

Families and Educators Together Teams (FET)

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



The work of Families and Educators Together (FET) teams in Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) is at the very heart of family-school collaboration as the district strives to move from involvement to authentic, trusting, and relationship-centered partnerships. The teams prioritize listening to underrepresented families' voices about their experiences within the school and creating shared goals for strengthening community.

The district currently has FET teams at 14 of their 56 schools. Teams meet monthly and are comprised of at least five parents (who represent the student population), five educators, and a school leader. The teams have seen an increase in family participation at most schools with the shift to virtual meetings during the pandemic. Each team is led by two or three co-chairs who plan each meeting in partnership with BVSD's Director of Family Partnerships. Some schools also include additional staff in the planning process.

In FET gatherings, family members bring forth their voices to discuss with staff how to build a more inviting, equitable, stronger school community for all. Themes discussed have included establishing new school wide communication systems, providing equitable transportation to school events, and including unique family cultures and celebrations within the school's culture.

When initiating a new Family and Educators Team, the district found that it helps to anticipate some challenges and questions. For example:

- How will you intentionally build trust with traditionally underserved populations of families?
- How will you explain the FET concept and how it will help their children at school?
- How you will find staff and/or teachers to help plan and facilitate meetings?

FET meetings reach their potential when the team has a clear understanding of its goals and structure the agenda in ways that prioritize building trust, strengthening relationships, and fostering high levels of participation.

FET is gradually leading participating schools to become more equitable communities and take their school-family partnership efforts to the next level. The impact on how participating family members feel about their child's school is tangible. One FET father shared: "When we come into school, a lot of us Spanish-speakers feel timid when we see the principal. We try to hide. Even though she doesn't speak our language, I now feel comfortable when I see her. I feel like this is my school too."

A mother at another school shared: "It was very difficult for me as a mother to feel trust with the teachers. FET has broken down that barrier for me... As a result of the FET team, many parents have had the chance to bring forth their voices and look for opportunities that before they feared to ask about or pursue."