences maintain a strengths-based approach rather than one focused on deficit, and provide clearer expectations for students from the adults in their lives. Manitou Springs School District believes that their culture of restorative practices to guide discipline has a greater potential for continued student engagement, as opposed to punitive ones. In fact, Manitou Springs High School has high graduation rates and low dropout rates, and while this is not due solely to the restorative culture, the leaderships believe that it is a strong contributor.

The Essential Element is You!

Ignacio School District

Ignacio, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

When working with families of diverse backgrounds in the schools, it can be very powerful to tailor partnering activities to the needs of each group. In the Ignacio School District, one way that this is done is through *The Essential Element is You! Native American Parent/Family Engagement Conference*. The goal of this conference is to bring more Native American parents into the school and engage them in school activities.

This day-long conference, while spearheaded by the Ignacio School District, targets several different districts who have families of Native American background. It is also supported by several Native American tribes, and multiple community and government organizations. Families are encouraged to bring their children, and all conference expenses are covered.

Nationally known Native American leaders are invited to attend as keynote speakers. Breakout sessions are also planned for the day. Topics include information about college and career preparation, data-based decision-making, and challenges to secondary education for Native American students. All sessions are presented by experts in their fields.

This conference is important as it allows speakers to share what is happening in the school districts with families, resulting in families being better informed and able to take more active roles as advocates in their students' educations. The conference also provides families with the opportunity to share any concerns that they have.

In order to examine the success of the conference, evaluation forms were provided for every session. The team learns a great amount of information from these evaluations, and uses it going forward for future conferences.

District Advisory Board

Poudre School District

Fort Collins, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Family involvement in school processes is critical to forming lasting partnerships, and it is important that families are able to give their input to district-level leaders. In the Poudre School District (PSD), a District Advisory Board (DAB) has been established to provide families with this opportunity, and to keep them apprised of happenings in the district.

The DAB was established to represent the interests of current students and their families, and to communicate these with school and district leadership. It is made up of one primary and one alternative representative from each school. Preference is given to parents with children in the school to act as the representatives. Representatives can volunteer or be chosen by the school principal. Four representatives from the community are also recruited to serve on the DAB. In addition to the regular monthly meetings, the DAB has subcommittees that meet separately on specific topics.

A representative from the Board of Education acts as a liaison between the DAB and the PSD Board of Education. The Chair of the DAB and Chair-Elect meet every month with the district Superintendent or representative and the liaison in order to plan and evaluate meetings, and to determine topics for future DAB meetings.

For other districts interested in beginning this type of board, DAB representatives recommend that families, community members, and school leadership be involved in the planning and implementation. There should be clear communication systems established, bylaws created, regular meetings set up, and a district policy written to ensure the continual existence of the board.

This type of a project is critical for partnerships, as many of the topics that the DAB examines and provides feedback on relate directly to how the district operates, and how the system functions to support student outcomes. Feedback from the DAB is considered by the Board of Education when making decisions that will influence students, families, and the community.

Family Inspired Resources for Education

De Beque School District
De Beque, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The De Beque School District serves a fairly small population of students and families in a small rural community. However, they still understand the critical part that families play in education and the importance of partnering between families and schools.

The goal of their increased family-school partnering practices is to work collaboratively to create an environment of empowerment, growth, and positivism. This includes implementation of a staff-developed, data-based family involvement plan which aids students, their families, and teachers in their professional practices. It also includes the use of a liaison that works with both families and schools.

Specific time is dedicated during teacher collaboration days for the liaison to share data about the importance of family-school partnering, as well as for parent involvement committees to meet. Staff activities focused on family involvement are also planned during this time. The staff developed a 'Parent Involvement Expectations Guide' for each staff member to use with notes on best practices.

These practices have also influenced the community. The program has shifted the community's perspective of the school, encouraging partnerships between school and community. The district reports that the team approach to education has been nothing but positive for the district and the community's interwoven relationships.

The district will continue their work on partnerships, as their focus for next year will be based on a survey that families and the community completed. Committees from the teacher collaboration days each developed a focus for next year in relation to their standards and the needs of the families.

Teachers have shared success stories, and have expressed a feeling of support and a shift into a team-like atmosphere. This new work shows a positive change in mood and support with parents, a shift to a more welcoming and engaging environment with shared respect and knowledge.

Family Liaison Support Program

Denver Public Schools
Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Having family liaisons is an important way to engage families in schools, and providing continual support for these liaisons is equally as important for sustainability. The goal of Denver Public Schools Family Liaison Support Program is to provide opportunities for educators to increase family partnering at the school level.

In order to do this, workshops, training, and coaching is provided for family liaisons to increase their knowledge of best practices in partnering. By doing this, liaisons can educate, engage, and empower the whole school community to support student success. While liaisons – currently there are 55 – are hired by school principals, the district Office of Family and Community Engagement partners with the schools to provide tools, knowledge, and skills to work with families. Additionally, a Professional Learning Group exists that many liaisons attend, which allows for networking, collaboration, and small group work.

Providing support to these liaisons is critical in regards to using partnering to support student outcomes. The liaisons have been invaluable in increasing family partnerships, which in turn can increase student achievement and improve attendance. Parents have become active partners who are able to leverage resources, attend trainings and district activities, and be joint decisions makers.

To assess the success of the support program, the district both tracks attendance at each event and administers short surveys to the liaisons at the conclusion. Overall, the liaisons have expressed satisfaction with the information and support that they are receiving. Even more importantly, liaisons have stated that they feel excited about creating connections with the other liaisons. These connections allow them to share their experiences, learn new information and skills, which can help them to increase and strengthen parent partnerships in their school communities.

Including School Goals in a Grant Process

Crest View Elementary School
Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Multiple school teams include teacher and family representatives. Yet, often these teams struggle to work together, even though they work toward the same goal of student success. Crest View Elementary School has found a unique way for school-level organizations to partner by linking grant applications to school improvement goals.

Crest View's Parent Teacher Organization, ReachOut Crest View, funds enrichment grants for teachers throughout the school year. In previous years, these grant applications did not have any connection to the goals of the school's Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) or School Accountability Committee (SAC).

In recent years, however, the school Principal and grants committee of ReachOut Crest View implemented a new requirement for grant applications – they now must include a link to either one of the major improvement strategies from the UIP or a SAC goal. The Principal informed all teachers at the school of this new requirement.

By implementing this change, the grant activities that are funded now directly support the goals of the school. These goals are often related to student achievement, and so these grants are now able to more directly support improvement in student outcomes. While this practice hasn't been formally evaluated, connecting the grant funds and the goals of the school has given the teachers a more clear focus for application. The grant committee also now has a clearer and defensible focus when making their selections.

Crest View has been able to sustain this practice through strong principal support and whole staff buy-in. This practice is an excellent example of how a school's Parent Teacher Organization can work in conjunction with the School Accountability Committee.

Parent and Family Partnerships

Action Design Team

Boulder Valley School District
Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

To implement sustainable and comprehensive family-school partnering practices across a school district, it is beneficial for leadership to create a plan to guide and unify efforts. In the Boulder Valley School District (BVSD), the Parent and Family Partnerships Action Design Team was responsible for creating their comprehensive strategic plan, which is part of a larger overall strategic plan.

Parent and Family Partnerships was one of 17 design teams to provide feedback to the district. It was then chosen as one of six priority areas to include on the district's strategic plan for the 2015-16 school year.

The process to create the partnerships strategic plan lasted over 4 months, and involved community, staff, and parents. The team created a draft, which was then approved by the Steering Committee and Executive Committee. The design team drafted the plan in order to provide guidelines for several areas, including engaging families of diverse backgrounds, consulting and collaborating with families in school planning, providing training for families, and evaluating the effectiveness of engagement strategies. Within the plan were key actions and performance indicators that could be referenced.

In addition to providing feedback for the BVSD strategic plan, the Action Design Team also recommended the district hire a Director of Family Partnerships, a position which was created and filled over the summer of 2015. This full time position provides district-level leadership and director facilitation of schools to ensure the implementation of a comprehensive and sustainable partnership structure for student success.

Having this focused strategic plan allows Boulder Valley School District to unify their partnering efforts across the district. By doing so, they can help to improve student achievement, homework completion, attendance, and student retention.

Parent Teacher Leadership

Teams

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

When engaging in family-school partnering throughout a district, it can be beneficial to have both informal and formal, long-term programs to support efforts. In Denver Public Schools, Parent Teacher Leadership Teams have been created in order to maintain a sustainable family engagement structure that is focused specifically on increasing student achievement.

The goals of this particular program are to increase parent engagement and establish a district culture of shared responsibility between school and home for increasing student outcomes. The groups use self-assessment data to target where students may need more support, and develop engagement plans that are aligned to district academic goals. They work to understand how students are performing and determine ways that achievement can be increased while also engaging families.

The Parent Teacher Leadership Teams include parents/guardians and staff from each school that work together; they typically include a school leader, one teacher from each grade level, and two parents or guardians from each grade. These groups meet once per month, and both teachers and families have duties for which they are responsible.

Having these groups ensures that a family partnering structure is in place that aligns with student achievement. These groups are also responsible for Academic Standards Nights, when teachers explain Academic Standards and expectations to families of students in their classrooms, which support involvement in school as well as student learning at home.

The district has seen a significant increase in the number of family members that attend events. Additionally, the entire staff in the schools receives professional development on engaging culturally, linguistically, and socio-economically diverse families, and they are able to develop a common understanding about parent engagement and the impact that partnering has on achievement.

While formal evaluation has not yet been done on these groups, Denver Public Schools see the teams as a wonderful way to set an expectation of shared responsibility in the schools.

Site Based Management Council

Traut Core Knowledge School
Fort Collins, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Sharing decision-making power between parents and families and school personnel is an important way to foster the joint responsibility needed for positive partnerships. At the Traut Core Knowledge School, this shared joint decision making can be seen on the Site Based Management Council, which is the decision making body of the school. The fourteen member Council is split evenly between the Parent Advisory Board and the Teacher Advisory Board. The parent representatives are elected by the parents in the school, and the school's charter sets out the requirements and duties of the position.

Traut has five guiding pillars that they operate under as a school, one of which is the Parent Partnership Pillar. This pillar is the foundation for the Council, and represents a true shared and equal governance structure, which is very unique in the structure of schools. The Council was initiated when the school was established, and has continued since. In addition to the Council, Traut emphasizes supporting families' success, as evidenced by their mentoring program in which families are led step by step through the important aspects of the school.

The school believes that empowering families in this way to be an equal partner in decision-making results in an incredible level of commitment. This commitment means that families often dedicate their time and resources in vast amounts. Staff members are also equally committed, and consistently give their time and resources, above and beyond what is expected. This results in a true, joint partnership in which all parties are contributing to the school and the community.

For other schools that would like to achieve this type of equality, those involved should be aware that the hardest part is the willingness of the school community to relinquish power. However, Traut leadership notes that as their history indicates the results can be very successful, and there is no limit to what they can accomplish when this power is shared and decision-making is truly a partnering process!

Thought Partner Groups

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Including families in brainstorming ways to achieve specific goals is a powerful way in which families can partner with schools in decision-making. Denver Public Schools uses their Thought Partner Groups to bring together family and community members to make important district decisions.

To begin, the challenge that the district is facing is defined. Then, the role of the Thought Partner Groups is defined. This includes very specific deliverables to ensure that the district is aligned with community participants, and to empower participants to work within these charges and to complete the deliverables. The expectations are best created between stakeholders inside and outside the district.

Thought Partner Groups typically have 15-20 participants, which includes parents of children whose grade level matches that of the project goals. Depending on the goals of the group, it can either be a specific school level meeting or more regional. Meetings begin with an orientation towards the work and deliverables and the current issue. Education around specific school matters that will affect the work is given (for instance, around the budget, if it is a monetary issue). Education on engaging other members of the school community and pros and cons of specific proposals put forward by the district are also presented.

While these groups encourage engagement from family and community members in regards to making important district decisions, there are also some challenges to implementation. Materials should be parent-friendly, the student voice should be incorporated in the process, and a variety of voices should be acknowledged. It is also important to honor school legacy and community ties to school, and to work to appropriately balance the interests of parents versus what is best for the community overall.

The district currently uses participant survey, staff survey, and board of education survey to evaluate the Thought Partner Groups' process, and is working on strengthening their assessment. They believe that these groups are significant because they are linked to evaluating new high-quality programs for students, which are linked to higher student outcomes. Additionally, the groups empower community and family stakeholders with the tools necessary to be crucial partners in the making of important decisions for the schools.

"CARnival" of Arts Family Night

Wamsley Elementary School

Rifle, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Holding events in the community can be a great way to engage students, families, educators, and community members all at one time. At Wamsley Elementary School, a family arts night was held at a local car dealership that helped to involve the community in a school event. The goal of the event was to engage families in a non-threatening environment, foster relationships with the community, celebrate the arts at Wamsley, and support math and reading skills.

The CARnival had many activities developed by school grade level teams, such as ring toss and cup stacking. When possible, math skills were incorporated into the games. Student artwork was also displayed throughout the event, and there were student musical presentations. Grade level art awards were given out, with students receiving scholarships from the car dealership. School staff and the PTA planned the CARnival, and grade level teachers split up the responsibilities, including planning logistics and soliciting prizes from the community.

This event helped support the idea that learning can happen anywhere, not just in school, and that families can always be a part of that learning. CARnival is seen as a great way to engage every student and family, to encourage their participation in school, and to form partnerships with them. By engaging parents with their child in a laid back and fun environment, and interacting with the teachers, the school hoped to involve those parents at a higher level in their child's education.

Wamsley staff believe that advertising, planning, and distributing leadership were all critical when planning this event, and recommend this type of an approach for any other school considering an event such as this one. Continual communication that began early with families about the event was one of the most important factors in order to ensure that families could attend the event.



One of the most important goals of family-school partnering is working together to support student learning. However, offering support for the adults in the families is also an important piece to partnering that has an impact indirectly on the students. In order to offer this adult-focused support, Denver Public Schools has created the Center for Family Opportunity.

The goal of the Center for Family Opportunity is to help increase the self-sufficiency of adults in the school community by offering free services. These services include classes in career development and financial literacy, access to legal services, assistance with tax preparation, and educational opportunities. By collaborating with the community, the Center supports families by providing services that foster self-sufficiency and thus strengthen the families overall.

Denver Public Schools modeled their Center after a national model – centralizing best in the field resources at one location. Families can access multiple services in one spot, making it much easier for them. In addition to targeting adults with children in schools, the Center is open to any adult in the community, and courses are offered free of cost. The Center solicits feedback from participants in order to make sure that resources are meeting identified needs.

Offering these types of services helps to support family-school partnering efforts and student achievement. Adults who are active participants are more likely to attain employment, increase household income and decrease the likelihood of unplanned, disruptive moves. These outcomes in turn provide students with increased stability. Additionally, participating in educational opportunities helps parents to better support their children academically, and demonstrates their commitment and support of education.

Data gathered by the district indicates that they are reaching adults who may not otherwise be able to access these types of services. Only 16% of participants hold full-time employment, and about half report having not obtained a high school diploma. Additionally, half of the participants receive more than one service at the Center. This program is working to strengthen both individual members the school community, and the community as a whole.

Check and Connect

Thompson School District

Loveland, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Offering students tangible, hands-on tools to attaining academic and behavior success can be a very important way to offer support. In the Thompson School District, the Check and Connect program is one way that these tangible supports are offered. Implementing this program has led to great improvements in reducing truancy in the district.

Check and Connect works to build mutual trust and open communication which is developed through a long-term commitment focused on student success. The program has four components: enhancing family-school communication and home support for learning, systematic monitoring, individualized intervention, and mentoring. A focus is placed on problem solving and resolving conflict constructively.

In Thompson, Check and Connect has been targeting students in grades 6th-12th who are referred by staff as at risk for truancy or suspension/expulsion issues. Volunteer community members are trained and then paired with these students. Each volunteer obtains 2 student-mentees and meets with them in school once per week. Supervision from the district-level provides continuity and consistency for the program.

After only one year of implementation, the district reports that their students are showing increases in attendance and academic achievement. Equally as important, there have been increases in engagement from both students and families. The district discovered that there was no change in behavior due to the fact that the volunteer mentors did not feel comfortable problem solving with students in this area. To address this, further emphasis was placed on behavioral supports training. District staff hope to see gains in behavior next year.

Families are an important part of the Check and Connect program. Procedures to connect are targeted to both students and families. At the end of the school year, mentors, students, and their families are all invited to attend a potluck to discuss the year and give feedback, and also to celebrate success.

Community Collaboration for Student Success

HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-op
Englewood, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Though traditional education involves students attending schools and families partnering with these educators, family-school partnering can also be achieved in non-traditional educational settings, such as blended learning at HOPE Online Learning Academy Co-op. It is designed to provide a blended learning model through a community-directed partnership.

The mission of HOPE is to provide student-focused education through blended learning for students who typically are underrepresented in online learning due to access issues. HOPE works to create partnerships with community learning centers to provide small learning environments that represent community voice. Their system is intended to build capacity by coaching educators within their communities rather than relying on bringing people in from the outside.

A large part of HOPE's work is ensuring that families remain connected to learning. Their programming supports families and children in setting goals and achieving their academic potential within learning centers that are run by community groups. The staff members employed by the community groups are familiar with their communities, can relate and communicate with parents, and have a passion for working with their local students.

HOPE's methods appear to result in improved performance both academically and in regards to family engagement, as they report small but significant gains for their consistent students. They show improved outcomes in academic achievement and growth, as well as increased reading skills. They also report improved student engagement for school events and activities, and increasing re-enrollment rates.

While HOPE is not a traditional school setting, they still maintain the importance of working with families to build relationships in order to support student learning and outcomes.

Community Resources

Directories

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

In partnering with families, even programs that may seem small can have an important impact on relationships. One program like this in Denver Public Schools is the collection of Community Resources Directories. The goal of these directories is to ensure that families have access to information about resources throughout the city. These resources are varied, from supporting student learning to providing families with their basic needs. The directories provide families with tools to navigate systems outside of the schools to help foster self-sufficiency and help obtain academic, social, and economic support.

These guides are sent by the Office of Family and Community Engagement, and are done so both in hard and digital copies. The district also utilizes online platform to host the information. One challenge to these guides is ensuring that the information (hours, contact) is up to date. The district uses school volunteers to maintain this information.

While these guides are not an extremely involved program, they are very important tools for empowering parents to be informed of the resources that they can access, and allows families to self-advocate. This is especially important for many of the families who face economic or social challenges to attending school – having access to these resources help families to overcome said challenges and get the assistance needed.

For other districts who are considering this type of a program, Denver Public Schools offers several suggestions. First, they recommend checking to see if there is any existing material already in place in the community that could be built upon. They suggest creating a template that is easy to understand and provides all pertinent information for an organization. Becoming familiar with non-profits, businesses, and faith-based organizations around the community is important, as is establishing relationships with leaders of these organizations. Maintaining the guides as “live” documents also allows for information to be updated frequently. Finally, the district recommends having hard copies for those families who may not have computer access.

Community Service Organization Partnership Program

Platte Canyon School District
Bailey, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

While families and school educators and leaders are essential for partnering, it is important that a third group not be forgotten as a critical component to building these partnerships – community members and organizations. Platte Canyon School District sees the importance of these parties and supports their engagement through the Community Service Organization Partnership Program.

In the Platte Canyon District, there are currently 15 partnerships established with local community organizations. These partnerships produce programs that directly benefit students and their families. One partnership, with the Platte Canyon Area Chamber of Commerce, has resulted in a scholarship for students, an adult education program, and a monthly newsletter for the school district. A second partnership with the Conifer Rotary Club has resulted in a literacy intervention and a program to give food to families who do not have enough. And a third partnership with the Bailey Outdoor Education and Recreation Association has resulted in a Frisbee Golf course and a newly developed trail system on formerly unused property, both utilized by the school and the community.

The community partnerships are linked to learning, building the capacity of families and community organizations, and building relationships among students, families, schools and communities. These partnerships lead to increased self-confidence while engaging students, parents and community members. They are linked to Colorado Academic Standards, and are evaluated by the district on an annual basis.

These programs help support students, families, and the school district in many different areas, and are very important when considering engaging community stakeholders and having them as an invested part of the school system.

High School Internship Program

Platte Canyon School District
Bailey, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

High school students often face tough decisions when considering their futures, including whether or not to attend college, what career path to pursue, and which skills to develop. Platte Canyon School District's High School Internship Program is intended to help students in making these decisions by offering job shadowing and internships with professionals in the community. The program is also intended to enhance skills and knowledge of all parties involved to foster effective partnerships that support student achievement and improvement of the school district.

Currently, 22 students are a part of this program. Job shadowing and internships are scheduled for days that the students are not in school, in order to increase learning outside of the typical school year. Examples of internships include placement with a former councilwoman who now works in education leadership and politics, and placement with a veterinarian.

This program is important because it builds human, social, and intellectual capital of the participating students. The internships include a focus on increasing the ability of community partners and families to build partnerships and connections. Students increase their self-awareness while engaging in a different type of learning. The internships are linked to the Colorado Academic Standards in Science, Language Arts, Math, and Social Studies.

For those considering this program, Platte Canyon District suggests that the person coordinating the internship program work closely with the high school counselor. In order to attract mentors with whom to place students, it is suggested that a letter be written to the professional with a follow-up phone call. Platte Canyon was very encouraged by the fact that almost all the professionals contacted were eager to work with students, which is important when considering building relationships between schools, families, and the community.

Pen Pal Service Learning Project

Lewis Palmer Middle School
Monument, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

In our current society, technology is often the most used form of communication. Many young students have never written or received a personal letter, and may be unsure of how to do so to communicate with their communities. At Lewis Palmer Middle School, this is one of the motivations of the Pen Pal Service Learning Project.

In this project, 7th grade students are paired with pen pals in the community, often senior citizens. Parents give permission for students to participate, and students are paired at the beginning of the school year. Time usually used for study hall is dedicated to this project instead, with students learning about writing, proofing, editing, and reciprocal communication skills. Letters are exchanged throughout the school year, and the school hosts a reception at the end of the year in order for pen pals to meet in person.

There are many goals addressed by this project, both for the students individually and for the larger community. Students are connected to the community, are able to reach out to people using a different mode of communication, and able to work through the discomfort of forming a relationship with someone they do not know. For community members, they are able to form a relationship with the school system, and to create a connection with a middle school student who they may see as difficult to reach. Additionally, the community member may become a mentor to the students. Many aspects of family-school-community partnering are supported by this initiative, including: creating a welcoming climate, developing personal relationships, facilitating connections among families, and connecting the school with community resources.

Throughout the year, teachers debrief on the process and identify what is going well and where improvements may be warranted. Students and community members are also able to offer their feedback on the project, and this information is shared with school administration.

The pen pal project has received wonderful feedback – over 90% positive. Students report that this type of communication helps them to develop relationships different than others that they have. The community members feel more connected to the school system, and often become part of the students' and their families' lives. Students also report that they learn to be more open in meeting people who they may not think they have anything in common with, which can translate to being more accepting to their classmates.

School on the Rise Dinner & Veteran's Day Concert

Ignacio School District
Ignacio, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

History is an important subject for students to learn in order to become invested members of their communities. Ignacio School District believes that learning history in a hands-on fashion can often help students to understand the subject more fully. This is one of the reasons for their annual Schools on the Rise Dinner and Veteran's Day Concert.

For the past four years, the Ignacio District has been hosting this event, which is open to all members of the community and is widely attended – often more than 50% of the town is present! The planning for the event is a true collaboration and involves students, district staff, teachers, and food service staff. The cost of the event is covered by the school district in order to make sure that all community members can attend.

Veterans are specially invited to the event and a concert of patriotic music is put on in order to honor these esteemed guests. Having veterans as guests helps students to learn to respect the veterans, their experiences, and their sacrifices. This encourages students to be better citizens.

While veterans are special guests of this event, all members of the community are also invited and welcomed. Community members are asked to provide any input or concerns that they may have regarding the school district. The casual and family-friendly environment allows people to express their thoughts openly.

During the first year of this event, community members were asked to answer questions on motivating students, engaging families, and meeting expectations. This information was put together and made into a booklet that was distributed in the community. It also became the foundation for the continued improvements in the school district in the areas of communication, accountability, parent engagement, attendance, and expectations.

Each year, the current status of the school district in these areas is presented, along with goals for the future. Some of the goals that have emerged include district wide family nights, the development of student friendly rubrics, and continuing positive rewards and incentives for students.

The Schools on the Rise Dinner and Veteran's Day Concert is a great way to connect with all members of the community and form true family-school-community partnerships, while also collecting and using feedback to improve the work of the school district.

Scientific Explorations Program

Platte Canyon School District
Bailey, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

In order to engage students and families in particular academic subjects, it can be beneficial to provide more hands-on learning and experiences. In the Platte Canyon School District, elementary students are able to experience this type of learning through the Scientific Explorations Program. This program brings scientifically knowledgeable high school students and local science professionals, who are often also parents of students, into the elementary schools to help teach students in a different way.

These scientific explorations are based in the Colorado Academic Science Standards, and each exploration is a part of the district's science curriculum map. One example of an exploration was the dissection of bovine eyes under the guidance of a local eye doctor. Another exploration was an anatomy and physiology day led by ten high school students and their AP Science teacher. These explorations are intended to be hands-on and interactive for the students. Over the years, the program has evolved to be aligned with school and district achievement goals, and to connect families to the teaching and learning goals of students.

Overall, the program is linked to learning, building relationships, and encourages the participation of families. The explorations focus on building the capacity of families and professionals in the community to engage in partnerships, and connect and network. Students are able to learning subjects in a more in-depth fashion, and high school students who are teaching develop further self-confidence. Each exploration is evaluated annually to measure effectiveness and to work to improve the practice.

The district has found the explorations to be extremely effective for *both* elementary school students and high school students who are teaching. For other schools thinking of implementing this type of project, the district recommends starting with one parent/exploration to get the ball rolling. The children love to have their families come to visit and teach, and many of the best explorations come from parents.