

# One Call at a Time

## Centaurus High School

### Lafayette, CO



Centaurus High School, located in Boulder Valley School District, launched a positive phone call initiative during the Covid-19 pandemic. The primary aims of the One Call at a Time project were to deepen student engagement and strengthen ties with families by recognizing students through phone calls made by school and district-level leadership. In the second half of the school year, the high school made more than 200 positive calls.

Positive phone calls are a high-impact, relationships-centered approach to strengthen bonds with families and recognize students in a meaningful and motivating fashion. They are also simple and fast. It takes less than five minutes to make the call and leaves students and families feeling uplifted, appreciated, and seen. Positive phone calls or other positive outreach systems (i.e. postcards, emails, etc.) both fortify school-family partnerships and propel student learning.

The One Call at a Time team consisted of the school principal, school Engagement Specialist, Director of Equity and Family Partnerships, a Director of Student Services, and a district Coordinator of Instructional Practices. The team developed two overview documents to inform and engage staff. Two district leaders and the principal made the majority of the calls. School based staff identified students who could benefit from a positive call by entering their names and reason for the call on a staff wide spreadsheet. Calls conveyed either the personalized messages written by the staff member or used a script when a staff member opted not to write an individualized message. All call notes and relevant contact information were documented on the spreadsheet. If any specific time-sensitive information was shared during the call, the team member contacted the principal and school counselor. To support greater two-way communication, families were also encouraged to contact the staff for any support. Any student could be nominated for a positive call home, but the overarching focus was on students who had recently made some type of improvement. Staff were encouraged to think of students who were improving their attendance, increasing their engagement, more consistently completing assignments, or students that were better advocating for themselves.

Next year, the school hopes to have both teachers and school leaders make phone calls to utilize a two-pronged approach that would make the impactful practice better woven into the culture of the school. The team's advice to others wanting to replicate the program would be to expect teachers or staff to create a personalized message for all students listed on the spreadsheet so calls can be completed more quickly and efficiently. One effective strategy to garner greater participation could be for school leaders to carve out time at meetings for staff to write their messages and/or make calls. Having a handful of "early adopters" on staff serving as enthusiastic ambassadors for the initiative can also help increase participation. Additionally, while leaving voicemails for families is still powerful, to reach them directly it is best to call during non-work hours.

The short calls made a notable impact. One mother said, "I really appreciate the call. I needed this today. My son is going to be glowing." After receiving a voice message, a father reached back out and shared, "Thanks for reaching out today. That's awesome! We are super happy to hear it and very proud. Especially since he never shares." Another father perhaps captured the essence of the benefits best when he said, "Any good news about a teenager is always welcome!"