

Newcomer Inclusiveness and Trusting Relationships

Adams 12 Five Star School District Thornton, CO



COLORADO
Department of Education

Adams 12 Five Star School District staff wanted to ensure inclusivity of families who speak a language other than English or Spanish. Language is a barrier when families speak a language that may not be as common and when there are few to none who speak that same language in the community and schools. Adams 12's Newcomer Youth Advocate took the lead in 20-21 toward helping families feel connected to someone in their school district who may not speak their language, but has a knack for building trusting relationships and breaking communication barriers.

This practice takes a very hands-on approach. It includes completing a Newcomer intake form where families receive information about the school system and the school learns about the family and their educational goals. At the initial intake, the Youth Advocate becomes aware of what resources the family needs and follows-up with a home visit. Multiple language-based resources are used during all interactions with the family, including tele language, Google translate, family members, neighbors, or anyone in the community who can assist to improve communication. The most genuine way of communicating with families that do not speak English or Spanish is by showing that you care, creating a pleasant atmosphere, and demonstrating positive welcoming body language. This practice requires that the advocate and school staff become educated about the families' culture, such as removing shoes prior to entering a families' home and dates/impact of religious holidays.

Both students and families experience benefits from the home visits and improved communication. For example, one student who received a home visit asked the Newcomer Youth Advocate for help with biology. The Newcomer Youth Advocate worked with the biology teacher to explain the student's level of English language comprehension and connected the teacher with the building ELL coordinator so that assignments and tests could be modified. This student was able to understand and demonstrate his knowledge of the subject matter in other ways that do not require heavy English dialect. Similarly, families contact their advocate when they needed help communicating with their electric company, connecting with the DMV and of course, their local schools.

The Newcomer Youth Advocate is a new position in Adams 12 that many believed would cover all district-wide Newcomer support. Currently it only supports secondary schools that do not have a family outreach liaison. The district is in the process of empowering schools to be their own Newcomer advocates, teaching school-based liaisons to be aware of Newcomer in their buildings and how to best understand their needs.

Adams 12's Newcomer Youth Advocate shares the following advice: "Take the time to get to know Newcomer families' situations and listen to their stories. They are a long way from home, sometimes unaccompanied, without parents or guardians and the majority of the time have suffered various forms of trauma. These families are prime examples of resiliency and strength. It is in our best interest as a community to offer them a welcoming environment and help support students in any way, shape or form. The better prepared students are, the more likely they will become positive contributing members of society. Students are part of our communities, our neighbors and future."