

# Redesigned Back to School Night

## Crestview Elementary School, Boulder Valley School District

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Crest View Elementary in Boulder redesigned its Back to School Night by integrating it with the beloved Fall Festival, a celebration organized by the PTO. This innovative approach aimed to create a more relaxed, comprehensive experience, fostering an inclusive tone for the academic year. The objectives were to enhance family engagement, specifically with Latinx families, and to create an effective platform for community building and information sharing.

Discussions for the revamped Back to School Night began with the school's Families and Educators Together (FET) team. The traditional format often excluded families who felt marginalized as they sat in a classroom corner with an

interpreter. Feedback from FET families revealed a desire for an interactive experience, moving away from the "sit and get" design, which was intimidating and overwhelming. Teachers also preferred a less stressful evening to genuinely connect with the community.

Crest View Elementary's Back to School Night and Fall Festival transitioned seamlessly into an integrated event. The unification enhanced engagement by combining academic information with enjoyable activities for families. The evening featured a structured flow with staggered classroom visits offering brief interactions for caregivers to meet teachers, receive concise curriculum overviews, and understand key procedures. Teachers delivered streamlined 10 minute presentations, repeated as needed, allowing flexibility for families with multiple children. Many translators were in classrooms and school, assisting families as needed. Educators prepared handouts to minimize lecture time. A new element was the teacher created "passport," which encouraged students and parents to explore classrooms and the school, culminating in a free book from the library. Concurrently, the Fall Festival unfolded across the school grounds. Festivities included school-sponsored concessions, games, face painting, crafts, community booths, and a student showcase. School Information Hubs were staffed by PTO members and staff, providing space for informal interactions.

There were a few logistical and planning challenges in implementing the new structure as various school/parent groups had different visions for the night. However, the integration of Back to School Night with the Fall Festival represented a progressive evolution in Crest View Elementary's family engagement. By combining academic introductions with a community celebration, the school created a more welcoming, informative, and enjoyable experience. Parent, student, and staff feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with the interactive "passport" being a particular highlight.

The key to success in the Back to School Night's overhaul was listening to the voices of marginalized families. The new design strengthened the community, enhanced home-school partnerships, and established a positive, inclusive tone, particularly fostering greater engagement with Latinx families. As one parent said, "We wanted to help, to participate, and be part of our school, and through FET, tonight we got to!"