

Family Transition to Middle School Parent Panels

Homestake Peak School & Gypsum Creek Middle School

Avon, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

YouthPower365 desired to enhance what was already being done by the Eagle County School District to support student and family transitions to middle school. This included creating a safe and welcoming space for families to share their expertise when transitioning to middle school, as well as for the rising students' families to ask questions and feel more comfortable and confident in their role. The goals were to support the formation of positive communication and relationships and highlight the importance of family engagement at the middle school level, recognizing the family role looks different compared to the elementary school level.



Utilizing best practices in family engagement, YouthPower365 sought to develop a panel experience that was strengths-based, honored lived experiences and funds of knowledge, and was rooted in positive relationships with a focus on two-way communication. YouthPower365 spent the past year listening to families and community partners and utilizing various parent surveys to hear and learn. Feedback included that while there were many activities to support students in transition, there weren't supports available for families, leaving them with unanswered questions and feelings of being lost, unwelcomed, and uninformed before their students even enter the new school building.

YouthPower365's Family Engagement Team identified two Eagle County School District middle schools that have been committed to partnership and investment in family engagement. Principals and staff with family connections (English Language Acquisition teachers and counselors) were approached with the YouthPower365 proposal to host Family Transition to Middle School Parent Panels. Both schools welcomed this proposal and moved forward to add this to the agenda of their building's Family Orientation and Middle School Building Tour held in the Spring of 2023.



In partnership with the above school leaders, YouthPower365 created a script for the panels that followed the principal's welcome and presentation of their program. The script included a welcome to families and acknowledgement of the important part they play in the learning and success of their students and the recognition that the panel was in response to family feedback. The topics were family generated including communication, growing independence, peer relationships, and essential organizational and self-efficacy skills. YouthPower365 provided a moderator who asked specific questions to panelists and facilitated a Q&A session. Interpretation was available to promote participation.



Anecdotally, the feedback from families and educators was very positive. A teacher in attendance, who is also a parent, reported this was the first time family voice and experience was represented and felt there was power in this experience. Both middle schools who participated in the panels have expressed interest in partnering for future years. The middle schools and YouthPower365 were intentional about removing barriers and were thoughtful about the evening event timing, childcare, light dinner and drinks, and Spanish interpretation. Interpretation did lengthen the panel responses, which in turn limited the quantity



and depth of responses. Prior to the events, the panelists were identified and prepared their responses in advance to be mindful of the time. At future events, YouthPower365 will attempt to provide simultaneous translation with headsets.

For future parent panels, YouthPower365 will be mindful of including a broader family experience representation, considering single parents, grandparents raising students, recent arrivals, and second-generation families. YouthPower365 will also prepare and ensure comfort with the panelists as well as the host school to share both challenges and successes. For the future, YouthPower365 will consider how to share the same information to families or other schools who couldn't attend, with possibilities including: recording the event, creating a takeaway handout, or offering a generic panel at a different time and location, not focused on any one school.