

Test-Taking Family Partnership Strategies

Arvada K-8

Arvada, CO



COLORADO

Department of Education

Arvada K-8 is a Title 1 school with 80% of families qualifying for free/reduced fee status. The demographic of families includes newcomers and families that are navigating a variety of life circumstances. The Arvada K-8 staff and Family Engagement Liaison (FEL) saw an opportunity for students and their caregivers to learn from each other by inviting the adults to join their students in the classroom to learn the steps and practice of standardized testing on Chromebooks. The goals of the practice were:



ARVADA K8
TIMBERWOLVES

- 1) To build interaction between students and adults around an academic topic.
- 2) To build communication between students and adults that could then be transferred to home learning support.
- 3) To introduce the basic use of Chromebook devices to adults that may struggle to support learning at home because of lack of knowledge about the device.
- 4) To reduce student anxiety around testing by sharing the experience with their parents, guardians, and caregivers.

The FEL approached the school leadership team and the instructional coach with the idea of piloting this test practice for 3rd-5th graders. After some discussion, primarily around logistics and need, the team decided that 3rd and 4th grade would be the most viable target group because of the newness of some of the types of tests that were going to be administered in the coming months. After the practice was approved by the School Leadership Team (SLT), the FEL discussed logistics with the 3rd and 4th grade teachers, who agreed to pilot the program.



Parents and guardians were invited into their student's classroom and sat next to them as if they were also students in their class. This situation put the students and the attending adults on a relatively similar level of knowledge. However, the students had been taking practice tests for a few days and were familiar with the use of Chromebooks. Tips were shared to help students and families prepare. Messaging included getting a good night's sleep and eating a hearty breakfast. To meet the needs of families, the program provided breakfast sandwiches to all participants, which added the welcoming aspect of a community meal to the program. During the meal, teachers asked families to *'share what it was like to take a test when you were in grade school.'* The adults were quick to share stories of pencil and paper tests, filling in little circles completely, and strategies that had worked for them (and some that hadn't). The teachers then shared basic details about the reasons for CMAS testing, and what the outcomes mean for both the students and the school.

Using their student's Chromebook, the adults were then asked to open the Chromebook and log in. They quickly learned that some students do not charge their Chromebooks, and that Wi-Fi is a challenge when 30 people are trying to log on all at the same time. The teachers told them it was a timed test, and the adults

Standard 3 — Support Student Success

Essential Element 3 — Design Capacity-Building Opportunities



struggled through the first few steps of accessing the test, and then answering some of the questions. The students then took over as their families' teacher, guiding them through how to log in efficiently and navigate the questions. Students and adults discussed answers to questions. Everyone felt the anxiety of a time constraint, and discussed ways to breathe, focus, and navigate the anxiety. In the last minutes of the class period, adults and students discussed ways that they could continue practicing test taking at home. Families were encouraged to use these strategies to continue to build partnerships and support throughout the school year and at home.

Over the next few months, teachers reported better family engagement and responses to communications from families. The CMAS scores of the 3rd and 4th graders will not be available for a few months, but teachers discussed that students were better prepared and seemed more at ease than in past years. The practice was evaluated verbally before families left the classroom. They were asked what they learned, if the session was valuable, and why. The FEL also asked the teachers for their evaluation of the practice. The teachers were incredibly surprised at how valuable the practice had been; not only for the collaborative learning that had occurred, but for the multi-generational capacity building and relationship-building.

Teachers had valuable time with parents and guardians, who got a small glimpse into both the challenges and rewards of teaching. A challenge the program experienced was with two newcomer families who did not speak English (their students were part of the ELL program and had similar understanding of English). The program provided an interpreter, but struggled with deciding to what extent that interpreter should help, as the goal was for the student to do the teaching. In the end, the interpreter was used during the teacher instruction and group discussion, and assisted the student as needed.

The keys to the success of this practice are:

- 1) Strategically identify specific grade levels, taking into consideration the needs of the students.
- 2) Tailor your event to a time, location, and mode (in person vs. virtual) that will ensure robust participation.
- 3) Choose a breakfast meal that is grab-n-go and leaves little mess or clean-up,
- 4) Discuss all the details of the practice with each teacher individually so that their concerns and suggestions are equally heard.
- 5) Let teachers do what they do best (teach) and have the FEL or another point person take care of getting the word out to adults; getting their sign-up (limit two adults per student); re-confirming attendance the day before the event; and ordering, setting up, delivering, and cleaning up breakfast items.
- 6) Have copies of practice tests and other tips ready-made and ask teachers to use them as a 'parting gift.'
- 7) If a teacher is uncomfortable with doing this event for whatever reason, ask them to teach you how to do the practice tests and do the event as a family coffee or roundtable instead.

Overall, teachers shared, "This was the best learning experience I've ever done with families in the classroom" and "I had forgotten what the stress of taking a test feels like. Now I know to listen better when my student says they are stressed about a test, and also, how to work with them before a test so there is less stress."