

Parent Network Groups

Boulder Valley School District

Boulder, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education



Boulder Valley School District (BVSD) conducts Parent Network Groups to provide support, resources, and information for families with students with special needs. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, these networking meetings included a monthly 'homework' assignment consisting of an individual research-based action plan that could be used to increase independent living skills, plan next steps, and help

the student work on a specific skill. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the 'homework' assignments were put on hold as many parents were struggling with at-home learning and needed resources and supports focused on the need at-hand.

Before the pandemic, the Parent Network Group held a monthly two-hour, in-person meeting from 11am to 1pm at the BVSD Education Center. During the 2020-2021 school year, meetings were held online via Google meets, with two meetings per month due to increased parent needs. The groups were held from 5:30pm to 7pm. The network consisted of two groups that were divided by level of support and needs. One group was for parents of students who received support at the resource level and the second group was for parents of students who received services through an Intensive Learning Center. Groups were open to all parents who have children ages 3-21 years old. Each group had an email list and were sent reminders, links, and resources about a week before the monthly meeting.

A recent survey of participants indicated a strong desire to return to day-time meetings, but parents did enjoy the on-line format with the possibility of in-person meetings at the end of each semester. Parents reported that not having to drive, take the time to get there and back, or coordinate childcare, made the meetings much more accessible. They reported missing seeing each other in person, but the online format allowed for new parents to smoothly join throughout the year.

Future parenting network groups requested by parents include a group for Spanish speakers and one for parents who have children struggling with mental health needs, particularly anxiety. The impact of the Parent Network Groups is overwhelming positive. One parent shared, "I've found them incredibly helpful. I've learned so much about how to navigate the system. Hearing other parent's stories is so valuable."

Another parent shared, "I appreciate the support and resources to help navigate school with a child with special needs. The groups are amazing and so helpful in terms of community, resources, and learning about policies and practices."