

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.