

Health and Wellness Parent Advisory Committee

Denver Public Schools and Action for Healthy Kids

Denver, CO



With support from Action for Healthy Kids and Denver Public Schools (DPS) Food and Nutrition Services, parents from eight schools in southwest Denver are meeting regularly with district staff to discuss student health, unite their voices, and advocate for healthy changes to their schools' wellness policies and practices. The goals of the DPS Health & Wellness Southwest Parent Advisory Committee are to educate parents 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 to 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.



The parent group was initially founded as a partnership between DPS Food and Nutrition Services (FNS), Action for Healthy Kids (AFHK), and Westwood Unidos. Action for Healthy Kids is a nonprofit dedicated to creating healthier school communities across Colorado. Westwood Unidos is a neighborhood leadership organization that works to build the capacity of community members to be engaged in public policy and decision-making that affects their lives.



The committee meets 6-8 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, and speakers from different student support services in DPS (e.g., social work, psychology, nursing, etc.) are 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. The meeting format (brief presentations followed by community sharing and discussion) provides an opportunity for parents to learn from district staff, community experts and each other.

The group's collaboration has increased family engagement and community involvement and has led to significant improvements to the school nutrition environment to date. School policies and practices around access to water have been strengthened—parents worked with their individual school principals to institute changes in their school cafeterias in ways that best fit each school's needs.

Having a committed parent-leader to serve as community organizer has been critical to the success of the practice. 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.