



Collaborating for Healthy Schools: Building an Effective School-Family Partnership

Recommendations from Action for Healthy Kids and the Denver Public Schools Health & Wellness Southwest Advisory Committee

Our children face an unprecedented health crisis. Challenges to their health and well-being include:

- Emotional and behavioral difficulties
- Adolescent depression and anxiety
- Lack of physical activity
- Poor diet quality
- Obesity and other chronic illnesses
- Substance misuse
- Other mental health conditions

Schools are an ideal setting to transform kids' health and wellness, as the locations where children spend more than 1,200 hours each year—more than anywhere else besides their homes. Schools are a reflection of the local community and are places to support, cultivate, and maximize student potential. For kids to develop the lifelong habits necessary to become healthy and successful adults, schools, families, and communities must commit to working together to build a culture that supports the whole child.

Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK) is a national nonprofit and leading children's health organization that activates school-family partnerships to enable all kids, to become healthy and resilient, in body and mind. AFHK programs are designed to ensure all kids, especially those in underserved communities, are supported with the **three foundations of lifelong health** including: ← sound and appropriate nutrition paired with physical education and activity ← safe, supportive environments where they can play and grow, and ← stable and nurturing relationships with adults.

For information about our programs and resources, visit ActionforHealthyKids.org.

Contents

Foreword	3
by Theresa Peña, Denver Public Schools	
Acknowledgements	4
Introduction	5
Recommendations	9
> Before the Committee Meets: Setting the Stage and Recruiting Members....	9
> Committee Meetings: Building Trusting Relationships.....	11
> Committee Meetings: Developing and Implementing an Action Plan.....	13
Appendix	15
> How Public Schools Work.....	15
> Suggested Activities.....	16
> Discussion Questions.....	23
> Recommended Resources.....	24

Why Collaborate?

“School-family-community partnerships are essential for helping students achieve at their maximum potential...Research shows that—at both the elementary and secondary level—when schools, parents, families, and communities work together, students: earn higher grades, attend school more regularly, stay in school, and are more motivated. This is true for students of all ages, all backgrounds, and across race and ethnicity.”

National Center on Safe Supportive Learning Environments: Family-School-Community Partnerships

Foreword

Since 2016, Denver Public Schools (DPS) has worked with Action for Healthy Kids to convene parents and DPS staff to educate and empower parents to advocate for changes in school meals. Some highlights of our work together include greater access to water during school lunches, menu modifications to the breakfast in the classroom menu, improved customer service training, and added entrée items to reflect the cultural diversity of our students. Over the last two years, we have formalized our work and created the Denver Public Schools Health and Wellness Southwest Advisory Committee. The majority of the DPS parents that have joined this committee are very active in their school community, they are opinion leaders at their schools, and many are monolingual Spanish or bilingual parents that the District typically has a hard time connecting with. Our committee educated parents on how policy change is made in the District and strategies to make change; then they were empowered to successfully advocate for changes in the school and the District level. We started with school meals and once those issues were addressed, the parents expanded their interest to include other topics of health and wellness: social/emotional learning, bullying, healthy food served during school for parties and events, and school support for at-risk students and families.

I am an enthusiastic supporter to continue this work and to expand our areas of interest and impact. Training parents to advocate for their children at both the school and District level is a powerful opportunity to engage parents in the success of their child's education. The AFHK team has been a visible proponent of parent voice and our DPS parents are very excited to work with DPS staff to learn and advocate for ongoing change and improvement in the areas of health and wellness. With the support of the AFHK team, we identified other departments in DPS to collaborate with the Committee to ensure that the parents' voices continue to drive continuous improvement for Denver's children.

Theresa Peña
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Denver Public Schools Food & Nutrition Services
August 1, 2020



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Colorado Action for Healthy Kids, September 2020

Collaborating for Healthy Schools: Building an Effective School-Family Partnership

Recommendations from Action for Healthy Kids and the Denver Public Schools Health & Wellness Southwest Advisory Committee

Introduction

In 2016 parents from eight schools in southwest Denver started meeting regularly with Denver Public Schools (DPS) district staff to discuss student health, unite their voices, and advocate for healthy changes to their schools' wellness policies and practices. The parent group was initially founded as a partnership between DPS Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), and Westwood Unidos, a neighborhood organization that works to build the capacity of community members to be engaged in public policy and decision-making that affects their lives.

Started originally to meet the specific needs of Spanish-speaking families in the Westwood neighborhood in Denver to address parent concerns related to school meals, the group soon broadened its reach to become the DPS Health & Wellness Southwest Advisory Committee to include more family members and address a broader range of school health and wellness topics.

Key impacts of the committee's work to date include the following school nutrition successes:

- Stronger school policies and practices around access to water
- Updated lunch menus that feature more culturally relevant items
- Quality concerns related to food temperature addressed
- Improved customer service
- Healthier celebrations and snacks at schools and at home
- Increased family engagement and community involvement

The goals of the committee are to educate parents and family members about district health goals and initiatives, educate DPS staff about the interests and concerns of DPS families, and provide opportunities for staff and families to build trusting, collaborative relationships that improve school health and academic outcomes together within the framework of the **Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC)** model recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

This report provides recommendations from the committee's work to support other families and school or district staff to develop collaborative committees to improve the health and well-being of their students. The recommended strategies in this report will help steer the conversation between school staff and families to create trusting relationships and lay the foundation for meaningful partnerships.

"School efforts to promote health among students have been shown to be more successful when parents are involved."

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Parent Engagement: Strategies for Involving
Parents in School Health

Building Community and Trust

The Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child approach defines family engagement in schools as families and school staff working together to support and improve the learning, development, and health of students.¹ Yet families face many obstacles that prevent them from becoming involved, including inflexible work schedules, transportation and childcare issues,

¹Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/components.htm>

WHOLE SCHOOL WHOLE COMMUNITY WHOLE CHILD



A Collaborative Approach to Learning and Health

The focus of the Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child (WSCC) model "is directed at the whole school, with the school in turn drawing its resources and influences from the whole community and serving to address the needs of the whole child. ASCD and the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) encourage use of the model as a framework for improving students' learning and health."* Family engagement is one of ten key components that must work in concert for children to be healthy, safe, supported, challenged and engaged.

To learn about the WSCC model and how it can guide your school health efforts, visit:

- ASCD: <http://www.ascd.org/programs/learning-and-health/wsc-model.aspx>
- CDC: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>
- RMC Health Smart Guides for WSCC component areas: <https://www.rmc.org/resources-tools/>

*ASCD WSCC poster: <http://www.ascd.org/ASCD/pdf/siteASCD/wholechild/wscposter.pdf>

Importance of Trust

“No meaningful family engagement can be established until relationships of trust and respect are established between home and school. A focus on relationship building is especially important in circumstances where there has been a history of mistrust between families and school or district staff, or where negative past experiences or feelings of intimidation hamper the building of partnerships between staff and parents.”

Partners in Education, *A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*, SEDL, 2013

and limited access to the technology needed to receive school communications.² Misconceptions about how schools and districts are structured and how district departments, policies and budgets work can get in the way of effective engagement. Language and cultural barriers may make communication challenging. Family engagement efforts in underserved and marginalized communities may falter due to a history of mistrust between families and school or district staff.³

Often school staff will determine health and education priorities and jump in to identify solutions without involving all stakeholders until after critical decisions have been made. Asking families and community partners to provide “feedback” after priorities and solutions have been identified causes families and other community partners to feel a lack of trust towards the school and school district.

Building trusting relationships with all stakeholders takes an investment of time and resources on the part of school and district staff. At the same time, families and community partners who want to be engaged in decision-making about student health and education policies and practices can begin by getting to know how their school and district work, what resources they have, and what challenges they face.

How To Use these Recommendations

The strategies presented here are recommended for school or district-level collaborations between staff and families. While advancing school and student health was the primary reason the DPS committee convened, many of the strategies would be appropriate to apply to any collaboration between families and staff.

The recommendations are divided into three sections based on their purpose and general timing in the collaboration process, but it’s not necessary or always appropriate to do them in a set order. The DPS committee often worked on *building trust* activities and *action planning* activities at the same time in the same meeting or they alternated between the two types of activities at consecutive meetings. Sometimes parents in the group met on their own without district staff present, to brainstorm or to participate in a learning session about school systems or leadership skills. Building trust takes time and patience, and taking action together can help with that process, so it’s not necessary to wait until a deep level of trust has been established before starting to take concrete actions towards your primary goals.

Bringing New Members On Board

To become a sustainable partnership that works on multiple issues over time, new members should be recruited on a regular basis. However, this can lead to friction or disengagement if too much meeting time is devoted to bringing new members up to speed on past activities or skills-building that current members have already participated in. This was one of the main challenges experienced by the DPS committee. Starting in 2020-2021, the group decided to host a longer learning session at the start of each school year designed to provide background information and skills-building for new members so that the regular monthly convenings could focus more time on action planning.

² Hanover Research Insights Blog, Best Practices in Family and Community Engagement, 2013. <https://www.hanoverresearch.com/insights-blog/best-practices-in-family-and-community-engagement/>

³ Partners in Education, *A Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships*, SEDL, 2013

Recommendations within each of the three sections (Setting the Stage, Building Trust, Action Planning) are listed by stakeholder; some strategies are for staff to complete, some are for families to work on, and some are for both groups. The Appendix includes suggested activities, discussion questions, and additional resources on related topics.

Using a Facilitator

To provide a welcoming atmosphere of trust and inclusivity, investing in a skilled, neutral facilitator to run committee meetings would be ideal. If funding is not available for a professional facilitator, members can take turns filling this role, but consider bringing in a trainer or an expert from the community to teach committee members some facilitation techniques—because being a member of the group while directing the process can be tricky.

The Role of a Facilitator

“According to the traditional definition of facilitation, a group member cannot formally fill the role of facilitator because a group member is not content neutral. Traditionally a facilitator does not intervene directly in the content of the group’s discussions; to do so would require the facilitator to abandon a neutral position and reduce the group’s responsibility for solving its problems.

However, in real-life situations, there can be a crossover between the roles of facilitator and participant. We, indeed, switch roles. As group members or leaders, we suddenly find ourselves in the position of facilitator and must use facilitation principles and techniques to guide our groups through efficient processes to effective outcomes. This is our reality.”

Enhancing Rural Capacity Community of Practice – A part of the national Cooperative Extension System

Find facilitation tips at: <https://community-development.extension.org/neutral-meeting-facilitation-difficult-and-critical/>

Recommendations: Before the Committee Meets

Setting the Stage and Recruiting Members

Recommendations for Staff

- Consider the demographics of your community. Learn about their values and the specific challenges they may face.
- Create a warm and welcoming environment that shows families that their input is desired, respected, and valued.
- Offer multiple two-way communication channels so families can ask questions and share opinions (e.g., texts, emails, phone calls, video-conferences, in-person meetings).
- Consider your own mindset. Get rid of pre-conceived notions about how parents think, the expertise they have, and how they want to be involved.
- Seek district buy-in from multiple departments for the committee's work.
- Seek district, community or nonprofit funding to support meeting coordination and facilitation.
- Minimize language barriers by recruiting bilingual and bicultural staff to participate. Arrange for quality interpretation.

Two-Way Communication

"Communication acts as a bridge to engagement and, ultimately, strong parent partnerships. When you make an effort to contact parents, you're saying that you value their insights. Parents who might otherwise feel uncomfortable reaching out then know that they're welcome to do so."

Waterford.org: How Two-Way Communication Can Boost Parent Engagement

Recommendations for Families

- Get involved at your child's school as you're able. Visit the school and learn about its culture and practices related to student health. Volunteer in the classroom and at school events.
- Introduce yourself to school leaders and ask questions. What are your school and district priorities and practices related to student health, and how would they like families to provide support?
- Talk to other parents. Gather perspectives and ideas from other families.
- Consider your own mindset. Get rid of pre-conceived notions about how school and district staff think and why they work in a certain way.

A Committed Parent Leader

"To achieve changes in the health of our children, we have to be involved!" says Colorado AFHK Parent Advisory Board member Gabriela Medina, who was instrumental in getting the group started and co-leads it each month. Having a committed parent leader to serve as a community organizer has been critical to the committee's success. Finding someone who cares deeply about the work, who has connections and personal credibility within the community and the skills to build trusting relationships is worth an investment of time and funding.

Recommendations for Staff and Families Together

- Find and agree upon a meeting location. If meeting in person, consider schools or other district venues as well as community spaces. Some families might feel more comfortable speaking up if meetings are held in "neutral" locations not owned by the district. Transportation is a challenge for some families; selecting a venue that members can reach by walking or public transportation can help boost membership and inclusivity. If meeting virtually, make sure all parents are trained and comfortable using the virtual platform (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, etc.)
- Consider providing childcare for the meetings. If childcare cannot be provided, are there other ways this barrier can be addressed (e.g., children attend meetings with their parents, schedule meetings at different times, provide stipends for babysitters, etc.)?
- Recruit 1-2 committed parents to co-lead the committee. They should care deeply about the work and have connections and credibility in the community.

- Recruit school or district staff with a strong belief in the group’s purpose and value and a willingness to commit to the group and take actions to address family concerns.
- Invite families to participate on the committee. Involve people who have a deep understanding of the culture, norms and dynamics of your community.
- Work with established school parent groups (e.g., PTO, PTA, Parent Advisory Council, Parent Action Committee) to get their perspective and buy-in for the collaboration and to recruit more families to participate.
- Enlist a skilled, neutral meeting facilitator to provide a welcoming atmosphere of trust and inclusivity during the meetings. If funding is not available for a professional facilitator, members can take turns filling this role—consider bringing in an expert to teach committee members some facilitation techniques.
- Seek partnerships with community groups to help build trust and deepen relationships between school/district staff and family members.

Solution-Focused Mindset

Often when an issue comes up at the school or district level, it’s because parents are dissatisfied with how things are being handled or how something is impacting their child. Because school and district staff have so many different roles and responsibilities to juggle, they may not see the issue from the family’s perspective, and it may be difficult to stop what they’re doing to consider improvements to policies and practices. When not addressed, the issues are likely to turn into bigger problems, debates or power struggles.

Many problems are not solved due to a lack of understanding from parents on how a school system works, a lack of understanding from staff that parents want the best outcomes for their children, and a lack of trust or ownership of the issues from both groups. A solution-focused approach requires an individual commitment from everyone at the table to share responsibility and ownership of the issues and solutions. Instead of dwelling on shortfalls or the history of the problem, solution-focused thinking looks to the strengths and resources of the individual, team or organization and how these can be used to generate potential solutions.

National Council for Special Education (Ireland)

<https://www.nbss.ie/nbss-model-of-support/level-3-individualised-support-for-a-few-students/solution-focused-thinking>

A solution-focused approach to a family-school issue should strive to:

- Identify what’s already working for all stakeholders and do more of it
- Focus on what’s possible rather than on what’s wrong
- Move from problem-solving and strive for finding solutions
- Stop doing what isn’t working and do something different

Solution-Focused Supervision: A Go-To Approach, By Claudia J. Dewane, DEd, LCSW. Social Work Today, Vol. 15 No. 5 P. 24

<https://www.socialworktoday.com/archive/090915p24.shtml>

Recommendations: Committee Meetings Building Trusting Relationships

Recommendations for Staff

- Provide quality interpretation with meetings conducted primarily in the language spoken by the majority of participants.
- Communicate the overall vision and priorities of your school/district clearly and transparently.
- Provide families with clear information about how your school and district departments function, set policy, and make decisions.
- Share your school and district policies and plans related to student health.
- Share the rules and regulations your schools and district have to consider when making decisions about student health and the school wellness environment.
- Provide families with information on how to get involved at different levels at school and in the district.
- Support parents who want to be involved on a deeper level. Create an environment for them to take the lead on shared goals and set agreed-upon boundaries.
- Ask families about their lives and their concerns.
- Validate the challenges families have and their expertise.
- Don't get defensive—share the challenges you have so that families can help come up with solutions.

The DPS Health & Wellness

Southwest Committee meets 8-10 times during the school year. Monthly discussion topics related to school nutrition, physical activity, social-emotional climate and mental health are determined by the committee members in advance. Speakers from different student support services in DPS (e.g., social work, psychology, nursing, etc.) are often brought in to let parents know what services are available and what opportunities exist for families to get engaged with the work at a community level to support the success of all students.

Recommendations for Families

- Don't make assumptions—learn how things work. Take advantage of learning opportunities and ask questions. (See *How Public Schools Work* in the Appendix for a general overview on how public schools in the U.S. operate.)
- Communicate your concerns clearly in a constructive, non-judgmental way.
- Approach conversations in a spirit of collaboration vs. confrontation.
- Validate the challenges staff have and their expertise.

Trust and Transparency

The DPS committee work wouldn't have been successful without a commitment to transparency and honest dialog from DPS staff. Theresa Peña represented the district on the committee—her desire to understand the families' priorities on a deeper level, her willingness to share her department's challenges, and her readiness to take whatever action she could around the group's concerns were instrumental in developing trust and led to collaboration vs. confrontation and shared responsibility on the issues.

Recommendations for Staff and Families Together

- Get to know each other with *Getting To Know You Activities*. (See Suggested Activities.)
- Bring in school/district experts and community partners to share their expertise, programs, and resources on various school health topics.
- Offer opportunities for families to learn how to support their children and advocate for their needs. (Check out free instructional resources from *The Right Question Institute* in Suggested Activities.)
- Build communication skills. (See Suggested Activities.)

- Bring a solution-focused mindset to committee meetings and to the work itself. (See Suggested Activities.)
- Find common values. Every person brings a different set of values to the table. Identify the core values you share and bring them to the forefront of how you collaborate as a committee.
- Carry on respectful meetings even when an issue creates conflict.
- Honor others' valuable experiences.
- Seek out a variety of ideas before making decisions.
- Identify and prioritize needs and opportunities in your community to increase family engagement and improve student health. (See Appendix for potential discussion questions to get you started).
- Create a shared vision for the committee based on your core values and priorities.
- Share responsibility to keep the momentum going. Give research assignments or other tasks for members to complete between meetings.
- Schedule regular committee meetings at a time and location that works for most members. To be inclusive, rotate times and venues if needed.

A shared vision defines what you and the other members want to create or accomplish as part of the group. In essence, it is your destination. A shared vision should come from all group members; it is not imposed by one person or just a few people. It creates common interest and a sense of shared purpose for all of your group activities. The creation process builds trust among all members and inspires commitment from the group to share responsibility and action.

Senge, Peter, The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization, 1990.

Assignments Between Meetings
 In between meetings, parents on the DPS committee gave themselves assignments to apply what they were learning. Assigned tasks were related to establishing relationships at their individual schools and conducting research related to their focus areas. For example: Schedule a meeting with your principal or your child's teacher—get to know them, find out what's important to them and what their beliefs and values are. Related to their water project, parents found out how each of their schools were meeting federal regulations around access to water during school meals. Parents brought back what they learned and shared it with the group at the next meeting.

Todos los niños de DPS tienen una salud integra. Salud emocional, física y una buena nutrición.
 All DPS children have comprehensive health. Emotional health, physical health and good nutrition.

To create their shared vision and goals, the DPS committee listed issues that were important to their individual families first. They talked about why some issues were more important than others and looked for common themes to define priorities for their work together as a group. To get to a shared vision, they realized they had to leave individual concerns behind. They settled on social emotional health, physical activity and nutrition, and school safety as their priority issues in the future, although issues related to COVID-19 and the new school landscape could lead to a reevaluation of those priorities in 2020-2021.

Recommendations: Committee Meetings Developing and Implementing an Action Plan

Recommendations for Staff and Families Together

- If applicable, work with your school leaders to complete a school wellness assessment for your school to determine how it stands on your priority issues. Share your school results with the committee.
- Establish objectives and goals related to your committee's shared vision. Goals can be set for individual schools, multiple schools, or district-wide, if your committee works at that level.
- Review available resources and requirements. Discuss possible solutions to achieve your objectives.
- Create an action plan:
 - Determine what activities need to take place.
 - Create a timeline.
 - Determine roles and assign responsibilities.
- How will you know if you're successful? What are the desired outcomes for your activities? Determine how you'll evaluate your efforts and set measurable goals.
- Find community partners to help you achieve your goals through funding, in-kind donations, volunteers, expertise, and connections.
- Celebrate your successes and share them with the larger school community.
- Find new members and create a sustainability plan to keep the work of the committee going.

Measurable Goals are SMART

Set goals that will help you determine if your efforts are successful. SMART goals are **Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Relevant, and Time-bound**. For Example: by the end of the school year, 75 percent of elementary school teachers will be implementing movement breaks in their classrooms at least two times a day.

Download a Word version of an AFHK School Health Action Plan template here:

<https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Action-Plan-Template-1.docx>

A wellness assessment is well worth your time and effort and may cover several aspects of the school environment: health education, nutrition, physical activity, social emotional and mental health, family and community involvement, staff wellness, healthy and safe school environments, and health services.

Conducting an assessment allows your school team to:

- Develop key relationships with staff
- Determine your school's strengths and weaknesses
- Define goals to suit your school's need
- Justify your desire to make changes
- Document starting points in order to show progress over time

Action for Health Kids recommends the **School Health Index** or Colorado's **Smart Source** (for Colorado schools). See Recommended Resources for links.

When new people join the committee, be sure to inform them what the group is working on and provide opportunities for new input. Don't be afraid to shift in a new direction. Consider providing mentors to younger or less experienced members.

Share your Story

Action for Healthy Kids would like to know how you're putting these recommendations into action in your school community so we can highlight impactful work that's improving the health and well-being of kids across the country. If you have a great story to share about your family, a student or parent, or your school please complete our story questionnaire.

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/1nHhREZ4pG60xAwD7dEQPIK2W2y27gKkboQHLIjoCJd0/viewform?edit_requested=true

If you have questions or comments about these recommendations, please email us at contactus@actionforhealthykids.org.

The DPS Health & Wellness Southwest Advisory Committee was selected as a **2019 Promising Partnership Practice** by Colorado's State Advisory Council on Parent Involvement in Education.



To view other Promising Partnership Practices which align with the National Standards for Family-School Partnerships, visit: <https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/promising>

"The committee allows parents to engage with the larger community—not just their own kids. Rather than just seeing problems, the meetings help parents become more involved in the solutions."

Theresa Peña, DPS Food & Nutrition Services

Appendix ← How Public Schools Work

In order to form a successful partnership, families must understand how the public school system works in the United States.

An Overview

The United States has a highly decentralized system of education. While the federal government administers programs to promote student achievement and ensure equal access,⁴ every state has its own department of education and laws regulating school finance, the hiring of personnel, student attendance, and curriculum.

In most states, the public education system is divided into local school districts, which are led by a school board that represents the local community. Each district is responsible for coordinating education policies, planning for educational needs in the community, and establishing or adopting their own programs and curricula for the schools in the district. Districts delegate varying levels of independence and decision making to individual schools.⁵

U.S. public schools are tax-supported and free to students and their families. While public elementary and secondary schools receive about 8 percent of their funding from federal sources, including national school meal programs,⁶ they rely heavily on local property taxes to meet the majority of their expenses. Thus, there is significant variation among schools regarding available resources, curriculum, and activities offered; typically, schools in the U.S. have tended to reflect the educational values and financial strengths of the communities in which they are located.⁷

[See AFHK's handout on Public School Leadership Structure](#) to understand who the key players and decision makers are in a typical public school community so that you can include stakeholders at every level in your focus area.

⁴ U.S. Department of Education, The Federal Role in Education. <https://www2.ed.gov/about/overview/fed/role.html>

⁵ Corsi-Bunker, Antonella, *Guide to the US Education System*, International Student & Scholar Services, University of Minnesota. For more information, see: <https://iss.umn.edu/publications/USEducation/>

⁶ U.S. Department of Education, The Federal Role in Education.

⁷ Corsi-Bunker, Antonella, *Guide to the US Education System*.

Appendix ← Suggested Activities

Getting To Know You Activities

Learning the names of the people in the room is important, but in order to create a space where collaboration, trust and meaningful relationships can be established, you need to know more about the people you will be working with. These activities are designed to help groups get to know each other, reduce tension, relax and enjoy themselves.

Bingo Activity

Group Size: 5-30 participants

Equipment Required: prepared bingo cards, pens or pencils

Approximate Time: 15-30 minutes

Instructions: Create bingo cards in advance using general traits or experiences that members of your group are likely to relate to (see sample, included). Have participants go around the room and find someone that fits the description in each box. If a person matches an item, have them initial it. The first person to fill their card (or fill a row or column if time is an issue) yells "Bingo" and the game is over. The object of the exercise is to get all of the items initialed by someone in the group and get to know the people in the room.

Beach Ball Questions

Group Size: 3-20 participants

Equipment Required: beach ball, permanent marker

Approximate Time: 15-20 minutes

Instructions: Inflate an ordinary beach ball and write questions on it in advance with a permanent marker. Have participants stand in a circle or scattered around the room. Participants take turns throwing the ball to someone else in the group/circle. The person who catches the ball has to say their name and answer whatever question is under their right thumb.

Download Beach Ball Ice Breaker question ideas from Jill Hoppenjans and the University of Vermont Orientation Team: <http://www.mauracullen.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/Beach-Ball-Questions-Icebreaker.doc>.

What's your story?

Group Size: 3+ participants

Equipment Required: None

Approximate Time: Allow ~1-5 minutes per participant

Instructions: Tell the group that we want to hear their stories...We're going to go around the room/circle and everyone will have a chance to share out. Tell them to answer the following questions when it's their turn: [Adjust questions to meet the needs and interests of your group and the time you have available]

1. What's your name? Do you have any nicknames?
2. Where do you live? Where are you from?
3. What's your favorite music genre and why?
4. What is one skill, ability or expertise you bring to the group?
5. Why are you present here today?

After everyone shares, wrap up the activity by asking a few participants to share what they noticed or discovered about the group. See if the conversation will start without giving examples beforehand so that the examples don't lead the discussion. You might hear things like... "a lot of us have similar skills, the same taste

in music” or “the discussion brought back memories about...” Close the discussion by emphasizing how every person in the room is key and important to creating change—however, as our stories show, we each have unique skills and interests that we bring to the collaboration.

Find additional Getting to Know You Activities:

FunAttic.com – <https://funattic.com/icebreaker-games-for-adults/>

SessionLab.com - <https://www.sessionlab.com/blog/icebreaker-games/>

Communication Activities

Good communication is an essential part of any relationship and is the foundation for a healthy partnership. These activities can help your group understand the importance of effective listening and two-way communication.

Hear me out! (Pido la Palabra)

Group Size: 5-30 participants

Equipment Required: None

Approximate Time: 10-20 minutes

Instructions: Ask everyone in the group to find a partner. Once everyone is paired up, read the following instructions: On the count of three, everyone will share out with their partner the answer to the question asked. Partners will not take turns talking—both will respond to each other at the same time.

Question: “How did you start your day today? What activities did you accomplish this morning? Ready 1,2,3.....” Everyone in the group at this time should be talking all at once and over their partner’s voice. If one partner is listening silently, encourage them to talk at the same time as their partner. Encourage everyone in the group to answer the questions and talk over each other.

After about 2-3 minutes stop the activity and ask: “How did you feel to talk over someone else? Or for someone else to talk over you? To not be able to get your point across?” Close the discussion by pointing out that often, even when we are not talking over one another, we are not listening to understand what the other person is saying—instead, we are listening to formulate our reply. Authentic communication is when all people involved are given the space to get their point across and are listened to—without an immediate response from others. Once everyone has shared out their opinions, thoughts, and concerns, then it’s time to figure out how to move the communication forward to solution-based thinking.

Back to Back Communication

Group Size: 5-30 participants

Equipment Required: Two rows of chairs lined up back to back (1 chair per participant), copies of a diagram, paper, writing utensils.

Approximate Time: 20-30 minutes

Instructions: Prepare a diagram in advance with a variety of geometric shapes (see sample, included). Have the group divide into pairs with each pair sitting back to back along the row of chairs. Give one row the diagram and the other row paper and writing utensils. Have the person holding the diagram describe the shape to their partner. The listener must not see the diagram, may not ask any questions, and should draw it based only on the partner’s description.

After 10 minutes, stop the activity and have the partners compare how well the listener’s drawing matches the original. Make the point that each paper looks different even though each pair of partners had the same original diagram and received the same instructions. Ask the listeners what it was like to complete their drawing without being able to ask clarifying questions. Do they think the results would have been better if

they were allowed to ask questions? What did they learn about communication from this simple activity? Close the discussion by emphasizing that communicating clearly isn't easy, and that many misunderstandings come from false assumptions and misinterpreting what's being said. That's why it's so important to ask questions and confirm understanding (two-way communication) to ensure the message is not distorted.

Four Core Beliefs Activity

Group Size: 5-30 participants

Equipment Required: None

Approximate Time: 15-30 minutes

Background:

The book *Beyond the Bake Sale* recommends in chapter three that schools examine these Four Core Beliefs to determine whether they are ready to partner with families:

1. All parents have dreams for their children and want the best for them.
2. All parents have the capacity to support their children's learning.
3. Parents and school staff should be equal partners.
4. The responsibility for building partnerships between school and home rests primarily with school staff, especially school leaders.

Instructions:

- Give each participant a survey with four core beliefs above and a four-point scale: strongly disagree, disagree, agree, strongly agree.
- Instruct each participant to complete the survey anonymously, based on their own beliefs. Reinforce that the surveys will be completely anonymous.
- Once the participants have completed the survey, have them fold it in half.
- Participants should stand and trade their survey 7 times with other participants, to make sure no one knows which survey belongs to which person.
- Determine four areas of the room that represent the four scales on the survey: one area for strongly disagree, one for disagree, one for agree, and one for strongly agree.
- Have the participants look at the question on the survey in their hands and go to the corresponding area of the room.
- Based on where people are standing, the group will see how individuals answered the survey.
- Repeat this step for survey questions 2-4.
- Either after each question or after going through all four core beliefs, have a group discussion about why they believe the answers occurred.
- You may also ask the group what the beliefs look like in practice.

Reference: Henderson, A. T., Mapp, K. L., Johnson, V. R., & Davies, D. (2007). *Beyond the Bake Sale: The essential guide to family-school partnerships*. The New Press.

Find additional Communication Activities:

PositivePsychology.com - <https://positivepsychology.com/communication-games-and-activities/>

TrainingCourseMaterial.com - <https://www.trainingcoursematerial.com/free-games-activities/communication-skills-activities>

Bias Awareness Activity

Tag Game

Group Size: 10-30 participants

Equipment Required: Badges in a variety of shapes, colors, and sizes, paper clips

Approximate Time: 20-30 minutes

Instructions: Prepare badges in advance in a variety of geometric shapes (circles, squares, triangles, etc.), colors and sizes. Tell the group: “we are going to play a game that should highlight how easy it is to form unconscious biases and beliefs based on first impressions and assumptions.” Have the participants clip a badge somewhere between their waist and neck. Then instruct them to form groups without talking—do not tell them what criteria to use to form the groups. Once formed, tell the participants to break up and form into new groups. Repeat at least two more times.

Come back together as a large group and discuss what groups were formed in each round. Participants typically form groups with people who have badges of the same color or shape. It is less common for participants look beyond the badges and form diverse groups in which many shapes, colors, and sizes are represented. This powerful yet non-confrontational activity leads well into a discussion about how automatic “us” vs “them” categorizations are and how those categorizations serve as a barrier to collaboration among diverse stakeholders.

Activity developed by Sandra M. Fowler, Training Across Cultures, in International Journal of Intercultural Relations (2006) and adapted by Include-Empower.com: <https://cultureplusconsulting.com/2018/08/16/a-ha-activities-for-unconscious-bias-training/>

Building Advocacy Skills

Help families build their capacity to ask better questions and participate more effectively in key decisions affecting their students’ health and education with these free instructional resources and activities from the Right Question Institute:

- Question Formulation Technique (QFT): <https://rightquestion.org/what-is-the-qft/>
- Framework for Accountable Decision Making (FADM): <https://rightquestion.org/resources/asking-questions-about-decisions-the-framework-for-accountable-decision-making/>

Solution-Based Thinking Activity

If both staff and families are in the room for this activity, it's best led by a trained, neutral facilitator or someone who is comfortable serving in that role to help ensure that feelings are validated without causing offense to any of the participants.

Rarely do we come in thinking about a solution and offering support to help solve the issue. A solution-based approach to a family-school concern strives to focus on what's possible rather than what's wrong. It's about sharing responsibly and finding solutions together. To do so, individuals in the group have to separate their assumptions and preconceived notions about what's possible from the real issues and factors that impact the focus area.

Ask all members of the group (staff and parents) to share 1-2 things they're not happy about in your focus area. Write them down on a white board or easel for all to see. Once you have heard at least one concern from each person, ask the following questions, as appropriate for the concerns listed:

- If you had the power to change the issue, how would you approach it? What would you do differently?
- Do you know what the district policy is regarding this issue?
- Do you know what the federal, state, and local regulations are for the issues mentioned?
- Do you know what is already being done (by the school, district or community) to address this issue?
- Do you know what resources are available to help solve the issue?
- If you listed a person as the concern, is the person really the issue? If you were in their shoes, what would you or could you do differently?
- What does our group have the power and ability to change or influence related to this concern?
- If it's beyond our power to impact this issue currently as a group, what can we focus on instead?

Note: You can use this activity to introduce the idea of solution-based thinking and/or help identify the issues you're going to work on as a group. If the group doesn't have answers to questions about district policy, regulations and how the issue is already being addressed, these questions can serve as good homework assignments in between meetings.

If you are facilitating the discussion,

be prepared for the type of things you might hear, but don't lead the discussion by giving out suggestions in advance. Examples of the types of things you might hear if your focus area is school food:

- Quality of food served in the cafeteria
- Not enough fruits and vegetables served at lunch
- Cafeteria manager doesn't pay attention to anything I say
- Lunches brought from home aren't any healthier than school meals
- Classroom teachers give out junk food as rewards
- Parents blame staff for everything

Eat your Fruits and Veggies

One concern for parents on the DPS committee was related to the fruits and vegetables served at lunch—they didn't feel kids were getting enough, and what they were getting wasn't always appetizing. When the families spent some time exploring this issue with DPS staff, they learned that there were regulations in place related to how vegetables could be cooked and served that limited what could be offered. When DPS staff asked families how they get their kids to eat vegetables at home, parents realized that they were putting high expectations on the schools to do things that they often struggled to do at home. Once the group examined the issue together and let go of their assumptions, they were able to come up with a strategy to address their concern: host taste tests to introduce students and families to healthy menu items containing fruits and vegetables and learn more about their preferences.

BINGO

Let's get to know each other! ¡Vámonos a conocernos!

Has a garden in their back yard or front yard Tiene un jardín atrás o enfrente de su casa	Speaks another language Habla otro idioma	Works in a nonprofit Trabaja en una organización sin fines de lucro	Is a stay-at-home parent Es un padre/madre de hogar (trabaja en su hogar)
Enjoys dancing Le gusta bailar	Is afraid of spiders Tiene miedo a las arañas	Was born in Colorado Nació en Colorado	Likes to cook Disfruta cocinar
Was born in another country: Where? Nació en otro país ¿Cuál?	Does not drink coffee No toma café	Has traveled to another country Ha viajado a otro país	Has been to a farmer's market Ha visitado un Mercado Agrícola
Is involved in their community Está involucrado en su comunidad	Enjoys working out Disfruta hacer ejercicio	Has the same favorite food: What is it? Tienen la misma comida favorita ¿Cuál es?	Has children: How many? Tiene hijos ¿Cuántos?

Go around the room and find someone who fits the description in each box. If a person matches an item, ask them to initial the box. The object of the exercise is to get all of the items initialed by someone in the group and get to know more people in the room!

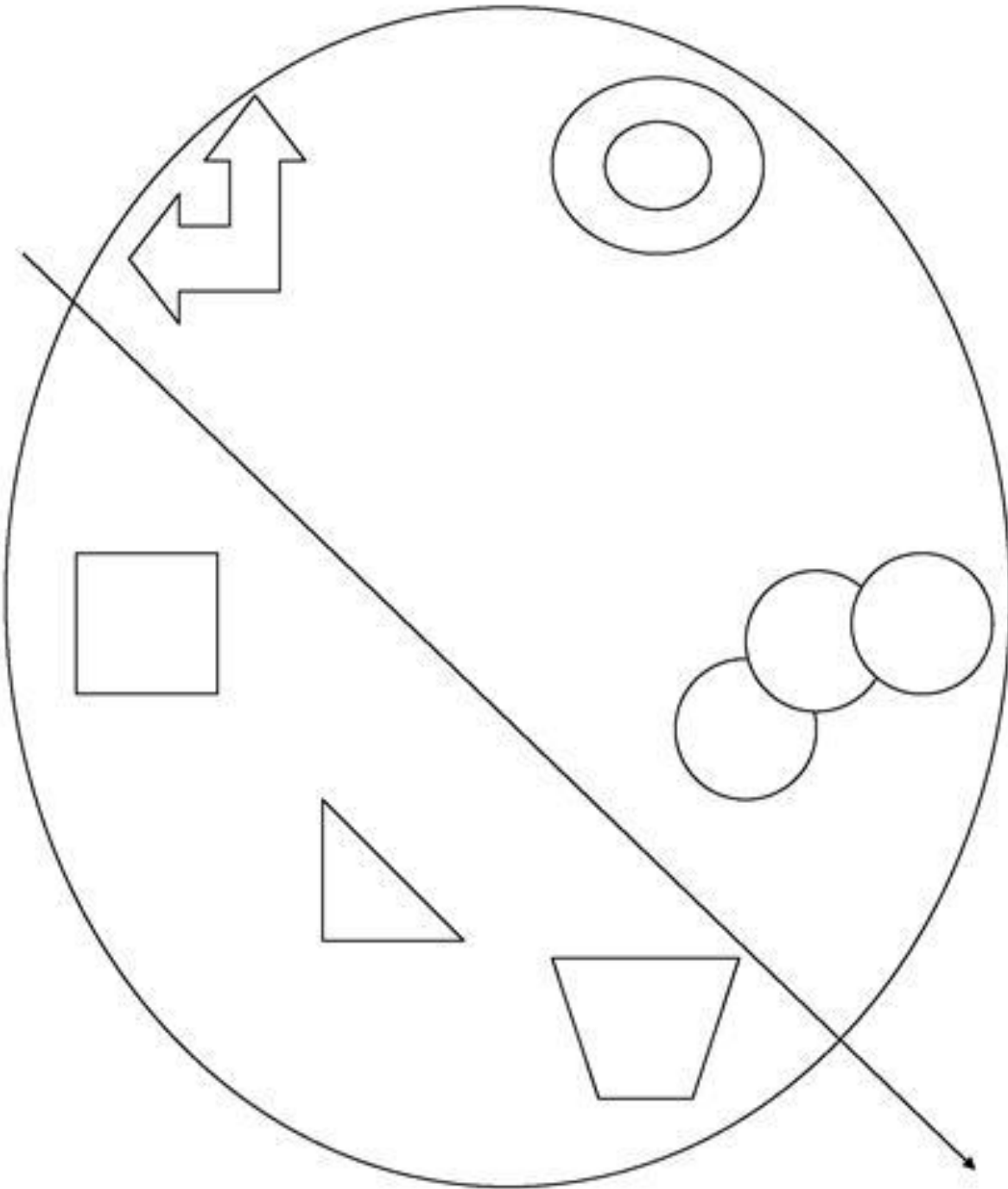
Vaya por el cuarto y encuentre alguien que coincida con la descripción. Pídale que escriba sus iniciales en cuadro y responda la pregunta donde sea necesario. El objetivo del ejercicio es conseguir que todos los cuadros tengan un nombre de alguien diferente y que se conozcan más de uno al otro.

Back to Back Communication

Sit back to back with your partner. One person will describe what to draw. The other person draws what is being described.

Source: TrainingCourseMaterial.com

<https://www.trainingcoursematerial.com/free-games-activities/communication-skills-activities/back-to-back-communication>



Appendix ← Discussion Questions

These questions are intended to help guide your group through the process of identifying and prioritizing the needs and opportunities in your community related to family engagement and student health.

Family Engagement

- How does your school currently inform parents and families on how to be involved?
- What strategies are being implemented or will be implemented in order to address language and cultural barriers?
- Does your school or district have an official policy or plan around family engagement?
- What current family engagement strategies exist at your school and in your district? What new strategies could be implemented in order to engage more families?
- What are areas of improvement for your school and district related to creating a welcoming environment for parents and families?
- Has your school collected information from families using a family involvement or school climate and culture survey?
 - See these sample surveys for parents and school staff from the Colorado Department of Education: http://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/school_family_community_partnership_survey
- Does your school currently practice shared decision making? If so, how? If not, what processes can be developed in order to ensure all stakeholders have a voice?

See PTA's National Standards, Goals, and Indicators for Family-School Partnerships; the Dual Capacity Building Framework; and the Colorado Department of Education PK-12 Family, School, and Community Partnership Framework (all linked below) for additional discussion question ideas related to family engagement.

Healthy Schools and Students

- What concerns do parents at your school currently have about student health and their school environment? What are staff concerns?
- Has your school completed a self-assessment such as the School Health Index to identify strengths and weaknesses of health and safety policies and practices in order to identify potential areas for improvement?
- What policies are in place in your school or district related to health and wellness? Does your school or district have an official plan in place to improve student health?
- What are innovative new practices related to your focus area that your group could implement?
- What district level resources exist to support your school within your group's focus areas?
- What community organizations exist in your area that could support your school within your group's focus areas?
- How do families provide input into school and district-level planning around health and wellness policies and practices?

Appendix ← Recommended Resources

Family Engagement in Schools

Global Family Research Project: <https://globalfrp.org/>

Research and resources defining and advancing the fields of family, school, and community engagement

Global Family Research Project Family Engagement Playbook: <https://globalfrp.org/>

Dual Capacity-Building Framework for Family-School Partnerships

<https://www.dualcapacity.org/>

PTA's National Standards, Goals, and Indicators for Family-School Partnerships

https://www.pta.org/docs/default-source/files/programs/national-standards-for-family-school-partnerships/national_standards_goals-and-indicators.pdf

Colorado Department of Education – Office of Family-School-Community Partnerships

PK-12 Family, School, and Community Partnership (FSCP) Framework:

https://www.cde.state.co.us/uip/p-12_fscp_framework

Guide for school districts to create family-school-community partnerships, including a list of recommended resources

School/District Staff Mindset

Institute for Student Achievement (ISA)

Family-School Partnerships: 9 Beliefs and Attitudes for Success (staff mindset)

<https://www.studentachievement.org/blog/9-beliefs-and-attitudes-that-foster-collaborative-family-school-partnerships/>

Alyssa R. Gonzalez-DeHass and Patricia P. Willems. Examining the Underutilization of Parental Involvement in the Schools. *The School Community Journal*, 2003

<http://www.adi.org/journal/ss03/Gonzalez-DeHass%20&%20Willems.pdf>

Meeting Facilitation Tips and Trainers

The Design Gym: <https://www.thedesigngym.com/top-11-skills-effective-facilitator/>

Everyday Democracy: <http://www.nmtpp.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/TipsForFacilitators.pdf>

Enhancing Rural Capacity: <https://community-development.extension.org/neutral-meeting-facilitation-difficult-and-critical/>

RMC Health: <https://www.rmc.org/trainings/>

Alma Consulting Services: <https://www.facebook.com/pages/category/Community-Service/Alma-Consulting-Services-101437574773999/>

Whole School, Whole Community, Whole Child Model

ASCD: <http://www.ascd.org/programs/learning-and-health/wsc-model.aspx>

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention: <https://www.cdc.gov/healthyschools/wsc/index.htm>

RMC Health Smart Guides for WSCC component areas: <https://www.rmc.org/resources-tools/>

School Wellness Assessment Tools

AFHK School Health Index (SHI): <https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/step-2/>

Online self-assessment and planning tool for schools recommended by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Action for Healthy Kids offers an abbreviated version which includes a variety of school health topics

Colorado Healthy Schools Smart Source: <https://www.colorado.gov/pacific/cdphe/smart-source>
Inventory of best practices in school health administered to Colorado schools every other year by the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment

School Health & Wellness Resources

Action for Healthy Kids: <https://www.actionforhealthykids.org/>
Tools and resources to create healthier schools and healthier families

The Hub: <https://coloradohub.org/>
Platform connecting health and education stakeholders across Colorado with a broad array of resources—peers, organizations, programs, professional development, toolkits, templates, research, and more