



## INCREASING STUDENT ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PROJECT BASED LEARNING

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## ABSTRACT

### Final Project Question

“What would happen if we prioritized student behaviors over teacher behaviors as the driver of increasing student engagement?” And, “What if the response to the question, “My teacher makes learning interesting,” was 92% instead of 72%? How would our school look different?”

Although students spend half their day in a career elective course of their choice, student perception survey scores found the lowest rated question for the past three years as, “My teacher makes learning interesting.”

There are many factors that lead to student engagement: content, learning environment, high expectations, teacher personality, having concepts explained in a clear manner, differentiated ways to demonstrate learning, to name a few. Learn how CEC has chosen to emphasize moving away from teacher behaviors as indicators of lesson success.

## INTRODUCTION

When looking at the 2017-2018 survey data, nearly every category had positive student and parent responses (Academics, Discipline, General School Culture, Classroom Culture, Family Involvement, Safety, and Opportunities for Future Planning).

As we dug deeper and looked at the 2017-2018 Student Perception Data, we found a category with an unusually low (72%) positive response rate: Question 4- “My teacher makes learning interesting.” Upon further review, that same question was scored the lowest in the 15-16 school-year and the 16-17 school-year as well.

The Career Education Center Early College of Denver (CEC) is an urban high school located in northwest Denver. CEC Early College is Denver Public Schools’ Flagship Career and Technical Education School. It opened in the fall of 1976.

Currently there are 430 students in the full-time program, who receive their high school diplomas from CEC. Full-time students receive both academic core and elective credit (CTE) from CEC instructors.

Students enrolled in other Denver Public High Schools have the opportunity to enroll into one of our twenty-two Career and Technical Education (CTE) courses on a part-time basis while still enrolled in their primary high school. CEC Early College currently serves over 300 learners through this program. These students receive their high school diplomas from their home high schools, however the students are eligible to receive opportunities for concurrent enrollment credit through several of our CTE programs at CEC.

In May of 2015 the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) approved CEC’s application to become an Early College. As an Early College, all students can accelerate obtaining college credit, and are eligible for a 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> year program. The fifth/sixth year program allows qualifying students to complete their credential or Associate’s degree.

Based on the most recent School Performance Framework, CEC’s full-time student population falls into the following categories: 81% qualify for free or reduced price lunch; 68% are designated as English Language Learners; 4% are students with IEPs; 95% are students of color. Most data remain stable, with increasing rates of English Language Learners, and declining rates of those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch.

CEC Vision: Preparing students for career success in a global economy

CEC Mission: The mission of the Career Education Center Early College is to ensure our students make successful life choices by supporting and guiding them in real world college and career experiences.

CEC Values: Accountability, Collaboration, Equity, Fun, Inclusiveness, Integrity, Students First

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Multiple data sources were reviewed as the problem of practice was identified. The School Performance Framework measures student test data (general population and sub-groups), along with graduation and drop-out rates, attendance and truancy rates, and the number of college credits obtained by the student body. Test data in particular, doesn't define the great work done at CEC and we have solid graduation rates and concurrent enrollment success.

Then we began to look at satisfaction survey data points. Nearly every category had positive student and parent responses (Academics, Discipline, General School Culture, Classroom Culture, Family Involvement, Safety, and Opportunities for Future Planning). CEC's students and families had positive response rates that beat the district average in EVERY category. All rates were well over 80% and many were over 90%. These scores are part of an ongoing trend of positive student and family satisfaction rates.

We decided to go a different route and when we looked at the 2017-2018 Student Perception Data, we found a category with an unusually low (72%) positive response rate: Question 4- "My teacher makes learning interesting."

Overall Student Perception Survey Results were as follows: Facilitates Learning-81%; High Expectations-89%; Supports Students-90%.

Question 4, along with Question 29: "My teacher knows when the class doesn't understand." (73%); Q 23: "My teacher explains things in different ways." (73%); Q 9: "My teacher encourages me to share my ideas." (75%); Q 25: "In my teacher's class, I have to explain my answers," (79%) all fell into the Facilitates Learning Category. Upon further review, those same questions were scored the lowest in the 15-16 school-year and the 16-17 school-year as well. In a school where students spend half their day in a CTE class of their choosing, student engagement rates should be high, but student response rates showed low engagement rates, which is truly what drove us to look more deeply on how instruction is given, and more importantly, how students demonstrate their learning.

Students spend half their day in a career class of their choosing. Assessments in those classes nearly always have students show different demonstrations of their learning. The goal is to make differentiated displays of learning in all classes. We are looking at a complete paradigm shift, one that challenges many current and past teaching practices. Often times, teacher evaluation rubrics are aligned to teacher behaviors, and frequently, teachers deliver information without much regard for student outcomes as they pertain to lesson success.

Additionally, in looking at shifting our focus from a reactive model to a proactive one, we are acknowledging that we are not engaging kids at the level that will motivate them. In changing our assessments, delivery, and lessons at the core level, we can meet their needs the first time they enroll in a course instead of spending time repeating it. We can give them transferable skills to be used across domains instead of isolated skills within certain classes. We can make them owners of their learning, which is ultimately, what we all want.

The key stakeholders are obviously the students. However, since the student perception survey is part of the overall teacher evaluation system, teachers become stakeholders, too. In order to improve school culture and student performance, teachers need to maximize student engagement through rigorous and interactive lessons with clear and

measurable objectives that are measured and analyzed to ensure that students are learning the skills and content of their respective classes. Ultimately, increased engagement should result in better attendance, reduced behavior referrals, and increased scores on unit, interim, and standardized assessments. Improvements in those categories will result in better school report card scores, from which every school employee and family will benefit.

If we succeed in our goal, student engagement and interest in their learning increases.

### METHODS

The COSIP model (Challenge, Opportunity, Situation, Issue, Problem) positively frames the situation; we have a challenge, not a failure. If we can get people to embrace that idea, we can start the movement.

The benchmark data showed the lowest survey score in relation to other data points within and outside of the student survey. The data within the survey was consistent over the last three years with the individual question, “My teacher makes learning interesting,” and the overall indicator in which that question resides, “Facilitates Learning,” as the topics that need attention and professional development to address and improve. However, not all staff considered this challenge an opportunity, and some reacted negatively to the information presented.

There are other data points we considered as we embarked on this project. We reviewed some of the teacher evaluation scores in the district’s framework for effective teaching. Students completed a survey, “Making Learning Interesting” during the first month of school. 34 different ways of learning were assessed and teachers were given the list with percent positive responses from highest to lowest. Results were as follows: 68.5% positive response rate for working in groups and building something with your hands; 63.3% positive response rate for independent learning; 60.1% positive response rate for using technology/digital resources. Our CTE courses regularly integrate those types of learning activities. The shift will be to incorporate those learnings to the core content areas.

The Q4 survey results tended to favor CTE teachers. However, there were core teachers who had high scores and CTE who were rated below the 72% average.

	Number/Percent of Returning Teachers who Scored 72% or <b>Lower</b> on Q 4 in 17-18	
<b>CORE-Number and Percent of the 12 who Scored Below 72%</b>		<b>CTE- Number and Percent of the 12 who Scored Below 72%</b>

9/12=75%	<b>TOTAL 12/31=39%</b>	3/12=25%
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	Number/Percent of Returning Teachers who Scored 72% or <b>Higher</b> on Q 4 in 17-18	
<b>CORE-Number and Percent of the 12 who Scored Above 72%</b>		<b>CTE- Number and Percent of the 12 who Scored Above 72%</b>
5/19=26%	<b>TOTAL 19/31=61%</b>	14/19=74%

Some of our work took place via conversations with teachers who had high student response rates to the question. That information was shared with the staff. Common themes from those interviews were passion, relationships with students, and meticulous planning that included high level learning activities. Teacher coaches shared that information with the teachers they supervise during beginning of year conversations and during mid-year conversations in January.

As the year comes to a close, we will compare student behavior and teacher behavior indicators. We will tally how much purposeful collaborative work and hands on learning is happening. The year-end survey response rate to Q4 will be the best indicator of our success to date.

The chart below indicates a first semester timeline of the steps we took to roll out the project.

WHAT	WHEN	WHO	OUTCOME
<p>Introduction of problem-showed many positive data points, then showed the question with the lowest student response rate for the last 3 school years, "My teacher makes learning interesting."</p> <p>Review of the teacher evaluation rubric; identified highest action student behaviors that would demonstrate active, engaged learning</p>	<p>August, 2018</p> <p>August, 2018</p>	<p>Lofaro and Spann</p> <p>Lofaro and Spann</p>	<p>Basis established for future work. Information was received (not favorably by all).</p> <p>Most scored evaluations include student behaviors as indicated in the rubric as a shift away from strictly identifying teacher moves.</p>
<p>Beginning of the year conversations with all teachers. Those with high response rates provided their high leverage moves. All others were asked to report on what high engagement might look like in their contents.</p>	<p>September, 2018</p>	<p>All Instructional Coaches</p>	<p>Completed with notes for each teacher and a bank of best practices from those with high scores. Enlisted those teachers to present future professional development</p>

Beginning of the year, the ongoing conversations with all teachers showing high leverage student behavior indicators that would show engagement	September, 2018-present	All Instructional Coaches	Teachers identified behaviors most relevant to their work
Student Survey- "How I learn best." Survey taken by 356 students, nearly half the school. Results disseminated to staff	October, 2018	Lofaro and Spann	No significant changes observed based on the information given
Differentiated Professional Development on Classroom management. Focus on how structures and routines can facilitate engagement.	October, 2018	Various Teachers	Inconsistent improvement based on the number of incidents recorded. Varies by teacher.
Formal student perception survey	November, 2018	All students	Results show 71% for Q 4
Roll out KNOW/SHOW CHART	January, 2019	All Instructional Coaches	Messaging and consistency with implementation were challenging with this rollout. Easier for some contents (CTE and Science) to



			implement than others (English).
Student Board Meeting for Updates to Reference Checks and assigning students to interviews	Feb. 19, 2019	Lofaro/Deanda	Students honest about what good teaching looks like and what they would like to see in new candidates.
Professional Development for Project Based Creation	March 4, 2019	Spann	A mix of core and CTE teachers presented their successes and challenges when students engaged in Project Based Learning. Teachers registered to participate in the “Do Something Real” event.
PBL Co-Planning	Tuesdays, March 5 through April 30	Spann	Cross content project creation and multiple demonstrations of learning created
“Do Something Real Night”	May 2, 2019	Spann	
All School Survey for Q 4	Late May, 2019	Lofaro and Spann	

Following are the high leverage strategies, rationale, rollout, and challenges we have encountered.

Our plan was to introduce some professional development that targeted engaging students at a high level. Teachers who scored high on Q 4 or who had taken on some level of project-based learning presented information to their peers. We had intended for this to happen in the fall, but we shifted some of our school-wide professional development to P/SAT preparation, and some individual professional development sessions to improving classroom management. There were improvements in classroom behavior, so that shift benefitted teachers and students. Test preparation and alignment to standards is not exciting work, and we won't know the results until mid-June.

There was a spring professional development day, and teachers did share some of the work they had done. Our staff has a great deal of respect for each other's work. The powerful piece of these sessions was the vulnerability voiced by the presenters. It was very clear that project-based learning was valuable, but difficult, and there were missteps the first round, but there were ways to improve for round two. The semester professional development kicked off the planning of our first annual "Do Something Real Night," a voluntary showcase of student work. Teachers representing both core and CTE are preparing students to present their individual work on May 2 to their peers, parents, teachers, industry and community partners, and central administrative personnel. To date, student interest has been high.

There was a personal challenge here. Normally there was a strict schedule for school-wide meetings, data teams, and events every Tuesday. In order to give the teachers participating in the showcase time to collaborate, they were released from those obligations. The principal has a difficult time deviating from standing commitments. However, there are very few collaborative opportunities within the building, and this time has proven valuable. In addition to cross content projects, the team of teachers has brainstormed differentiated ways for project demonstration. Their intention is to initiate a shift to more 21st Century skills being employed by students - building websites, videos, podcasts, and more publishable products than 20th Century-style essays or small class presentations that are only viewed by teachers or students in the classroom - in order to raise the stakes and provide more genuine opportunities for our students to engage in authentic audiences.

We also wanted to implement a KNOW/SHOW chart school-wide as a mechanism to increase student independence and provide differentiated ways for students to demonstrate what they have mastered. When designed correctly, a KNOW/SHOW is a simplified content-language objective with varied, detailed demonstrations of learning, transparent and explicit expectations for proficient work. This rollout was also pushed back from the end of the fall semester to the beginning of spring semester. Messaging and consistency with implementation were challenging with this rollout. We found that it is easier for some contents (CTE and Science) to implement than others (English). Further work to be done in this area.

Finally, we aimed to rely on the evaluators to target student behaviors and student outcomes during teacher evaluations. It was evident that most of our core and some of our CTE classrooms are heavily teacher centered. The most common issue observed in our observation of teachers is that students were complying with the demands and expectations of their teachers, but often those expectations lacked rigor or relevance. Teachers were focusing

more on task completion with simple yes/no questions like “Are you good?” or “Do you know what your next steps are?” rather than holding students accountable to the learning through more rigorous and accountable questions like “Does this meet the expectation - why or why not?” or “Tell me your next steps”.

That is part of the reason that the shift of observers focuses on active student behaviors as opposed to solely teacher behaviors. Both indicators are in the evaluation rubric. Teachers are becoming more familiar with those expectations through one on one conferencing with their evaluators. Also, through conferencing, we learned what we already knew, that students liked working in groups, and are working with teachers through coaching on how to provide more structured collaborative work that includes clear accountability for each group member (so that 1-2 members don't do all of the work). As odd as this sounds, we learned how much time our best teachers spend planning every detail of their lessons. We've seen lessons with great potential to engage students fall short because they lack detail. They lack the best resources; they lack clear expectations of what is proficient; they lack accountability structures for all students; sometimes they lack specific direction. Often times, there is too much support for students, particularly those who are proficient or advanced. The content becomes watered down and simple. Many teachers say they struggle to differentiate up. Students, particularly gifted ones, like a challenge.

While some challenges aligned with the introduction of specific strategies, other challenges were overarching and presented constant changes to our original plan.

Our first challenge happened when we introduced the project in August. CEC has traditionally had good results when measuring academic, behavioral, and attendance indicators. When we showed teachers the 72% favorable rate for Q 4, there was immediate pushback and numerous excuses. My ally and I addressed this by simply calling it out. When our results are good, we simply accept them without asking why or looking at what was done to contribute to the success. However, when things start to feel a little uncomfortable, we make excuses instead of owning it and trying to improve. It wasn't a popular observation for some; others understood and were ready to meet the challenge.

Another challenge occurred when many teachers struggled with classroom management to start the year. Many of the feedback/coaching conversations, professional development and peer observations were used to support management issues instead of academic and engagement concerns. There have been positive results yielded relating to this focus. 2017-2018 end of year data showed 24% of teachers rated less than effective in LE 3- Classroom Management. To date in 2018-2019, 16% of teachers are rated less than effective. The year over year data shows a significant reduction in the number of referrals written from 105 in 2017-2018 to 29 in the current school-year. The decision to prioritize classroom management as a professional development focus took away from the time we would have devoted to our projected, but the numbers show that it was a smart change that yielded the results we wanted.

We are challenged by the concept of aligning lessons, tasks, and assessments to content level standards. The traditional core curriculums align to standards, but many of them aren't relevant or are of little interest to students. Teachers are cautious to stray from the curriculum because it should align with the standards. They are also cautious when they do provide

alternatives because the substitute lessons may not closely align with grade level standards. It has been challenging to balance the time needed to review lesson plans with enough time for the teacher to implement the changes and deliver in a lesson. The Instructional Leadership Team had intended to emphasize building coaching capacity through case-conferencing struggling teachers, but instead has focused on calibration and alignment of lesson plans and feedback. We've been looking at standards alignment, but not at differentiated activities that would make learning more relevant and interesting to students. Those conversations are happening individually with teachers and brainstorming ideas happens in the moment. The new schedule has made it very difficult for non-math teachers to have regular meetings surrounding curriculum, strategies, student's successes and struggles at the grade or dept level.

CEC's school report card grade dropped from Effective to Approaching. The rating is based primarily on standardized test scores, not student engagement. Therefore, most of our building-level professional development has focused on test taking strategies for students, looking at test data, and creating practice problems with rigor that mirror what students will see on the PSAT/SAT. The Unified Improvement Plan was updated with interim data, and it revealed that we must continue to push standards alignment, test prep professional development and must continue providing opportunities to have exposure to practice tests and practice test questions.

Our latest and perhaps biggest challenge was preparing for a teacher strike. The entire district has shifted focus on aligning personnel and resources to support schools. A significant amount of time was spent preparing communications, lessons, staff assignments, updated emergency information, and student mental health and physical support plans. Meetings were cancelled or changed, and our professional development was interrupted.

A consistent challenge I've encountered since taking over as principal is pushback when any change occurs. I may not be effective in communicating the "why." As a leader, that is a constant improvement area for me.

## **RESULTS**

We've had other initiatives, particularly creating a ninth-grade core, strengthening our restorative justice practices, increasing test scores, improving attendance, providing remediation free outcomes for seniors-the same things all schools prioritize. But increasing engagement just seemed so important because it impacts the whole school! Every grade level plus our part time students take the survey, and they told us for three consecutive years that they want more interesting and exciting learning opportunities. Focusing on engagement is still the right thing to investigate. In the midst of all the other priorities, I just underestimated our ability to provide professional development that would explore project-based learning and give

teachers time to develop their own projects that would align to their standards and still give them the ability to assess the students.

Students took the Student Perception Survey in the fall. The positive response rate for Q 4 was 71%. This was not surprising since we did very little professional development at the time of the survey administration. That percentage was in line with the previous three-year results.

During mid-year conversations, evaluators reviewed the student perception survey results. There were 28 returning teachers who had results in 17-18 and 18-19. 15 of those 28 (54%) had an increase in positive response rate for Q4.

At mid-year, 50% (19/38) exceeded 71% (5 core, 14 CTE). The percent breakdown of core and CTE teachers who beat the average exactly mirrored last year's end results, 74% for CTE and 26% for core. The total percent of teachers who beat the average dropped from 61% at the end of 17-18 to 50% during the 18-19 mid-year.

Five of eleven new teachers beat the average score of 71%. This was a pleasantly surprising result. New teachers tend to score lower than the average in many categories.

When we averaged the response rate for teachers, CTE teachers had a significantly higher group average (85%) than core teachers (63%). The averages aligned with the activities that students like: working in groups; building something with your hands; using technology/digital resources. It's no surprise that students have higher levels of engagement in CTE classes. It is important though, for CTE teachers who fall below 72% to engage in the same types of discussions and learnings that core teachers will.

All schools have priorities and this project chose to prioritize student engagement in their learning by making teachers aware of student perception and asking them to look at their student engagement practices. Spann (the Ally) created a "Do Something Real" Night to showcase Project-Based Learning from teachers who opted to take it on. This required teachers across grade levels and disciplines as well as students who to present their projects. We invited community members as well and media outlets to document the projects. The success of the event has indicated that this will become a lasting institution at CEC that teachers, students, and parents can all participate in in future years. Participating teachers reported back that many of the successes were elevated and polished student work and having students engage in real, academic conversations with authentic audiences that included industry professionals, teachers, administrators, peers from different grade levels, and CEC family members. There was recurring collaboration between Core and Career Tech teachers that laid a groundwork for future collaboration and implementing common rubrics, language, and practices throughout the building. Despite some struggles through the process, all participating teachers want to continue to implement and expand their projects next year. We will have teachers to lead Professional Development and provide prospective teachers with exemplars and strategies for scoping the process, grading the work, and supporting students along the way.

The best evidence of impact will be an increase in positive response rates to Question 4. However, we can look at the increase in number of original ideas and projects that can come out of the discussion and demonstration of current projects. A higher number and an increase in the quality of the projects should, in theory, result in higher positive response rates. Students from participating classes are being surveyed this week. We won't have results at the time of this written submission but will at the time of the final presentation.

## REFLECTIONS

### **Fellow Reflection:**

I am personally conflicted when I set a goal that I don't achieve. The goal here wasn't an immediate jump in scores from 72% to 92%, but to provide opportunities for teachers to brainstorm and to present projects to their peers in order to start a change in practice to make learning more engaging.

The more I've thought about it, the more conflicted I've become. I'm wondering what my role is in not moving this initiative forward. What messages am I sending? What are people hearing from these messages?

While we entered the year intending to look at student engagement and project-based learning, the priorities changed early in the year. There was a shift from school-wide professional development on engagement to testing strategies and supports and classroom management. We don't know the impact the testing professional development will have, and won't until late June, but we've seen a decrease in year to date behavior referrals.

Thinking back to the fall I shared our report card information with the staff. Our test scores had dropped which resulted in a perennial effective school now coded as approaching. I made it clear that we needed to do more work to support students in preparing for the P/SAT tests and that everyone needed to do their part; it was not the sole responsibility of English and Math teachers to prepare the students, especially when the CTE teachers had students for two to three times longer than core teachers did. Unfortunately, test preparation tends to make lessons less interesting, and we've asked all teachers to input practice problems and/or test taking strategies into their lessons. I hope I didn't send the message that we should stop doing what we do well and work on test preparation. I haven't walked into a CTE class that wasn't working on content, so I don't think they sacrificed what was really important; hands on, relevant work.

Professional Development for classroom management became a focus in the fall as well. Teachers struggled early and the thought was no students were going to learn anything unless

all the teachers could run their rooms. Year to year comparisons show a significant decrease in referrals, so that is a positive. However, instructors simply having control of their rooms doesn't insure active and engaged learning. The mid-year Q 4 response rate doesn't show that students are any more interested in their learning than they were in prior years when classroom management wasn't a focus.

There wasn't complete abandonment of the concept of increasing student interest, the delivery had to shift from whole group professional development to one-on-one coaching during evaluation sessions with teachers. Some creative ideas spring up this semester: one civil action project for 9th grade to build upon being agents of change; a freshmen Biology presentation to upperclassmen in the Biomedical program regarding genetics; and a junior Economics project in which students have "jobs" and they look at the impact of their work habits on their ability to live the lifestyle they want. Additionally, for the second year in a row, Physics students will present energy ideas to a group of engineers, and there was recently a rocket launch in math this week. There is an upcoming project in which students share a videotaped presentation with their parents to share their learning. The large majority of our parents are Spanish speaking, so students can translate and explain in real time and parents can see what their kids are doing in school. I like this approach, we're always trying to engage parents more, and the video will allow them to view on their own timeline and have content in their native language.

As the year has gone on, I've read books and articles about equity and I've attended professional development about culturally responsive practices. I've realized that working on project-based learning in isolation as a means to engage students without considering its role in breaking down systemic educational inequities has been a miss. Project-based learning is an engagement strategy that increases rigor, creates opportunities for mistakes to help students grow, thus creating a trusting classroom environment. Students who are engaged and challenged feel respected. Students who engage in critical thinking don't disrupt the learning environment. As we look to carry on and strengthen our project, we will need to message the work as culturally responsive practices that will challenge and engage our students.

#### Ally Reflection on Leadership:

I have learned a great deal about creating teacher buy-in when implementing new schoolwide initiatives and expectations. Many school culture and structural issues are discussed by leadership behind closed doors, but it is extremely important for leaders to garner support among staff and use a grass-roots approach to generate buy in. Change should not be mandated. Start small and lead by example. Get buy-in from other school leaders and give them time and space to implement initiatives. This way, teachers don't feel micro-managed but rather feel included in creating solutions to issues as they arrive.

Teachers, like students, need permission to fail and they need exemplars, repetition, straightforward directives, and multiple opportunities to struggle and make progress. Whether in my role as an instructional coach or as a leader who is rolling out a new initiative or professional development to staff, I have realized that teachers need repetition and continued support as they attempt to adapt their pedagogy and take on new approaches to teaching or implementing systems.

From Ellie, I learned a great deal about adult learners and differing personality styles. I know that I need to continue to make attempts to deliver feedback in the way it will be best received. This can be a long and difficult process, especially when adults/teachers think they know what kind of processor they are, when actually they are something different.

I have learned that I should continue to be idealistic. I always feel like this could be my downfall, because it adds some emotional lows to the school years, but when goals are met or exceeded or positive change is successfully implemented, there is no better feeling. Some of our successes with the implementation of Project-Based Learning initiative at the student and teacher levels have encouraged me that we are on the right path and that we should continue to develop and expand this approach. Struggling students have done their best work and teachers have broken through ruts and traditions to make learning interesting to them. The Do Something Real Night helped us bring community members to our school which will really help improve our overall school culture and provide students with real-world scenarios. It will help teachers expand their networks and work in collaboration with other teachers and community members. My takeaway is to continue to set high expectations and to hold myself, my students, my teachers, and my administrators accountable to these ideals.

Perhaps the most valuable lesson I learned this year is regarding the human factor. I know that I must try to be sensitive to and aware of the tragedies surrounding all of us all the time. When I think about the deaths, losses, personal and professional struggles of the participants of the Cahn Fellowship, my own school, my city of Denver, my students and their families, it can be overwhelming. We experienced an overwhelming amount of loss, tragedy, fear, violation and there is no reason to believe that this will diminish in years to come. I must be kind and sensitive to everyone with whom I come into contact. I should assume that everybody is dealing with an all-consuming problem that I can't even see most of the time and try to keep perspective of life outside data, the classroom, and the building.

Another huge lesson that I can attribute to my Cahn experience is learning that all schools are dealing with very similar problems regardless of geography, age, race, etc. There is power in conversation and expanding our individual network. I've already learned so much from the Cahn fellows and Allies and can't wait to learn more at the final presentations. Next year I'll participate in a local Thrive Fellowship modelled after the Cahn Program with other instructional coaches from Denver and I hope to continue to make solid relationships with others and learn from my peers. Sharing strategies and solutions to ubiquitous problems is a way for us to work smarter



not harder and expanding my network has provided me with more tools for my toolbox as I continue to encounter new problems facing our school and our district.

Being part of the Cahn Fellowship has also encouraged me to consider becoming an administrator. My Fellow and principal, Jamie, has been calling me Principal Spann for about two years now. I always scoffed at the idea and thought I would never want to work in that role. But seeing the human side of principals, their high intensity and solution-oriented approach to their work, their passion for their schools, teachers, and students, and the frankness with which they shared their own vulnerabilities really touched my sensibilities and made me realize that I both appreciate and thrive in that type of community. Perhaps Jamie's prediction of me becoming principal could in fact come true one day.

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### **APPENDIX**

