

1:1 Community Conversations

Riverview School

Glenwood Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Riverview School was launched in the 2017-2018 school year to provide a PK-8 option in the Roaring Fork School District located between the communities of Glenwood Springs and Carbondale. During the design stages of the school launch, school leadership undertook a robust process to solicit community input about what type of school they hoped for. The practice described here is of the necessary evolution that effort, now that the school is up and running. 1:1 Community Conversations is directly connected to Riverview's vision, which was authored by the community.

Brianda Cervantes, the Community School Coordinator at Riverview, was the lead for applying community organizing principles to family engagement. Brianda's role has evolved over her two years at the school, moving from a hybrid role that combined elements of a community liaison with front office support to a role with a clear focus on building relationships and partnerships with families and community organizations. Brianda also works closely with the Family Liaison at Riverview to create a welcoming environment and opportunities for families to share their voice inside the school. Finally, she also works closely with the Family Services Department at the district to connect families to available resources and basic needs services outside the building.

The essential element of applying community organizing principles to family engagement is through hosting 1:1 conversations with families. Brianda started outreach at the beginning of the year to families she already had relationships with in addition to making cold calls. She leveraged opportunities to connect with families in person (events, pick up and drop off, front office time, registration, lunch and bus duty, student leadership class) and then would follow up to schedule a meeting, if they were interested.

Meetings primarily took place at families' homes and usually lasted 30-40 minutes. The 1:1 was a chance for a casual conversation about what the family's experience at the school has been like and what their hopes and dreams are, both for their children and for themselves. By asking about the needs and aspirations of both the students and their parents, Brianda is able to demonstrate to families that the school is invested in the success of the whole family, which in turn strengthens the partnership and opens up an avenue for honest dialogue between home and school. In order to maximize the impact of the 1:1's, Brianda would regularly debrief her conversations with her coach and report out on what she learned to the leadership team in order to ensure they were hearing the feedback from families.

A major foundation and lesson learned for successful implementation of this practice is the importance of having someone in your school whose role is specifically focused on connecting with the community and providing the structural and logistical support for that partnership to be built. Additionally, setting aside dedicated days or blocks of time for this 1:1 engagement meant that Brianda could prioritize these conversations even when the everyday emergencies of life in a school would arise.