

Strong partnerships between schools and families create the conditions for student success. In this issue, we explore what it means to move from involvement to empowerment in family and community engagement. You will find how leaders build systems for communication and shared decision-making, with examples from districts and schools in action.



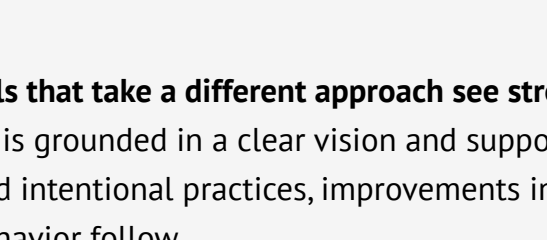
Family and Community Engagement Moving from Compliance to Impact

Family and Community Engagement (FACE) is widely recognized as essential, yet in many systems it remains on the margins, reduced to events, outreach efforts, or compliance tasks rather than treated as a core strategy for student success.

Parents are a child's first teachers, and educators, especially in the primary grades, play a critical role in supporting and reinforcing that foundation. When these efforts are aligned, the impact on student learning is significant. Research consistently shows that when families are involved, students perform better academically, particularly in the early years. A 2025 longitudinal report by the Parent Institute for Quality Education (PIQE) further highlights that in secondary grades, family engagement improves attendance and significantly increases the likelihood of postsecondary enrollment.

"Family and community engagement is often treated like a requirement rather than an opportunity."

From Compliance to Impact



Despite this, family and community engagement often remains an afterthought in many schools and districts. Policies tied to ESSA and Title I may exist, but too often they result in checklist practices instead of meaningful collaboration. Compounding this challenge, many educators enter the profession without formal preparation in family and community engagement.

Districts and schools that take a different approach see stronger outcomes.

When engagement is grounded in a clear vision and supported through aligned policies and intentional practices, improvements in achievement, attendance, and behavior follow.

What can district leaders do?

- Establish a clear vision, mission, and actionable plan for engagement
- Align efforts across departments, including bilingual education, multicultural services, and Title I
- Recognize and celebrate schools that demonstrate strong family and community engagement practices

- Embed family and community engagement into the overall strategy
- Equip teachers to build strong relationships with families
- Create time and structures for meaningful interactions to develop strong partnerships with local businesses and community members

What can school leaders do?

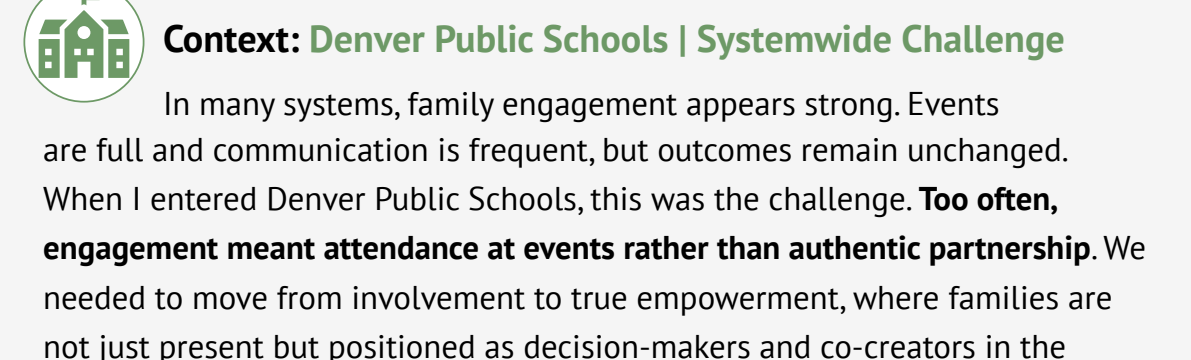
What would change if family engagement became central to every decision we make?

Share your stories and tag us on social media @CreativeLdrSol

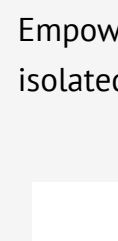


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Family and Community Engagement Online Course



From Involvement to Empowerment What Family and Community Engagement Looks Like in Action



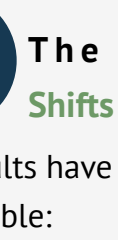
Context: Denver Public Schools | Systemwide Challenge

In many systems, family engagement appears strong. Events are full and communication is frequent, but outcomes remain unchanged. When I entered Denver Public Schools, this was the challenge. **Too often, engagement meant attendance at events rather than authentic partnership.** We needed to move from involvement to true empowerment, where families are not just present but positioned as decision-makers and co-creators in the system.

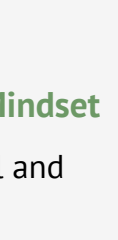


The Strategy: A Systemwide Blueprint

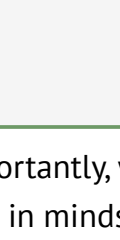
To address this, we launched the Family, School, and Community Empowerment Blueprint, creating a clear framework to move schools from isolated efforts to aligned, intentional practice.



From one-way communication to T.A.C.T communication
(Thorough, Accurate, Clear, Timely)



From isolated events to structured systems
(FACE teams with goals and accountability)



From participation to shared decision-making
(advisory councils, committees, and planning teams)

We grounded this work in a simple progression:

Involvement → Engagement → Empowerment



The Impact: Shifts in Practice and Mindset

The results have been both cultural and measurable:

- Increased Trust and Voice: family survey participation reached an all-time high
- Stronger Trust: positive family perception rose
- Improved Student Outcomes: schools report stronger alignment between home and classroom

More importantly, we see a shift in mindset:

Families are no longer asking, "How can I help?" They are asking, "How do we lead together?"



What Leaders Can Do Tomorrow

Leadership Move

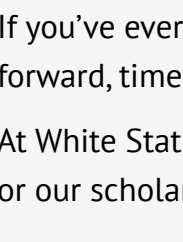
Start with one question:

Where are families informing this decision, and where are they missing?

- Build a FACE team that includes families, not just staff
- Audit and redesign events for dialogue, not delivery
- Commit to two-way communication across multiple platforms and languages
- Invite families early in decision-making, not after plans are formed

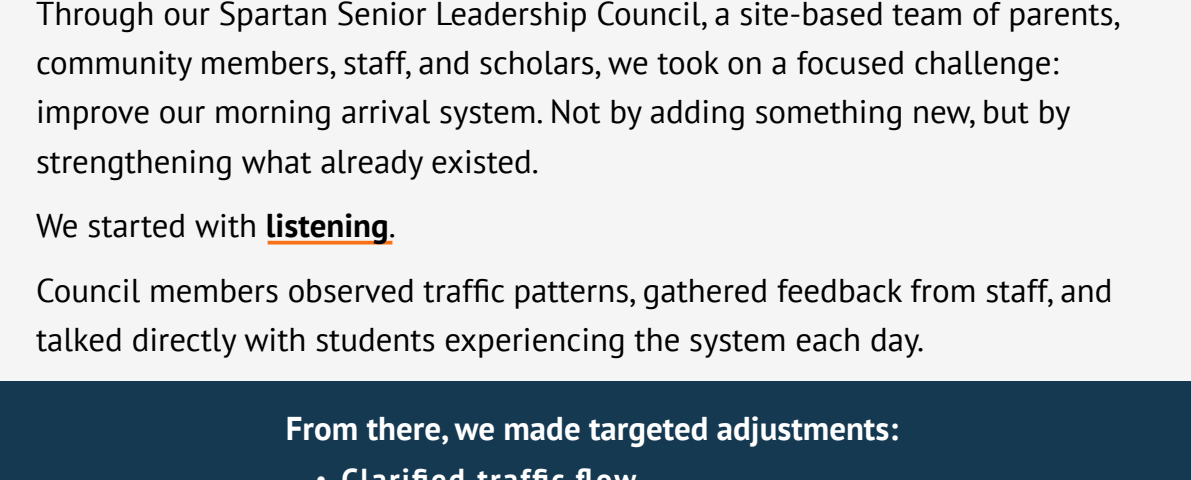
Empowerment doesn't happen by chance. It is designed through intentional leadership.

Engagement is not an event. It is a system. And when done right, it becomes a shared responsibility for student success.



Written by Alex Marrero, Ph.D.,
Superintendent of Denver Public Schools
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Denver Public Schools: Family and Community Engagement



"We didn't add something new. We strengthened what already existed."

FROM THE FIELD

From Traffic to Trust: Clearing the Way at White Station Middle

If you've ever sat in a school drop-off line, you know the feeling, cars inching forward, time slipping away, stress building before the day even begins.

At White Station Middle, we decided that wasn't the experience our families, or our scholars, deserved.

Through our Spartan Senior Leadership Council, a site-based team of parents, community members, staff, and scholars, we took on a focused challenge: improve our morning arrival system. Not by adding something new, but by strengthening what already existed.

We started with **listening**.

Council members observed traffic patterns, gathered feedback from staff, and talked directly with students experiencing the system each day.

From there, we made targeted adjustments:



- Clarified traffic flow
- Added signage for a teacher-only entrance
- Used visual cues to guide movement
- Established designated bus-only times

Small shifts. Implemented consistently.

The impact was **immediate**.

But the real outcome went beyond traffic. **Trust grew.** Families felt it. Staff saw it. Students experienced it.

This work reinforced something we believe deeply. **Strong systems build strong relationships.** When schools prioritize clarity, consistency, and shared ownership, they send a clear message to families. Your time matters, your children are safe, and your voice is valued.

At White Station Middle, we didn't just improve a process.

We strengthened the connection between school and community, one daily experience at a time.

"Safer."

"Easier to get to school."

"Improved a lot."

Written by Cedrick Gray, Ph.D., CLS Associate &
Principal at White Station Middle School
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Family and Community Engagement

At CLS, Impact is Not Optional — it's Fundamental.

We partner with schools and districts to transform intention into measurable results through tailored support, research-aligned practice, and collaborative implementation.

Let's Talk

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