



Promising Partnership Practices

2017

A collection of initiatives from districts and schools about working with families and community partners for student learning



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Introduction

2017 Promising Partnership Practices



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The State Advisory Council for Parent Involvement in Education (SACPIE) and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is pleased to share this third annual collection of *Promising Partnership Practices*. The purpose of this book is for schools, districts, and other educational organizations in Colorado to highlight how they partner with families and the community for student success.

Over 50 years of research indicate that students are more likely to succeed both academically and behaviorally when schools, families, and communities work together. This publication approximately 50 practices categorized by the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships (PTA, 2008), a research-based framework with which CDE and SACPIE align their partnering work (Senate Bill 13-193).



We look forward to highlighting more practices each year and to improving outcomes for students through family, school, and community partnering.

In Partnership,

Stacey Zis, SACPIE Chair

Kim Watchorn, SACPIE Vice Chair

Dr. Darcy Hutchins, CDE Family Partnership Director

CDE and SACPIE would like to acknowledge and thank Rachel Adler for helping to write the narratives for this publication.

Community Pozole Dinner

Truscott Elementary

Loveland, CO



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Truscott Elementary is one of two dual-language immersion schools in the Thompson School District. In 2007, a bilingual Café con Leche parent group started the annual Pozole Dinner event at Truscott. Pozole, which means hominy, is a traditional soup or stew from Mexico that is frequently served as a celebratory dish.

The goal of the Pozole Dinner is to bring the community together in a comfortable and welcoming setting where relationships are formed and strengthened. Building community with these types of events opens the door to success for students, recognizes the school as the center of a community, and builds strong culturally responsive partnerships in Loveland.

The planning process begins approximately two months prior to the dinner and includes brainstorming, planning, and organizing led by the Café con Leche parent group, with assistance from school staff, the family outreach liaison, and the community. The school receives donations from local and regional restaurants and businesses for food, as well as, items for a silent auction. Other activities at this event include arts and crafts, positive behavior support, a photo booth, healthy lifestyle promotion, and fundraising opportunities.

The Community Pozole Dinner has now become one of the most popular events at the school every year. It brings in more families and community members than any other school event. It is a relaxing way to visit, get to know other individuals and families, and create a feeling of belonging in the school community. Participants, planners and implementers provide feedback on the event in person, via surveys and through post-event reflecting sessions designed to evaluate the program and make refinements and adjustments for the next year.

Started as a very organic, grassroots effort celebrating the values and heritage of the bilingual Truscott families, this process represents a deep desire in the community to connect and celebrate cultural diversity in this dual-language immersion elementary school. Cultural events like this are meaningful to our community and have in the past 10 years become part of who we are and how we do business.

The biggest successes from the most recent Community Pozole Dinner was seeing a great number of families return, as well as welcoming new families, and hosting the dinner off-site at the neighborhood church. Doing this revitalized the event and provided a comforting setting where families could receive services, play games with their children and much more.

Cultural Ambassadors

Centennial BOCES

Greeley, CO



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The Centennial BOCES, located in Greeley, provides several supports for migrant families and students. The goal is to ensure the voices of *all* migrant families, including culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse groups of parents, are represented, honored and heard through the Northern Region’s Migrant Education Program.

In response to a significant, ongoing demographic shift in Colorado’s Northern Region over the past five years, Centennial BOCES (CBOCES), the grant administrator of the Northern Region Migrant Education Program, recognized a need to reach out and engage with “newcomer families,” many who had just recently moved into the region as refugees from Africa and Asia. For decades, the vast majority of migrant families in the Northern region had spoken Spanish as a primary home language, and they shared a cultural heritage based in Latin American roots.

To start, CBOCES reached out to members in various subgroup communities to identify natural leaders and sought their input. It didn’t take long to realize they needed to partner, *truly* partner, with newcomer neighbors by treating them as equals. CBOCES hired parent leaders who reflected the culture and languages of the newcomer, immigrant, migrant and refugee subgroups.

CBOCES created Cultural Ambassador positions and hired people from the community who spoke fluent Burmese, Karen, Karenni and Somali. The Cultural Ambassadors worked “as needed” to assist in translation, interpretation and cultural communication. CBOCES started with four Cultural Ambassadors and now have over a dozen on call staff!

The Cultural Ambassadors provide more than just language support; they held the keys that opened doors to true partnership. They continue to serve as parent representatives on the Regional Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and as well as on the State PAC. Cultural Ambassadors have co-presented with staff at national conferences, and continue to support our work by sharing their wisdom, knowledge and ideas to assist in better identifying students’ needs and in the design of educational support services delivered by the Northern Region Migrant Education Program.

CBOCES is already seeing a positive impact on students. By engaging newcomer parents in the education their children, CBOCES has noticed an increased enrollment in preschool and school readiness programs, increased attendance of children in school, and improved relationships between newcomer parents and the community at large. When parents feel welcomed, valued and respected, they engage more deeply in their children’s education in ways they find to be meaningful and effective.

Expedicion Comunitaria

Glenwood Springs Elementary School

Glenwood Springs, CO



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Glenwood Springs Elementary School (GSES) developed its Expedicion Comunitaria to encourage trusting relationships between staff and families. This partnership will also model for all that the school staff value character development, leadership and an ethic of service. Students will see that GSES truly models its motto of, “We are crew, not passengers.” They are all in this together and everyone is valued.

This project is supported and led by the Manus Fund (Valley Settlement Project) as a way to get parents of under-represented populations integrated into the school community. In December 2014, all staff members embarked on an effort to also reach local businesses. Teachers visited all local businesses and made connections that help provide the school with local experts, guest speakers, and general supporters of the school.

Each year GSES conducts an Expeditionary Learning Implementation Review. This is a comprehensive tool with 26 rubrics that measure all aspects of school operations. One of these rubrics involves partnerships with families and communities. Over the past two years, this indicator has consistently scored below the proficient mark (a 2 out of 5). This data coupled with annual school perception data (administered by Roaring Fork School District) indicated that there is a need to increase partnerships with families. The data showed a need to address concerns in the following areas:

- Families need to be invited, and consistently supported, to participate in school events through multiple (3 or more) strategies (e.g. scheduling events outside of school day, assisting with transportation, providing translators).
- The school needs to provide multiple (3 or more) ways that families can participate in the school community (e.g., governance, tutoring, classroom experts, portfolio panelists), and most efforts are successful.
- School leaders and teachers need to learn about and respect the cultures, backgrounds, and values of their students' families.
- School communications need to consistently and effectively welcome and accommodate linguistic and cultural differences.

Glenwood Springs Elementary addressed the survey results by building staff understanding of equality vs. equity. This staff learning expedition focused on better understanding their own cultural backgrounds as well as the culture in which GSES is nestled. Neighborhood walks and “Dinner with Friends” were some of the activities that helped school staff and families build trusting relationships, which will ultimately support student learning.

Family Fun Night

Centennial Middle School

Boulder, CO



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Family Fun Night at Centennial Middle School (CMS) aims to increase family partnerships from all parent demographic groups in a school event. Specifically, CMS targeted groups of parents who were previously not represented at most formal parent groups, PTO and SAC, and who had less than average participation at current night events.

In August of 2015, Centennial Middle School established a School Accountability Committee. This group reviewed several items including: the district Unified Improvement Plan goals for our school, and all data available from test results and climate surveys. After several meetings of reviewing data and completing data analysis protocols, the group then set specific action steps for each of our specific school goals.

One goal, The Family Partnership Goal, was set by BVSD and required all schools to select a parent representative for our school Family Partnership Contact, and to complete the BVSD newly created BVSD Family Partnership Inventory. This first year, 2015-16, CMS worked with the BVSD Family Partnership leader to help us recruit parent volunteers for SAC and PTO from underrepresented groups, specifically parents who speak Spanish and whose students are in the English as a Second Language program.

This past year, 2016-17, CMS set a specific goal for increasing parent involvement from all demographics in our school in order to increase family engagement within the school. The SAC group continued to use the BVSD documents provided to help us create a one year action plan, or Families and Educators Together (FET) goal. CMS set a goal of increasing the PTO and Accountability involvement. Number counts at meetings showed increased attendance, and increased demographics of the school population that was represented at meetings.

CMS also set a goal of increasing activities at our school for parent participation and engagement for families. This work led us to create the first ever Family Fun Night that was held in April 2017. This was a dinner, bottle flipping contest, movie and movie trivia night. CMS made this a bilingual event, Spanish and English, to target the community they were trying to bring in.

All marketing and trivia sheets were in both languages. Marketing strategies used were: signage, school newsletter (posted on the website and sent out via email), PTO newsletter (posted on their website and emailed out), announcements at school via the intercom and on our TV, and the use of the electronic sign at the front of the school. A local company provided popcorn, the PTO funded a pizza dinner, and SAC arranged for the games and movie. At the May SAC meeting members debriefed the activity and decided to expand the evening to include more activities.

Holiday Cheer Event

Greeley-Evans School District 6

Greeley, CO



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Greeley-Evans School District 6 collaborates with the University of Northern Colorado's Bear Hug Club annually during the holiday season. The Bear Hug Club conducts an annual book and toy drive each November before wrapping gifts for donations given to the Families in Transition Program. The Families in Transition Program, also known as the McKinney-Vento Program, works to support students within the Greeley-Evans School District who are experiencing homelessness.

During the 2016 holiday season, even more holiday cheer was spread through a gift giveaway to families. Fliers were sent out to each school within the district so that students who qualify could receive a gift and a book. Several days prior to the district's winter break, the administration building was festively decorated, music was playing, and a photo booth was available for attendees to take pictures with Santa Claus. Gift cards were raffled off, and cookies, hot chocolate, and coffee were available through donations by local Safeway and King Soopers grocery stores.

Although Greeley-Evans School District 6 provides annual support for McKinney-Vento families during the holiday season, the Holiday Cheer Event exceeded previous expectations by adding gift card giveaways and feedback options for the 40 plus families in attendance to communicate what was and was not helpful during the event.



Most of the families who participated in the Holiday Cheer Event are typically unable to experience luxuries such as paying for pictures with Santa Claus at the mall, receiving gifts, or having holiday decorations in their homes. The Holiday Cheer Event was able to bring families together for a night of treats, gifts, and quality time.

International Dinner

Lewis-Palmer School District 38

Monument, CO



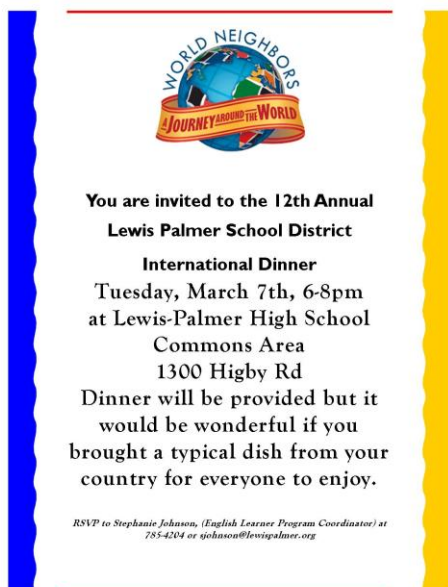
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Lewis Palmer School District’s International Dinner aims to provide an opportunity for families within the school community to share a dish from their native country and meet new people. Students of the parents who attend the International Dinner receive books and play games representing a variety of different countries. Attendees of the event also report feeling more connected with other parents and district staff.



Prior to the dinner, information is sent to the community to request a reduced cost for food. A flyer advertises the dinner, and invites everyone in the school community to attend. The dinner is for all ages, families, staff, administrators, and anyone with a connection to another culture.

Lewis Palmer’s English Learner (EL) Program Coordinator states that one of the biggest challenges is finding a venue large enough, since 200+ people attend. Space is needed for the buffet, tables, chairs, and centers for students to complete activities. A space is also needed for student performances.



The EL staff debriefs the International Dinner to determine what worked well and what needed to be improved. Over the years, the EL Program Coordinator developed a “continuity book” to avoid reinventing the wheel and encourage sustainability. Lewis Palmer staff also recommends connecting with community members, and learning what EL families do for a living, in order to include them in the planning (e.g. tapping into their businesses, such as restaurants).

Newcomer Parent Mentor Program

Parent Engagement Network

Boulder, CO



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School transitions can be very stressful for both students and parents. Schools have programs in place to support the transition for new students, but parents often need transition support as well.

The Parent Engagement Network (PEN) has extensive experience implementing *Parent Transition Programs*, connecting seasoned parents with new, incoming parents, offering support and assistance as new parents integrate into the school community.

The PEN Parent Transition Program is very flexible and can be adapted to fit the needs and resources of each school and PEN Team. Central aspects of the program can be enhanced through a variety of optional components, discussed in this guide.

A PEN Parent Transition Program Coordinator(s) serves as intermediary between Administration who seek transition support, PEN School Support Team who brings the expertise, and Transition Program Mentors who will be in direct contact with incoming parents. Steps and tools of the program are outlined in this guide and on-going support is provided by the PEN School Support Team.

Options for levels of support are below:

LEVEL	COMMITMENT	PROGRAM OVERVIEW
Basic Level 1:	Have limited time, resources and/or allies.	Limited number of parents, provide the program elements to large groups of new parents. <i>Limited personalization of program.</i>
Mentor Level 2:	Have more time and resource levels to increase program elements. Identified and committed Parent Mentors.	Have enough Parent Mentors for each person to reach a small group of new parents. <i>Increased contact, with opportunity for program enhancement.</i>
One-on-one Level 3:	Have time and extensive resources/committed parents to provide one-to-one support.	Parent Mentors provide 1:1 support for new parent and/or identified group(s) that need deeper, 1:1 support.

Both youth and parent involvement are highly correlated with student success, increased attendance, and decrease in risky behaviors. Parental stress about entering a new school environment translates to an increase in student stress. This program creates a warm and welcoming environment that decreases the stress experienced by parents, students *and* staff and thus helps students thrive.

Professional Exhibition

Fort Lewis College

Durango, Co



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The Professional Exhibition at Fort Lewis College is designed to share teacher education professional practice experiences with families, community members and organizations. A cohort of future teachers enrolled in Fort Lewis College plan one night each semester to share their student teaching experiences with family, friends, community mentors, and college faculty. Each new teacher is tasked with presenting significant and meaningful responses to the following questions:

- Instruction: What are the most effective instructional methods for reaching all students?
- Creating and Managing Diverse Classrooms: How can teachers use culturally responsive pedagogy structured within the classroom to engage, manage, motivate, and inform students about the world in which they live?
- Assessment: How does assessment influence instruction, student learning, and school culture?
- Family and Community Relations: How do schools, teachers, families, and the community engage each other in learning?
- Personal Reflection: What question will guide my professional and personal development?

After the presentations, the Fort Lewis College Teacher Education Department’s facilitator asks students to present honest and constructive feedback about each of these presentational elements and invites the audience to contribute.

For Schools of Education that would like to replicate this practice, representatives at Fort Lewis College state that “It is important for students to plan their own event with their peers.” This allows the pre-service teachers to have ownership over their learning and reflect on their student teaching experiences.

In addition, students of the pre-service teachers inadvertently benefit from having educators with the knowledge and skills to reach out to every family, and create meaningful partnerships focused on student success.

Welcoming All Families into the School Community

Foster Elementary School

Arvada, CO



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WELCOMING ALL FAMILIES

“Welcoming All Families into the School Community” was designed to promote the engagement of all families at Foster Elementary School, including middle-income families who enroll students in the school’s dual-language program as a result of school choice, families with English Language Learners (ELL), and families experiencing generational poverty. Foster Elementary has a diverse student population, with 41% of students identified as ELL, 66% participating in the Free and Reduced Lunch Program, and 32% using the school choice option to participate in the dual-language program. School staff have had to tailor engagement practices to their diverse student and family population in order to create a welcoming environment for all families.

FAMILY-SCHOOL PARTNERSHIP PRACTICES

The principal at Foster Elementary has been using a variety of family-school partnership practices in order to equally and equitably engage all family demographics. For example, headphones are used at many meetings for simultaneous translation; headphones offer Spanish during English-speaking meetings, while English language headphones are offered during Spanish-led meetings. The principal believes having meetings in Spanish provides an opportunity for English-speaking parents to better understand the challenges that mono-lingual Spanish speakers face in their efforts to be involved in their children’s education.

A Title I liaison is funded by Jefferson County School District to discuss how Spanish speakers can be better engaged in their children’s education. The position focuses on relationship building with the diverse families served by Foster Elementary School.

Additionally, the school’s principal requests that parents address her informally, by using her first name. Staff are given the same option, but are allowed to choose how they prefer to be addressed. Informal attire is worn by Heister and the Foster Elementary staff to send a visual cue that she and her staff are approachable to the entire school community.

WELCOMING FAMILIES SUCCESSES

Heister and her staff are increasing the likelihood that parents will be active participants in their children’s education by creating a welcoming environment for all families on a daily basis. Foster Elementary staff understand the importance of personalized connections and the positive long-term impact the family-partnership practices have on their students.

Welcoming Greeters Program

Parent Engagement Network

Boulder, CO



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Department of Education

The Parent Engagement Network (PEN), located in Boulder, implements several initiatives within the Boulder Valley School District to support family-school-community partnerships. One initiative is the Welcoming Greeters Program. This program welcomes parents and other guests into the school building, provides information and direction, increases safety measures in the school, and enhances the welcoming environment and overall school climate.

PEN and the school PEN PAL (Parents As Leaders) work with school administration and staff to identify ways this program can create a welcoming environment for all visitors to a school. Using our assessment and visioning support, schools identify which facets of the program best match their needs. The Program Coordinator works with school administration to develop support materials relevant to school policies, procedures and logistics Greeters need to be aware of in their role.

All parent volunteers are trained to be a positive face for the school, to be aware of school policies and procedures, to answer basic questions visitors might pose and to gather or defer more complex questions to appropriate parties, to be culturally aware and sensitive, and to engage with students in a supportive way.

Welcoming Greeters: at school entrance tables Greeters are given additional support on policy and procedures, especially related to school safety and student entrance and exit routines. Greeters sign up for shifts to sit at a table and welcome people upon entering the building. Greeter Tables are set-up with visitor sign-in sheets, pens, clock, visitor ID, nametag or pass, and Greeters may be given walkie-talkies for direct office communication.

School Tour Guides: are provided with nametags or other identifying garments such as tee-shirts or “Ask Me” buttons. Additional insights, fun facts and scripts for each stop along the way are provided by the Program Coordinator, making the tours more fun and the Parent Tour Guides more confident.

Event Greeters: are provided with identifying “swag” as described for the Tour Guides. They may be positioned at the entrance, at info tables, or float to offer assistance and answer questions of attendees.

This program creates a warm, welcoming environment that leads to a more positive school climate in which children feel safe, connected and accepted. Research shows that a culture of dignity, caring and respect in a school positively impacts the performance of staff and teachers, encourages parent involvement in the school, and drives student success.

Book Groups

Parent Engagement Network

Boulder, CO



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Parent Engagement Network (PEN) Parenting Book Groups have been offered to Boulder Valley parents since 2007, working in partnership with the Boulder Valley School district. Parenting book groups were originally organized by parent volunteers from the Parent Engagement Network, with support from “Please Stop the Rollercoaster” book author, Sue Blaney. The Parenting Book Groups continue to be planned and implemented with the assistance of PEN Parenting Book Group Coordinator.

Parents and caring adults of all K-12 school age children are the target audience. School teachers and staff may also express interest in starting a group and this program can easily serve their needs.



PEN supports interested parents to come together to form the book groups based on a range of varied books and topic areas that support effective parenting. Specific content areas may include child & adolescent development, ADD/ADHD, resilience, or bullying, for example. Book authors, professionals, and other community organizations have collaborated with the book groups in the past.

Parent Engagement Network programs, including the Parenting Book Groups, link indirectly to student outcomes. PEN Programs create school and community context for supporting youth by empowering, engaging, and educating the most important influences in their lives: parents and caring adults. Research shows that children with connected parents are not only more likely to be involved in fewer risk-taking behaviors; they are also more likely to be resilient in the face of life’s challenges.

Many busy parents of youth don’t have enough time to connect with their peers or build a network of support. PEN Parenting Book Groups not only help inform parents about stages of a child’s development, but they also help parents connect with other parents that are dealing with similar questions and issues.

PEN Parenting Book Groups provide parents with a network of resources to build relationships, tools for navigating child and family issues, and opportunities to invest in their student’s success through purposeful conversations leading to sustainable action.



PARENT/SUPERINTENDENT FORUMS

The superintendent of Adams 14 School District launched regularly offered Parent/Superintendent Forums during the 2016-2017 school year which are held throughout the community. The forums gave parents and families the opportunity to discuss issues concerning their students in person with district leadership. Topics included, but were not limited to: the district's progress in boosting academic performance, the district's turnaround plan, and what to expect when students take state tests. District leaders were able to better understand how to capitalize on family desire to be involved as a result of these regular forums.

These forums have turned several suggestions into action. When parents told the district they wanted more access to technology as a learning tool for their students, Superintendent Abrego requested that the board of education set aside funds for technology in Adams 14 schools and classrooms; students will now have access to Chrome Books for the 2017-2018 school year. Parents and families requested a meeting and forum with local college representatives, and Adams 14 set up college visit to meet this request. The visit included a discussion of how parents can make college a reality for their children; for many parents and families, this visit was their first time on a college campus.

FAMILIES EMPOWERED INSTUTUTE

The half-day Families Empowered Institute and Resource Fair was a popular event, drawing in over 75 parents and families. Participants chose between 12 workshops which focused on topics such as: preschool, understanding grade level expectations, high school to college and career transitions, and how families can help boost student achievement through family-school engagement. School staff shared information with parents and families on ways to support their children's social-emotional development outside of school. Parents and families were also able to visit with representatives of 30 community organizations like the Boys and Girls Club, special education services, local healthcare providers, and Denver-area colleges.

Parents and families are empowered to become advocates for their students and for themselves through the Parent/Superintendent Forums and the Families Empowered Institute. Adams 14 leaders believe the best way to involve more parents and families is to encourage those who participate to share what they have learned with family and friends. School leaders have been encouraging the sharing of district partnership so that every family can become involved in the empowerment movement.

Family Involvement Toolkit

Colorado Springs School District 11

Colorado Springs, CO



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FAMILY INVOLVEMENT TOOLKIT

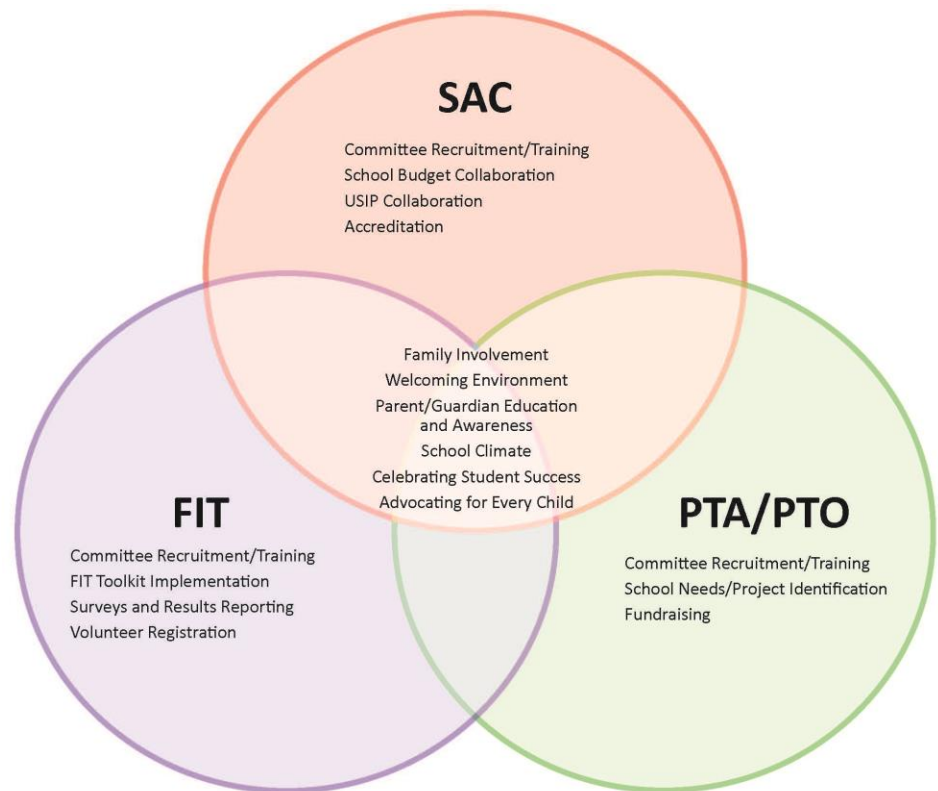
Colorado Springs School District 11 created the Family Involvement Toolkit to satisfy the need to help schools identify their strengths and weaknesses around family involvement. The Toolkit was created in 2012, with resources aligned to the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships.

Each year, goals are designed to help schools develop a more comprehensive understanding about ways to successfully partner with families in their children’s education. Colorado Springs School District 11 works with schools on each year’s goal, although schools may choose to focus on goals other than the one chosen by the district.

The Family Involvement Toolkit is in a constant state of development, in order to stay current with family partnership research and practices. It provides D11 schools with a common understanding of what successful family partnerships entail. D11 district staff state that the Toolkit encourages schools to work together to build relationships and strengthen community and family engagement across the district.

FIT COACHES

Each school within Colorado Springs School District 11 has a FIT (Family Involvement Toolkit) volunteer coach who oversees working with the school’s Parent Teacher Organization (PTO) and School Accountability Committee (SAC). FIT, PTO, and SAC members each have designated responsibilities, but also intersecting work, as illustrated in the diagram above.



Family Wellness Engagement Specialist

Thompson School District

Longmont, CO



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During the 2016-2017 school year, Thompson School District hired a part-time Family Wellness Engagement Specialist (FWES). This position was funded to:

- Assist in the development of strong family, school and community partnerships.
- Increase family awareness of local health services and learning opportunities.
- Increase family involvement in school wellness initiatives.
- Support the connections between family health, parent engagement, student academic performance and student attendance and behavior.

The FWES was tasked with focusing on Title I elementary schools and developing both universal and targeted strategies based on school needs. The universal strategies included development of monthly Family Wellness Newsletters and School Wellness Newsletters. The Family Wellness Newsletter provided basic health and wellness information, learning opportunities in the community, and events such as 5k's, community block parties, nature walks and much more.

The School Wellness Newsletter provided staff with tips for promoting health and wellness in their schools as well as professional development opportunities. Other universal approaches included creating wellness bulletin boards in three of the Title I elementary schools with seasonal health themes, and providing wellness resources at Back to School events and Family Nights.

Targeted strategies varied by school and included working with a community partner to host *Cooking Matters for Families*, a 6-week course designed to support families in making healthy and affordable nutrition choices. Other targeted strategies included increasing parent engagement and sustainability at a school-based community garden, implementing activity based homework for Every Kid Healthy Week, providing education and assistance to a PTO in developing their first before-school smoothie club, and assisting with several wellness-related family events at the end of the school year.

A significant challenge with this position was limited time to fully develop programming at Title I schools. Currently, the position has been funded at 50%, and may be most useful if focused on just one or two priority schools. This could lead to stronger relationships with school staff and families to determine needs and create strategic plans to address current health and wellness issues.

Although this was a new position, it has provided valuable communication between staff and families, and expanded the collaboration between community partners and schools to support student success and family health and wellness.

Virtual Toolbox

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



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Boulder Valley School District's Virtual Toolbox is a new resource for schools filled with links to promising partnership practices. The online portal is organized around the Parent Teacher Association's (PTA) national standards for promising partnership practices, and follows school goals regarding the same practices.

The Virtual Toolbox aims to help schools within Boulder Valley communicate their successes via an online platform. Although the Virtual Toolbox was only introduced to Boulder Valley School District in May 2017, it is already receiving positive feedback. School staff report loving using the online portal. Boulder Valley hopes to spread the word about the Virtual Toolbox online service so more schools and administrators can actively use the site.



BVSD Family Partnership Toolbox for Schools

Ideas and Resources for Schools to Partner with Families

Standard 1: Welcoming and Building Relationships with All Families

Families are active participants in the life of the school, and feel welcomed, valued, and connected to each other, to school staff, and to what students are learning and doing in class.

<https://goo.gl/7ogF6k>



Standard 2: Communicating Effectively

Families and school staff engage in regular, two-way, meaningful communication about student learning.

<https://goo.gl/2eyV0S>



Standard 4: Speaking Up for Every Child by Empowering Every Family

Families are empowered to be advocates for their own and other children, to ensure that students are treated fairly and have access to learning opportunities that will support

Standard 5: Sharing Power in Decision Making

Families and school staff are equal partners in decisions that affect children and families and together inform, influence, and create

Standard 3: Supporting Student Success by Partnering with Families

Families and school staff continuously collaborate to support students' learning and healthy development both at home and at school, and have regular opportunities to strengthen their knowledge and skills to do so effectively.

<https://goo.gl/xjVMty>





CONEXIONES

The Summit School District, in connection with their local Family Intercultural Resource Center (FIRC), has created an outreach and home-visitation program called “Conexiones.” Conexiones is a kindergarten readiness program which aims to increase school connectedness, high school graduation rates, representation in advanced placement classes, enrollment in postsecondary institutions, and close the achievement gap. In the short term, Conexiones aims to increase the proficiency level of students in their academic achievement, increase the number of positive behavior referrals, increase administrative and teacher contact with families, and increase attendance rates.

Summit School District has identified family engagement as a key to the success of learners within the district at every age. As a result, the district actively connects with all parents, families, and community partners to build a network of support for every student’s academic success, character development, and social-emotional health.

GOING OUT TO BRING THEM IN

Several years ago, Summit Middle School leaders and staff began working with partners at the Family Intercultural Resource Center to launch a home visitation program called “Going Out to Bring Them In.” Summit Middle School believes that, while home visits are typically associated with early childhood programs, parents need supports across the kindergarten-to-twelfth-grade spectrum. Research has shown that the most critical parent involvement happens in the home, but parents may need specific information on how best to support their students and their academic success outside of school.

Going Out to Bring Them In begins to create strong relationships between families and the school for incoming sixth grade students. These relationships help ensure that students experience a positive transition between elementary and middle school.

Conexiones and Going Out to Bring Them In work together to build strong positive relationships between families, community partners, and the school. Summit School District recognizes that parents want the best for their children, but that they sometimes need specific instruction to help students achieve their fullest potential. Both programs work to educate families while increasing student successes.



**Going Out
To Bring
Them In!**

Family Liaison Professional Development

Adams 12 Five Star Schools

Thornton, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Adams 12 Five Star Schools has several supports in place to promote family-school-community partnering, one of which is providing professional development for family liaisons. The goal of the practice is to meet monthly with all family liaisons of Adams 12 who are from Title I and non-Title schools to provide them with training on specific skill building that is directly related to their work with families and students. One of these practices involves learning the Parenting the Love and Logic Way curriculum so that family liaisons can pass on their knowledge of child discipline to their parents.

It is the goal of Adams 12 Office of Federal Programs to help train each liaison in this curriculum to build the capacity within their own buildings instead of having to hire an outside vendor. Family liaisons know their families best and training of this nature is received positively by parents when it is facilitated by someone who is connected directly to their school. Another goal of this practice is to provide an avenue for liaisons to collaborate with each other on projects or share ideas, resources and coping strategies.

The practice is geared towards all Title I and non-Title liaisons who are interested in teaching parenting skills on a voluntary basis to pass on to the parents they serve in their buildings. The Office of Federal Programs works directly with each school using parent set aside funds both at the school and district level to send liaisons to certification classes for Love and Logic. Once certification is received, it is expected that the family liaison will facilitate 1-2 classes during the school year in English or Spanish. If there is a non-Title school that has requested a class, the Parent Engagement Coordinator reaches out to that school make arrangements for the delivery of these services. The Parent Engagement Coordinator and Title I Coordinator reach out to liaisons and principals for input about the type of professional development they are in need of. Monthly agendas and notes of the meetings are shared with liaisons and their building supervisor/principals. Principals are also encouraged to attend a meetings when possible.

The practice of training liaisons monthly in different areas equips them with resources to provide to families who are experiencing barriers to their children's education. Families who are well connected to their schools and teachers tend to have students with higher attendance rates and higher reading scores. Families who feel that they belong to a strong school community are more likely to reach out to helping professionals in times of need.

Parent Academy for Student Success (PASS)

Westminster High School

Westminster, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Often the best ideas in education are second-hand. Westminster High School replicated a family partnership program from California called the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE). Westminster High followed the program with fidelity, but gave it their own name—Parent Academy for Student Success (PASS). PASS' vision is to achieve economic and social equality for all students through education. The mission is to provide families with the knowledge and skills to partner with schools and communities to ensure their children achieve their full potential.

Parents gain critical college and career preparation information, as well as knowledge on how their child's school and district function, and how to better prepare their students for college. This social change program teaches parents how to confidently and respectfully advocate for themselves and their students within the school system and their community.

The nine-week program debuted in Westminster during the 2016-2017 school year, and involved 100 parents, 87 of whom graduated from the Parent Academy for Student Success. In future years, Westminster School District hopes to expand the program to reach other elementary, middle, and high schools within the district to partner more successfully with parents to improve student outcomes.

Whitney Allen, a staff member in the Future Center for Westminster Public Schools, planned, implemented and evaluated this program with support from PIQE staff during this first year. Additionally, she had support from on-site school administrators. Whitney also hired and trained local PASS Recruiters and Facilitators to implement the program to parents. The PIQE philosophy strongly encourages parent graduates of the program to share their knowledge with other parents by becoming PIQE/PASS Recruiters and Facilitators themselves.

National data from the PIQE indicates that students whose parents complete the program experience a 40% higher high school graduation rate when compared to the national average. Of these high school graduates, 20% more enroll in college than the national average. Students take more college preparatory classes, earn significantly higher grades than their peers whose parents do not participate, complete more high school courses, and are absent approximately 40% less during the school year.

PASS facilitators recommend that once you commit to the program, follow it to the letter and you will have success! The national organization has worked out all the "bugs" over their 30-year history and are very generous with their coaching support every step of the way. Also, dedicate a detail-oriented person to run this program. There are many moving parts to manage, but the results for parents (and their students) are palpable!



PROFESSIONAL COUNSELING SERVICES INC.

Professional Counseling Services Inc. was brought into Englewood Public Schools in order to help support students with substance abuse issues and re-engage these same students in school. *Professional Counseling Services* provides prevention and intervention services to middle and high school students in multiple school districts across the greater Metro-Denver area. The services provided by *Professional Counseling Services* are individually tailored to meet the needs of students and their school. Interactive and engaging classroom presentations are also designed to share the risk of drug and alcohol use with students at the universal level.

In-school counseling sessions are available to individual students who are struggling with drug or alcohol use themselves, and for students who have a loved-one who struggles with the same issues. All programs and methods employed by *Professional Counseling Services* are backed by over five years of quantitative and qualitative data which shows the efficacy of its curriculum. Additionally, students have consistently reported lower frequency of substance abuse following completion of the program, and both students and parents have reported improvement in their communication.

Englewood School District reports similar results. A pre- and post-survey provided by *Professional Counseling Services* asked Englewood students who participated in the program to rate the frequency of their substance use. A majority of Englewood students who participated reported learning new information, and having decreased or ceased substance use frequency as a result.

ALTERNATIVE TO SUSPENSION PROGRAM

Alternative to Suspension programs are available to any student who has been caught under the influence, or in possession of a substance or paraphernalia on school property or at school events. This service drastically reduces the length of time students serve in out-of-school suspensions, which helps prevent students falling behind academically due to a suspension.

The six-week drug and alcohol Alternative to Suspension program provided by *Professional Counseling Services* is an effective way to stimulate positive family interactions and communications between family members and between family members and school staff. Students benefit from drug and alcohol related education, while parents are able to learn the risks associated with drug and alcohol use in their students and in their homes.

Reading Extravaganza

Columbine Elementary School

Boulder, CO

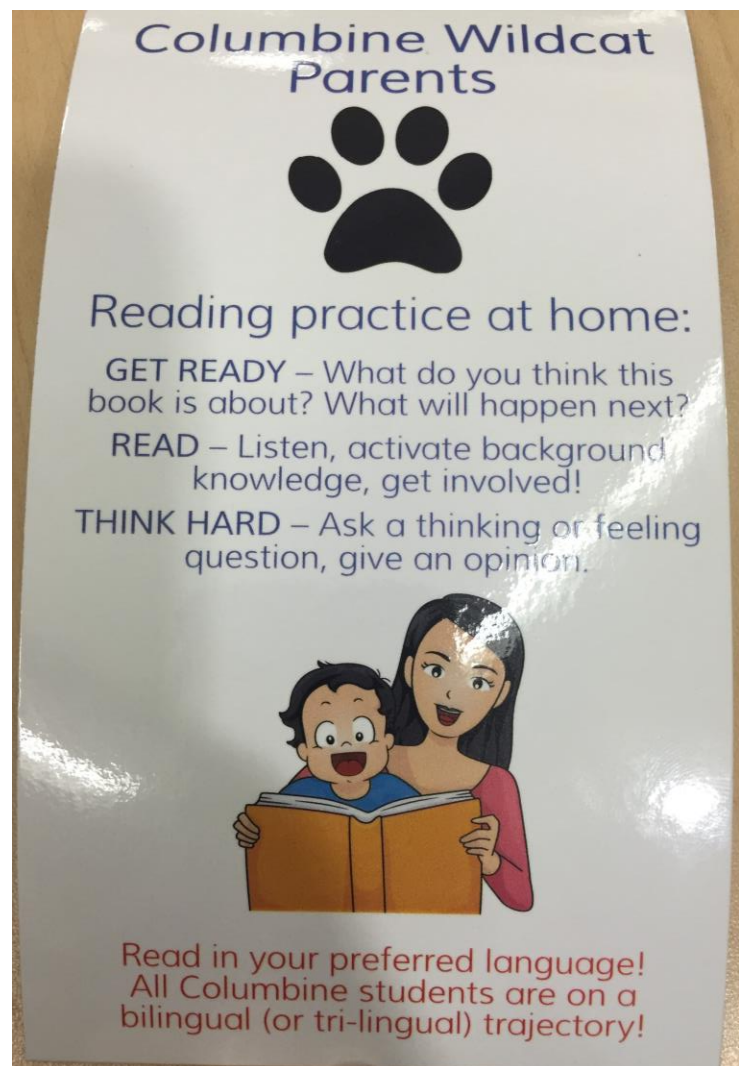


COLORADO
Department of Education

Columbine Elementary School's Reading Extravaganza was held on December 13, 2016 to help meet the school's literacy goal: to inspire a culture of reading within Columbine Elementary School. Sessions were held in both Spanish and English to more than 150 attendees. Prior to the event, students made invitations which were then given to parents and families to encourage participation.

The Reading Extravaganza was comprised of three main parts: a social event, teaching teams, and a reading session. Following a brief social gathering, parents and families were split up into "teaching teams" based on their student's grade level. Teachers gave presentations to inform families about what is happening in classrooms and modeled teaching strategies used at school to help parents learn how to engage their children in reading at home. Next, parents and students spread out all over the school to read together using the strategies they just learned from the teaching teams.

Books for the event were collected via donations, and students were able to take home books of their choice free of cost. Parents were able to learn how to use the library both for themselves and with their students. The first annual Reading Extravaganza worked to change the culture of reading and has received positive feedback from teachers. Families walked away with new information about reading at home and were given a magnet with reading questions to help engage with their students.



Reading Odyssey

Odyssey Elementary School

Colorado Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Formerly known as *One Book*, Reading Odyssey aims to promote family literacy and build a greater sense of community through the shared experience of reading books as a community. Odyssey Elementary's goal was to give each student their own book and to encourage reading at home.

Reading Odyssey began with a school wide kick-off assembly including a short skit and a message from the Odyssey principal. Upon dismissal, each student received a copy of the book and a bookmark with the reading schedule. The school used morning trivia as an incentive to read each night. Students received reading tickets for answering trivia correctly. At the end of each program, these tickets were entered into a drawing, and winners of the drawing were given new books (purchased with Book Fair Scholastic Dollars) to add to their home libraries.

Odyssey hosted two family literacy nights per book. Students and their families were invited to attend a relaxed evening with a reading, a small craft and snacks. Some of the nights offered three reading rooms: K-1, 2-3, and 4-5. This allowed teachers to model comprehension questions during read alouds that were appropriate for different reading levels. Parents gave positive feedback through surveys, stating their enjoyment of the relaxed atmosphere of the events and the time spent together with their children and other community members.

Planning the Reading Odyssey was truly a group effort. Odyssey's principal requested that the Library Paraprofessional facilitate the program. A committee was then formed to offer support, including one teacher from each grade level (K-5), one discovery teacher, a reading interventionist, and support from the administration team. This team spent time reading the book and developing ideas for promoting school and community involvement. Together, they planned a kick-off assembly for our students, shared ideas with other classroom teachers for tying the book in with classroom lessons, planned two family literacy nights per program, developed resources to share with families, and organized celebrations after completing the book as a community.

Odyssey's principal offers the following advice to those looking to start a similar initiative: "Take the jump! While the process of implementing a school and community wide book club is time consuming, you will reap the rewards of bringing your school community together. Parents, students, and teachers alike gained a renewed interest in our library program, have continued seeking books to read together, and have been passionate in their support of continuing the Reading Odyssey program in coming years. There has been such a buzz about the program that other schools within our district have reached out to our school for support adopting similar programs in the coming school year."

Support Team of Motivated Parents (STOMP)

Dupont Elementary
Commerce City, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Dupont Elementary School’s parent to paraprofessional pilot program, Support Team of Motivated Parents (STOMP) creates an opportunity for parents to volunteer in their local schools in a more meaningful way. The parent to paraprofessional program supports parents with their professional and child-rearing goals by helping them attain a paraprofessional certificate. The program works to support a two-generational approach to leverage family efficacy through adult education and credentialing.

Dupont Elementary uses a flooding model to help students achieve grade level proficiency. To leverage the flooding model approach, Dupont leadership decided to utilize STOMP parent volunteers to support strategic students in reading who need additional support to be a grade level.

STOMP volunteers were trained in the Voyager Passport and Pasaporte reading intervention program that helps students with fundamental reading skills. The parent volunteers work with small groups of 2-5 students for 40-45 minutes four days a week.

A part-time Reading Intervention Teacher oversees the STOMP volunteers and collaborates with classroom teachers around student data and performance.

The STOMP program has shown significant improvement in student ability to accurately read nonsense words, or words with no conventionally accepted meaning. Additionally, students whose parents participate in the program are likely to attain academic benefits in the home.



How it all began...

September 2016	October 2016	November 2016	December 2016	January 2017	February 2017
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Interest Form 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Oct. 20th Superintendent Parent Forum Defining Family & Community Engagement Dupont Literacy Nights & its focus on Family Engagement 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Each One, Teach One Site Visit Top 3 Parent Interest: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> Supporting Child's Learning at Home Parent Volunteering Parent Leadership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Climb Higher Grant Submitted Parent to Para presented at December Parent Forum 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parent Recruitment and Orientation for Parent to Para Program 24 parents attend; 17 commit to the program and get trained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents get trained and start STOMP program February 13th



Taste of the Apple

Mackintosh Academy

Littleton, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Taste of the Apple has become a staple at Mackintosh Academy in Littleton. Current and prospective parents of Mackintosh Academy students attend the event to gain a better understanding of the inquiry-based, International Baccalaureate (IB) learning strategies and approaches utilized by Mackintosh Academy staff. Parents also learn how and why the implemented strategies are so well suited to address the needs of gifted children enrolled in the Mackintosh Academy.

The series of mini-classes are offered twice annually so that parents can experience, not just “hear about,” the educational strategies and approaches their gifted children experience each and every school day. Examples of the classes from January’s event include:

Creative Exploration - With the Visual Arts teacher. Explore a wide variety of media and artistic expression through a sampling of Mackintosh art activities. Let your inner artist shine!

Story Time! - With the Kindergarten teacher. Why do human beings tell stories? What are the elements of a story? Come and relive the joy of story-time! Discover the commonalities in stories from around the world as you explore the human connection. Use visual organizers to express and share your learning in a fun group setting.

The Colonies Are in an Uproar! – With the fifth and sixth grade teachers. Unjust taxes! A harmless snowball fight ends with death and injury. Protesters dump tea in Boston Harbor! Battles at Lexington and Concord result in casualties for both the Patriot forces and British soldiers. Boston is under siege! Come join the fifth and sixth grade teachers as they lead you through a reenactment of the Second Continental Congress. You will help make the decision whether or not to declare independence from the British Empire!

Mackintosh Academy recognizes that family engagement in their child’s education is a key factor in determining positive student outcomes. Children do best when their parents are involved, well informed, and supportive of their educational needs. *Taste of the Apple* is a powerful opportunity for parents to become more knowledgeable and engaged with their students’ education.

Event organizers have two pieces of advice to replicate this initiative: 1) Promote the event with teachers so they can recognize that this will help them in doing their jobs better and prevent confusion and disagreement about educational strategies and assignments; 2) Formalize a way of soliciting parent feedback and suggestions through a short evaluation at the end of the sessions.

Diverse Advanced Learners

Denver East High School

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The goal of Denver East High School's Diverse Advanced Learners program is to bridge the gap between best practices for gifted and talented (GT) learners, English Language Learners (ELL), and culturally responsive and diverse education. Diverse Advanced Learners began in 2016 with the purchase of the Depth and Complexity Curricular Framework. The purchase of this curriculum is beneficial to students identified as gifted and talented, but it also benefits students outside of gifted and talented classrooms via the "spill over effect."

Simultaneous year-long evening parent workshops and accountable teacher learning classes supported the school's decision to diversify its curricula. Additionally, a family liaison worked to assemble a Student Focus Group centered around the needs of gifted and talented, advanced, and diverse student needs.

Denver East High School's work to support Diverse Advanced Learners impacts student outcomes in a variety of ways. Predominantly, Diverse Advanced Learners programming provides support and resources in an intentional and focused way for gifted and talented students, their families, and the school community as a whole. Advanced Learning Plans (ALP), which outline the specific educational needs of gifted and talented learners, were carefully aligned to the unique needs of each student at Denver East High School.

A series of information and support sessions were provided for families throughout the 2016-2017 academic year. These sessions focused on a variety of gifted and talented topics. A professional development brown-bag lunch series, "Diverse Advanced Learners," was provided for the school community to communicate the specific needs of gifted and talented high school students.

Diverse Advanced Learners works to support the whole student to ensure that each individual learner, family, and teacher understand gifted and talented learning and are empowered with the tools, strategies, and resources to support the highest level of course enrollment (e.g., Advanced Placement).

Denver East High School hopes to diversity enrollment in their gifted and talented and highly gifted and talented (GT/HGT) population through their work with the Diverse Advanced Learners programming.

Don't miss this new PDU only for East teachers !

Diverse Advanced Learners Series



Depth and Complexity is a curriculum that provides visual prompts to help students go deeper in their understanding of concepts and grow in critical thought.

This 6 session PDU will be held at East in the Social Room during lunch:
Thursday, November 3, 2016 Session 1: Nature and Needs of Diverse Advanced Learners
Thursday, January 5, 2017 Session 2: Introduction to Depth and Complexity: Why and How?
Thursday, February 23, 2017 Session 3: Unpacking the Nature and Needs of Diverse Advanced Learners
Thursday, March 2, 2017 Session 4: **Depth and Complexity as Instructional Practice**
Thursday, April 6, 2017 Session 5: Case Studies of Diverse Advanced Learners
Thursday, April 27, 2017 Session 6: Celebrating Instructional Practices that Nurture Intellectual Rigor

Participants will earn PDU credit and receive a set each of the Depth & Complexity icon cards and Content Imperative Cards valued at \$42.00!

PDU Deadline Registration: Tuesday, October 25, 2016

Questions:
Dr. Scarlet Chopin, East Assistant Principal- scarlet_chopin@dpsk12.org
Brian Weaver, M.A. Coordinator DPS Gifted & Talented Specialist, Brian_Weaver2@dpsk12.org

English Development Family Outreach Framework

Douglas County School District

Castle Rock, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Douglas County School District's (DCSD) English Language Development (ELD) Department aims to partner with families to establish relationships, implement instruction and programming, and support students and families within the educational environment. The ELD Department's primary focus is to authentically and meaningfully connect with families in order to foster their inclusion and meaningful participation in the school experience while supporting each family's unique needs through a culturally inclusive and responsive three-part framework.

Engage: Each family, along with other stakeholders, must have the opportunity to be engaged in and connected with their child's school and the community it serves. DCSD's framework invites families to be a part of the educational community during the school day, outside the school day, and in in the community.

Grow: Each family, along with other stakeholders, must be offered the opportunity to learn and grow. DCSD's framework provides multiple opportunities for families to learn about a variety of student supports such as literacy, 21st century classrooms, and district and community resources for academics, health and wellness, mental health, special programming.

Celebrate: Each family, along with other stakeholders, must be honored, celebrated, and supported in order to foster a successful educational experience from pre-school through the twelfth grade. This includes celebrating academic performance and achievements, academic growth, and educationally related passions, interests, and strengths.

At the district level, the ELD Department hosts an annual resource fair within the community to provide access and connections to a variety of community resources related to immigration, multi-lingual legal counsel, tutoring services, bilingual education options, and other services related to socioeconomic, cultural, and educational needs.

Events also occur at the school-level. Approximately 1,300 family and community members participated in ELD Family Outreach programs during the 2016-2017 school year, which included:

- Reading Together family meetings and celebrations
- Literacy, Tech, and Math Lunches and Nights
- College Application & FAFSA Nights and Saturdays
- Culture Fairs
- School Community Resource Fairs
- School curriculum nights
- Family Game Night

Family Leadership Training Institute of Colorado

State-Wide Colorado



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Family Leadership Training Institute (FLTI) of Colorado is a program created with families for families. The curriculum equips parents with the knowledge and skills to support their engagement with the school district, schools, and community systems at the individual, community, school, and policy level. FLTI is a free 20-week training that integrates personal and child development, leadership skill development, civic literacy, and civic engagement. The curriculum features five components:

- A community building retreat,
- Phase One – 10 sessions that focus on personal leadership development,
- Phase Two – 10 sessions that focus on the civic process and change,
- A Day at the Capitol for on-site learning, and
- A personally developed civic project.

Since inception in Colorado, FLTI has been successful in recruiting diverse participants across race, age, educational backgrounds, and income levels:

- FLTI attracts diversity in race and culture. Across the 10 sites currently reporting pre-post data, 11% of participants were Black/African American, 35% were Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander, 2% Native American, 1% of mixed races, and 47% White. Three percent considered themselves as other or of mixed race/ethnic groups.
- Education backgrounds vary: 6% received an education of less than high school; 35% were high school or GED graduates; 3% had completed two-year associate college programs; 21% were graduates of four-year college programs; 22% had a master's, doctoral or professional degree; 14% achieved post-graduate work; and 4% were still in high school.
- FLTI draws family leaders who report annual household incomes representing a broad range; 53% reported incomes of less than \$40,000, 15% between \$40,000 and \$59,999, 7% between \$60,000 and \$84,999, and 24% over \$85,000.

The Family Leadership Training Institute of Colorado relates to student outcomes by providing parents with the skills necessary to be engaged in their student's schools, school districts, and community programs that serve families to create positive outcomes for children. Additionally, many of the personally developed civic projects created by families target school and student outcomes. Parents who graduate from this program are more likely to be proactive when they see a school or student need, and will often take on leadership roles when asked.

Grade Level to Level Transition Support

Poudre School District

Fort Collins, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Grade Level to Level Transition Support is a program that supports students with special needs and families to successfully transition:

- From one grade level to the next.
- Into the Poudre School District from a different district.
- From one school to another within the Poudre School District.

When a new parent or family of a student with a disability moves into the Poudre School District, the family is supported with understanding districts policies and services available at specific schools.

An Integrated Services Parent Liaison works with the family to arrange school tours and introductions with special education teachers and building teams. Additionally, an information packet is sent out to new parents and families that includes an Integrated Services Parent Handbook for the Poudre School District, a district calendar, an acronyms sheet to help families navigate the language of education, a Student Profile form, and access to Helpful Hints from Parents to Parents regarding their attendance at Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings in the district. Information about special education is sent out via emailed newsletters throughout the year to ensure that parents are able to stay active and informed within the school community.

Next, when a family is transitioning their student to a new grade level, such as the transition from preschool to kindergarten, the Parent Liaison is available to support families with more information. Programming and service information, school tours, and connections with other families and staff members are facilitated. A Transition Packet is provided to support the individual needs of students during school-to-school transitions while building positive, collaborative relationships between staff, families, and students. The packet includes questionnaires, note catchers, timelines, and meeting agendas, as well as planning pieces to help families feel prepared and organized throughout their student's transition.

A Level to Level transition informational evening for parents of students with disabilities is provided each February. Parents of students transitioning to a new level are invited to a question and answer session with special education teachers and related service staff; grade-level specific sessions are provided. This Grade Level Transition Support is a continuous cycle throughout the academic year and into the future, as students continue their education with Poudre School District.

Growing Together Summit Family Day

San Juan BOCES

Durango, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Growing Together Family Day is an event that promotes a time for individuals with disabilities and their parents and families to network, gather information on topics of interest, and learn about community and school resources. The family day event is also a recognition and celebration of individuals and their families as they work together to enhance the independence and inclusion for people with disabilities.

The San Juan BOCES hosted the family day, in collaboration with Community Connections, ARC of Southwest Colorado, and the Southwest Center for Independence. Families and community members also helped with the planning. A grant from the Colorado Education Initiative helped to support this event.

The Growing Together Family Day event occurred on Wednesday, June 7th at Fort Lewis College, from 8am-3pm. The event started with a welcome and keynote entitled: Growing Up and Growing Strong- Living with a Disability. Participants then chose from a wide array of informational and interactive 45-minute sessions. Session breakout topics included:

- Get Present! The Science and Application of Mindfulness Awareness in Parenting
- The Pitfalls and Victories of Advocating for Youth
- Financial Planning for the Future
- Happy Graduation! Now What?
- Self-Advocacy 101

Throughout the day, attendees also participated in a sensory room exploration and an adaptive equipment demonstration. Event planners provided child care, boxed lunches, and a culminating activity and raffle.

Families in attendance completed an evaluation with overwhelming positive feedback. The majority of participants requested having even more breakout session options in the future. Parents left the family day empowered to advocate for their children in school and beyond.

Partners in Leadership

Sewall Child Development Center

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Sewall Child Development Center, located in Denver, knows the importance of empowering families and their children with special needs. One initiative the Center implements is the Partners in Leadership program; a support that provides year-long training, community-building, and Inclusive Leadership Development.

Sewall Child Development Center provided training to 17 families and several adults with disabilities at the organization's headquarters. The 17 families represent current Sewall children, ages 2- 5 years as well as families of children enrolled in REACH, an inclusive charter school, through 3rd grade.

Sewall's training closely resembles that of the Partners in Policymaking curriculum. The Center utilizes their best practices to provide 128 hours of training across 8 sessions. Family partners receive training about all eleven topics in the curriculum, including information on:

- History of Disabilities
- Inclusive Education and Lifelong Learning
- Service Coordination and Case Management
- Supported and Competitive Employment
- Supported Living and Home Ownership
- Assistive Technology
- Person Centered Planning
- Local and State Government
- Federal Government and Federal Issues
- Community Organizing
- Parliamentary Procedure and Serving on Boards

In addition to these core competencies, Sewall will leverage its expertise educating families on how to navigate school-based systems and how to support children in kindergarten.

Sewall leaders have advice for other organizations looking to implement a similar practice. The first is that families need ample time to process strong, complex emotions throughout the training. Fortunately, Sewall's experienced staff has been able to build time for processing into the curriculum, and is well-equipped to facilitate emotional, personal conversations. Any staff implementing this curriculum should have strong facilitation skills and be comfortable working in this environment. Second, it is incredibly helpful to have a broad knowledge of local advocacy and disability resources. Being able to provide referrals and guidance to families helped build trust and allowed families to feel more supported throughout the process.

PARITY Training

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The purpose of the PARITY (Parents Advocating Responsibly in the Interest of Their Youngsters) program is to uncover the power and knowledge that Latino parents possess to actively advocate for the educational success of their children. The program is a partnership between BVSD and CARE and hosted by one of BVSD's high schools (Centaurus High School).

Seven training sessions (held on Saturday mornings) are conducted for Spanish-speaking families. The parents are responsible to do work at home (homework) between sessions that engages them in school-related activities through a cycle of *idea posing*→*action*→*reflection*, which provides them with practical experience in using the advocacy strategies they are learning in the training and strengthens the power they are discovering within themselves so that they may actively engage in their children's schools and advocate for their educational success.

BVSD administrators, educators and students present at many sessions with the goal of parents being able to build relationships with others in their school community.

Parents will learn to:

- recognize the importance of parent involvement
- recognize and use their knowledge
- understand their rights as parents
- identify their children's assets
- identify advocacy strategies to support their children's education
- develop an action plan to effectively advocate for their children
- work with the school as partners in education as they advocate for their children
- meet and talk with the superintendent and board members about their children

The training sessions are typically conducted on Saturday mornings from 8:45 a.m. – 12:00 p.m. every other week. During the interim weeks of the training period, the parents visit their children's schools, the teachers/counselors, principals, and meet with the superintendent and board members.



WELCOME CENTER

Aurora Public Schools' Welcome Center aims to assist refugee and immigrant students in their transition to the school district and to provide academic support for these same students through targeted programming. Students are able to participate at all grade levels as long as they have come to the United States from other countries.

A centralized admissions system refers any immigrant and refugee families directly to the Welcome Center as a part of their school registration. During the intake process, families participate in an informal discussion to share information about their family's background and begin to create a relationship with district staff. This meeting allows Aurora Public Schools to be proactive about any issues that may arise during a child's schooling. Being aware of student background also makes Aurora Public School staff better able to work with students with disabilities.

Parents and families are then shown a binder, which explains the process of enrolling in the public school system in the United States. The orientation binder and following discussion allow families to ask questions and ensure they are prepared for their child's academic transition.

TEACHER ON SPECIAL ASSIGNMENT

Aurora Public School's Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) runs a support program for high school students with limited or interrupted schooling. This program focuses on English and Literacy development, and helps students acclimate to schools by encouraging participation in afterschool activities and teaching students how to become accountable for their own attendance. Two summer programs provide refugee and immigrant students with the opportunity to continue learning English over the summer break, and to participate in other enrichment activities designed to support social development.

Engaging with parents and families of refugee and immigrant students enables Aurora Public Schools to continuously convey to families that active participation and partnership in their child's education is encouraged. Parents are able to learn about the differences in academic and school community customs in the United States, and are able to participate actively in their child's academic development.

Adult Literacy Classes

Lewis-Palmer School District 38

Monument, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Lewis Palmer School District's Adult Literacy Classes aim to support culturally and linguistically diverse families to learn or improve their English in order to improve their communication skills with their children's schools.

The Adult Literacy Classes are open to anyone in the community, but are targeted for parents with children enrolled in the school district. The classes are scheduled for 90 minutes in the evenings twice a week during the school year, which works with most working-parents' schedules. An adult English as a Second Language (ESL) curriculum is employed by an English language teacher within the district.

A celebration potluck is held at the end of the year to congratulate parents and participants on the progress made during the last several months. Participants and graduates of the program are able to support student outcomes through educational support and homework help.

For those interested in implementing a similar program, Lewis Palmer School District contacts have two recommendations: start small and be flexible. For example, the current location of the classes is central, but there are scheduling issues and the building is now alarmed. Sometimes scheduling conflicts cause the classes to change rooms. To overcome this obstacle, all of the adult students have the teacher's cell phone number to text if they are late, and she will let them in. The teacher waits for all students prior to class.



LEARN ENGLISH

Learn English with other adults in your community. Practice speaking, expand your vocabulary, improve your grammar and read with understanding.

Where: *LPSD Administration Building*

When: *Monday and Wednesday evenings 6:00-7:30 p.m.*

Notes: *Class starts September 6th 2016 and goes until May 2017. Sign up by calling Stephanie Johnson at 785-4204, District EL Coordinator. Classes are free of charge.*

Contact: *For more information call 785-4204*



Community Accountability Committee

Douglas County School District

Douglas County, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Community Accountability Committee (CAC) is a nonpartisan Douglas County, Colorado organization dedicated to advocating for accountable and representative school district policy-making and implementation. At the Executive Director level, the CAC strives to interact directly with the Douglas County School Board (BoE), and the District Accountability Committee (DAC) which serves in an advisory capacity to the Board of Education. At the full district wide level the CAC works to increase parent and community engagement, as well as the engagement of all school district staff.

The CAC Partners work to empower accountability throughout DCSD while advocating for effective community engagement within each neighborhood school. The CAC works with individuals that currently or would like to be:

- A part of the CAC School Accountability team.
- Up-to-date on CAC communication to be an informed advocate with parents, teachers/staff, school leadership and community.
- Participating with your local neighborhood School Accountability Committee (SAC) by attending meetings or serving on the committee.
- Productively involved within the school feeder area.
- Providing input and oversight to the District Accountability Committee (DAC) for the neighborhood school.
- An informed and active voice to the Board of Education (BoE) for your neighborhood school.

With the involvement and planning of multiple parents and other community members, the Community Accountability Committee for Douglas County School District (CAC4DCSD) was founded on November 1, 2013. CAC launched independently from the Douglas County School Board.

Implementation of all aspects of the CAC are the responsibility of the Executive director working in partnership with various parents and other community members throughout Douglas County School District. Evaluation of the work of the CAC is an ongoing process involving CAC Partners who are on School Accountability Committees throughout the school district.

Through effective family engagement within a school community, staff and other community members become more effectively engaged. This family/community engagement provides the critical link to the ongoing improvement of student outcomes.

District Accountability Committee Forum

Douglas County School District

Castle Rock, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The goal of Douglas County School District’s (DCSD) Accountability Committee Forum is to educate and inform parents, families, and community members about the various aspects of the school district. Attendees receive information about several aspects of DCSD’s students’ education; they are then able to partner more successfully with teachers and school staff to improve their student’s education process and outcomes.

Winter Forum Session Planning Guide—Page 2

5:00-5:30	Networking: Please Join Us in the Commons			
5:30-5:45	Evening Introduction <i>Sandra Brownrigg, District Accountability Committee Chairperson</i>			
5:45-6:15	Keynote Address: The Direction of the District <i>Erin Kane, Interim Superintendent</i>			
<i>Breakout Sessions: Please See Descriptions & Presenters on the Previous Pages</i>				
	Room 131	Room 141	Room 142	Room 143
6:30-6:50	Direction of the District Discussion		Current Education Legislation and Civic Engagement	Understanding the DCSD Charter School Application and Approval Process
7:00-7:20	50-minute Session	Stone Canyon Outdoor EdVentures	50-minute Session	
<i>10-Minute Break</i>				
7:30-7:50	Capital Needs	Educator Effectiveness in DCSD	2021 Graduation Requirements: What’s Changing	New SAC By-Laws: What’s Changed?
8:00-8:20	Capital Needs	Educator Effectiveness in DCSD	2021 Graduation Requirements: What’s Changing	New SAC By-Laws: What’s Changed?
<i>Please Return to the Commons</i>				
8:30-8:50	Keynote Address: The Direction of the District: A Student Perspective <i>Alec Greven, President, Student Advisory Group</i>			
8:50-9:00	Closing Remarks <i>Sandra Brownrigg, DAC Chairperson</i>			



DAC Meetings
6:30-8:30 p.m.

March 14
April 11
May 9
June 13

DAC Website
www.dcsdk12.org/district-accountability-committee

DAC Facebook
<https://www.facebook.com/DCSDDAC>

Twitter
<http://www.twitter.com/dcsddac>

Email
dcsddac@gmail.com

Classes offered range from information sessions about student performance and district budget priorities, tips on how to partner with a student’s teacher, and grassroots outreach provided by Grassroots St. Vrain. Principal and teacher discussion panels, crisis communications overviews, and mental health discussions were also included to provide comprehensive information to parents and families.

DCSD’s District Accountability Forum focused on bringing the community together to discuss the needs of students and determine how parents and community members can best affect student educational outcomes. Over 300 attendees expanded their horizons and learned how to support student success in Douglas County Public Schools.

Environmental Scan

Colorado's Finest High School of Choice

Englewood, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

COLORADO'S FINEST HIGH SCHOOL OF CHOICE

Colorado's Finest High School of Choice is an alternative high school in the Englewood School District. Parents at this school have been less involved than parents of other high schoolers within the district. The school's principal recognized the importance of family partnerships and decided to investigate the factors hindering her students in order to support student success.

ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN

The administration at Colorado's Finest High School of Choice received a Counselor Corp grant, which helped in the creation of the Environmental Scan. The Environmental Scan is an electronic survey which was sent out to parents, teachers, and students to determine the needs of students via self-identification and perception data from parents and teachers during the 2016-2017 school year. The survey's goal was to determine "what can be offered during the school year based on the perceived and self-reported needs of our students?"

Student, parent, and teacher responses revealed three major areas of concern: anxiety, depression, and stress. These three social-emotional issues have been detrimentally impacting students at Colorado's Finest High School of Choice.

Colorado's Finest High School of Choice used the data collected by the Environmental Scan to determine need for in-school programming. The following programs were implemented during the 2016-2017 school year and will continue to be offered during the 2017-2018 school year.

MINDFULNESS CLASS

"Thoughts, feelings, behavior: How do I manage?" This elective class offers students a chance to discover healthy ways to cope with every-day stressors, change their thought patterns, and create positive outcomes within their own lives. Breathing and movement techniques are taught through yoga to help students take control of their body and thoughts.

21ST CENTURY LGBTQ-STRAIGHT ALLIANCE

"A place for students to meet and support each other" in the discussion of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, and Queer (LGBTQ) issues and topics. The primary goal of this elective is to spread equality and understanding across the school's population.

Jeffersonian-Style Gathering

Jefferson County Public Schools

Golden, CO



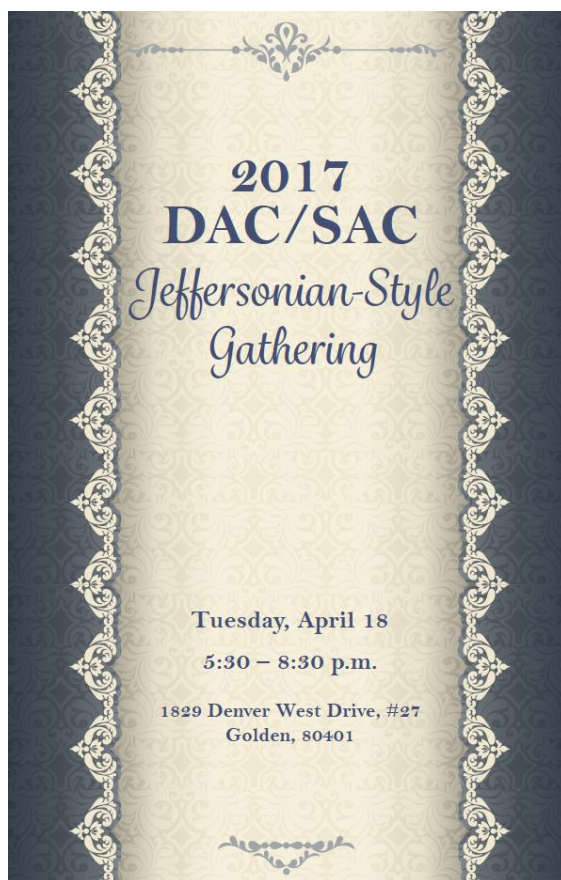
COLORADO
Department of Education

Jefferson County Public School's District Accountability Committee (DAC) and School Accountability Committees (SAC) came together for a Jeffersonian-Style Gathering on April 18, 2017. The goal of this event was to discuss successful family-school partnership work throughout the district among interested DAC and SAC members. Sharing successes and challenges of family-school partnership made it possible for successful events to be replicated in schools to increase levels of engagement with new and different populations of families and community members.

Jefferson County's district accountability executive committee was responsible for the timing and formatting of the event, while the district's Communication Specialist was responsible for the presentation of family-school partnership practices at the event with the assistance of the family-school partnership subcommittee of the district accountability committee.

During the event, participants gathered for mingling and refreshments. A brief overview of the evening followed. Attendees then broke into small groups of 8-10 individuals to discuss pre-determined questions about how to leverage family partnership for student success. The gathering closed with a panel of six experts that answered questions about partnering.

All attendees received a survey following the event. Many attendees reported appreciation for the opportunity to connect with other district staffers with whom they would not otherwise have met; contact information was exchanged so that conversations could be continued after the conclusion of the event. Jefferson County staff were able to discuss specific ideas, strengths, and challenges of partnering with both wealthy communities, and those impacted by poverty.



Parents in Action

Crawford Elementary School

Aurora, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Parents in Action was created to authentically engage families in academics and extracurricular activities at Crawford Elementary School in a way that accurately represents the diversity of the school. Crawford Elementary is made up of diverse families, the majority of whom are from Nepali-, Burmese-, Somali-, and Spanish-speaking backgrounds.

To authentically engage those communities in our school, the school identified parent leaders in each group. With the support of school staff and Colorado African Organizations, Crawford Elementary held meetings with these group leaders. To begin, the parent leaders created surveys for their communities to assess what changes they wanted to make at the school, gauge their levels of interests in topics to explore and how they wanted to be involved in the school. After the survey information was collected, the parent groups picked a project that they wanted to do and topics that they wanted to learn about. Surveying families helped the initiative be successful because the learning and projects were identified by the family groups as things they needed and wanted to do.

Parents in Action activities for the year included:

- Burmese Community: Homework Club and meetings to learn about the student report card and communicating with teachers at conferences.
- Nepali Community: Homework Club and meetings to learn about the student report card, discipline and who is who at the school.
- Somali Community: Colorado Muslim Society Presentations to 3rd-5th grade to promote unity and diversity; Meetings to learn about the report card, reporting problems to school, importance of attendance; Sponsored a lunch for teachers and Somali community; Created a phone tree to get school messages to all Somali families.
- Spanish Community: Initiated a plan to support attendance through a monitoring and reward system; hosted an event to showcase Hispanic cultures throughout central and South America.

Crawford Elementary's principal, Jennifer Passchier, believes that "if our families are more invested in our school, their children will see the value their families put on education." School staff reported an increase in attendance and in family support of student learning. For example, the Parents in Action groups donated over 700 hours of their time during the 2016-2017 school year. Additionally, a more diverse population was present at Parents in Action meetings; specifically, the school's refugee population.

Partners in Education

Laurene Edmondson Elementary School

Loveland, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

PIE NIGHTS

Laurene Edmondson Elementary School designed the Partners in Education (PIE) event in order to increase parent involvement and engage families in the development of the school's Title IA Parent Involvement Policy, as required by federal law. School leaders were looking for new ways to include stakeholders and families that have historically been under-represented in school improvement planning. In 2016, the Edmondson Elementary PIE Night was created for this exact purpose.

Families are invited to join school staff for pizza pie and desert pie during PIE Nights. School leaders create questions designed to gather input on school improvement issues, student learning, policy and practice, and topics raised as areas for exploration by staff, students, and families. Adult participants are invited to transition between stations to provide feedback after dinner is served. Discussion questions in the past have included:

- What are some afterschool activities you might like to see offered at Edmondson?
- What types of information might you like to hear about your child at conferences?
- What are some of your thoughts/feelings about students having homework in elementary school?

Third through fifth grade students are also invited to participate in the discussion rotations, and childcare is provided for students too young to participate.

PIE Nights facilitate more open communication and provide families with a voice and a sense of inclusion within the school. The event establishes and strengthens relationships and partnerships between school staff and families. It ensures that diverse perspectives are included in school improvement planning and activities for the future. Families in return feel more invested in the school as they see that their input is being used to develop activities and policies for the school.

WELCOMING FAMILIES

Making all families feel welcome, facilitating meaningful communication, and fostering family and staff partnerships are key in the success of PIE Nights at Edmondson Elementary School. Parents and students are able to actively participate in policy, practice, and activity development at their school through engaging in direct two-way communication with staff members.

Partners in Education has extended Edmondson's family involvement network through this annual event. This highly effective family engagement strategy requires minimal planning, includes simple facilitation skills, and fosters unique and rich partnerships between families and school staff.

Green Mountain High School Academy Program

Green Mountain High School

Lakewood, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Academy Program is a four-year advanced learning series that is available to all students at Green Mountain High School (GMHS). Built upon Advanced Placement (AP) standards of excellence, the Academy Program incorporates AP coursework into its curriculum allowing students to accrue AP college credits and earn endorsements in particular disciplines along with their high school diploma.

The Academy Program at GMHS consists of four Academies, including (1) Arts, Humanities, & Performing Arts; (2) Business & Global Studies; (3) Health & Human Services; and (4) Science, Technology, Engineering, & Math. Within these Academies, students can select from 14 different Pathways that delve deeper into specific yet complementary disciplines.

Key stakeholders have been involved in vetting our Academy Pathways and co-curricular opportunities. These stakeholders include the GMHS Advisory Board made up of approx. 200 business partners (many of them parents of students at GM), college and university partners, school district and community partners. Students are a key stakeholder on our Advisory Board. The school has the Academy Student Leadership Team of approximately 60 students who serve as “Rambassadors” and have helped to vet other Academy Program components.

GMHS is continually improving and growing the program to meet the needs of industry and students. For example, last year they started an Agriculture Pathway that currently has a wait list of students. They have a chicken coop, raised growing beds, a hoop house (donated by CSU Global), an outdoor education lab, and aquaponics systems. Much of the Ag items have been donated through a partnership with the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado and in partnership with local landscape companies. GMHS offers Senior Capstone projects, mock interviews, internships, career shadows, and a new apprenticeship program through CareerWise Colorado.

The data show significant student growth since the start of the Academy Program. Approximately 80% of the Class of 2017 completed one or more pathways. Together they completed over 400 pathways. This was also the first year GMHS could collect data on the first graduates in the Academy Program who graduated from college in 4 years. Many of them completed college degrees in fields related to the Pathways they completed in high school.

GMHS’ parting advice for those wanting to implement an Academy Program is: “Go slow to go fast. Take one thing at a time and do it well before broadening opportunities.”

Community Resource Fair

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Boulder Valley School District recently held a community resource fair for staff members who work most closely with parents. A variety of community agencies were represented, including Community Food Share, Mental Health Partners, the Emergency Family Assistance Association, Out Boulder County and Attention Homes. They gave overviews of the services they provide and answered questions, from whether they could help a school start a Gay-Straight Alliance for students who need more support (answer: yes), to the availability of affordable housing options (answer: limited and requires a one to two-year wait).

The resource fair is part of Boulder Valley's family partnerships initiative, led by director Madeleine Case. Every Boulder Valley school now has a family partnership representative who links families to support services.

The representative varies by school, but includes school community liaisons, school counselors, front office staff and teachers. "A lot of times, we're their first contact," said Emerald Elementary teacher aide Liz Miranda, who is also the school's family partnership liaison. "Sometimes, their pride stops them from going where they need to." The resource fair was set up in a "coffee circle" format, with agencies working on similar issues, such as food access, housing or special education, grouped together.

After providing an overview, representatives answered specific questions.



Engaging Business Partners

Eldorado Elementary School

Highlands Ranch, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Douglas County School District (DCSD) works hard to ensure every school's accountability committee (SAC) and Parent-Teacher Organization (PTO) have an active community member to help advise school goals. Eldorado Elementary School has a true win-win partnership with their community member, a local real estate agent.

With the help of this real estate agent, every new family to Eldorado receives a welcome pack filled with school-specific gifts and helpful information about a variety of tips to make the transition to Eldorado Elementary an easy one. Eldorado Elementary also receives a 5% commission from home sales of families who use this real estate agent.

Eldorado also engages with a local mortgage expert who has been sponsoring the professional development of all teachers in the school's new writing program: The Write Tools. This mortgage expert was able to teach Eldorado teachers how to write a successful grant proposal.

These partnerships provide important funding for the school and training for staff, as well as engages the community with the schools so that they understand the importance of the school to the local community. Eldorado and DCSD staff stress that is important to communicate to parents in order to engage the community members. In order to successfully engage the community, parents must help in the community outreach efforts.



Julia Robinson Mathematics Festival

Fort Lewis College

Durango, Co



COLORADO
Department of Education

The Julia Robinson Mathematics Festival aims to work with local schools and teachers in the Durango area to find the joy in mathematics. Students in grades six and seven learn to work collaboratively with Fort Lewis College faculty while focused on a mathematics-based activity or game; each activity or game lasts approximately 20 to 40 minutes. Middle school teachers are able to observe and participate, and may take what they have learned back to their classrooms to help students engage with mathematics in an engaging way on a more regular basis.

Students benefit by direct exposure to enjoyable mathematics activities and games. They are able to learn to love mathematics via active participation in the Julia Robinson Mathematics Festival. Educators are able to gain knowledge and skills necessary to teach mathematics in a fun, engaging way, and share what they have learned with families. Therefore, these same educators learn the knowledge and skills to successfully communicate with every family, and create meaningful partnerships based on student success.



For more information about the nationally-sponsored math festival, visit:

<http://www.nationalmathfestival.org/>

Learning about Community Resources

Fort Lewis College

Durango, Co



COLORADO
Department of Education

LEARNING ABOUT COMMUNITY RESOURCES

Education Professors at Fort Lewis College understand the importance of pre-service teachers learning how to partner with families and the community. Education-majors have the opportunity to take a course to learn research-based strategies to work with families and leverage community relationships.

The goal of the class, Learning about Community Resources, is to help pre-service teachers learn about partnering and connecting with families and community resources. Students in ED329, Family and Community Relationships, are tasked with giving a presentation to classmates and peers about local community resources and school partnerships which positively impact families in an elementary school classroom. These future teachers are asked to communicate basic information about a chosen community partner and its relevance for families and education as a whole; information communicated includes the community partner's mission and goals, population served, programs and events offered, desired outcomes, ways to refer families, and any volunteering, partnership, or internship opportunities available.

STUDENT OUTCOMES

Soon-to-be educators gain knowledge and skills in ways to effectively communicate with every family in a culturally competent way. Class participants learn how to create meaningful partnerships with families and community members or organizations which are focused on student success. Students indirectly benefit by having teachers who are able to effectively engage with their families and their communities, which positively impacts their academic futures.

Post-Secondary Transition Support

Poudre School District

Fort Collins, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Post-Secondary transition support in Poudre School District (PSD) is a service provided to parents and families related to planning for life after high school, and the continuum of care their students will need once they transition out of the public school system. The foundational purpose of including transition components in an IEP, as legislated, is to better prepare students with disabilities for post-secondary opportunity. This is done by assisting them to gain access to the supports and services necessary to reach their desired outcomes and become as independent as possible. The transition planning process promotes successful movement from school to post-secondary education and training, employment, independent living, and community participation based on students' preferences, interests and abilities.

PSD works tirelessly to keep parents informed by offering a quarterly newsletter which focuses on topics such as self-advocacy, recreational opportunities, PSD transition programs, adult agencies, services available to individuals with disabilities in the local community, and more. The newsletter is posted on the PSD Integrated Services Transition website. This website offers resources within the state and Fort Collins community, videos on independent living, and information about self-advocacy.

In addition to these resources, many events are held during the school year to continue informing parents and families of what to expect during the transition out of the public school system. For example, an annual Resource Fair provides opportunities for parents to connect with community resource agencies from around the Fort Collins area. High school specific support is offered to parents and teachers, including a Transition 101 night that is hosted by each high school within the district. Events like these work to keep parents and families involved and educated in order to best help their students succeed.

The PSD Parent Liaison works with the district's Transition Coordinator to develop the resources for post-secondary transitions. These events are hosted in collaboration with community members including Foothills Gateway (local CCB) Department of Vocational Rehabilitation, The Arc, and the Workforce Center.

Sky is the Limit Marathon

Skyway Elementary School

Colorado Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Nestled in the southwest corner of Colorado Springs lies Skyway Elementary School, the only Title I school in Cheyenne Mountain District 12. For thirteen weeks each spring, students are encouraged to run as many laps on designated courses to reach the goal of 25.2 miles by late May. Those that do, join their peers for the final mile at Cheyenne Mountain High School to complete the 26.2 miles, equaling a marathon. Students who do not finish cheer their classmates on as they make the final four laps and accomplish this goal.

But it's not completing the marathon that is the greatest, noteworthy accomplishment. What makes this annual event so special is the staff and community members that make it happen. Each Tuesday and Thursday morning, Mark Sessions, a physical education teacher, and Mary Whitman, a school counselor, determine which course to run, how many laps equal a mile, set the playlist to keep folks moving, set up tables and clipboards for volunteers, and prepare to pass out popsicle sticks to track laps that will equal mileage upon check in.

Mark and Mary are ready and willing to support participants and help them achieve their goals, rain or shine. For the 2017 marathon, they featured children's books each morning and had pictures of book covers in the hallway to encourage reading. "Marathon Mornings" also highlights holidays or other initiatives. For example, one particular morning, Mary's brother and a well-loved former Skyway principal joined students and parents to promote bicycle safety day.

While students, parents, neighbors, and staff run or walk their laps every Tuesday and Thursday morning, visitors are privy to what really makes the Skyway Marathon a special event. For 11 years, Mark and Mary have used this opportunity to highlight fitness, community, positive social relationships, family, and fun. The purpose has always been, and will always be, to create an occasion where parents can spend a little time, even if only 15 minutes before school, walking with their children and neighbors to get a little closer to accomplishing their goal of finishing their first marathon, hopefully the first of many in their lives.



COLORADO
Department of Education

For more information and partnering materials:

SACPIE

www.cde.state.co.us/sacpie

CDE

www.cde.state.co.us/resourcesforparents

Questions

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