

Family Friendly Walk-Through Report

NEWELL SCHOOL DISTRICT

OCTOBER 26, 2022



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Family Friendly Walk-Through (FFWT)

Implementation Report: Newell School District

Date of Onsite Visit: October 26, 2022

FFWT Team: Ashley High, parent; Jodie Severson, parent; Sarah Schwede, parent; Chad Tesch, parent; Elizabeth Oliver, parent; Karl Hoyal, parent; Charlee Bachman, parent; Paul McLaughlin, teacher; Michelle Stockert, Title I teacher; Noreen Yule, HS SPED paraprofessional

Facilitated by: Morgan VonHaden, SD SFEC Project Director; Angie Lynch, SD SFEC K-12 Learning Specialist; Laura Kelly, SD SFEC K-12 Learning Specialist; Maria Kemp, SD SFEC K-12 Learning Specialist; Diana Suarez, Coaction Collective Consultant.

The Family Friendly Walk-Through (FFWT) is a tool designed to provide schools with an opportunity to consider how welcoming their school is to families, neighbors, and community members. Research has shown that for parents and families to fully engage and participate in their child's education, they must feel invited by the school. Prior to conducting a FFWT, family and staff surveys are administered to create a baseline data set for family engagement at the school.

Newell School District is a rural, one-section, public school that serves Pre-Kindergarten through 12th grade in connected buildings, and is located in Newell, SD. The total student enrollment of K-12 at the school is approximately 244 students. Of those students, 89% identify as white, 3% as Native American, 3% as Hispanic, 2% as multiple races, <1% as Black, and <1% as Asian. The student population that qualifies for Free and Reduced Lunch Program is 53%.

The FFWT focuses on four key areas:

- **Physical Environment** – refers to the physical environment of the school itself including maintenance and upkeep of the school building and grounds, the school entrance, and the condition of the school hallways and common spaces.
- **School-Wide Practices** – refers to activities, expectations, and procedures that are being implemented consistently throughout the entire school.
- **Learning Connections** – refers to how the school connects with the home about learning that is happening at the school and shares how the family can support their student.
- **Written Materials and Communication** – refers to how well the school communicates with families in a family-friendly way and how families can communicate back to the school.

Commendations and Recommendations

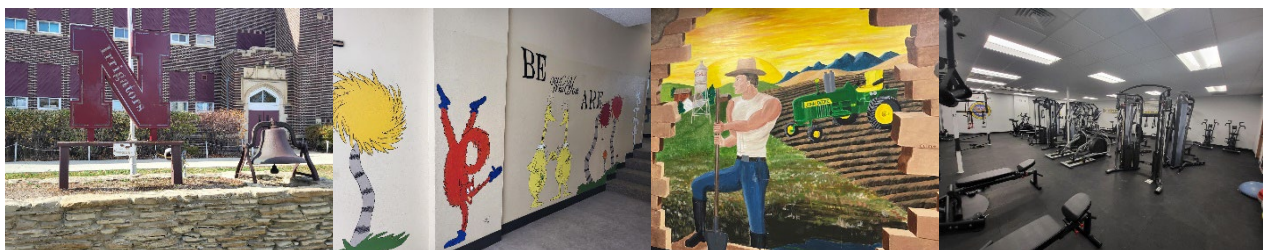
While considering family engagement at your school, the FFWT Team examined four areas during the walkthrough and participated in onsite discussions. After synthesizing the material and integrating FFWT Survey results, the FFWT offers the following commendations and recommendations

- **Commendation:** A commendation reflects an area where the school is excelling or going beyond expectations.
- **Recommendation:** A recommendation reflects an area where improvements could be made to increase family engagement opportunities.

Physical Environment

Commendations:

- The school building connects elementary, middle, and high schools. Additional space has been added to support the increased enrollment over the years. Although one hundred years old, many renovations have been done and continue to be the focus for school improvement. The name of the school is displayed in large print on the building with an iron sign displaying school pride with the mascot name written across the monogram. A marquee sign near the street with digital display of upcoming events allows visibility for incoming traffic in both directions and highlights community sponsorship/support.
- The main office is down the hallway from the entrance with a large window allowing front office staff to view and address visitors through the glass once they reach it.
- The building is aged; however, the overall upkeep and cleanliness of the building is maintained. There was no evidence of litter on the grounds and the landscaping and overall campus are well maintained. Families and staff praised the maintenance department for their effort in making the school a pleasant place to work and visit as well as their commitment to connecting with students.
- New playground equipment, video surveillance cameras on the outside of the building, state of the art gym equipment, water filler stations, and new CTE program equipment give the facility an updated look and are an investment in student and staff safety and comfort. The playground equipment was installed with the help of the community, family, and staff volunteers and plans for installing safer ground are in the works.
- The school hallways create a strong sense of community, permanently highlighting student work in the form of beautiful murals reflecting the community while also covering some of the aging spots making the school a vibrant, welcoming environment.
- Generations of families are displayed in class composites on the walls where students can make family connections.
- Common spaces such as the elementary gym are leased out to the community with the possibility of doing the same with the new weight room in the future.
- Grade levels are separated, making the flow of the building easy to follow.



Recommendations:

The FFWT team decided on the following recommendations:

- Add external signage in the front of the building directing patrons to the main entrance, which is in the back of the building. Highlight the main entrance with larger signage on the building itself, indicating where and how to enter.

- Address the School Board for strategies to remedy the flooding of the main entrance.
- More opportunities need to be created for families and the community to get involved with renovations of the building (i.e., bathrooms, playground surface).
- The elementary and middle school student drop-off/pick-up area needs improvements to help traffic flow by possibly making it separate from the parking lot to increase student safety.
- The external door to the Agricultural building is unmonitored. Explore options for a controlled entry to allow only authorized visitors access.
- Explore leasing the weight room, high school gym, and other areas to the community.

School-Wide Practices

Commendations:

- The hard-working farm community is reflected in the school mascot, the Irrigators, and student signature murals on the walls. Pictures of student achievement and activities are celebrated and displayed in the common areas such as, the lunchroom/elementary gym, and the high school gym.
- Students are encouraged to unite in participation of initiatives of inclusion, acceptance, kindness, and character in various displays of collaborative artwork, pledges, and challenges around the school. Students of the month at each school level are nominated by teachers based on demonstrations of character.
- Signs throughout the building communicate the school expectations of a smoke-free, tobacco-free campus. Signs also offer students help for mental health struggles by calling, texting, or visiting a website for access to counselors via 988-Suicide and Crisis Lifeline.
- Newell PRIDE is visible in the cafeteria/gym displaying the five pillars of positivity, responsibility, integrity, determination, and empowerment.
- Chromebooks are utilized at all grade levels making this a 1:1 technology school. Elementary school students leave the Chromebooks at school daily while the upper grades can take them home.
- School staff utilize GoGuardian as a technology monitoring system.
- The district utilizes a school website, app, and Facebook page for upcoming events and school calendars.
- All sixth through twelfth grade students are issued a key card to access the building on school days from 7:30 am to 4:00 pm.
- The FFWT team widely recognizes principal accessibility, and visibility as a strength. The staff and kids respect and know him. This was evidenced during the walkthrough when Mr. Schoenfish greeted grade school students by name, and they reciprocated. According to the staff and family surveys, of the families responding on the FFWT survey, 84% indicated agreement that the principal is visible and accessible to families, and of the staff members responding, 92% agreed. This is evident in the number of families responding to the invitation to participate in the FFWT as well.

- The family survey highlighted school staff as being welcoming and promptly providing assistance to visitors, with 81% in agreement. The FFWT team was also greeted warmly by the superintendent, principal, and teachers upon arrival.
- Funding for enhanced CTE programming is a focus to meet the needs of the students and community. Dual credit courses are offered as well as online High School Spanish through D2L.
- Some staff are shared between middle and high school and approximately 90% of band instruments are provided to grades 5-12, with opportunities for family and community donations.
- A Parent-Teacher Organization is active in the school.



Recommendations:

- Provide a variety of opportunities for family engagement and actively invite families into classrooms to share their skills and interests with students in all grade levels.
- Access family input to create solid school-wide procedures for pick-up and drop-off of elementary and middle school students to ensure student safety.
- Include families and staff in developing the school improvement and family engagement plans to foster an equal partnership and get all stakeholders' perspectives.
- Access family input to establish expectations for consistent staff communication with families.
- Access family input to establish a school-wide cell phone policy that outlines expectations of appropriate usage and is enforced consistently throughout the grade levels.
- Establish procedures and student expectations for lunch to make this flow better. Communicate these procedures and expectations effectively to students and families.
- Offer virtual options for school board meetings, PTO meetings, and activities so all families can participate.

Learning Connections

Commendations:

- The FFWT team stated that family engagement is important to both administration and staff.
- Administration is supportive of and actively seeks funding for the trade areas, encouraging real life experiences.
- The Superintendent supports bringing speakers in from the agricultural community to talk to students in grades 8-12.

- Of the families responding to the survey, 80% agreed that there are adequate opportunities for parents to collaborate with teachers about individual children and their progress in order to meet student academic and developmental needs.
- Comments from the family surveys identify ClassDojo as a platform used for communicating what students are learning and how they are progressing at the elementary level.
- Students in woodworking class create projects that help the school community, such as name plates for teacher's desks, and Home and Away signs for the seating sections in the gym.



Recommendations:

- Plan Family Engagement Events around learning opportunities for families and students. Bring back events from the past that are linked to learning, such as, Literacy and STEM Nights.
- Communicate frequently how families can support the school, especially incoming elementary families. Find out what families want to and can do to support the school and their students and incorporate those ideas, as well as learning opportunities into PTO meetings to encourage increased awareness and participation. Ask families when meetings would be convenient for them. Start PTO meetings with time for families to mingle, meet each other, and talk about items on the agenda. Offer the option of virtual attendance to include rural families.
- Develop a network of community and family member volunteers and bring their skills into classes at every grade level.
- Utilize funding sources to grow the CTE program and bring back classes like FACS to give students more opportunities to develop life skills and explore career options.
- Access family feedback to establish guidelines for teacher/family communication of student learning and progress. Provide families with information and tools on how they can extend their students' learning at home. Teach families, in-person or using video tutorials, how to utilize platforms to monitor student progress.
- Utilize strengths of families and staff to brainstorm ideas, organize, and follow through with implementation of family engagement events.

Written Materials and Communication

Commendations:

- The school provides both physical and digital forms of communication to inform parents of events, such as, newsletters, literature in student take-home folders, phone calls, emails, the school Facebook page, and the school app.
- ClassDojo is a communication platform utilized by grades K-2 to provide two-way communication with families and teachers on student progress and helps build relationships. Remind is used at the upper grade levels.

Recommendations:

- Identify and utilize preferred forms of communication to reach ALL families.
- Push out frequent reminders of events well in advance, especially to new families, through all media and communicate ways that families can get involved and support the events.
- Use consistent platforms with all staff at each grade level and set guidelines for frequency of communicating student progress to families.
- Provide trainings for families on how to use the communication platforms (e.g., Infinite Campus, ClassDojo, Google Classroom, School Website, District App).
- Update links and calendars on the school website to give families the most current and accurate information.

Top Recommendations:

During the Family Friendly Walk-Through review meeting, the team considered all discussion and suggestions in identifying the priorities most likely to advance Newell School District toward building a stronger Family Friendly environment.

- **Add external signage from the main road** directing patrons to the main entrance. Highlight the main entrance with larger signage on the building itself, indicating where to enter.
- **Establish Comprehensive School-Wide Procedures and Policies.** Collaborate with families on best procedures for communication and enforcement of the drop-off/pick-up process. Communicate these procedures in a variety of ways and make them accessible to families on the school website. Reach out to the community for support for proper signage, supervision/enforcement.
- **Offer Family Engagement Opportunities that are Linked to Learning.** Recruit participation from families to plan events with learning components that help support student learning at home. Provide training for families on monitoring student progress and learning strategies used in classrooms.
- **Communicate Opportunities for the Community and Families to Support the School.** Specifically ask families about their interests, skills, and availability and match them with a variety of involvement opportunities in the school. Give families frequent opportunities and ways to help the school community and allow them to take ownership of their role in this partnership.
- **Provide Consistent Communication Expectations using Chosen Platform to Communicate Student Progress and Information.** Work with families to choose the best platforms for each grade level for two-way communication about student learning progress. Provide training on effective use of chosen platforms.