

Five Star Leadership Academy

Adams 12 Five Star Schools

Thornton, CO



Adams 12 Five Star Schools in Thornton has more than 39,000 students and 50 school sites in five cities and two counties with a population that is more than 40 percent Hispanic and nearly 40 percent qualified for free and reduced meal benefits. How can a large and diverse district engage parents and community members in a meaningful way?



The goal of the Five Star Leadership Academy is to empower members to learn about and become involved in local, district and state education, and to take on future leadership roles within a school, the district, or community. The district achieves this goal by building groups of ambassadors who: Know What (knowledge of district and public education policies, actions and works); Know Who (personal relationships with school administrators and staff, elected officials and other parents and community members); and Know How (healthy public participation with an increased knowledge of navigating "wicked" problems and engaging with differing opinions).

The vision of the Five Star Leadership Academy began after the 2014 election where the district lost both mill levy override and bond funding initiatives with 60 percent of the community voting no. This election left the district without a passed funding measure since 2008. The outcomes conveyed a strong message that the community was not aware of district needs and did not have a voice in the solutions. The superintendent and communications director initiated a group that would begin to address these issues. They hired an engagement specialist to lead it and district staff members were consulted to be guest speakers and provide content expertise.



Every year, Adams 12 requests applications in May for the following fall from parents and community members. The group meets September to May, one Friday a month, from 9:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. Each month, a different topic is discussed - from finance to governance, curriculum to safety. Since the start of the Academy, the district has passed a bond in 2016 (more than 60 percent yes) and a mill levy override in 2018 (56 percent yes), which district staff believe is due in part to building district ambassadors (now at over 240 graduates). In addition, participants are continuing their influence in the

district with graduates representing more than 70 percent of the District-wide Accountability Committee membership.

Beyond the programming to help participants learn the ins and outs of public education, building relationships is key. Get to know the participants, learn from one another, and help them become even better ambassadors for your district. It takes patience but is essential.



Standard 4—Speaking Up for Every Child