

Foothills PTA

Foothills Elementary School

Lakewood, CO



Foothills Elementary School is a Title I School nestled in a socioeconomically diverse neighborhood. The school represents families from five continents, speaking twelve different languages. The PTA and school community recognized that Foothills has had some ongoing challenges with recruiting, sustaining, and engaging diverse families from all walks of life. Staff and family leaders identified that the biggest challenge in getting families to attend school functions is childcare. Many Foothills families work more than one job and need childcare if they do have time to attend a PTA event/meeting. In the summer of 2021, a core family partnership planning team made the decision to seek out a grant centered on creating and advancing a more Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Foothills Elementary School PTA. This grant, offered through the Center of Family Engagement (National PTA Initiative), focused on recruiting, and involving families that are underrepresented in the Foothills PTA. Together the PTA Co-President and the Family Engagement/Diversity Liaison set forth on a mission to discover ways to encourage and support family involvement.

Foothills staff followed an action plan that the National PTA provided that included opportunities to participate in listening sessions alongside other Diversity/Equity/Inclusion (DEI) grantees. Through the facilitated listening sessions, staff were able to set goals, as well as reflect and learn how to tailor outreach, initiatives, and events to better serve the Foothills community. The first step in achieving their goal to develop a more active and diverse PTA community was to complete a DEI profile template. With this template, the team reflected on which ethnicities were under-represented on the PTA. Through the action plan template, team leaders determined that the PTA lacked the participation of Foothills' second most represented family population—Latino families. Staff used that data to reach out to families within the Latino community to determine what Foothills staff could be doing differently to engage families of this population.

Subsequently, staff contacted all 54 individual families by phone, email, and face-to-face when possible. Foothills' Family Engagement Liaison shared: "It was our desire to meet with our targeted families to discuss how we can encourage their participation and involvement in the PTA. It was essential that we gave families multiple means of opportunities for their voices to be heard." Alongside Foothills' principal, staff hosted two listening sessions (virtual and in-person) and an online family survey. Foothills' liaison continues: "It was important to us to ensure that families had several ways to participate to help us discover how our PTA can provide a more equitable landscape."

During the listening sessions, staff established a safe place, ensuring the conversations were confidential. Families were encouraged to speak from their own experiences and facilitators expressed that the goal of the sessions was to learn more about the preferred ways to engage in their children's school life. Facilitators reminded families that there is not one right way to engage with the school and that everyone cares about their children and that may look different for all families. Staff helped families to see that engagement takes many forms such as watching your child in a concert or a talent show, cheering them on during a sports game, helping them with homework, advocating for their needs and accommodations, volunteering at a school event, or attending a PTA meeting. Staff shared that they value families' thoughts and any personal experiences they may have had with the PTA, whether good or bad. Attendees also learned next steps to continue the conversation beyond the listening session. Ten families responded to the Online Family Survey, one family joined for the virtual listening session, and two families and community members joined the in-person listening session.

Essential Element 1—Create an Inclusive Culture

Standard 1—Welcoming All Families



The feedback these thirteen families provided was invaluable. Foothills’ liaison states: “We learned that using multiple platforms to reach families showed that we truly care about the families’ experiences and perspectives. Families appreciated having a safe place to voice their thoughts and concerns. Most importantly, we learned that ALL families want to engage in their child’s education in some way. This work allowed us to see that comprehensive communication is key.”

It is fundamentally important to provide a safe and welcoming environment for families which includes a judgement free place to share their thoughts and ideas in the decision-making process. Lastly, staff learned that EVERY family brings a gift, talent, and contribution to the Foothills PTA table. This is a value that the PTA will be mindful of moving forward while continuing our work to support Foothills students, staff, families, and community.

Foothills’ staff are looking forward to the next phase of their DEI, PTA journey. The family liaison shares: “It is our intent to move into the second phase of the DEI Grant process to provide families with flexible times to meet including during the school day, evening, remotely, and video recordings for families that cannot attend meetings. We will provide translation services, a light meal, and childcare to accommodate the varying needs of our families. We will conduct surveys and provide families with feedback forms to ensure that families can share power and their own personal insight in the decision-making process.”