

Family & Educators Together Parent Leadership Summit

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



The Family and Educator Together (FET) teams are equity-centered teams, focused on strengthening trust-based, reciprocal relationships between school staff and underrepresented families. They engage in meaningful dialogue that centers the voices of family members in ways that help educators discover more effective approaches to strengthening family-school-community partnerships and leads to the co-design of transformative action projects that create a more inclusive, collaborative, and equitable

school community. For the first time since FET was launched six years ago, we convened Spanish-speaking parent leaders across our participating schools for a full-day summit on May 14, 2022. The gathering focused on supporting families in cultivating leadership strategies, sharing successes and insights from their teams, exploring how the district can create more just schools, and honoring their experiences as parent leaders. Boulder Valley School District's (BVSD) Coordinator of Family Partnerships partnered with Denys Vigil and Ere Juarez, leaders from CARE, a parent leadership and advocacy organization that has offered extensive training in the past to Spanish-speaking families about how to navigate the U.S. school system and know their rights as family members. It felt vital to have the event co-planned and co-facilitated by leaders that families know and trust.

The summit was centered on asking questions to parent leaders that helped everyone learn each other's successes and insights from their experiences on FET teams. Participants shared their team's action projects and answered questions about their positive and negative experiences within their children's schools, which we captured in writing and provided rich insights to share back with school teams and district leaders. They learned more about their rights as parents and examined data on achievement and opportunity gaps that consistently impact Latino students. In the afternoon, we held a World Café in which they discussed in small groups questions such as, "Why do Latino families sometimes feel silenced or invisible in our schools?" and "What are some concrete ways that we can make FET gatherings more meaningful for families?" Parent leaders also completed a detailed survey about their experiences in their children's schools and engaged in whole group conversations around next steps for their teams and the district as a whole to create more equitable schools. The summit concluded with each participant receiving a certificate and a plaque reminding them of the transformative power of their voices.

Participants completed a robust summit evaluation that provided detailed information about what they enjoyed about the summit as well as helpful ideas on how we can improve it in future years. Additionally, the co-facilitators spent time in the summer months crafting an extensive report that highlighted parent insights from the summit and related data. This report was shared at a gathering with district leadership as well as with leaders of FET teams in August. The most challenging part of putting together the summit were the hundred plus phone calls made to potential participants and unexpected construction near the school site where the summit was held.

The facilitation team's advice to others wanting to replicate this practice would be that it is worth all of the time invested because one day of insights can inform next steps for individual schools and the district for the entire next school year. Also, it is beneficial to provide participants with note catchers and use other approaches (i.e. chart papers) so that the wisdom of family members can be fully captured. As one parent shared as we discussed next steps to improve our schools' effort to support underrepresented families, "We can't give up; FET has what we need, and we are not alone."

Standard 5—Sharing Power

Essential Element 2—Build Trusting Relationships