



Leadership Cherry Creek

**December 2022
Executive Summary**

Members of the Leadership Cherry Creek Class of 2023 learned about Athletics and Activities and Communications in the Cherry Creek School District during their December 15 meeting held in the Lecture Center at Grandview High School.

Grandview Assistant Principal Trevor Watrous welcomed the group to Grandview. Then Director of Athletics and Activities Larry Bull presented a brief overview of the sports, organizations, and events that many students consider to be some of the most meaningful parts of their education. Bull explained that the primary reason students participate in sports is to have fun, followed by the desire to improve their skills, stay in shape, do something they're good at, and for the excitement of competition. He noted that students gain many benefits by being involved in athletics and/or activities, including the fact that those activities are inherently educational, employers want employees with well-rounded backgrounds, and colleges recruit students with a history of involvement in extra-curricular activities. Athletics and activities also foster success later in life.

Research from the U.S. Department of Education shows that students who are involved in school sports and organizations have fewer unexcused absences and discipline referrals, higher grades and test scores, and are more likely to earn a college degree than students who are not involved.

Athletics and activities also support the Cherry Creek Schools' Mission and Core Values.

Bull said that a wide variety of activities are offered at the elementary and middle school level. They range from art, band and choir to Destination Imagination, robotics club and STEM club. Four sports are offered at the middle school level: basketball, track and field, wrestling, and volleyball. 75 to 80% of middle school students participate in athletics and/or activities.

At the high school level, there are clubs and activities to interest just about everyone. The Colorado High School Activities Association (CHSAA) sponsors marching band, orchestra, student council, vocal music and speech and debate, while CCSD high schools sponsor DECA, FBLA, other performing arts activities and both service clubs and interest clubs. Sixty to 75% of high school students participate in one or more activity.

High school student athletes can participate in some two dozen CHSAA-sponsored sports and CCSD also offers Unified Sports, where typically developing students and students with special needs play together.

The district has a long history of excellence in athletics and activities, with 251 team state championships and 340 individual state champions in the past 30 years, and with many students being

named to All State musical groups, qualifying for state and national DECA and FBLA competitions and receiving other honors every year.

After Bull's presentation, LCC members were treated to a performance by GHS sophomore Alyssa Brewer, the school's feature twirler who performs at school and community events, and with the GHS Marching Band. The group also got to hear from four members of the GHS Activity Council, about the activities they plan throughout the year and how they provide opportunities for all students to be involved. The students also answered questions about the value of participation, how they manage their schedules, and more.

Next, Chief Communications Officer Abbe Smith presented a report on the district's efforts to be transparent and communicate effectively with parents, community members, and other stakeholders. She explained that the district's goal is "to inform, empower and engage families, students and staff as partners in achieving excellence by broadening our audience reach, strengthening communications channels, creating opportunities for meaningful dialogue, lifting the voices of all stakeholders, including historically marginalized people, and fostering a districtwide culture that supports all student in rising to their potential."

Smith talked about the district's efforts to share the stories of Cherry Creek Schools students, staff, and community members. A special focus is elevating the voice of all students, Smith said.

The district provides opportunities for in-person communication through districtwide groups such as Leadership Cherry Creek, PTCOs, student advisory groups, community forums, and more. The district also uses technological tools to communicate, including the district website, electronic newsletters, social media platforms and automated phone calls, emails, and text messages. Smith explained that many communications are translated into the district's top nine languages after English.

During the 2021-22 school year, the district sent out 14,568 messages through Blackboard Connect, the district's mass communications tool. More than 85,000 past and current parents and community members receive The Parent Connection, the district's twice-a-month newsletter. There were nearly 2 million visits to the Cherry Creek Schools website, www.cherrycreekschools.org, in 2021-22, and nearly 19,000 people follow the district on Facebook. Smith explained that many communications are translated into the district's top nine languages after English.

Smith shared data from the Fall 2022 Parent and Guardian Communication Survey. More than 6,000 parents and guardians responded to the survey. While the majority were positive about the district's communications efforts, they also asked for more communication by text messages, pointed out that they are sometimes inundated by calls and emails from the district, schools, principals, and teachers, and shared that school and district websites are difficult to navigate. Smith explained some of the steps the district is taking as a result of the survey feedback, including increasing the use of text messages, working to revamp school and district websites, and working to improve the delivery of urgent messages when schools are placed on secure status or lockdown.

There was good discussion about many communication topics, including crisis communications and ways to improve both in-person and other communications with families that speak a language other than English. Smith thanked everyone for sharing their insights and ideas, as they will help the district continue to improve communications efforts.