

School CAFÉs: Engaging Community Partners

Jeffco Public Schools

Golden, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

In 2024, Jeffco schools began a partnership with [SchoolConnectAZ](#) to train schools to host CAFÉ (Community and Family Engagement) meetings to strengthen partnerships between schools and local community organizations. A CAFÉ is a round table conversation between a school principal and the local leaders of their community, in which the partners work together to address the needs of neighborhood children and families. The goal of a CAFÉ is to bring partners around the table to help address school needs, as they relate to student achievement, school culture, staff retention, and family engagement.

District leadership met with SchoolConnectAZ to learn more about their process, then visited Harrison School District 2 in Colorado Springs to observe their districtwide CAFÉ co-hosted with [COSILoveYou](#). They then partnered with Lumberg Elementary in November to prototype a CAFÉ in Jeffco. At that meeting, 12 businesses, faith-based organizations, service clubs, and nonprofits gathered to learn about the priorities of the Lumberg school community and sign up for various opportunities to support. Building off the energy of that night, a School Champion was designated to keep partners engaged and Lumberg hosted two more CAFÉs in February and May.



During a CAFÉ, community partners from all sectors meet with a principal and their school team and share a meal. The principal then shares their priorities and calendar and names specific areas where community partners can contribute their time, talent, and treasure. As community partners identify opportunities to support, they commit right then and there.

Following the success at Lumberg, Jeffco shared the opportunity with other school leaders from around the district and hosted a 3-day training in June 2024 using central funds. The training built the capacity of the participating schools to recruit School Champions, asset map their community partners, and host CAFÉs and other catalytic community engagement events such as “Love Our Schools Day.”

The success of the CAFÉ is evaluated through regular surveys, feedback sessions, and analysis of key performance indicators such as staff turnover rates, student attendance, and academic performance. As Jeffco expands CAFÉs to more schools, there will be challenges with coordinating schedules to ensure consistent participation from all community partners, as well as maintaining momentum and ensuring follow-through on action items by community partners. School champions will be crucial to keep all partners fully engaged.

For those looking to replicate the CAFÉ initiative, it is advised to start small with a school community that already has many invested community partners. The success of the initiative will rely on genuine partnerships. It is also essential to be adaptable and responsive to feedback, ensuring that the initiative evolves to meet the changing needs of the school community. Finally, maintaining consistent communication and celebrating small wins will help sustain engagement and drive long-term success.

Standard 6 – Collaborate with Community
Essential Element 4– Dedicate Necessary Resources