Early Childhood Family Connection

Partner Elementary Schools, Lewis-Palmer School District 38

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The Early Childhood Program at Lewis-Palmer School District believes that families are essential partners in their child's education and are dedicated to fostering a sense of belonging within the school community. The friendships formed among families during these early years often last throughout the entire school experience. Because of this, Lewis-Palmer implemented the Early Childhood Family Connection with Bear Creek Elementary School, Lewis-Palmer Elementary School, and Palmer Lake Elementary School.

Several times throughout the year, families were invited to come to school 45 minutes before pickup. The purpose of these gatherings was to help build relationships between families, give families a glimpse into the classroom and what their children were experiencing, and gather family input on what they were looking for in an early childhood program to better meet their needs.

The overall structure began with a connection time followed by time within the classroom. The preschool director welcomed families and facilitated several small group discussions. For example, at the beginning of the year, participants were encouraged to brainstorm responses regarding what they hoped their children would gain most from preschool—whether academic skills, social-emotional growth, independence, or something else. They also discussed what they envisioned seeing and hearing in a great preschool classroom, and what they, as a family, wanted from the early childhood program.

After the discussions, families were invited into the classroom to participate in an activity. Activities ranged from friendship lessons taught through literature to end-of-unit showcases. For example, the teacher read "The Rainbow Fish" while families sat on the floor with their children. The children were then given clothespins and taught the language of sharing, such as stating that they would give a peer a blue clothespin and asking if they could have a red one. To motivate sharing, the bags of clothespins contained only one to two colors, so to create a rainbow, students needed to trade. Another example was the teacher sharing various learning experiences the children engaged in during a specific unit, one of which culminated in a successful fashion show as an end-of-unit celebration featuring clothing the children had decorated, such as tie-dyed t-shirts, decorated vests, and hats.

Encouraging family participation was a key component of the program. When personal invitations came from teachers and children were excited about the end-of-unit celebration, attendance increased.

By hosting intentional gatherings, the Early Childhood Family Connection program ensured that families were valued partners, fostering a strong sense of belonging that supported the child's educational foundation and lasted throughout their school years.