

In Denver Public Schools (DPS), the office of Family and Community Engagement (FACE) fosters a school community that is educated, engaged, and empowered to share the responsibility in creating thriving schools where Every Child Succeeds. As COVID-19 emerged, the district wanted to provide their communities with additional support due to the difficult time many families were experiencing. Families were trying their hardest to support their children in this new educational world. When the 2020-21 school year started the district was unable to meet with parents in person, which allowed for a new parent engagement platform to emerge. In late September, the district announced to Title I families a new resource that was created to support them with technology questions, resources, live parent trainings, bilingual high school and college podcasts, and subject-based videos to support students with math, science, and literature. The purpose of the FACE University webpage was intended to be a “hub” for families where they would be able to find important information, trainings, and resources instead of going through many different websites.

An important and critical piece of the FACE University was the Family Leadership Institute (FLI). The Family Leadership Institute has been an in-person venue for DPS families across the district to enhance their leadership skills to support their children’s educational success. The purpose of the FLI was for participants to hone their leadership skills and abilities creating networks to drive positive change at their home, school, and in their communities by gaining a clear vision, values, communication, and organizing throughout their learning experiences. Due to COVID-19, DPS hosted four virtual events on different topics such as Trauma Informed Practices, Communication, Family Engagement Practices, and Behavioral Supports for families. All live sessions had interpretation available in the languages that families registered with and were recorded for families who were not able to attend. The team also did a second virtual version of the FLI in the second semester with a focus on Health and Wellness and Strategies for Behavior, Advocacy and Partnership.

This pivot to live virtual trainings allowed for a larger and more diverse turn out of parents and families in comparison to the in-person events. Challenges in the beginning included getting used to the technology, receiving zoom invitations, emails, etc., which required technology supports and scaffolding for families. Now, families join the meetings with ease and know how to access interpretation, mute their microphones, and ask questions through the chat. Through this pandemic, families have really shown their passion and leadership by joining these different parent engagement opportunities even if it meant getting out of their comfort zones. The FACE University website also has podcasts for high school and college students. These podcasts are bilingual programs that provide necessary information to help families navigate the college process. A panel of experts spoke about various topics including paying for college, choosing a college, myths about the college experience and many other topics they wish they knew when planning for their next steps after high school. There are also short K-8 videos on how to support students with math, science, and literacy. These videos are posted every quarter explaining what children should be learning and how to creatively support students at home.

The FACE University is still growing. There are still many other topics, resources, and information that could be shared but the program this past year has been a success. The district will continue to work on partnership opportunities to make the webpage as successful and as parent friendly as possible with the help of families and community feedback. The district’s goal is to make sure that every person who goes to the FACE University webpage is able to find what they are looking for as well as accessible for everyone.

Essential Element 3—Design Capacity-Building Opportunities
Standard 2—Communicating Effectively