

Clay Workshop

Poudre School District

Fort Collins, CO



Family Liaisons in Poudre School District (PSD) schools continually work to improve home-school communications for English Language Learners. Pre-pandemic, this included once a month in person meetings for parents to learn about different topics to help them navigate the school system and support their child’s learning. This year, Latinx families were overwhelmed with online learning and the stressors that came along with the pandemic, particularly mental health. The goal of this workshop was to provide a space for families and students to practice reading and listening comprehension. Families and students demonstrated their understanding of each story through clay art activities, which also helped to relax the mind and promote well-being.

Elementary and secondary Family Engagement Specialists partnered with Poudre River Library District’s bilingual community outreach workers to contract with an artist in Guadalajara, Mexico, “Memo Plastilina,” to teach a story/clay workshop. Having an authentic Mexican artist host the workshop was a highlight for many families.

Families received a registration link through School Messenger to attend the event. The day before the workshop, an email was sent to all participants with the link to the virtual class. Registration was closed a week before class, so the team had time to get the supplies to the school sites for students to take home.

During the workshop, students listened to a Spanish reading of the story *La Fortuna de Berta*, written by Lourdez Gutierrez and illustrated by Memo Plastilina. After the story, students used clay to create their own version of Berta the chicken. The students were completely enthralled with the clay and their creations. As Memo was showing the steps with the clay, he talked about Berta and asked them questions about the book. Talking to children about the books they read is one of the best ways to support literacy, auditory and oral development, and sharing cultural and linguistic wealth within the family. This activity encouraged students and families to practice both critical thinking and creativity.

Family Liaisons reported that parents were very happy and satisfied with the clay workshop; they really liked that it was hands on and kept the students engaged; they immediately asked when the next one would be! One of PDS’s family engagement leaders commented that it was amazing to see all the different variations of Bertha the students created. The students also said how much they enjoyed the experience.

The family engagement specialist’s advice to those wanting to implement this program would be give yourself time to purchase the supplies and get them together to send out to families. Another consideration would be to ensure all students have access to a laptop.