

The Family Advocacy Program

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



The Family and Community Engagement (FACE) Department at Denver Public Schools (DPS) launched a new program this year, The Family Advocacy Program. The goal was to support schools with engagement practices and to empower families to have stronger voices in their schools/communities. To start, FACE selected eight Title I schools, one from each region of Denver, and surveyed parents at those school sites on what they want to learn, along with how and when. Over four months, there were two monthly meetings which hosted engagement support chats for school-based staff and monthly Parent Village Advocacy Trainings for 1-2 parents and a school representative from each school site.



Jasmine Rigby, Title I Specialist, researched advocacy and engagement to develop this program. Denver Public Schools is made up of 207 schools, 155 of which are Title I. The goal was to find a way to equitably provide resources, identify the similarities and differences in needs of families and school staff district-wide, and begin building family advocates across the district to help drive engagement work forward.

Through 150 surveys collected, FACE heard families advocating for academic support, homework help, and improved communication with their school. This led to the engagement chats, where they dove into many topics such as improving communication strategies, newcomer family support, building investment within schools, and event planning. The monthly parent/school leader meetings were based on [Building a Parent Nation: The Parent Village Toolkit](#) that educates families on their advocacy style to address parent needs in their communities. At each session, a new community partner spoke on topics that arose during sessions like advocacy, disability supports, and mental health.

Each session was evaluated using a brief survey. These surveys helped the district rapidly implement feedback by asking what else parents want to learn, and building those topics into future sessions. A major challenge was transportation. Because FACE partnered with one school per region, schools felt times were too busy to sustain coming to in-person meetings. However, the closing survey indicated that schools that maintained parent participation through the initiative want to implement parent villages at their school sites next year. To address the transportation issue, FACE plans to launch this program region-by-region with a new goal of building strong relationships between neighboring schools. They will also simplify curriculum and shorten the length of the program to one month, running the eight sessions on a weekly basis. This should increase longevity in school participation, provide time for schools to apply what they learn, and create opportunities for more schools to participate each year.

A few tips to consider if you plan on running a similar program at your school: 1) consistent communication is key, 2) check in on families and schools regularly, 3) provide personalized resources they truly want and can access easily, and 4) thank them for showing up, every time!