

Parent Coffee Chat

Holly Ridge Primary and Holly Hills Elementary School

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

During the 2018- 2019 school year the Holly Ridge and Holly Hills Elementary School (located in Cherry Creek School District) family liaison hosted an annual parent coffee chat. The goal is to create a warm and welcoming environment with the intent of encouraging a more inclusive school community for every family. In attendance are the school administration team and the mental health support staff. The Hollies (a collective term for both Holly Ridge and Holly Hills) have a growing number of families who come from diverse backgrounds. This coffee chat is a great way to connect families with school resources that are key to aiding in the success and development of every student.

During the morning of the coffee chat, the family liaison transforms the school library into a relaxed and inviting atmosphere. Before the event begins the administration team, mental health support staff, and the family liaison greet the families as they begin to take their seats. Local neighborhood businesses donate a light breakfast for families and staff to enjoy together. Both Spanish and Arabic interpreters are on hand for families who need interpretation.

After breakfast, staff share a 20-minute PowerPoint about school and community resources. The family liaison highlights the various food, clothing, and shelter resources available to help families have their physical needs met. The administrators and mental health team then share a little bit about themselves before discussing signs to look for in times of crisis. The mental health team also provide their hours of availability to continue any conversation that require a more discreet setting. This event is a positive way for parents and educators to connect in order to help build a strong foundation of support for the remainder of the school year.

After the coffee chat, the family engagement liaison met with the assistant principal to discuss what went well and what to improve for next time. One of the greatest challenges of the coffee chat was scheduling. Many of the families are single parents who work more than one job. Hollies' staff believe that offering a parent coffee chat in the morning as well as in the evening is a great way to communicate with more families in the future.

The Hollies' family engagement liaisons states: "If I could give another liaison advice about wanting to replicate this practice, I would say give yourself plenty of time to plan and try to communicate with teachers in order to find out more about your parent population. Building prior knowledge of your school population will help your school connect with families who are in desperate need of basic necessities such as food, clothing, shelter, and mental health support. A friendly face and effective communication are just a few things that we believe are key to developing a successful school year."