

Listening Circles

Colorado Springs School District 11

Colorado Springs, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

In 2021-2022, the D11 Family, School, and Community Partnerships (FSCP) Collaborative determined that beginning with Essential Element One (Creating an Inclusive Culture) of Colorado's FSCP P-12 Framework would be the best place to start when looking at how to streamline effective family engagement practices within the district. They focused on one of Essential Element One's reflective questions: How are you learning about families lived experiences? To help address this question, staff suggested the restorative justice practice of listening circles as a first step to building trust and uncovering families' experiences.

The collaborative agreed to embark on a district wide Listening Tour in the Spring of 2022. After conducting five listening circles in strategic geographic, community-based locations, the listening tour proved successful and continued in the 2022-2023 school year.

The members of the Listening Circles team included a District Restorative Practice Specialist, team members from the Student Support and Engagement department, and members from the D11 Engage department. The process began in the Fall of 2021 and included reaching out to all schools that identified Family Engagement as one of their major improvement strategies in their school improvement plan. All Title 1 schools were also contacted.

Through conversations with principals, learning teams, School Accountability Committees (SACs), and PTA/PTO's, the district learned about individual schools' culture and climate, communication effectiveness (or lack thereof), and how they viewed family engagement at their school. One recommendation for each school was to conduct separate listening circles for parents/caregivers and staff. By implementing listening circles, schools were directly addressing one of their major improvement strategies, family engagement. Family engagement was explained as ultimately stemming from trust.

To establish a meaningful, symbiotic relationship between families and their schools, it is essential to begin building a trusting, inclusive, equitable culture for families. Studies show involved and engaged families can improve student outcomes. Therefore, the restorative practice of listening circles can lead to positive student academic and social success. In the 2022-2023 school year, three listening circles were successfully conducted. Two were held for parents and caregivers at the elementary level and one was held for staff members at the elementary level. D11 Engage secured a grant to cover all listening circle costs including paying personnel, providing childcare, and providing food.

For each circle there was an assigned note taker. Afterwards, the team met to go over notes and discuss themes that emerged. Those notes and themes were then provided to the principal. For the staff listening circles, the notes and themes went to both the principal and the area superintendent. Since the circles were conducted throughout the second semester, feedback regarding what administration plans to do with the information has not been received. Most responses or action taken will be in the Fall 2023 semester. Despite a concerted effort



Family Engagement Listening Circles

WE WANT TO LEARN FROM OUR FAMILIES!

Elementary invites families of our school community to share your experiences as parents and caregivers. This is a time for your school to learn from your lived experiences through a confidential sharing circle.

"an opportunity to speak and listen to each other in an atmosphere of safety, decorum, and equality...to help people gain a shared sense of understanding and emotional connection" (The International)

Building Trusting Relationships One Conversation at a Time!

Please join us!
Friday May 5th, 2023
Field Day after lunch

*Childcare and Pizza will be provided.

Please register through this QR Code:



to advertise, the circles had very low attendance. QR codes were printed on flyers to better attract participants, as well as provide insight into the degree of commitment from those attending. Attendance was the most significant challenge.

Recommendations include developing a step-by-step "contract" for principals to agree upon. Additionally, outline details of what services will be provided, the school's expectations, and specific deadlines. If you think you have advertised enough, **ADVERTISE MORE!** Make phone calls, be positively relentless! If the seats are not full, circles lose their effectiveness.