Increasing School Accountability Committee Engagement through Monthly Coffee Talks

Axis International Academy, Charter School Institute

Submitted by Jessica Welch, jessicawelch@csi.state.co.us

Three years ago, AXIS International Academy was struggling to get consistent family engagement with its School Accountability Committee (SAC). The school decided to pilot monthly topic-driven Coffee Talks as an informal way to recruit and strengthen SAC participation. As monthly attendance at Coffee Talks increased, the school was able to increase engagement with the SAC as well. The SAC helped organize and run these monthly Coffee Talks as an opportunity to increase parent understanding of and engagement in academic topics.

Coffee Talks were monthly opportunities for parents to connect with school leadership in a casual, transparent, and collaborative setting. These gatherings served two purposes: to strengthen relationships among families, staff, and leadership, and to offer insight into the "inner workings" of the school.



Each Coffee Talk started with informal networking as attendees received their coffee and were welcomed (10 minutes). This was followed by a presentation from the school administration on a key topic (25 minutes), and then the floor was opened for questions, clarifications, or suggestions (10 minutes). During the 2025–2026 school year, topics included parent engagement, unified improvement planning, multi-tiered systems of supports and academics, multi-tiered systems of supports and behavior, school finance, facilities updates, and what changes as students grow at AXIS. Finally, the Coffee Talk ended with classroom visits so parents could observe learning in action (15 minutes). By including classroom visits, Coffee Talks created meaningful opportunities for parents to bridge the connection between school-level initiatives and classroom experiences. The school added a virtual attendance option that year and provided substitute coverage to at least one teacher each month to ensure staff participation.

The school evaluated the success of the Coffee Talks through survey feedback and by monitoring attendance. Since instituting the practice in 2023, average attendance increased from 13 people per meeting to over 40 in 2025–2026. The SAC and the school leader also solicited real-time feedback during the meetings using a combination of Post-it notes (for in-person attendees) and Padlet notes (for virtual attendees). The SAC solicited input from families on topics they wanted to hear about by including a QR code in the monthly school newsletter and by reviewing meeting feedback.

In the second year of hosting monthly coffee chats, the school experienced a challenge related to a small group of parents using the meetings to air grievances. Feedback from attendees reflected that the majority of parents were frustrated with this behavior. As a result, the school leader and the SAC collaboratively developed a set of meeting norms and expectations. One of the norms established was that the conversation had to stay focused on the topic at hand, and that discussions had to be productive and positive. However, school leaders provided an opportunity for parents to stay after the meeting to raise individual concerns one-on-one.