



# Promising Partnerships Practices

---

# 2020

---

A collection of initiatives from districts and schools  
about working with families and community partners  
for student learning



State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

# Appreciation Dinner

## Greeley-Evans District 6

### Greeley, CO

Greeley-Evans' District 6 Family Center and the Greeley Family House work closely together to ensure that every student receives the services available to them. Building a relationship with the families and staff helps the Family Center better serve the community. The goal of District 6's Appreciation Dinner was to foster the relationship between district staff and the local shelter.

The Families in Transition (FiT) team coordinated the event with assistance from a staff member at the Family House. Family Center staff served the meal to the shelter staff and families residing in the shelter. District staff members donated all of the food. In the planning stages, the idea came about to give the children gifts since the event was taking place around the holidays. The Family Center collaborated with a private donor for gifts for all the children invited.



Once the Appreciation dinner was planned, the FiT team met with the Family House staff to finalize a date that would work for everyone. Flyers were made and distributed at the shelter and case managers personally invited each family. The day of the event, District 6 staff cooked the meal and prepared gifts for the families to be honored at the Family Center building.

The turnout was amazing and families had a great time coming together as a community with both Family Center and Shelter staff.

Along with enjoying dinner, families participated in activities, such as building gingerbread houses. Every child left with gifts for the holidays.

This event encouraged everyone to interact with each other and share conversations that helped build trust and let families know that the Family Center considers serving them a privilege. Families are more likely to remember that positive interaction with the staff and reach out when they need help.

The practice was evaluated by the success in turnout and by the ability for everyone present to interact with each other and begin a new relationship or build on established relationships. The biggest challenge was having only one private donor. In the future having more than one donor would be helpful. The FiT team offers three valuable pieces of advice: "Start planning early, recruit donors, and have fun!"



# Culture and Community Night

## Altura Elementary School

### Aurora, CO

Altura is a Title I school in Aurora with nearly 70% English Language Learners and 13 different languages. The goal of Culture and Community Night was to bring Altura's diverse community together to celebrate the school community's unique backgrounds through a night of art, music, games, and family fun activities.

The initial planning team consisted of the Family Liaison and the Art and Music teachers. As plans began to develop, the team brought in partnerships with the Denver Art Museum, Think 360 Arts, and the Learning Source Family Literacy program. The Museum led an art making station with different themed art from several countries, as well as donated a food budget for the event. Think 360 Arts provided Flamenco dancers to entertain at the end of the evening. The Family Literacy Program provided parents the time, space, and materials to bring their visions to life.



Families were front and center during the night, including helping with set-up and pick-up. They were given five weeks to create a "booth" representing their culture. Many families chose to make food, dress in customary clothing, bring art, jewelry, books, and activities from their culture. Staff ran games and activities from around the world and a photo booth showcasing the flags from the countries represented at the school.



People in attendance spent the first 90 minutes mingling at booths, eating, and learning about different cultures. During the last 30 minutes, everyone gathered in the gym and watched Flamenco dancers perform. Students made passports in Art class in the weeks leading up to the event so that they could have them stamped by the different countries they visited. Students learned music from around the world in Music class leading up to the event.

Culture and Community Night was Altura's highest attended event up until that point and set the tone for the rest of the year. Staff left several of the projects up for display for two weeks because students were so proud of what their families had done. "This made my heart happy", said one staff member.

The planning committee's advice to others wanting to replicate the event would be to start planning early to ensure families have plenty of time to prepare. Allot a materials budget and space for families to come and work on their projects. Invite community partners to come share in the festivities.



# Educational Gifts for Winter

## Kenton Elementary School

### Aurora, CO

Kenton Elementary School has a population of 538 students with 95 percent offered free or reduced lunch. School staff wanted to provide an educational gift for students. Secore, Kenton's community church, "adopted" 180 families to help the school meet their goal. This meant that children under 18 years of age would all receive a gift. In addition, Little Flower, a Catholic charity, helped with this goal by donating gift boxes to 50 students.

Each teacher nominated children who would benefit the most from this program. The school's family liaison helped families by completing the form with them, either in person or over the phone. The liaison then transferred this information to Secore via web submission. Little Flower requested permission letters for each individual student provided by the school's family liaison. Additionally, permission slips were requested so that pictures could be taken of students receiving their gifts.

Secore supported the effort by purchasing educational gifts for children ages 13 and under. Students who were 14 to 18 received a gift card of their favorite place. In addition, Little Flower helped by providing 50 gift boxes with school supplies, fun fact books, hygiene supplies, and a gift card to McDonalds. Secore and Little Flower brought so many gifts that it took 19 total volunteers to unload it all from a large trailer.

Volunteers continued their incredible work by calling parents and coordinating the gift pickup. Some of the children who walk home after school had an adult volunteer walk them home. Some children opened their gifts as soon as they received them, with their parents' permission.



The most difficult challenge Kenton staff experienced was trying to fit all the gifts in the family liaison's small office. The excitement quickly turned to worry. The trailer arrived near the end of the school day, and students who were in the office waiting to be picked up wanted to see what was inside the bags. Staff had to keep a close eye to make sure that students did not open the gifts awaiting distribution.

Despite these minor challenges, the project was a huge success! The students were extremely happy with their gifts. One parent commented, "My child is going to be happy to receive a gift from his school. Another parent added, "This winter break my child will continue to learn at home" due to the educational nature of the gift.

# Graduation Rose Ceremony

## Poudre High School

### Fort Collins, CO



Poudre High School has the highest Hispanic student enrollment in Poudre School District and hosts a newcomer program. The Graduation Rose Ceremony provides an opportunity for English Language Learners (ELL) students to be recognized for their accomplishments, as well as a space for graduating seniors to thank people in their lives that helped them achieve their academic goals. When this practice began a few years ago, attendance was fairly low. Fast forward to 2019 and it was standing room only in the high school's Events Center.

The ELD Department and counselors take the lead on planning and implementation. They begin by making a list of seniors who at some point in their K-12 education were an ELL. This team asks those students to write a 'thank you' note to any person—teacher, staff, or family member—who helped them achieve their graduation goal. The ELD Department makes a PowerPoint presentation with each student who is going to attend. The PowerPoint includes future plans, awards, recognition, clubs, activities, or anything else that relates to the students' high school career.

Guests who attend the Rose Ceremony includes ELD teachers, other Poudre High School educators, the leadership team, counselors, graduating seniors, and their families. The ELD team calls each student to the stage. The student then picks a rose in a vase and reads the 'thank you' note to their mentor. At the end of the ceremony, attendees enjoy a Tres Leches cake and Ponche. In all, the ceremony lasts about two-and-a-half hours. The first 90-minutes is dedicated to student recognitions and the last hour is all about the celebration!

In addition, younger students have the opportunity to watch the ceremony by video or attend in person. What these younger students see are their older peers who have faced the same struggles, some even greater than their own, standing in front of an audience proudly honoring the influential people in their lives. They see and hear about the achievements of ELL students and it plants the seed that they too have what it takes to finish high school.

The ceremony also honors the hard work and sacrifices that parents and relatives have made for their children and highlights the partnership between families and school. Poudre High School families are not always able to attend traditional school events, like Back to School nights and parent teacher conferences, because they are often working many jobs to support their children. That does not mean that they don't care or are not involved in their student's success. This ceremony acknowledges that ALL families are important and gives our English learners a chance to directly say thank you for the support. What better way to support the student outcome of receiving a high school diploma?

Poudre High School's family liaison explains how the Rose Ceremony still took place in 2020, despite COVID-19: "We brought two roses to each house of our senior graduates also with a letter from the team in charge of the event. One rose for the student and the other one for who they decide to say thank you. We went in a caravan and toured where our English language learner students reside and enjoyed seeing them with their families celebrating this achievement."

# Lead, Love, and Learn at Westgate

## Westgate Elementary School

### Lakewood, CO



Westgate Elementary School's mission is to Lead, Love, and Learn. With that in mind, the staff at Westgate work with families to further student learning. Welcoming families from the start of the school year begins with making the connections with families and students. From in-person registration to a Kindergarten Ice Cream social, families are a main part of Westgate Elementary's school culture.

This partnership with families played a part in the transition to distance learning when the COVID-19 pandemic hit Westgate. Staff at Westgate were able to provide students with the technology needed to complete their distance learning from home. Not only did staff help to provide technology, but the Westgate Food and Clothing Pantry provided necessities for families, such as shelf-stable groceries.

Teachers and administration tracked student learning and worked with families to help support students. Families were able to trade in technology that was not working properly or pick up paper packets for students that were having a harder time with distance learning. The Kindergarten team at Westgate made packets for students that found distance learning hard. Families could also pick-up crafts, fun reading activities, and free books outside the school's front doors.

During this time, the Family Engagement Liaison created a Virtual Spring Break to take students to places from the comfort of their home. Students chose from two destinations each day and connected with other families on social media about where they went and what they did. Westgate's social media post was filled with students taking the Virtual Spring Break to another level by bringing in props from home into their posted pictures. Families traveled with their students and got to enjoy museums, volcanoes, the Great Barrier Reef, and even two New Wonders of the World.

With support from Westgate staff, 376 Westgate students (87.5%) participated in JeffCo's distance learning in the first week alone. Without the efforts of building teacher/student and teacher/parent relationships from the very beginning, the transition to distance learning may not have gone as smoothly. Teachers and staff were available to communicate and answer questions for both students and parents.

Teachers kept a personal touch at Westgate by writing notes to students, creating an uplifting video in answer to student messages written in chalk at the school, visiting students at a safe distance just to say 'hello,' and creating videos for fifth grade and Kindergarten in place of continuation.

# Learning Literacy as a Newcomer

## Elkhart Elementary School

### Aurora, CO

Elkhart Elementary School welcomes second language students and families throughout the school year. As students are learning English as a second language, parents have an opportunity to attend workshops and literacy classes.

Classroom teachers lead the workshops. A Learning Source literacy instructor leads the literacy classes. Grade level teachers plan activities for parents that align with the instruction students receive in the classroom and delivered with the same pedagogy techniques used for students learning English for the first time. Every session is interpreted for families in attendance.

Family feedback for more supports was the impetus for the classes and workshops. Both programs have supported building relationships, trust, and belonging between parents and the Elkhart Community.



Elkhart's welcoming environment has been a key element in parents participating in the planned activities at each workshop. It is essential to have hands-on activities to engage parents in the workshops. Staff use Title I funds for the workshop materials. Parents are encouraged to use the materials to enhance their students' learning at home.

Teachers personally ask their students to invite their parents to each workshop. Parents receive invitations from their students and personal telephone calls and emails from teachers. The invitations include a clear purpose for each workshop. The personal invitations

and the clear purpose of the workshop support engagement, attendance, and positive outcomes for the event.

Elkhart's family liaisons shares: "When planning parent activities, it is always important to take into consideration the time of the event and weather conditions. We have found inclement weather and time of the event can affect parent participation, as well as if parents are not allowed to bring their younger children. Seeing the pride and love parents have in learning while participating in these parent programs have been truly rewarding!"





# Mission Viejo Food Bank

## Mission Viejo Elementary School

### Aurora, CO



The Mission Viejo Food Bank was established in 2017 to provide snacks for students and families in need. In 2014, Wilder Research published a [report](#) highlighting the important role nutrition plays in a student's academic success. Mission Viejo staff believe that if students have proper nutrition with the help of Food Bank, they will be more ready to learn.

Mission Viejo's family engagement liaison, Sandy Zimmerman, spearheaded this initiative. Zimmerman shares: "When I found that we had multiple families in need of a service like this, I brought the idea to my Principal, Andre Pearson. Mr. Pearson was thrilled with the idea and an integral part of the process, allowing me whatever means were necessary."

The first step was to find a suitable location within the school that allowed for easy access. Once that was decided, school staff discussed how they would obtain the food. The school held its own Food Drives and enlisted other schools in the district to help. This included canned foods and gift cards. The Food Drive allowed both students and staff to be involved in the process, creating a positive school climate and helping others.

Some of the challenges in the beginning were spreading the word and finding a time when parents could use the Food Bank after school hours to provide discretion. Mission Viejo staff moved the Food Bank to another area that work better for the students and parents to access, while allowing privacy.

Zimmerman explains: "I am also the Student Council Director, so I was able to have Student Council representatives keep the Food Bank cleaned and organized, check expiration dates, and dispose of items no longer viable. We also discovered other needed items and included them in our Food Bank, such as: toiletries, diapers, and baby food."

For others hoping to start a Food Bank in their own schools, Mission Viejo staff shared that it is important to be aware of the location and of neighboring schools that would be willing to help. Another suggestion is to keep the Food Bank locked if it is in an area accessible to all. That way, the resources can be properly used and controlled for those who truly need it.

Mission Viejo's Vice Principal, Michelle Chambers, included the following idea: "Make it look like a grocery store,". As you can see in the photos, that is exactly what they did, and families loved it. One of the mothers stated: "I feel like I am shopping instead of using a food bank."





# 8<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> Grade Transition Event

## Boltz and Leshar MS/ Fort Collins HS

### Fort Collins, CO



Poudre School District (PSD) considers school transitions a priority. Middle to high school transition is an important time for families and students to learn about the changes to come and prepare for the next four years. The transition event focuses on helping culturally and linguistically diverse (CLD) families become familiar with how to navigate the school district, be knowledgeable about student programs and opportunities for student involvement and learn how to acquire credits towards graduation. Families and students receive a roadmap for how to best take advantage of school programs that will lead their teens towards post-secondary readiness.

In general, PSD schools offer a variety of transition events that are often focused on engaging 8<sup>th</sup> grade students during daytime high school visits and evening open house events. However, this event caters to culturally and linguistically diverse families and students, so they can have a dedicated time to engage with school staff and administration, via an interpreter, and become acquainted with their new school.

A team of family liaisons, teachers, counselors, school administration, and the IT department coordinated the evening with Boltz Middle School, Leshar Middle School, and Fort Collins High School. Families attended an information session that a counselor presented in English with Spanish interpretation. Families followed along with a bilingual PowerPoint, and a Q&A occurred in both languages. All families received program and high school written information in English and Spanish.

One outcome of this event is that families received information and training about the school application ParentVue. This resource helps guardians monitor their student's class schedule, grades, attendance, and email teachers. PSD staff helped families download the application on their phones and walked them through the tool. Students then go on a tour of the school led by high school peers, and at the end of the information session, families can walk around the high school hallways. Most importantly, this event connects middle school families and students to their new school staff, counselors, fellow students, and their high school family liaison who will be their right hand for the next four years to graduation.

At the end of the event, families complete a survey to provide feedback. Family Liaisons also receive many follow-up phone calls, asking clarifying questions about next steps and school programs. In general, feedback is positive, and families appreciate learning about the school system and feeling ready for high school to begin.

PSD's family engagement specialist offers the following advice about replicating this program: "Ideally, a transition event should take place towards the end of the school year. At this point families and students are mentally more prepared for the upcoming transition and are ready to receive new information about their new high school. Based on the attendance list, Family Liaisons at Boltz and Leshar Middle Schools followed-up with families who did not attend the event to assure they received the same information. It's always a good idea to have snacks and fun, prize raffle, and end with a survey about the event. One of them most vital elements to hosting a well-attended event is make the time on their calendars in the weeks before the event to make personal phone calls to all 8<sup>th</sup> grade families to explain the importance of the 9<sup>th</sup> grade transitions."

# COVID Case Management Team

## Fort Lewis College

### Durango, CO



Fort Lewis College has an incredibly unique and beautifully diverse student population. With this comes very specific needs that especially needed to be addressed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The goal of this practice was to create a safe and knowledgeable team of people to help support students affected by the pandemic with housing resources, navigating financial resources, food, aiding in access to medication, internet access, and connecting them with physical and mental healthcare.

As a Native American serving institution, Fort Lewis staff also helped students navigate the needs of their communities and what resources were available. With the severe COVID-19 hit to the Navajo Nation and the many reservations the students are from, staff wanted to make sure they were able to support them in a myriad of ways.

While many individuals played a big role in the success of this program, it was the brainchild of the Fort Lewis College student affairs director, Jeff Dupont. He sought out expertise in case management and tasked Kate Suazo with being the team lead. Suazo's team is made up of people from all over the college who worked collaboratively to make sure each student received as much support as they needed. The team also collaborated with several community partners in Durango, including the local food bank and housing resources.

The team created a form that was sent to students, staff, and faculty where the individual could provide a snapshot of their needs and concerns. The form was accessible everyone, even if they did not have internet access. Once the form came in, the team analyzed the information and assigned the request to one of seven case managers. That individual would introduce themselves to the student and help them determine the way in which the team could provide support.

Along the way, the first priority was creating a relationship with the student, allowing them to feel safe and seen. The Fort Lewis campus is incredibly student-centered. Suazo explains: "We allowed students to tell us what they needed, while also giving them the space to let us take the lead if they were overwhelmed. We met students where they were. This included mode of communication, assistance with different needs, and just being available for a check-in. We began to notice that word of mouth was our best way of getting students interested in requesting support from this program. What made this successful was relationship-building. Reminding students that they had a network of support on campus and in the community, we were there to just walk the journey with them."

This program needs to have a balance between relationship-building and resource-providing. If students are just given a list of resources, they might feel overwhelmed and not follow through. By having a solid relationship and creating trust, the student can navigate those resources based on their needs. Students are incredibly resilient; sometimes they just need a mentor to walk alongside them. One case manager shared: "My student said that she was two hours away from dropping out when she received my email, she felt it was a sign that she had help and wasn't alone."

# COVID-19 Personalized Phone Calls Home

## Denver Public Schools

### Denver, CO



In Denver Public Schools (DPS), the office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) fosters a school community that is educated, engaged, and empowered to share the responsibility in creating thriving schools where Every Child Succeeds.

As COVID-19 emerged through our DPS communities, the district wanted to provide additional support. Like many districts, staff began to send surveys to families about how the district and schools could better assist during this time as well as provide food and technology for students. School-based staff made an extra effort to call, text, or email families to see if they needed any further support. At times, however, there was still no response or schools did not have the capacity to do this outreach. Common themes from these surveys and data from school staff led to the realization that schools needed the extra capacity to connect families directly to resources as well as to make additional efforts to attempt to reach families who were not engaging in remote learning.

In the midst of the pandemic, DPS Superintendent Susana Cordova and the FACE office led and assisted in completing individualized calls from central office staff to make sure that families understood that as a district we are here to connect and provide any needed resources to them. The Assessment, Reporting and Data Support and Impact Office provided family contact information from schools who sent data about who they reached, who they were not able to reach, and those that needed the extra level of engagement. FACE staff created a google form where staff members would fill out information of all families contacted and what resources were requested from each of the families. In each call, central office staff made sure that families understood what resources were available internally and externally, connected them if requested, and reiterated to families to not hesitate to call back in the future if they are in need of any resources.

As FACE staff continue to call families individually, families express gratitude and shock that district staff are calling to check on their wellbeing. In these calls, many families say they appreciate having the opportunity to talk to someone about how they are feeling or asking questions not related to education. Some family members have also shared some of their hardships on how they are struggling to make ends meet. Many of the families continue to ask what next year will look like. The FACE staff understand that a lot of these questions are still up in the air, but it is their duty to make sure all families feel supported and heard.

A FACE staff member shares: “As we continue walking families through these unprecedented times, it is very critical for us to continue open lines of communication and a deep foundation in collaboration across DPS departments, educators, and families to understand the current realities of our community. We understand that families engage in different and meaningful ways which is why we are documenting all of the feedback we are receiving from families and providing it to district leadership. As the FACE department, we hope that these personalized engagement calls help us bridge that connection between school and home for the student’s future success!”

# Dad's Learning Community

## Elkhart Elementary School

### Aurora, CO

The Dad's Learning Community is a family partnership program created from Aurora Public Schools' (APS) strategic plan. APS' strategic plan was developed in collaboration with the Aurora community, to support the district VISION of every student having the plans, skills, and credentials to shape their successful futures.

Ronald Schumacher has been the principal of Elkhart Elementary School for ten years. During that time, he has been actively building relationships and partnerships with parents and families in the community. Elkhart is not only linguistically diverse; it is also home to students from many countries around the world. Mr. Schumacher implemented the Dad's Learning Community program to engage fathers in the school and in their students' learning. The event also helps build trusting relationships between home and school.



The breakfast is hosted twice a year. It is amazing to observe the fathers walking into the building and sharing with the principal their questions, concerns, and suggestions that go beyond homework. Their questions, concerns, and suggestions have ranged from information on their student's Individual Education Plans, Diversity Learning Center academics and scoring, International Baccalaureate curriculum and outcomes, how new second language learners are educated, input on school projects and budgets, impact of district and state policies on education, and much more.

The implementation of the Dad's Learning Community requires a lot of planning, such as setting a good time of year (weather and work season are key factors), time of the day (early morning, right after school starts, middle of the day, evening time, etc.), formal printed invitations in the language of the parents, face to face invitations with a clear message of the relevance of their participation, personal phone calls (gentle reminders), male interpreters in the needed languages, a welcoming room, and snacks that all attendees can enjoy during the conversation.



Other considerations when planning the Dad's Learning Community agenda and topics are sensitivity to cultural norms, clear and effective goals for the meeting, a personal invite from the principal before sending invitations, and promotion of the event at other parent activities and meetings.

The Dad's Learning Community is an outstanding family partnership program that promotes an environment of trust and respect. Elkhart's diversity of students, families, and voices is an asset that is supporting every student shaping a successful future.



# Fall Community Connections Event

## Thompson School District

### Loveland, CO



Staff within Thompson School District's Departments of Language, Culture and Equity and Title I Family and Community Engagement collaborated to host the Fall Community Connections Event. The goal of the event was to create paths to stronger communication and collaboration and to build and nurture relationships among students, staff, and families. Students with a gifted education identification (GT), English Language Learners (ELLs), students in the Dual Immersion Program (DLI), and students attending Title I schools in all grade levels Kindergarten to 12th grade were all invited to attend.

This outdoor event took place at a centrally located open-air park in downtown Loveland. A number of booths were hosted and staffed by community partners and in-district partners to provide information and resources for families. Students from Title I schools provided entertainment representing the cultural backgrounds of participating students and families. Both the "Folklorico Dance Club" from Truscott Elementary and a local community Folklorico dance club performed.

Strong partnerships and collaboration made this event a success. Participating community partners included the Loveland Fire Department, Front Range Community College, the Loveland Public Library, Sunrise Healthy Clinic, Loveland Public Transit, Steps eXp Reality, Servicios de la Raza, Loveland Rotary KidsPak of Loveland, and AIMS Community College. Loveland restaurants provided food, and everyone who completed an event survey received a free Kona Ice from a local vendor.

The practice creates a sense of belonging for students and families as they connected with the performances, cultural music, and with others in the larger community. This practice also provided important information from community providers in a one-stop shop at the event booths, including information related to student learning, extracurricular activities, the road to graduation, and beyond. Thompson School District representatives were on-site to provide information to families about graduation requirements, district athletics, district nutritional services, after-school childcare programs, and Loveland Rotary KidsPak (a partner organization that provides meals to families in need).

Thompson School District staff collected valuable information through the end-of-event survey. The questions included in the student survey and parent survey were tied to the district's strategic plan to increase the meaningful engagement of all stakeholders. The goal was not to evaluate the event itself but rather, collect student and parent/guardian feedback on their sense of safety and belonging within the school system, as well as what families need when it comes to helping their child succeed in school. Staff gathered a robust set of qualitative data that informed the district equity and family/community engagement policies, and was used to identify funding and programming priorities for next year.

Essential Element 2—Build Trusting Relationships  
Standard 6—Collaborating with the Community



# One-on-One Foster Care Interventions

## Greeley Evans District 6

### Greeley, CO



The District 6 Family Center supports students in foster care by conducting school visits to meet with students one on one in their schools. The primary goal of these interventions is to ensure stability of students in foster care. Less than 3% of young people raised in foster care graduate from a 4-year college, and only about half of youth in foster care finish high school (<https://www.nfyi.org/issues/education/>). This is not the District 6 wants to see for these students, which motivates the services for this group and the individualized approach to interventions.

District 6's Students in Transition Liaison works with a number of foster students at the school level to build relationships by meeting with students regularly. During the one-on-one meetings, the goal of stability in education is achieved by diverse approaches tailored to each student's situation. A variety of topics are addressed with each student based on their needs, including receiving credits earned at previous schools, general academic achievement, extracurricular participation, attendance, and placement dynamics.

The liaison works as an advocate for foster students (especially at the high school level where credits are crucial) by reaching out on behalf of students to the administration, counselors, academic achievement staff and teachers if the student is experiencing issues with grades or social adjustment. Through these connections, students' individual narratives are addressed to raise awareness of each youth's unique circumstances and how this might be affecting academic performance.

Foster parents are also involved in the conversation. Parents are included as full educational decision makers of the youth. Decisions where a biological parent would weigh in are brought to the attention of the foster parents, such as permission to join a sports team or club, transportation logistics, and other similar concerns. This approach builds trust between parties and encourages stability by acknowledging the family dynamic the foster family is working toward in their homes.

An emphasis is placed on having each child engage meaningfully with their school outside of academics and the Liaison encourages students to participate in such opportunities. These usually take the form of extracurriculars such as clubs or sports, but could also include volunteer work or other projects. This partnership encourages positive and healthy student-faculty relationships, encourages responsibility, and ties them to a safe, supportive social network.

Foster student interventions will continue as long as possible and are currently supported under the Education Stability Grant which was awarded to District 6 in 2019. The foster program works in close contact with other District 6 programs that support students in transition such as students experiencing homelessness, migrant support staff, and newcomer refugee supports so each team is aware of services potentially available to students that double qualify, or for general services that might support foster students. These teams are all working toward the District's Innovation2020 goals: 'Engage, Empower, Inspire.'

# Parent Online Learning Support

## North Middle School Health Sciences and Technology

### Aurora, CO



As the world learned about the COVID-19 pandemic schools worldwide were among the first to close. North Middle School (NMS), just like all schools, faced so many uncertainties, yet their team quickly formed a plan to augment the streams of communication and offer technology support.

As NMS transitioned online, the staff felt concern about whether or not families would know they could still rely on the school for support. Teachers utilized apps like Talkingpts.org to text individual parents in different languages and leadership sent a whole-school weekly communication via email, phone and text. When teachers were unable to get ahold of a student, administration continued to make the calls. At times, staff would contact all members of the household to find a student. Staff also posted the family liaison's work cell phone number on the school's website and office staff checked the school voicemail daily.

Once staff made contact with the families, it was clear that they needed to be more concise with all the information that we were sending to families and find an easier way to share it. Therefore, North's family liaison created a [Youtube video](#) that showed an overview of how to help students' login, monitor their progress, and what to expect to see in the online platform. The liaison then posted the video on North's Facebook page and texted the video to all families.

After making the first video, the liaison made another one to help parents [utilize their mobile hotspot](#). The next step was to make sure that staff offered parents an opportunity to ask questions and provide feedback about how the school could improve online learning support. To begin this dialogue, NMS hosted a couple of virtual coffee chats with parents, the principal, the administrative team, and counselors.

Counselors answered questions and offered parental advice to support students through this difficult time. The virtual coffee chat also encouraged staff to listen to parents' concerns and then to take action. One theme was that families wanted to take a more active role in their student's learning. As a result, staff helped parents create their own account for their student's online learning on Edgenuity. This way parents could see if they were on track with their learning and how much time they spent logged in. During the coffee chats staff also learned about immediate needs and parents were able to offer their support to each other.

One of those immediate needs were groceries. North's family liaison, Margarita Alamillo Barrios, had been in contact with the non-profit organization *We Don't Waste*, and promptly planned a food drive-thru in the school's parking lot. *We Don't Waste* took care of the entire operation and distributed close to 300 food boxes. Barrios explains: "We are very thankful that we had the opportunity to make this connection between *We Don't Waste* and our community. Although *We Don't Waste* offers support in many areas of Colorado, it was very helpful and convenient for our families to be able to find them in a familiar space."

Barrios continued: "Although the pandemic seemed to have abruptly driven us away from each other in many ways we grew closer and stronger as a community. We were able to go outside of the regular methods to reach our families and make more connections."

# PEDAL Forums

## Westminster Public Schools

### Westminster, CO



Westminster Public Schools (WPS) serves a diverse group of approximately 9,000 students in 18 schools, including three Early Learning Centers, five elementary schools, two middle schools, four innovation PK-8 schools, four magnet PK-8 schools, one comprehensive high school, and one alternative high school. The district also houses the Westminster Virtual Academy (K-12) and a day treatment program. Students are characterized by significant socioeconomic challenges, a high rate of mobility, homelessness, and English language barriers. The majority of students are Hispanic (76%), most qualify for free or reduced lunch (78%), 39% are English learners, and 12% identified with special needs.

In the 2009-10 school year, WPS elected to move from a traditional system of schooling toward an innovative approach referred to as *competency-based education*. The entire school district from preschool through grade 12, including the innovation and magnet schools, is organized around engaging learners with skills necessary for today's workforce, instructing students at their developmental instructional levels, and advancing *only* when they have demonstrated competency--or mastery--of each concept and skill.

The PEDAL—Programming for Every Driven and Accelerated Learner—Leadership Team implemented weekly virtual *PEDAL Forums* (one for parents and another separate one for students) during the final 10 weeks of spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Forum participants represented schools across the district and students from primary to the high school level.

The main purpose of these forums was to engage families in helping children with high abilities to remain engaged, motivated, and successful in their learning, regardless of the learning environment. Topics include but are not limited to: social-emotional learning, using the district's Empower platform to enhance student learning of specific interests and aptitudes, post-secondary options, and sharing other relevant topics related to gifted education (e.g., PEDAL identification, perfectionism, summer and other community offerings). Discussion topics were largely determined by what the parents and students wanted to discuss, so it was truly owned by them, though facilitated by staff.

Through these forums, valuable relationships formed between families, students, and WPS staff.

Westminster's PEDAL Coordinator shared: "We believe parents can support their children better because of this work. We also feel students have become more knowledgeable and stronger advocates for their needs."

The PEDAL Coordinator continued: "If I were to offer advice to those wishing to replicate this practice, I would suggest the following: (a) stick with consistent meeting times, (b) use the same video conference (Zoom) link weekly, (c) send a reminder to both parents and students the night before to enhance participation consistency and (d) be creative in how content stays fresh and interesting through guest speakers, home projects, discussion topics on current affairs, break-out sessions, and so on. Also, due to the time it takes to plan high-quality sessions (including coordination of guest speakers), it might also be helpful to consider a bi-weekly schedule. For the 2020-21 school year, consider offering the same sessions in the evening and in-person to provide flexible options for families. These forums take some work, but it's very well worth it!"



# Personalized Engagement

## Denver Public Schools

### Denver, CO



Denver Public Schools' Community Engagement Strategy and Advocacy (CESA) Team creates culturally relevant, transparent, and authentic engagement strategies through consultation, strategic planning, and advocacy across the district. The approach is community-led and district supported, ensuring that those closest to the issues are closest to the decision-making. The team is committed to:

- Honoring Denver communities through story-telling.
- Listening to understand.
- Creating community-driven processes across the family of schools.
- Creating shared accountability through mutual trust and shared decision-making with partners, families and throughout the district.

Part of this commitment is demonstrated through Personalized Engagement (PE) for schools. CESA began the PE initiative to respond to the increased need for engagement to develop trusting relationships with families. CESA prioritizes Title I schools and other high priority schools to initiate PE since they may potentially face significant changes in upcoming years making PE essential for their efforts moving forward. However, schools can request to collaborate on PE and/or CESA can contact a school if there is an identified need regardless of a school's status.

PE utilizes personal visits between a student's parent or guardian and a CESA staff member. These conversations are focused on building relationships and listening to families/parents and their experience with their school and community. Family and Community Engagement (FACE) staff members are trained to ensure that families are able to access academic partnership and multigenerational resources that are linked to learning and find plausible avenues for engagement at both school and district levels.

Engagement occurs in phases, and each phase is tailored to a school's particular needs that are determined in collaboration with school leaders during the intake process. School leaders and FACE team members agree on what is needed and commitments that each party can make. For example, after initial inquiry with school leaders for Phase I, Phase II could consist of small group engagement led by CESA team members with the objectives to increase parent participation and ensure community voices are heard. CESA compiles a biannual report that provides data updates in the middle of the school year and a final report at the end of the school year with recommendations for school leaders.

One of the challenges and most important components is buy-in from school leaders. This is a collaborative process and it is necessary that school leaders can commit not only to the process, but to the implementation of recommendations to make changes in the way that they engage community. Otherwise, the process may be deemed obsolete. To those wanting to replicate the process, Senior Manager, Eloy Castro, advises: "Understand the community that they are engaging with and have some understanding of best practices. Some communities may prefer to meet as a collective at a civic dinner while others may prefer to engage virtually. It's going to have to be tailored to the group that they are working with."

# Spring Remote Learning 2020

## Edgewater Elementary School

### Edgewater, CO



Edgewater Elementary staff, students, and families always look forward to the annual Spring Carnival. This event allows students, teachers, staff, and parents to come together for one during the school year to share memories and create more. This year's event was going to have a literature focus. Unfortunately, like so many other long-awaited plans, the Spring Carnival was canceled because of COVID-19.

All students, families, and teachers had to turn to remote learning—a huge change with many obstacles and challenges. Luckily, these new realities didn't dampen Edgewater staff's spirit as they found other ways to support students and strengthen partnerships with families.

Teachers helped their students throughout this time of new learning while they themselves were learning how to manage this new system. Many families had to become much more involved with their child's education due to distance learning. Staff took great effort in reaching out to families that needed support with technology, internet services, food and other resources. In turn, families were willing and available to receive support from staff members in setting up internet services and applications such as SeeSaw, Google Classroom and Google Meet.

During remote learning, Edgewater staff saw an increase of families helping their children with schoolwork. For example, in some primary grade levels, students were asked to video tape their reading. In the video, you can see and/or hear some families helping the student sound out words, taking turns reading, or just encouraging them to keep going. Many families joined Google Meet sessions to learn instructional strategies to support their child at home or to touch base with the teacher. Staff noticed a level of family engagement that we had not experienced before. Even the school principal experienced an increase in families reaching out through emails and phone calls.



The highlight during this difficult time was during Teacher Appreciation Week. Many families and students sent notes, photos, videos, and poems to thank their teachers for all the hard work they do every day. Many staff members shared that they had never experienced the level of gratitude and appreciation they received from our families and students.

Edgewater's mission is to provide a quality education for every student every day. During these challenging times, all stakeholders demonstrated what this mission is all about. Edgewater's family engagement liaison explained: "Even though the Spring Carnival was not an event to engage our families this school year, we found that remote learning formed partnerships between school and families that will have a positive impact moving forward. We are proud of our school community where everyone showed that 'all means all.'"

# Title I Collective/Parent Leadership Teams

## Greeley Evans School District 6

### Greeley, CO



The goal of the Title I Collective and the Parent Leadership Team (PLT) practice was to have more parents, especially Title I school parents, have open discussions about the district and learn how to be more involved with district staff. While all parents were welcome to attend the Parent Leadership Team, District 6 staff wanted to make sure that all of the districts' populations were represented.

Parent recruitment consisted primarily of personal invitations. District 6's Title I Specialist, Janet Navarro Perez, started with families who attended other events at the Family Center. These are families who previously attended Strengthening Families courses and sewing classes. Perez also invited parents from five Title I PLT schools—four elementary schools and one middle school.



Perez explains: "My goal was to get as many parents to attend as possible. I personally called each parent myself and told them about the event. I had other team members from the Family Center help me by giving me names and numbers of parents they worked with, and I then called them and told them they were referred by the certain team member."

The personal outreach paid off; 17 new families attended the first Title I Collective/PLT meeting! Each participating school also had a group of teachers, administrators, and counselors. Having school staff also on the team was critical because it ensured that parent leadership would continue in their individual buildings.

Unfortunately, the Title I Collective was only able to meet three times before COVID-19 forced schools to close. However, Family Center staff remained in contact with the families during stay at home orders. Perez shares: "I know there has been positive school improvements and more involvement with some of the parents since because parents would ask me to help them get in touch with certain teachers when they could not get ahold of them during the online learning process. I also had a lot of parents tell me that they really enjoyed these meetings because they had never attended anything like them, and it made them feel more involved and able to speak up about any problems they are having with their children's schools."

For those looking to form their own parent leadership teams, consistency and persistence is key! Perez shared: "Even if you have to feel like you're being annoying or bothering too much, sometimes that is what they need to see so families know that you really want them there. After so many calls to the same parents, a lot of them already know me and feel comfortable having a conversation with me when I call."



# Virtual Home Visits

## ACTION Zone, Aurora Public Schools

### Aurora, CO



The model used by the Zone within the Aurora Public Schools system focuses on addressing family and community needs through community partnerships, 2-generation supports, and family advocacy initiatives. In response to the pandemic, staff needed to quickly and deeply understand what students and families were experiencing. The leaders and the staff in the Zone also wanted to ensure they maintained relationships and trust with families during this time and be able to inform community partners of needs as they arose. The ACTION Zone team needed a way to gather this information through a streamlined but relationship-centered approach and thus developed a Virtual Home Visit (VHV) program.

The design and development of the VHV program was spearheaded by the members of the Office of Autonomous Schools (OAS) team, including five school-based Community School Coordinators. District and school staff collaborated with the mental health team, counselors, nurses, teachers, and Community Health Navigators with the Community School Coordinators taking the lead role as trainers of other staff on implementing the program. Because educators were stretched thin by the new demands, schools relied on classified staff, such as paraprofessionals, attendance liaisons and campus monitors to be the primary conductors of the VHVs.

OAS staff conducted a Virtual Home Visit training for Community School Coordinators, who then trained the staff at their individual school sites to reach out to families by phone or virtual platform. The “dialers” conducting the calls received scripts and support centered around relationship and trust building as well as a database to capture the information that they gathered. The data collected included a social-emotional check-in as well as questions about basic needs that a family could use support with. These databases then served as the basis for an accompanying referral system, which other school, district, and community partners staff were able to access in order to get families the resources they needed as quickly as possible. The dialers conducted two rounds of outreach throughout April and May and, over the course of this two month period, made 3,668 connections resulting in 232 applications for rental assistance, 687 referrals to Community School Coordinators and 170 referrals to Community Health Navigators at Children’s Hospital.

The data collected through the trackers was invaluable for understanding the unique needs in each community. Beyond the referrals themselves, the data helped inform a variety of initiatives in the community, including food distribution system for undocumented families, digital literacy support for families, and a surge in funder support that enabled the procurement of hotspots and computers as well as the hiring of multi-lingual community navigators to support immigrant families. Another auxiliary but significant impact of the program was the mindset shift that was experienced by the dialers themselves. Many of these staff members had limited experience interacting with families prior to the VHV program and shared a shift in their understanding of the roles of families in school.

ACTION Zone’s Director of Community Schools, Family Advocacy & Community Engagement believes that the foundations of the program itself could be applied to any school or geography with some analysis of need.



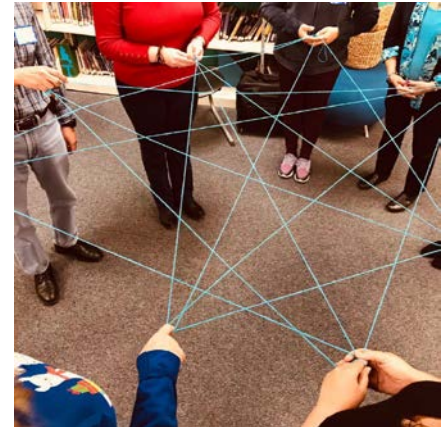
# Conexión Connection

## Douglas County School District

### Castle Rock, CO



Removing real or perceived barriers for culturally and linguistically diverse families by building strong partnerships with two-way communication has proven to increase family engagement for Douglas County School District (DCSD). Following analysis of past family engagement efforts, staff realized that DCSD practices were aimed at sharing information with families and eliciting feedback instead of offering opportunities in which parents had a voice and created a common goal together. Leveraging the relationships built by two bilingual cultural and family liaisons provided an opportunity to bring families together.



To begin a plan for removing barriers to multilingual parent engagement, DCSD, in partnership with Patsy Roybal, Consultant with Families for Excellence in Education, engaged in a series of workshops, conversations, and goal-setting sessions. In close partnership with Roybal, a series of five workshops were created and offered in a bilingual setting. A local church that many of our families attend offered space to hold the workshops. Each workshop included opportunities for parent input, feedback, and experiential learning.

The first workshop outlined the research that links academic achievement to student success. In the second workshop, parents learned about the school system, including the leadership structure, district accountability committee, and the school accountability committees. Workshop three focused on academic standards, analyzing school performance frameworks, and assessments such as CMAS and ACCESS. Workshop four built upon families' desire to have their voices heard, so they practiced public speaking skills and built confidence. The final session celebrated graduates of the workshops with a certificate and cake.

## Connection

Parents growing together with their children

### PURPOSE:

1. TO BE THE VOICE OF BILINGUAL PARENTS
2. TO HAVE REPRESENTATION WHEN MAKING DECISIONS
3. TO HELP PARENTS GET INVOLVED IN SCHOOL ACTIVITIES
4. TO PROMOTE THE INCLUSION OF BILINGUAL PARENTS BY HELPING THEM TO OVERCOME FEAR AND REMOVE REAL OR PERCEIVED BARRIERS THAT MAY EXIST.

Following the initial five workshops, some families received additional support from Roybal to become trainers themselves. These families met to plan their next steps, choose a name for their newly formed parent advocacy group, and defined their mission. A series of facilitated discussions resulted in a name, clear mission, and vision for the group. This was an organic process that united families with a common purpose and firmly rooted them in the work.

Before the parents could facilitate the workshops for other families, the COVID-19 pandemic closed the meeting spaces. Conexión continued to meet via Zoom and invited families to join for Q and A sessions offered by the parents. Conexión is in the process of planning how they might offer mini sessions of the workshops via Zoom next school year until in-person training is allowed by the local government. Conexión is also hoping to offer Facebook live streaming events to engage more parents.

# Cooking Matters at Sunrise

## Sunrise Elementary School

### Aurora, CO



Sunrise Elementary School, located in Aurora, is part of the Cherry Creek School District (CCSD). Sunrise has a diverse student community, approximately 60% of whom qualify for free or reduced lunch. During the 2019-20 school year, Sunrise staff sought to engage families in new ways. Enter Cooking Matters!

The goal of Cooking Matters is to partner with families and caregivers through high-quality nutrition education. Cooking Matters is responsible for orchestrating the food, instruction, and materials for the course while the school was responsible for recruiting families/participants and providing the space, childcare, and translation.

The program coordinator, Title I CCSD coordinator, and the assistant principal collaborated to make the program come together. The goal was to have 10-12 participants. The team identified families that had an older student with siblings in younger grades and reached out to those parents, describing the program and surveying their interest. All of the families contacted were interested! The school took advantage of having a brand-new innovation space, specifically the maker space. It had a sink and butcher-block tables that were convenient and just what the class needed.

Sunrise's partnership with Cooking Matters helped the school achieve a Unified Improvement Plan goal—to increase family engagement. The cooking course allowed the students and parents to try new tasks with guidance. This increased their knowledge on healthier lifestyle choices by creating meals they may not typically prepare the same way or enjoy. The parents received tips, food, and a gift card to help support these new practices. The feedback from families was quite positive. They overwhelmingly enjoyed this opportunity. Students spoke about it in school and some of their peers were hoping to get involved if it were to occur again.

One of the biggest hurdles that the Sunrise planning team encountered was getting families to be able to commit for the full 6 weeks. There were work schedule changes, sports conflicts, a snow day, and other typical life events that came up. In the end, three of the five families consistently committed and made it to the end.

Sunrise's family liaison shares the following advice for other schools wanting to conduct a similar activity: "I would invite an extra family or two when beginning the class, simply so more people can utilize the opportunity if others are not able to fully commit."

# FACE Centers

## Denver Public Schools

### Denver, CO



The mission of Denver Public Schools (DPS) is to provide all students the opportunity to achieve the knowledge and skills necessary to become contributing citizens in our society. DPS is committed to meeting the educational needs of every student and their family through impactful and innovative partnerships that address the need of the whole family. The Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Centers aim to mitigate stress factors of families living in poverty by providing supportive services to families that increase financial independence and family stability ultimately decreasing generational poverty. Multi-generation strategies remove barriers for families, allowing them to engage more deeply with their children. Through this inclusive approach, DPS is able to increase support for the whole child, which results in families having stronger trust with the school and being better equipped to support student achievement and school readiness.

In a 2013 citywide parent survey developed by the DPS FACE team, 17,400 respondents indicated a need for job training, English as a Second Language (ESL) services and financial planning. As a result, the FACE Center was established to offer free wraparound services to students, families, and community members. An advisory group of community agencies supported the design of the program in 2013. Since that time, the FACE Centers have grown from one location serving approximately 100 participants to two locations serving over 1,500 participants annually. Community partners that provide services at the FACE Centers include the Mental Health Center of Denver, Operation HOPE, Clayton Early Learning, Denver Human Services and CREA Results. The FACE Centers also partner closely with DPS schools and operations departments, including John H. Amesse and Johnson Elementary Schools, DPS Early Learning, and DPS Assessment, Reporting and Data.

FACE Centers provide free wraparound services that allow community members to obtain critical life skills to increase their economic self-sufficiency and the academic achievement of their children. Collaborative partnerships with community agencies enable FACE Centers to deliver services in the areas identified by the community as most needed, such as financial literacy, workforce development and educational classes that include English as a Second Language (ESL), parenting classes, and high-school equivalency. The FACE Center person-centered approach includes on-site support, check-ins, and access to inclusive services. Participants have access to interventions around challenges related to mental health, homelessness, special needs, and poverty. By addressing these underlying causes for unemployment and disengagement, FACE Center staff can support families' efforts to achieve financial security and stability. When families are financially secure and stable, their children not only demonstrate higher rates of attendance, but they are also better able to learn at school. Additionally, free childcare makes it possible for parents to engage in these programs and psychologists located at the FACE Centers ensure families have access to social-emotional and mental health support.

The FACE Centers utilize a person-centered approach to participant intake, engaging participants in goal setting. Participants complete a Family Success Plan upon entry that assists in guiding their individualized case management needs and goals. They are supported throughout their time at the FACE Centers with follow-up meetings, based on the need of the individual participant, but at a minimum every six months. Data is tracked throughout the life cycle of a participant utilizing Salesforce and evaluated with the support of the DPS Assessment, Reporting and Data support team. Evaluation includes progress towards goals of individual

clients, as well as impact on student attendance, achievement and satisfaction. FACE Centers also conduct ongoing surveys from participants to assess efficacy of services and promote continuous improvement.

After two years of FACE Center operations, it became apparent that many of the goals of participants and families were not achievable unless social emotional supports were available. To this end, FACE developed a partnership with the Mental Health Center of Denver to contract services for full-time mental health therapists at both sites. Work with the host school administration is also critical to the FACE Centers' success. Through buy-in from the school administration, FACE was able to advertise services directly to teachers and staff who are in contact with parents and guardians on a daily basis and who know the families best.

The FACE Center approaches wraparound services based on the individualized goals of each participant. Each participant requires unique tools and resources in their path to self-sufficiency. One of the main success factors of the FACE Center program model is the authenticity of services and staff ability to support participants in defining their own goals and supporting the participant in creating their individualized action plan. The program is based on a person-centered approach to building a trusting and welcoming environment that asks for feedback from participants to continue program improvement and assess any new needs. Staff engage in ongoing professional development to ensure that services are being delivered with the highest standards of professionalism and excellent customer service.

Ayako Williams, a current DPS parent and now an Enrichment Coordinator for DPS notes: "All the people that are working there [FACE Center] are so welcoming. They make you feel like you're a part of a family. Tristan [Workforce Coach] raised my confidence level to where I felt like I could get any job. He makes you feel so calm and confident that you know you are going to come out of the FACE Center successful."



## FSCP Partnership with RISE East Village Elementary School Greenwood Village, CO

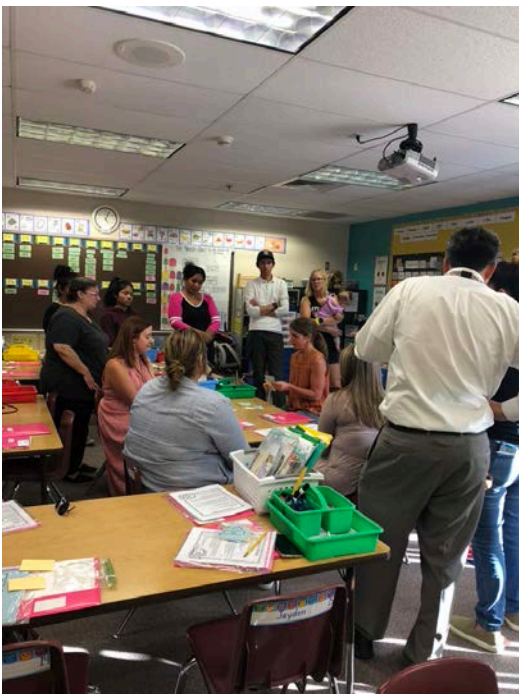


During the 2019-20 school year, Village East Elementary embarked upon a year-long Family Engagement Partnership with RISE Colorado. The partnership was titled RISE Colorado's Family-Engagement Program & Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) PD Series. The RISE Partnership served two purposes:

- Invite families into a phased approach to *Educate, Engage, and Empower* in an effort to encourage parents to be change agents in their child's education.
- Engage educators and staff members in professional learning experiences to extend their racial consciousness and awareness around societal issues impacting families.

Village East serves a diverse bi-cultural and bi-literate community with over 32 different languages spoken. Village East is an urban community with many rich assets. However, it also presents a challenge to parents who need to support their children in an educational system that may be different from their home country.

This work began with two English Language Support (ELS) Specialists who wanted to build better partnerships with families. They created a Parent Engagement Action Team that consisted of 12 teachers that had the passion and drive to improve experiences and outcomes for families. Throughout the year they brainstormed ways to improve family engagement and oversaw those big rocks regularly. RISE Colorado was an organization that they were familiar with because of its proven track record of community organization and racial consciousness methods. The team fully engaged in the RISE partnership and met twice a month.



RISE Colorado provided a school partner that worked with the Parent Engagement Team twice a month. During these meetings, the RISE School Partner trained the team on effective parent engagement strategies. Week one consisted of the school partner leading a preview of the racial consciousness experiences and materials with the smaller Parent Engagement Team. Week two consisted of the RISE partner supporting the team to replicate the learning from week one for the whole staff. The structure was predictable and consistent. The teachers experienced activities like Asset Mapping to explore businesses and places of worship/support in our community. They also crafted Stories of Self and Stories of Us to connect/share with families.

East Village staff also engaged in Family Learning Night planning. These nights were designed to offer academic topics that families could use at home and a more intimate version of parent-teacher conferences. As a result, more parents attended school-based events and commented on the welcoming school climate.

# Inclusivity in DAC

## Englewood Public Schools

### Englewood, CO



Englewood Schools had a very impactful and engaged District Accountability Committee (DAC). The goal of the DAC is to provide a forum for parents and community members to make recommendations, provide input and work collaboratively with the Board of Education and the school district which helps the district in achieving its mission and vision. When looking at the makeup of Englewood's DAC, the district realized it was lacking representation of key stakeholders that make up the school community. All schools and School Accountability Committee (SAC) representatives were present, but not all populations of students and families were represented.

The DAC recognized that they needed the insight and voice of the Language Development Council (LDC), Gifted and Talented Advisory Council (GTAC), as well as the Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC). The Superintendent, Chief Academic Officer, and District Family, School and Community Liaison decided to reach out to these committees to see if a parent representative from each council would like to join DAC. Fortunately a parent from each council agreed and joined the DAC this year.

The District Advisory Council (DAC) now represents stakeholders that were not participating on district level committees. The idea behind this was to hear voices and seek input from many different populations in the district. Englewood Schools' DAC meets five times per year. At the conclusion of each DAC meeting, the DAC Executive Assistant sends out talking points to each representative to report back to their respective committee. The talking points help bridge communication between families and the district. It allows for the families to hear, understand, and ask questions regarding what is happening at the district level as well as having a voice on recommendations that are brought forth to the Board of Education. The dialogue between the DAC, SACs, and sub committees has proven to be very beneficial.

Up to this point the inclusivity practice has been evaluated anecdotally. At the end of each meeting, the DAC Chair leads a plus/delta round table to evaluate the effectiveness of the meeting. This allows the Chair and district leaders to see what worked well and where changes may need to be made. One of the challenges that came about had to do with the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic. The last DAC meeting was held virtually, which did not allow staff the ability to evaluate the effectiveness of the overall DAC this year. In the future, district leaders will continue to convene the DAC for special meetings in which input is needed from a variety of stakeholder groups.

When looking at replicating this practice, one may want to look at the populations served and then ask the questions: Are all voices at the table when making district level decisions? Are all stakeholders represented? Once you understand and engage the stakeholders you serve, you can then have complete representation, well rounded recommendations, and input that considers the needs of all stakeholders.

# Knowledge at Parents' Fingertips

## Cherry Creek Independence Elementary School

### Aurora, CO

Staff at Independence Elementary recognize the importance of building strong relationships with families in order to optimize student outcomes. Two ways that Independence staff have guided families to support learning at home are semi-monthly talks and weekly podcasts.

The programs were planned by the community liaison, Lucia Wirths, and approved by the principal, Lisa Morris. The community liaison wanted to help the parents grow as individuals and to help them support their children, so she came up with these ideas to educate them on the topics needed to accomplish that.



Twice a month for an hour, families would get together with specialists, such as psychologists and social workers, to talk about different topics. Families selected the session themes, which included relationships, forgiveness, managing emotions, and child behavioral issues.

The meetings take place in Independence's conference room. The meetings begin with a planned speaker sharing information on the pre-determined topic for 15-minutes. Families spend the remaining 45-minutes asking questions and sharing experiences.

Along with the semi-monthly talks, the school send podcasts to all families in English and Spanish every Friday. The podcasts came from PIN (Parent Information Network) and BBVA-Aprendamos Juntos. The themes of the podcasts included information about parenting, supporting children, stress, anxiety, ADHD, Dyslexia, and personal growth. These talks and podcasts help educate the parents about how to support their children, therefore helping both students and parents.

These programs' evaluation is ongoing. For the monthly talks, the parents give verbal feedback and complete a survey about the talk. For the weekly podcasts, parents send feedback via email about the podcasts and the themes they covered.

If someone were to recreate something similar to these programs, they should use apps such as *Remind* to help parents remember to go to the talks. If they wanted to recreate just the talks, they should "let the parents decide what topics they would like to speak about," says the community liaison, Lucia Wirths, "this is important because they will be motivated to participate a lot." Also, they should use translator apps such as Microsoft translator if the people in the room don't all speak the same language. If someone wanted to do just the weekly podcasts, they should try to create transcripts of the podcasts. Mrs. Wirths says this is important because "if there are parents who cannot listen to them, they can still learn about the topics." With both programs it is important to constantly receive feedback from the parents to make sure they are interested.

# Problem Based Learning

## STEM Launch K-8

### Thornton, CO



The goal of Problem Based Learning (PBL) is to present local, real-world problems to students, as well as provide field experts, research, and experiences, so that students can develop and use 21st century skills. Students then present solutions to the community members which presented the problem. In order to successfully implement the PBL model, there must be a strong school-community partnership.

Community members and parents serve as field experts and panelists within each PBL. STEM Launch relies heavily on its community partners and parents to present students with problem-based opportunities, learn from their expertise, and listen with an open mind to the students' solutions. The ultimate goal of PBL is for students, working with the local community, to solve or diminish problems occurring within their neighborhoods and communities.

Teachers work with their STEM coordinators to develop the problem statement for each PBL. The 'problem' may come from a member of the community, the parent group, or local news organizations. As teachers and coordinators build out the PBL, they reach out to local experts. Community members and parents join the PBL as guest speakers, vetting participants, thought partners, and finally as panelists. The panel is comprised of community members and parents who have a stake in the solutions to the issue at hand.

A PBL begins with the development of a problem statement based on a real-world issue/concern. Students gather research through articles, scholarly research, expert testimony, and real-world experience with the problem. As the PBL begins, students are presented with the problem statement, complete research, and interact with community experts. When possible, students partake in a field experience to witness the problem firsthand. Time is then provided for students to develop and design their solutions. Prior to the Panel, students complete a vetting process in order to receive feedback and questions pertaining to their solution. Students work on furthering their solution and present their current best thinking to a group of community experts at the Panel.

This model brings learning to life. Students are working through their standards in a way that contributes to the betterment of their community. The effects of PBL are long-lasting. Students become proficient in communication, collaboration, design thinking, and problem solving. These skills are vital to their future aspirations.

The evaluation of PBL is multifaceted. Community members and parents that serve as experts and panelists are asked for their feedback regarding the PBL in which they participated. Students and teachers also have an opportunity to share feedback about ways to improve future PBLs.

STEM's instructional coach shares: "The advice that I would give to someone just beginning to delve into PBL is to be creative, think outside the box, and don't be afraid to fail. Reach out to community members and parents. It is very exciting to work with community partners in order to build the school-community partnership in a way that benefits everyone."



# READ Plan Project

## Jefferson County Public Schools

### Golden, CO



The READ Plan Project started with an idea - *What if we engaged families of 1st graders on READ plans, with a triangulation of academic support between teachers, the Family Engagement Liaison, and families?*

Research shows that the longer a student remains on a READ plan, the more likely they are to continue to fall short of grade level reading benchmarks. District staff's thought was to change this trajectory with a laser-focused approach that leveraged relationships, strategy building workshops, and provided additional reading resources and ideas for families to support learning at home. The Title I Department worked with the district READ team to identify 2 pilot schools, Slater Elementary and Foothills Elementary.

READ Plan Project had several objectives:

- Monitor the growth of identified 1st grade students.
- Increase communication and family-school partnership - specifically with the teacher.
- Increase family understanding and the urgency of the READ plan.
- Create resources and strategies for parents.
- Increase efficacy of families to support and impact their child's reading growth through individual support and group networking opportunities.

Principal leadership was integral to the success of the program. The Family Engagement Liaisons worked collaboratively with the 1st grade teachers, instructional coaches, and district READ team. Together, they co-designed a plan for family conversation and networking, collective and individual personal connection (face-to-face, email/text, phone call), teaching at-home reading strategies and skills, increasing access to appropriate, relevant reading material, goal setting and progress monitoring, and celebrating success. Schools worked with their Instructional Coaches and district staff to conduct regular data digs. It was key to include the Family Engagement Liaisons at these meetings so they could gain a deeper understanding of grade level expectations. In turn, Family Engagement Liaisons were viewed as being part of the 'academic success team.'

Reading events were open to all 1st grade families, with additional personalized outreach to families of students on READ plans. Family Engagement Liaisons Shantell Lopez (Slater Elementary) and Bernadette Marquez (Foothill Elementary), tapped into their creativity to make reading and reading strategies fun for families! Slater Elementary launched their *"1st Grade Super Readers - a Mission to Read"* and Foothills their *"Foothills Falcons Soaring Readers"*. Both schools hosted guest speaker, Gary Johnston, with an evening family event that emphasized building their child's *love of reading*. His message was simple, "A child will learn to love to read by reading with people they love". Kids had fun too with programs like, *How to Build a Reading Cubby* and *Cocoa, Forts, PJs and Reading*. Each event provided an opportunity for children to choose books to add to their home library. Slater Elementary Family Engagement Liaison worked with staff to video tape reading mini-lessons demonstrating a particular strategy so families could see and hear the strategy in action.

#### Five Finger Rule for Choosing a "Just Right Book"

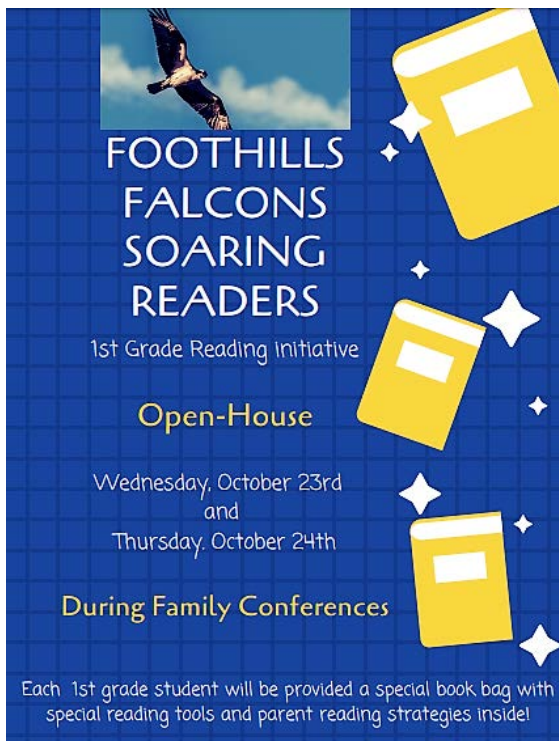
1. Choose A Book!
2. Open the book to any page and begin reading.
3. Put one finger up for each word you don't know.



- 0-1 Fingers Too Easy
- 2-3 Fingers Just Right
- 4-5 Fingers Too Hard

The READ Plan Project has shown promising outcomes. At Foothills Elementary, Instructional Coach Bonnie Kurtz indicated that students were showing marked improvement as compared to previous years. However, as of March 13th, with school districts shifting to remote learning as a response to the COVID-19 crisis, schools were not able to end the year as planned. While Slater and Foothills teachers and Family Engagement Liaisons continued their personal outreach to these families, understandably, some momentum was lost. Now, with the 2020-2021 school year in sight, the hope is both Slater and Foothills will continue with this initiative and modify as needed to meet the new demands of a remote and/or hybrid learning environment. Slater and Foothills are poised to lead other schools in launching their own programs.

As stated earlier, this program is a coordinated approach aimed at building the capacity and efficacy of families to support their child's reading success. It spans family, school, district, and community. For schools considering implementing this idea, here are some considerations:



- Planning and buy-in are key.
- Approach the project with a willingness to try something.
- Create a solid communication plan.
- Include Family Engagement Liaisons in the data and academic conversations.
- Impress upon families that they have agency and can impact their child's academic growth.
- Make it fun for kids and families! Provide books, learning-fun-at-home ideas, and other incentives.
- Celebrate and recognize, with kids, families, teachers etc., the hard work it takes to reach a goal.

# Social Emotional Learning GET Together

## Laurene Edmondson Elementary School

### Loveland, CO

Laurene Edmondson Elementary School's Guaranteed Education Team (GET) Together initiative began three years ago to boost the parent voice in decision-making. This year, Edmondson staff used a GET Together to help families understand the basic concepts of social emotional learning (SEL).

The success of the SEL GET Together was a community affair! The mental health team, including the principal, psychologist, social worker, counselor, and SEL paraprofessional, took the lead in planning the GET Together. This team worked closely with the family, school, and community partnership liaison, Parent Teacher Association, and School Accountability Committee. Staff worked as a collaborative whole to finalize planning and implementation of this event including logistics, prepping materials, and presenting some of the sessions. Crossroads Church and Thompson School District staff both provided volunteers and conducted presentations.



Prior to the event, school staff sent a Sign-Up Genius to families. As a follow-up, staff created individualized flyers with each teacher highlighting two areas that they felt would be beneficial for families to attend. Teachers also made 3-5 personal phone calls to the families they especially wanted to attend. The response rate increased about three-fold after these additional outreach efforts.

The actual event began with a 30 minute "soft start" in the gym with a zones of regulation check in, dinner, and SEL activities at each table to simulate how we start our day at school with students. After the soft start, school-aged students remained in the gym for a make-and-take of at home SEL tools, while younger students went to a room for childcare, and adults attended their two chosen 25-minute sessions. At the end of each session, the adults filled out an electronic survey on chrome books.

As a result of this event, families and staff now speak the same SEL language. This information especially came in handy during remote schooling due to COVID-19. Staff could easily remind families about strategies and tools to use in the home learning environment (e.g., cozy corners, calming strategies, zones of regulation at home, setting limits with schoolwork expectations). Staff created additional videos for families highlighting the previous strategies and tools that were presented at the GET Together.

Surveys indicated that families felt like the GET Together was "calming," "sets them up for success," and that they "wanted more." Staff commented that the planning was done well and was a whole-school effort. Edmondson's hard work and partnership sustainability has not gone unnoticed. The GET Together work was featured in the [Hetchinger report](#), published in February 2020.

# Vaughn Monthly Parent Math Academy

## Vaughn Elementary School

### Aurora, CO



The importance of family partnerships has always and continues to be a major focus at Vaughn Elementary, as well as in the Aurora Public Schools District. Including parents in the learning of their students has been a focus this year in order to give parents the tools needed to help their children at home with assignments when needed. Assuming that parents will know how to help their student with their math homework was a generalization Vaughn staff needed to avoid making.



During a family engagement-planning meeting, the first and second grade teachers, Family Liaison, and Family Literacy teacher combed through Title I surveys to determine potential initiatives for the 2019-20 school year. The number one requested item was learning to understand the new math strategies to be able to help their children. Some suggested presenting lessons at parent meetings either before or after school but others wanted it to be more impactful and engaging.

The planning committee made the decision to invite parents into the classroom during a new math lesson so they could see the lesson for themselves and observe how their child is learning during whole group instruction. This high-impact strategy gives parents insight into how their child learns and participates, while noting any strengths and struggles the child might have.

Once breaking off into small group practice, parents were encouraged to participate in their child's group. They used the same tools the students would be using for the lesson. Parents received a take-home math tool-kit to help them practice their student's new learning in math. This bi-monthly event started with few attendees but once word got out, parents started inviting other parents by word of mouth and attendance improved. The consensus from parents was positive; they enjoyed learning alongside their children.



Vaughn teachers are already seeing the positive impact on students whose parents attended at least three academies, including improved confidence, fewer interventions, and increased homework completion.

Vaughn's Family Liaison shared: "My advice to anyone wanting to replicate this Family Engagement event would be to have your teachers on board, provide manipulatives for families to take for at-home practice, get someone to help you take pictures, be ready for lots of parent questions, advertise every which way you can, and recruit room parents to help spread the word!"



# FAST Team

## Rocky Mountain Prep Creekside

### Denver, CO



Rocky Mountain Prep (RMP) Creekside is a PK-5 public charter school located in the Southeast area of Denver. The school serves an incredibly diverse community of students and families, representing 26 languages and a broad cross-section of racial and socioeconomic backgrounds. RMP believes that scholars' families are their first and longest-lasting teachers and that they must actively partner with families to ensure scholars are successful at RMP and beyond. Though that partnership historically focused around academics, over the past few years the RMP Creekside team became increasingly aware that experiences and conditions outside of the school building were having a major impact on students' and families' abilities to be physically, emotionally, and mentally present. In order to support families with meeting those basic needs and connecting them to the appropriate resources quickly, the RMP Creekside staff developed and implemented the Family Advocacy Support Team (FAST).

The FAST team was intentionally designed and staffed with individuals who were best positioned to quickly and effectively understand and respond to the needs of students and families. Not all classroom-based staff have a comprehensive understanding of yhr support services available through the school and through community partners, but they did have strong existing relationships and channels of communication with families. The relationships that families have with classroom-based staff combined with the broad knowledge of the support staff made the central feature of quick response times from the FAST teams possible. The FAST team is made up of 7 members: a Family Liaison, Social Worker, Psychologist, Counselor, Nurse, a General Education Teacher, and a Special Education Teacher.

The FAST team's exact process varies from case to case but in general follows the below process:

1. Staff notices a basic student need or a parent states a student need.
2. Staff submit a referral via google survey.
3. FAST team reviews submissions weekly.
4. FAST assigns next steps and tracks until completion.
5. Teachers/Staff are notified when referral was completed or if extended past 14 days.

As with launching any new human-centered strategy, the RMP Creekside team encountered a variety of both logistical and systemic challenges. Starting a program with no funding created its own challenges; staff had to fundraise to meet the immediate needs while they compiled a list of the most relevant community resources. Immigration concerns have also been a pressing issue. Having a partnership with a community organization that can support immigration requests helped the school meet these specific needs.

For those looking to replicate this practice, consider the following:

- Set up a quick reference guide on what your team would be able to support financially.
- Plan for what happens if a family continues to need a large amount of support throughout the year?
- Do you have a compiled resource guide?

- 
- Who is the best group of people to launch this program?

# Food Outreach Champions

## Boulder Valley School District

### Boulder, CO



In the days immediately after Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) closed due to COVID-19, district staff created and coordinated a team of outreach champions to support families who, for a variety of reasons, could not leave their homes during the crisis. This team included many of BVSD's community liaisons and an assortment of teachers, principals, front office staff, and community volunteers.

The project was initially intended to be a one-day event over Spring Break. Staff knew the Emergency Food Distribution was shutting down for 12 days, meaning some families would not be able to provide food to their children. The Equity and Partnerships team collaborated with the BVSD Food Services department and the district foundation, Impact on Education, to offer a day for a designated school representative to pick up food bags and gift cards for families who were unable to leave their homes.

Little did district staff know that one day would turn into an ongoing service to families who fell victim to the many challenging effects caused by COVID-19. Since that day in mid-March, every Tuesday and Thursday, dozens of BVSD staff members hit the road, picking up food, books and supplies, then safely hand-delivered the items to the doorsteps of the district's most vulnerable families.

Due to a generous outpouring of community organizations, BVSD outreach champions are now able to offer even more resources when they visit homes. Outreach champions can now offer even more resources, including bringing books, ensuring families have Internet, providing personal care products, and giving art supplies to students and families.

When summer break commenced, it was uplifting to discover that so many of the delivery champions were interested in continuing to serve over the vacation. BVSD was able to compensate them for their time and reimburse them for their mileage. Staff also added a few volunteers from the community to the summer team to ensure that they were meeting the needs of families from all participating schools throughout this challenging time.

In the end, it is not just the resources that the outreach champions bring to families. It is also the value of seeing a person who cares about them and sharing a face-to-face interaction - from a distance. When they are going to the doorsteps and safely interacting with families, they are an ear to better support teachers and principals and other staff. They are able to garner better insight to help everyone better fill voids.

BVSD's Director of Equity and Partnerships shares: "These porch conversations will sometimes give us a more candid view of what families truly need. There is something different that happens when we let go of the position of power that we inhabit when we ask families to come to us. When we are standing on a family's porch, they feel more comfortable to speak candidly and transparently about what is going well, what they need and what could better help them and their children during these unprecedented times."

# Immigrant Services Program

## Metropolitan State University of Denver

### Denver, CO



According to a January 2020 study by New American Economy (NAE), 2018 American Community Survey (ACS) data indicate that 2% of all U.S. college students, or approximately 450,000, are undocumented.<sup>1</sup> Given the precariousness of an unstable immigration status, it comes to little surprise that in an April 2018 study of over 1,400 undocumented college students found that, “(f)our in five Scholars (83%) described themselves as ‘very anxious’ about their immigration status, with a similar percentage (86%) expressing concern for the legal status of their family.”<sup>2,3</sup>

These two studies lead to a fruitful partnership between Metropolitan State University (MSU) of Denver and three non-profit community organizations—Denver Children’s Advocacy Center, Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, and FWD.us. The goal of these partnerships was to provide key areas of support to this student population. More specifically, the partners hoped to alleviate financial, legal, and mental health stressors for undocumented students at MSU Denver. As a Hispanic Serving Institution and a key education provider in Colorado’s immigrant community, providing and modeling community partnerships is a key element to MSU Denver’s mission.

These partnerships were initiated by the Director of the MSU Denver’s Immigrant Services Program, which is charged with supporting immigrant, refugee, DACA, and undocumented students at MSU Denver. The program strives to provide all-encompassing support to ensure students’ academic success. Various staff at Denver Children’s Advocacy Center, Colorado Immigrant Rights Coalition, and FWD.us provided either material, staff, or programming support to students and/or campus events.

The partnerships between these three community organizations and the Immigrant Services Program resulted in direct financial support to more than a dozen DACA recipients renewing their status (FWD.us), numerous on-campus workshops to help with immigration forms, entrepreneurship resources and development, as well as Know Your Rights trainings (CIRC), and event development, coordination, and participation around mental health, anxiety, and coping mechanisms (DCAC).

Students and families received additional one-on-one support from the three community organizations while MSU Denver offers physical space for workshops and promotional support to programming organized by some of these organizations. Undocumented students at MSU Denver have reported that shared programming and community organization presence on campus assures them that they have the supports they need for emotional wellbeing and academic success.

---

<sup>1</sup> New America Economy (NAE), *Undocumented Immigrants*, (2018).

<sup>2</sup> Garcia et al., *Mental Health of Undocumented Immigrant Adults in the United States: A Systematic Review of Methodology and Findings*, (2016) 1-25.

<sup>3</sup> Bernstein, J. & Blazer, J., *Legalizing Undocumented Immigrants: An Essential Tool in Fighting Poverty*. (2008) 408.



# Instructional Rounds—Reimagined

## Cimarron Elementary School

### Aurora, CO



After a series of meetings, teachers and staff at Cimarron Elementary School discovered a mismatch between what students actually knew and how they were able to articulate that knowledge. After examining the data in both literacy and mathematics, the school's Guiding Coalition believed the root cause was providing practice and actionable feedback for students to improve their communication skills. In order to understand their challenges and improve oral communication, the Coalition determined that staff needed to hear directly from the students. This led to the creation of Instructional Rounds—Reimagined, an initiative that brings in stakeholders from across the district to work with students.

Cimarron's principal, instructional coach, and innovation teacher worked with the Front Range BOCES to develop guiding questions for students' responses. Classroom teachers nominated students which represented all classrooms, grade levels, races, and genders. In preparation for the actual Instructional Rounds, students were brought together for lunch and asked similar questions in order to test their validity and ease students' nerves.

On the day of the Instructional Rounds—Reimagined, guests from across Cherry Creek and other districts learned the school background and goals. Participants who received the questions learned how the students' feedback would be used to provide the school with actionable data.

Participants broke into two groups. Facilitators, who had been trained in the Instructional Rounds process, engaged with students in grade level cohorts. Observers listened to students answer questions and build off of their peers' responses. After participants listened and observed all students, they worked together with their groups to identify student response trends and how the students communicated. Each group shared their observations with Cimarron's leadership team and were given a chance to come up with creative ways to engage the students at Cimarron in next steps.

After the Rounds, Cimarron staff reviewed the data to determine next steps to help students to develop their communication skills. Patterns surfaced around the students' needs to develop listening skills and to develop their individual abilities to build on their peers' thinking. Other patterns included increasing student engagement through leadership opportunities and the students desire for learning choice (agency) within the classroom.

A tip for schools that are interested in capturing student voice at the elementary level would be to leave questions open ended for students to build on each other's ideas and provide small enough groups where every individual has a chance to share. Using spaces that are familiar to the students and setting up clear protocols (for staff, students and observers) will also lead to students feeling comfortable and confident to express themselves authentically. Taking time to stop and truly listen to students can not only lead to shifts in our instructional practices but to cultural shifts that can change the lives of every learner.

# Summer Food Service Program

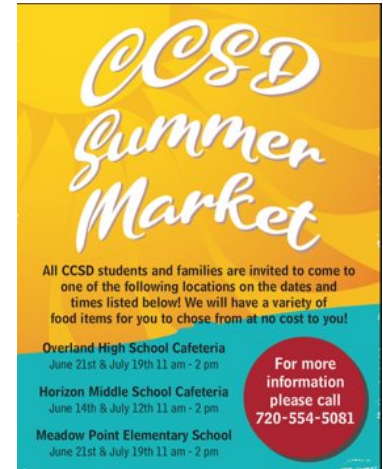
## Meadow Point Elementary School

### Aurora, CO

In summer 2019, Meadow Point Elementary School was one of three Cherry Creek schools to pilot and host a summer food service program. This program ran from May through July, Monday through Friday, from 11-1. The service provided daily lunches at no cost to children 18 and younger and a small fee for adults. The lunches included a main entree, fresh fruits, vegetables, and milk. In addition to the summer lunch program, Meadow Point also offered a summer market. The summer market let Cherry Creek School District (CCSD) families shop for fresh produce and a variety of pantry staples at no extra cost.

Meadow Point is a Title I school, with over 54% of students eligible for free and reduced lunches. Many of the families are on a fixed income, which adds a financial and emotional strain on families over the summer when students can't receive meals at school.

Because of the pilot's success in CCSD, the Summer Food Service Program was able to continue and grow during the difficult times of COVID-19. As the school year turned to remote learning, the district felt it was crucial to still provide students with school lunches. In the beginning, lunch was distributed Monday through Friday and then changed to a Monday, Wednesday, Friday distribution to lessen interaction and allow social distancing. Breakfasts were also added.



On distribution days, kids received two days' worth of breakfasts and lunches at a time along with fresh produce Friday's where they received frozen yogurt and an extra bag of produce. On average, 250-300 children received meals through this program.

Meadow Points' family engagement liaisons, Joei Sayers, shares: "Some days, this job tugs at my heartstrings and it pushes me to do more other days my heart is full of joy because I know our hard work is paying off and I know we have been a blessing to someone."

Sayers continues: "I have been told by many parents that the summer lunches lightened the burden of providing those daily meals and it was immensely appreciated. I personally wanted to see how the program was benefiting our district's families, so I stopped in for lunch a few times over the summer with my children and the turnout was always great. The families also loved the addition of shopping at the summer market and the fact that there was fresh produce all at no extra cost."



# The Digital Divide During COVID

## Boulder Valley School District

### Boulder, CO



On March 12th, students in Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) were asked to honor the COVID-19 stay at home mandate, and on March 13th, BVSD's IT and Equity and Partnerships Teams jumped into action. It was no secret that hundreds of families in BVSD not only lacked access to technology, but equally crucial, lacked access to the internet. The urgency of connecting families to technology was never so pressing.

The Chief Intelligence Officer used his creativity, leadership, and leveraged his network of community allies to embark on a project unprecedented in the district. Together with a dedicated team of passionate principals, community liaisons, and support staff, BVSD succeeded in connecting close to 1,000 families to the internet and distributed more than 6,000 Chromebook devices to students throughout the district.

Boulder's IT Team collaborated with the Boulder Public Library, who donated 100 hotspots, enabling students to establish an immediate internet connection. Staff network organized a thorough distribution plan through a combination of addressing phone calls to the IT help line, making personal phone calls to families, and responding to teacher feedback about who was not yet attending virtual classes.

In addition to the family outreach effort, IT deepened its partnership with the wireless technology company LiveWire. Boulder was able to strike a win/win situation with the company, allowing it to mount signal antennas on a variety of schools in the district in exchange for free internet to free/reduced lunch qualified families, encompassing 21% of BVSD's population. Those families who were within reach of the internet signal set up appointments directly with LiveWire and are now able to access the internet, some for the first time ever. This means that students could then participate in Home Learning, and parents could embark on a journey of learning about technology and digital literacy. BVSD revealed one silver lining under the dire COVID circumstances as the district made more headway in narrowing the digital divide in 3 months than it did in the last decade. Staff also acknowledge there is still work to be done.

BVSD also partnered with Comcast to implement and finance the Internet Essentials program and is covering the cost of the first six months' subscription for the families of students receiving free and reduced lunch.

In response to parent challenges of managing various learning platforms, BVSD fielded personal phone calls, went to people's houses to help troubleshoot access issues, and is currently working on creating "how to videos" in Spanish and English for families who are less familiar with technology. Those videos range from "How to login to your Single Sign-On account," to "How to access assignments in Schoology," to "How to login to Infinite Campus."

BVSD also partnered with CU's Renee Crown Institute who sent out surveys to Spanish speaking families. The 120+ responses helped inform teachers and administrators about the successes and challenges families faced and continue to face, both from a personal and an educational/technology standpoint. As a result, the district has been able to provide additional services such as a) a food distribution program, b) childcare for essential workers, c) online Summer Learning support, and d) personal phone calls home.

# The HUB @ Foothills Foodies

## Foothills Elementary School

### Lakewood, CO



The HUB @ Foothills Foodies, located on the Foothills Elementary School campus, offers free supplemental food, clothing, and wrap-around services to all of Jeffco's Green Mountain Articulation families. Foothills Elementary is a Title I school, where 76% of the student population qualify for free and reduced lunch. The school strives to be a valued community partner and has developed a critical role to better address a spectrum of needs for struggling families.

The HUB @ Foothills Foodies, which is 100% sufficient because of donations and volunteers, has the capacity to serve over 1500 families within the articulation area. To date, community partners have secured over 2000 pounds of food, thousands of personal hygiene products, and over \$6000 in monetary donations. These partners include the Concordia Lutheran Church, Lakewood Connects, Green Mountain Safeway, A Precious Child, Mission Lakewood Church, the Foothills PTA, Green Mountain Articulation Schools, Foothills Rotary Club, Foothills PTA, and private donors.

The HUB is recognized as a Health and Human Services Academy Career Pathway for Foothills students. Not only does it serve a vital community support function, but it also provides a unique opportunity for elementary age students to experience service. Students stock shelves with food and clothing items and assist in running the HUB as a store by welcoming and assisting shoppers and taking inventory. Students learn that they are never too young to make a meaningful difference in their community.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, the HUB has become more critical than ever. Without skipping a beat, Foothills staff and volunteers began providing Grab and Go breakfasts and lunch services through the Jeffco Public Schools Food and Nutrition Office. Since schools switched to online instruction in March, The HUB at Foothills Foodies has provided an estimated 1,080 bags of food to families which include breakfast, lunch, dinner, snacks, and hygiene items.

One Foothills parent, who is currently fighting cancer, shared: "Every month is just a struggle to keep medical bills from going to collections and paying the bills for all of our kids. Being able to supplement our groceries takes a little bit of stress out of that situation." Another parent added: "My husband's income has been slashed. We have 2 teenage boys that eat nonstop. This food has helped them from going hungry."

Foothills Elementary was recognized by Lakewood's Mayor Adam Paul and Jeffco Public School Board President Susan Harmon for its innovative work. Channel 7 and Channel 4 featured the HUB at Foothills Foodies on their newscasts and the Lakewood Sentinel shared with its readers about the resources offered to the community through this utterly amazing collaborative.



# Wish for Wheels

## Ponderosa Elementary School

### Aurora, CO



On May 28, 2020, outgoing second grade students at Ponderosa Elementary School were the first of the thirteen Title I school students to receive brand new bicycles and helmets from a partnership with Wish for Wheels. Wish for Wheels is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization that gives brand new bicycles and helmets to children in low income communities. Founded in 2004, their first giveaway made it clear that not only do bikes bring health and happiness into the students' lives, but the gift of a new bicycle can motivate a student to "do better" in school. Their unique model bundles corporate philanthropy, team building and employee collaboration together through fund raising, bike building to delivering the new bikes and helmets to students.

This initial event started with the Director of Funded Projects being introduced to Brad Appel, the Founder and CEO of Wish for Wheels. Fortunately for Cherry Creek Schools and the students at Ponderosa, Brad and his team had already received some corporate sponsorships and had bicycles purchased prior to the onset of COVID-19.

Leadership at Ponderosa, in partnership with the Cherry Creek Education Foundation, have a goal to raise \$100,000 dollars over the next two years so that every second-grade student in Cherry Creek's Title I schools can receive new bicycles. Ponderosa's principal explains: "Ultimately, we want to use bicycles not only as a means for a student to get to school, increasing his or her attendance, but as a tool for learning about health, safety, pride of ownership, and fun."

Starting in August 2020, Ponderosa staff will begin tracking attendance, discipline, and achievement data of all the students who received bicycles. Staff will survey both parents and students to see if there have been any significant improvements in the student's life after receiving their bicycle.

As is the case with so many well-planned initiatives, COVID-19 threw a little wrench in this activity. In an ideal situation, the staff and volunteers from the corporation who sponsored the school would come together to build the bikes one day and then give them to students the next day. When the students come to get their bikes, the staff and volunteers make sure that the students' helmets and bikes fit properly and there is time for demonstrations and students practicing safe riding techniques. But because of the pandemic, parents drove up, signed a waiver, and a sanitized bicycle and wrapped helmet were loaded in their car.

Ponderosa's principal, Chad Gerity, shared: "If you want to work with Wish for Wheels or try and replicate what they do, it takes corporate sponsorships. To really make it work, the planning needs to happen six months (or more) before each 'give away.' The planning includes not only securing the funding for the bicycles and helmets, identifying dates for the 'build' and 'give away,' but also organizing the staff and volunteers."

Moving forward, the hope is for Ponderosa students to be able to ride their bikes to school, practice riding their bikes in P.E. class and at recess. Staff also want students to use their bicycles to talk about math, as a tool for science, and as a subject for writing.

For more information and  
partnering materials:

**SACPIE**

[www.cde.state.co.us/sacpie](http://www.cde.state.co.us/sacpie)

**CDE**

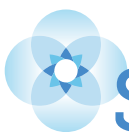
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/familyengagement>

**Questions**

Darcy Hutchins

CDE Director of Family, School, Community Partnerships

[hutchins\\_d@cde.state.co.us](mailto:hutchins_d@cde.state.co.us)



**SACPIE**

State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education



**COLORADO**

Department of Education