

 **BOULDER VALLEY SCHOOL DISTRICT** In Spring of last year at a Families and Educators Together (FET) team gathering, one courageous Spanish speaking mom said, “I’m so upset to just find out now in April that my child is failing a class. Why didn’t the teacher share that information with me at any point earlier in the semester?” This led to discussions about how staff can regularly update families on their students’ academic progress. The goal was to narrow the communication gap and academic gap, particularly for non-English speaking families. With the district recently supporting the use of the communication app Talking Points, the FET team at Louisville Middle School decided to move forward with this tool.

Talking Points was the preferred method of communication due to its ease of use. The principal allocated specific time for teachers to identify, and then communicate with, the students and families who would benefit the most from academic updates. Positive messages, as well as concerns or constructive messages, were encouraged. Approximately 50 teachers communicated with the families of students they had identified. Staff prioritized families they had not communicated enough with previously and non-English speaking families for text updates. This increased communication with 150-200 families.

Responses from families were immediate and well received. Teachers also appreciated the tool as they were able to be intentional in their communication. As a result, more ongoing communication between families and teachers was evident. Because strengthening family partnerships was included in Louisville Middle School’s Unified Improvement Plan, there was increased leverage to implement a communication tool such as Talking Points. One of the main challenges included taking time to utilize the program amidst competing priorities. Having the principal set aside specific time for teachers to communicate with families emphasized the importance of the strategy.

Those wishing to replicate this practice should allocate intentional and purposeful time to utilize Talking Points, or a similar communication tool. It helps to utilize a time when your staff is in the same space, such as staff meetings, so they can collaborate and support one another in reaching out to families.