

Thought Partner Groups

Denver Public Schools

Denver, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Including families in brainstorming ways to achieve specific goals is a powerful way in which families can partner with schools in decision-making. Denver Public Schools uses their Thought Partner Groups to bring together family and community members to make important district decisions.

To begin, the challenge that the district is facing is defined. Then, the role of the Thought Partner Groups is defined. This includes very specific deliverables to ensure that the district is aligned with community participants, and to empower participants to work within these charges and to complete the deliverables. The expectations are best created between stakeholders inside and outside the district.

Thought Partner Groups typically have 15-20 participants, which includes parents of children whose grade level matches that of the project goals. Depending on the goals of the group, it can either be a specific school level meeting or more regional. Meetings begin with an orientation towards the work and deliverables and the current issue. Education around specific school matters that will affect the work is given (for instance, around the budget, if it is a monetary issue). Education on engaging other members of the school community and pros and cons of specific proposals put forward by the district are also presented.

While these groups encourage engagement from family and community members in regards to making important district decisions, there are also some challenges to implementation. Materials should be parent-friendly, the student voice should be incorporated in the process, and a variety of voices should be acknowledged. It is also important to honor school legacy and community ties to school, and to work to appropriately balance the interests of parents versus what is best for the community overall.

The district currently uses participant survey, staff survey, and board of education survey to evaluate the Thought Partner Groups' process, and is working on strengthening their assessment. They believe that these groups are significant because they are linked to evaluating new high-quality programs for students, which are linked to higher student outcomes. Additionally, the groups empower community and family stakeholders with the tools necessary to be crucial partners in the making of important decisions for the schools.