

Summer Playdates

Ryan Elementary School

Lafayette, CO



The goal of hosting summer playdates for rising rhinos at Ryan Elementary was to build community, instill confidence, welcome families, create trust, and establish relationships between families and educators. Ryan Elementary is a neighborhood school located in Lafayette, Colorado. It is a STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) K-5. Ryan has a diverse socio-economic population, pulling students from a variety of neighborhoods in south Lafayette.

Summer playdates for rising rhinos (incoming kindergartners) started many years ago. Kindergarten teachers organize and host playdates for incoming kindergartners throughout the summer leading up to the start of the school year. Ryan’s rising rhinos and their families are given a schedule of the playdates for the summer. Teachers bring sunscreen, name tags, and sidewalk chalk as they meet their future students and their families.

Summer playdates are held at neighborhood parks that feed into Ryan. Teachers chose varying times to accommodate a variety of family schedules. In addition to hosting playdates at the park, teachers also have partnered with city entities for summer fun. An example of this is the Evening of Bedtime Stories at the Lafayette Public Library. It’s an evening of stories, crafts, and milk and cookies. The final playdate is a potluck BBQ. The teachers provide the hotdogs and families bring desserts and side dishes to share. Sometimes the side is a simple bag of chips or box of cookies. Sometimes people bring fruits or vegetables from their garden, dishes from their restaurants, or grandma's famous potato salad. It is a special time for families to showcase part of themselves and the group always end up with a feast to share.

Summer playdates are evaluated informally, primarily through conversations with families. Staff track attendance over the course of the summer, knowing that there are factors, such as work schedules, summer trips, and park location that impact a family’s ability to attend our playdates. At the start of the school year, staff have families complete a survey about kindergarten in general, and typically get very positive feedback about the summer playdate program.

Summer playdates are a simple way to build community and make the transition to school feel safe, welcoming, and exciting. One key element of the summer playdate program is going to parks in the neighborhoods that feed into the school. Additionally, if you have varying playdate meeting times it can accommodate various family schedules. Finally, having several playdates throughout the summer allows for families who are traveling, working, or with other activities the opportunity to participate. Relax and have fun getting to know your incoming students and families. Author Gina Greelee says it best, “when we establish human connections within the context of shared experience, we create community wherever we go.”