

# Holiday Help

## Ponderosa Elementary School, Cherry Creek School District

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At Ponderosa Elementary School in Cherry Creek School District, Holiday Help is a meaningful annual tradition that unifies the multifaceted community. This tradition is an opportunity to get together and support families within the community. The goal is to create pathways for support that don't rely on families initiating contact.

A retired staff member-turned-volunteer put together a form for families to fill out. The form asked for basic information such as the students' age, grade, favorite color, clothing sizes, and a few preferred gift items—excluding high-cost electronics or gaming systems—to help plan for realistic and meaningful gift support. Though this support is intended for students K-5, younger siblings are also included. The Community Liaison supported by separating out forms and delivering all the forms to the teachers. From there, teachers passed them out to the students, allowing staff members the choice of which families to support. They were handed out in early October with a due date of the end of October, giving ample time to sort, organize, and begin networking.



Members of the community, whether it be Ponderosa staff, those within the Cherry Creek School District, and friends and coworkers of staff members, felt connected to Ponderosa by supporting families. It's a deeply unifying experience to help support families who may not have been able to give their children the holiday season they had hoped for. These relationships create a welcoming, affirming school environment where every member of the community feels valued.

One of the challenges was the overwhelming quantity of requests for support. Ensuring all families were supported required a very intentional system to protect the privacy of families and ensure families received their gifts. At the end, ensuring the space was organized and that there was a protocol for the families to pick up their gifts was a challenge. Also, ensuring families came in to pick up their gifts before winter break became a challenge.

For others wanting to create a Holiday Help project, having a team that can network outside of the school is very important. Plan clear systems that protect families' privacy but also ensure clear protocols for all phases of the project that include making forms, collecting forms, gift collection, and gift distribution. The Community Liaison used the translation tool Talking Points to remind families that forms were due and made personal contact with families when the volunteer was unable to reach them. Start to finish, this project can seem never-ending, but the reward is unmeasurable.