

# Youth Equity Council

## Boulder Valley School District

### Boulder, CO



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

The Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) Youth Equity Council (YEC) formed in February 2021 to expand the conversation around equity. While BVSD has long recognized that to achieve excellence for every student, they must have a steadfast commitment to equity, student voice was largely missing from the conversation. Recognizing the potential of youth when given agency and viewed through an asset-based lens, co-founders, Amy Nelson, BVSD Coordinator of Equity and Community Engagement, Charla Agnoletti, CU Boulder’s Public Achievement (PA) Program Director, and Soraya Latiff, CU Boulder’s PA Assistant Director, launched the council to bring youth voice into the conversation.

Over 300 students applied to be a part of the YEC. Members were selected through an application process, in which they provided their demographics, described an inequity they had experienced within the school system, and their motivation for wanting to join the council. Through this process, 66 students were selected to be members, representing every middle and high school across the district. Students on the council are diverse across many intersecting identities. The selected students formed three equity issue teams: Student Rights, Student Resources, and Students for Anti-Racism.

During the pandemic, students met virtually, bi-monthly. The council began with two leadership training sessions focused on identity, youth organizing, and community-based research. Through continued participation in YEC meetings, students began to develop a sense of belonging and purpose in their K-12 education experience, a sense of their ability to contribute to change, as well as their ability to build youth-adult partnerships for educational equity. Students worked to address equity issues they identified while collaborating with district leadership, the district Equity Council, and community organizations. To date, the YEC presented to the superintendent and his cabinet and the Board of Education, provided feedback on the Boulder Police Master Plan and on BVSD’s School Resource Officer resolution, presented to the larger Equity Council on curricular representation, and supported an elementary class working on an equity project.



The YEC structured both formal and informal evaluations weekly that included Google Forms at the end of each session in addition to verbal and written feedback during each session. This consistent evaluation with participants allowed the facilitators to ensure students were connected to the content, the community, and felt their voices were being heard in the process. Youth shared anecdotally that the ability to provide feedback through the formal evaluation at the end of each session affirmed their agency and leadership to guide the direction and content of the council efforts. Additionally, YEC students were able to gather in person for the first time in June 2021 and were joined by many members of the district leadership team, the Board of Education, and their families. The YEC will continue next school year.

The YEC advises any district wanting to start a Youth Equity Council to ensure they are committed to not only hearing youth voice but, “[...] that people will take students and youth [voice] seriously” (Williams, YEC member). That requires establishing true youth-adult partnerships and leaning into the discomfort that often occurs for adults when youth critique education systems to improve them. Then, let the youth lead the way.