

Parent Panel  
Louisville Middle School  
Louisville, CO



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education



The vision around hosting a professional learning session in which staff could learn from a panel of Latino parents was born from an innate desire for BVSD professionals to understand the perspective of families. BVSD staff want to push forward for all families and to do so, staff recognize the need to know families' stories and desires.

The Families and Educators Together (FET) co-chairs identified four parents from the team that were interested in participating on the panel. They realized that due to parent work schedules it would not be possible for the participants to join the PD session in person, so one of the FET leaders interviewed each parent and wove the clips together into a single recording. Staff watched the virtual panel in a professional learning session in early April and shared their reflections both verbally and in writing. After viewing the panel, the FET leaders and another colleague led a brief training on implementing the TalkingPoints app to enhance communication between the staff and families.

The parents on the panel spoke about their experiences at school and both positive strides and changes that were still needed to create a stronger bridge between the school and Latino families. For instance, one mother said, "We have a lot of work to continue to do regarding communication. Some teachers are still sending emails in English. I think that is a way in which we could improve as a school." This dovetailed nicely into the second part of the PD which was focused on training staff around using the app TalkingPoints, which translates text messages between staff and families. As a father on the panel put it, "There is a tension that exists between us, and the tension is language. But when that breaks down and we find each other more, it's great."

After the staff watched the parent panel, the teacher leader asked them to reflect in writing on what they noticed, what surprised them, what they already are doing in their teaching practice that is positively reinforced, and what they might consider adding or changing based on the thoughts of the panelists. It was clear that the staff had taken away several insights on both how to better connect with families and how to improve their teaching. Staff mentioned, "I can be better at communicating with all families" and needing to "honor diversity among the Latino community."

The power and impact of the panel was reflected in the depth and breadth of insights shared by staff after viewing the panel and the questions they posed to ask families at future FET gatherings, such as as, "How could you feel more connected to non-Spanish speaking staff?" and "Do your students feel like they are a part of our school and community? Or do they feel like observers/outside?" The practice was high level and pushed the staff's thinking forward. A problem of practice, however, continues to be engaging all families of students- especially those where connection is most needed in order to foster belonging.

To replicate this practice, you will need champions of this work who have a passion for engaging families in partnership work. Persistence is key as families need to know they are safe, there is mutual trust and respect, and that we are here for them. In reflecting on the parent panel and the steps taken earlier in the year to bring forth parent voices, the school's principal shared, "Before FET started, we saw this glaring need to connect with more families. For me, it has been very meaningful to be in the room to hear parents' stories, see how much diversity we have in our Spanish-speaking community, and feel connected in an authentic way."