



OUR STORIES.

Our time.



AMPLIFYING THE VOICES

OF AURORA'S MOST IMPACTED FAMILIES



STORIES

GROUND

US.



They share perspective.

They offer invitations.

They tell the truth.

As a bridge to vital education and social services, RISE Colorado is uniquely positioned to gather, elevate, and center the stories of Aurora's diverse families.

In an immediate response to the COVID-19 pandemic, RISE Colorado launched a thorough, family-centered needs assessment of the **most impacted** communities of Aurora.

MOST IMPACTED:
those most marginalized and disenfranchised within the education system and beyond.

From March to August 2020, RISE Community Organizers and Community Navigators conducted **212 needs assessments** in families' native languages.

Aurora's marginalized families of color, including Black, Latinx, immigrant, refugee, and asylum-seeking families, have been most impacted by this global pandemic.

Thank you
RISE Family Leaders for participating, RISE Community Organizers and Navigators for conducting the one-on-one conversations. Without them, this report would not be possible.

This report sheds light on the lived experiences and perspectives of **1,039 individuals** whose voices have historically been ignored and silenced - individuals who are enduring inequities and finding ways to thrive. RISE Colorado is proud to release this report alongside Family Leaders to center and amplify the voices of Aurora's most impacted families.

DIVERSE & UNITED.

We deeply appreciate the way you've built deep relationships with your community that allow you to quickly assess their needs and dive in with support. Thank you for your service to the community and the opportunity to support you!

- Local Funder

RISE Families live in Aurora and Cherry Creek, across Adams and Arapahoe counties.

RISE works with marginalized families of color including Black, Latinx, immigrant, and refugee communities.

The Aurora and Cherry Creek communities are incredibly diverse. As an official refugee resettlement city, Aurora offers a home to immigrants, refugees, and asylum-seekers from around the world.

Aurora Public Schools (APS) serves students from over 130 different countries who speak over 160 different languages. Cherry Creek has 150 languages spoken in its schools.



Aurora is the third largest city in Colorado with a population of more than 385,000.



Aurora is an official refugee resettlement city.

Aurora Public Schools serves students from over
130 COUNTRIES
who speak over
160 LANGUAGES


20%
Aurora residents are immigrants

AURORA HAS THE 16TH-HIGHEST IMMIGRANT POPULATION AMONG CITIES OF SIMILAR POPULATIONS (2010 U.S. CENSUS).

VOICES OF AURORA'S

MOST IMPACTED FAMILIES

From March to August 2020, a total of **212 RISE Family Leaders** participated in the RISE Needs Assessment. RISE Family Leaders include Black, Latinx, Burmese, Karen, Karenni, Bhutanese, and Nepali community members representing **1,039 individual family members**.

WHOSE
Voices
ARE THESE?

Profile	TOTAL	Black, African American, African	Latinx	Burmese, Karen, Karenni	Bhutanese, Nepali
Total # of People (adults + children)	1,039	100	199	287	453
Immigrants & Refugees	782	33	83	249	417
Single-Parent Households	36	10	12	5	9
English Learners	1,014	75	199	287	453

Black, Latinx, immigrant, and refugee families are disproportionately impacted by the pandemic. The inequities they are living through during COVID-19 have always existed but are being exacerbated. The **loss of jobs, risk of eviction, lack of mental health and wellness support, and actual contracting of the virus** falls more heavily on communities of color. All this is happening during a time of heightened racial and social injustice, leading to a **tremendous amount of stress** being placed upon marginalized families of color.



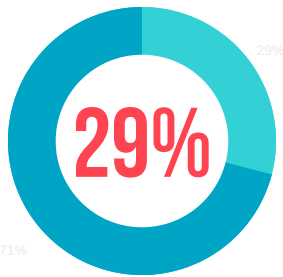
THE REALITY OF INEQUITY

during

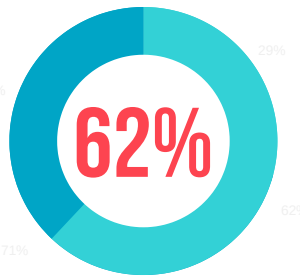
COVID-19

Families are struggling to meet **basic human needs**. The stress and trauma of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exposed and exacerbated **the harsh inequities and realities** facing marginalized families of color.

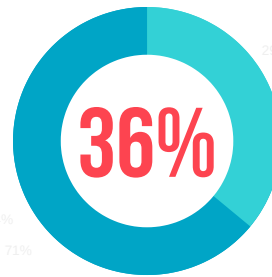
Here's what we learned from 212 RISE Family Leaders:



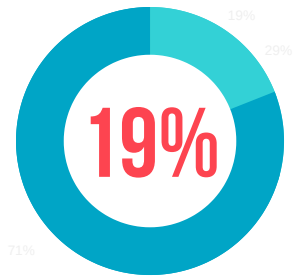
62 WITHOUT RELIABLE TECH & INTERNET



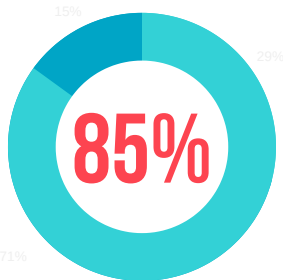
132 LOST THEIR JOBS



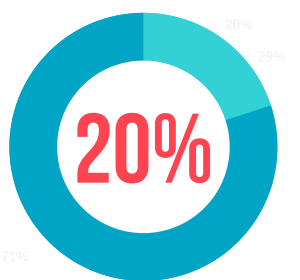
77 FACING FOOD INSECURITY



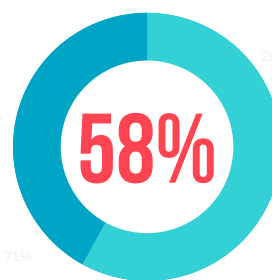
42 AT-RISK/FACING EVICTION



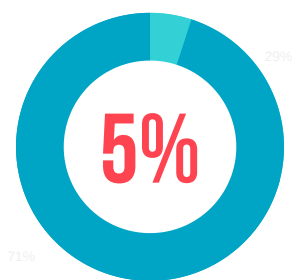
182 WITHOUT ACCESS TO PAID SICK LEAVE



43 DO NOT QUALIFY FOR FEDERAL STIMULUS/ UNEMPLOYMENT



124 NO OR LIMITED ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE



12 EXPERIENCED CRIME DURING THE PANDEMIC

62 ADULTS AND CHILDREN CONTRACTED COVID-19

NUMBERS DON'T TELL THE WHOLE STORY.

One Mexican family relies on the father for income, but as he is a self-employed mechanic, they're experiencing financial difficulties. Business is slow, especially in the auto industry, because people are traveling less and spending on essentials only - his business has been cut by over half. With four children and rent at around \$1,800/mo, they are worried about making ends meet. Online learning for the kids has also been a stressor, as they have had to adapt to new routines. They miss school and their friends, and are doing their best to stay calm. The uncertainty of the pandemic and how long it could last looms as their greatest concern. They have strong social supports from their cousins next door, but if they are unable to pay rent, they are at risk of eviction.

42
families
AT-RISK/
FACING EVICTION

124
families

WITH LIMITED OR NO
ACCESS TO HEALTH CARE

One single mother lost her job and has been unemployed for over a month. She struggles to support her daughter with her math homework, but has been trying to do arts and crafts with her kids to support their mental and emotional health. Even if someone in her family fell ill, going to a doctor hasn't even crossed her mind. Her required payments keep coming in, but her income has not. She had to cancel her car insurance to make rent, and her landlord isn't extending any rent deadlines. She lives with her three children - one of her daughters is an adult, and is pregnant. They do not have any medical insurance.



43 families

**DO NOT QUALIFY FOR
FEDERAL STIMULUS OR
UNEMPLOYMENT**

This family of two parents and six children was in the process of obtaining citizenship prior to the pandemic. Their lawyer advised them not to seek out any government assistance at this time. The family's biggest fear is crime and the police. The mother recently witnessed a neighbor committing a crime. The police insisted on her testifying against the neighbor. The mother is not comfortable going to court due to her immigration status, and she fears retribution from the neighbor.

Having moved to the U.S. from Mexico, this single mother of two high school boys is still hard at work in the cleaning business. Her biggest fear is losing her job during the pandemic, but she won't give up. If she was to lose her job, she would not qualify for unemployment, and she does not qualify for the federal stimulus package due to her immigration status. Food is a huge concern, but she isn't actively seeking assistance because she knows there are people without jobs who need it more. Her biggest stressor overall has been to have her high school boys stay at home - it's a tough age to ask them to stay inside, but she says it is what it is and she is doing her best to roll with the punches.

12 families

**HAVE EXPERIENCED CRIME
DURING THE PANDEMIC**

62 adults & children

**HAVE CONTRACTED
CORONAVIRUS**

Members of the Bhutanese Nepali community are going to the Mango House to be tested - 50 family members have contracted coronavirus, including 37 adults and 13 children. It has impacted whole families in devastating ways. After visiting the clinic, one Bhutanese Nepali family with two adults and two children received the news that they had all tested positive for COVID-19. This sent them into a panic, and they wondered whether or not they would survive the disease. Per the doctor's advice, they quarantined for two weeks, totally isolated from the rest of their family's care. They shared that the period of isolation was a very painful and sorrowful time in their lives - a nightmare. They were completely stressed out and overwhelmed thinking about the degradation of their health, loss of their jobs, and impact on their children's education, all without any source of income to pay off their rent and utility bills.

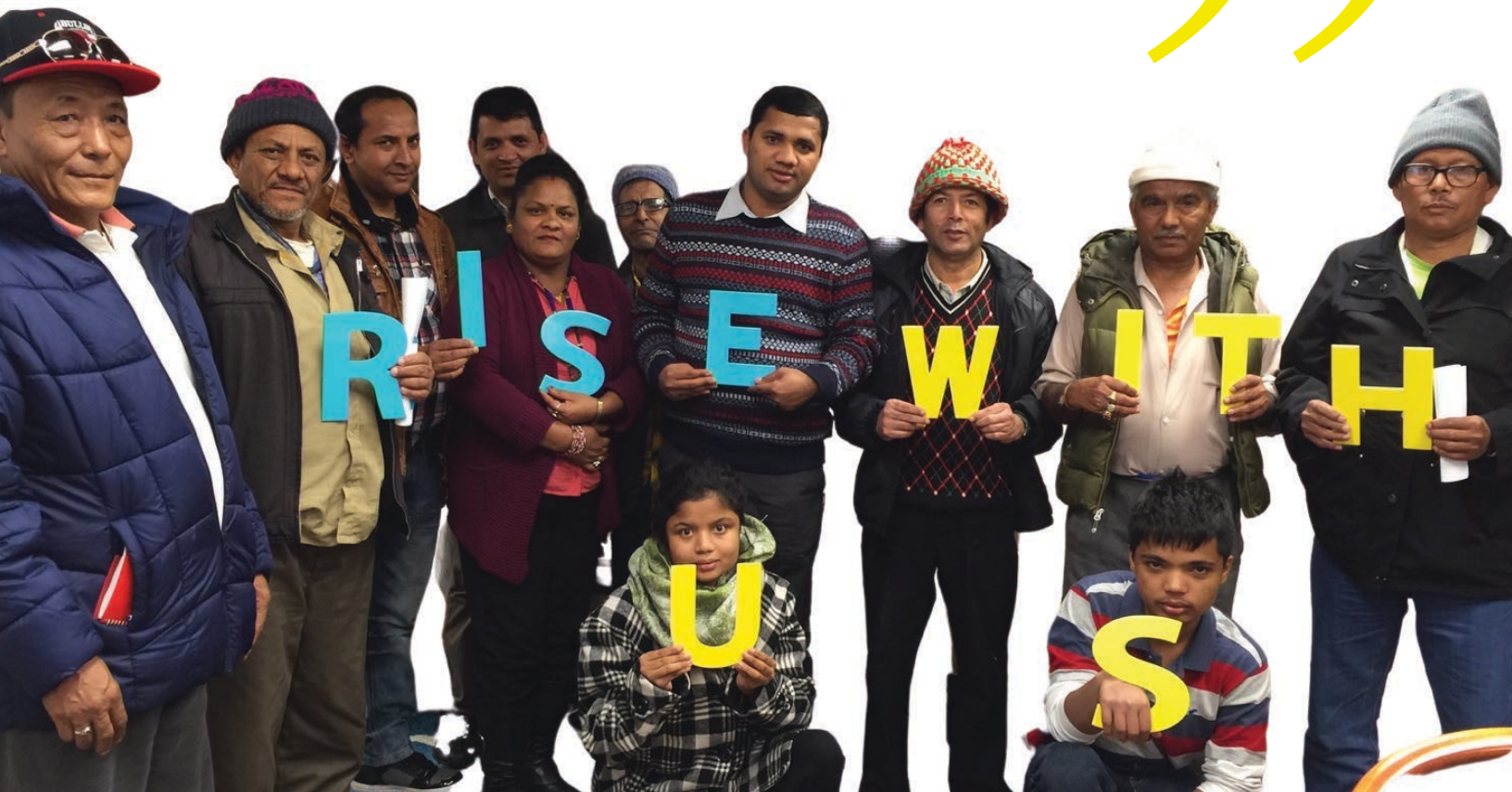


“

I would like to thank RISE Colorado for providing COVID-19 relief assistance to my family and many other families in my community! Your support and contribution has helped us in many ways in this horrific situation and we appreciate it!

- Bhutanese Nepali Family Leader

”





COMMUNITY ORGANIZING AT ITS CORE.

Community organizing starts with building relationships and trust.

RISE's Needs Assessment process puts Community Organizers and Community Navigators in **direct communication** with families to listen, understand their needs, and connect them to the vital supports and resources they need in real time.

EQUIPPED WITH THE NEEDS ASSESSMENT DATA, RISE COLORADO IS SUPPORTING FAMILIES BY:

- Distributing **\$620,000 in direct cash assistance** to RISE Family Leaders and beyond through the [RISE Together Emergency Relief Fund](#), gift cards from local foundations, the Family Independence Initiative, and the Left Behind Workers Fund.
- Making over **6,000 one-on-one check-in calls**.
- Purchasing and distributing **700 masks to Family Leaders** for their health and safety.
- Connecting families with **mental health and wellness support through a licensed therapist in seven languages**.
- Creating a comprehensive **50-page Aurora Resource Guide** to support families with food, online learning, and medical services, and translated in the top 8 languages of Aurora.
- Hiring Burmese, Karen, Karenni, Tigaru, and Bhutanese Nepali Community Navigators to support with casework and more Family Leaders.
- Engaging Family Leaders with summer programming and launching **RISE's Next Generation Virtual Summer Youth Program for more than 100 elementary, middle, and high school students**.

\$620,000
DIRECT CASH
ASSISTANCE

6,000+
ONE-ON-ONE
CHECK-IN
CALLS

108
STUDENTS IN RISE'S
NEXT GEN SUMMER
PROGRAM

RAPID RESPONSE

A timeline of RISE's response to support families most impacted

MARCH

COVID-19 SHUTDOWN

- RISE office shut down.
- Began one-on-one check-in calls with RISE Family Leaders.
- Shifted workshops and organizing with Family Leaders online.
- Hired 5 Community Navigators from the Bhutanese Nepali, Karen, Karenni, and Tigaru Communities.
- RISE Team began mental health and wellness sessions with a licensed therapist to process the vicarious trauma as first responders.
- Partnered with Denver Metro Emergency Food Network (DMEFN) to connect Family Leaders to food deliveries.
- Supported Family Leaders to file for unemployment benefits and emergency Medicaid.
- Public release of [RISE Aurora Resource Guide](#).
- Helped families retrieve computers from schools.

Without the basics of food and shelter, it's hard to focus on education.

Families need support with essential needs so they can have the capacity and bandwidth to think about their children's education, academic success, and hopes for the future. This is why RISE prioritized connecting Family Leaders with food resources, direct cash assistance, and other essential needs.

APRIL

IMMEDIATE SUPPORT

- Distributed \$22,000 in Visa gift cards to support Family Leaders with food and essential needs.
- Helped families navigate internet options.
- Launched mental health and wellness sessions for Family Leaders with a licensed therapist to process stress and trauma.
- Reminded families to take the 2020 Census to ensure their voices were counted.



MAY

A NETWORK OF PARTNERS

- RISE Board of Directors passed a resolution in support of the RISE Together Emergency Relief Fund.
- [RISE Together Emergency Relief Fund](#) launched to support Family Leaders most impacted by the pandemic.
- Helped families apply for *be well* Health & Wellness Initiative gift cards.
- Distributed \$22,000 in Visa gift cards to Family Leaders in need to support them with food and essential needs.
- Distributed \$25,000 in RISE Together Emergency Relief Fund grants to RISE Family Leaders for essential needs like food, medication, bills, and rent assistance.
- Donation of meals from Kokoro Japanese Restaurant to Bhutanese Nepali families with COVID-19.
- Partnered with the Left Behind Workers Fund as an official Screening Organization.

“

Thank you so much for this check, I am going to use it to buy real food. My children are going to be so happy when I take them out this weekend for grocery shopping. Thank you so much. You are a blessing to my family and to the community. Thank you, thank you, thank you!

- Latinx Family Leader

”

JUNE

ADAPTING TO THE NEW REALITY

- Launched RISE Next Generation Leadership Internship Program.
- Partnered with Family Independence Initiative (FII) to distribute \$500 cash codes to 200 Family Leaders.
- Launched RISE Next Generation Virtual Summer Youth Program for elementary, middle, and high school students.
- Delivered 86 bags of supplies to students who participated in the RISE Next Generation Virtual Summer Youth Program.



VIRTUAL COMMUNITY ORGANIZING

- Assembled a response plan to assist families at risk of eviction.
- Distributed masks and \$66,000 in Visa gift cards to Family Leaders.
- RISE interns hosted Virtual College Field Trip to Regis University and Grand Canyon University for 80 participants from RISE coalitions.



“

Thank you so much. In these dark times where I try to limit how much news I consume, RISE has been a beacon of light and hope.

- *Black Family Leader*

”

AUGUST

STEPS TOWARD TRANSFORMATION

- RISE Family-Led Community Forum webinar brought together 140 Family Leaders, Student Leaders, district officials, school board members, and community members. Students and families shared their hopes, questions, and ideas for the school year.
- Distributed \$50,000 in RISE Together Emergency Relief Fund grants to RISE Family Leaders for essential needs like food, medication, bills, and rent assistance.
- Release of [CPR radio story and article](#) by journalist Jenny Brundin centering the voices of RISE Family and Student Leaders.

THIS IS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CHANGE.

The Family-Led Movement for Educational Equity

Families and Students want to work alongside the school system, teachers, school leaders, and district officials. It's time for the education system to come together with Family and Student Leaders to heal and address inequities. This can best happen by bringing all stakeholders together to **rebuild and reimagine** what's possible in education.

RISE Family and Student Leaders want to have **active involvement** in ongoing planning and decision making efforts. This will ensure their voices are heard and centered so their needs are met to ensure **all students receive the excellent education** they deserve.



Students are wondering...

ELEMENTARY

- Is online school going to be like it used to?

When we go back to school...

- How will chairs and tables be set up in classrooms so that we all feel safe?
- How will they clean the schools every day to make sure we are safe?
- Are we going back to the same school?

MIDDLE

- Are we going to have nicer teachers? One of my teachers is racist.

When we go back to school...

- Will we have to wear a mask in school?
- Are we going to have school half the time?
- Are we going to practice social distancing?

HIGH

- With remote learning, what is the schedule for high school going to look like?

When we go back to school...

- How are schools going to keep us safe?
- How will social distancing work in classrooms?
- What will be the protocol for using the bathrooms?
- How can we maintain a 6 foot distance when we are sitting at tables or walking in hallways?

WHERE WILL WE GO FROM HERE?

Family & Student Leader Recommendations



HEALTHY, SAFE & INCLUSIVE ENVIRONMENTS

Create welcoming and inclusive learning environments for students and families of color.

Establish **district health and safety protocols for learning** that apply to students, staff, and families. This should include sick time policies, procedures, and guidance for both high-risk students and staff.

COMMUNICATION

Create a strong communications plan centering Families' and Students' voices.

Consistent communication with families is crucial. Now more than ever, we need the district to **share plans, gather feedback, and ensure an equitable, safe, and positive experience** of families and students during the 2020-2021 academic year and beyond.





LEARNING WITH EQUITY

Provide free internet access and technology to ensure equitable educational opportunities.

Ensure **all students** have equitable access to technology and internet, and cultivate the **best learning methods, resources, and opportunities** whether in-person or remotely.

Co-create learning plans for each student.

Implement Individualized Learning Recovery Plans **co-created with every student and family** to minimize gaps in learning with a significant emphasis on reading and literacy.

MENTAL & EMOTIONAL WELLNESS

Prepare teachers to support students experiencing trauma.

Prioritize **special training and support for teachers** to focus on mental health and wellbeing, racial trauma, and pandemic-specific trauma - which directly impact academic achievement.

Be ready to have conversations about racial inequities.

Amidst the pandemic and current racial and social injustices, educators need to develop an understanding of how to be **culturally responsive to students, families, and staff of color.**

Keep students physically active and socially connected.

Ensure students can still be **physically active** in school and **socially interact** with peers while maintaining a healthy and safe environment.



"Thank you so much for helping my family. My family faced many challenges during this pandemic. My husband lost his job. Now we are struggling to pay our bills. Thank you for the gift card. This gift card can help us to put food on the table."

- Karen Family Leader



Partnership & Collaboration

BUILDING TRUST BETWEEN THE DISTRICT AND FAMILIES

VALIDATE FAMILIES' LIVED EXPERIENCES

by listening to their stories and showing them they are cared for because families have been through A LOT during the pandemic.

PROVIDE HOLISTIC, WRAP-AROUND SERVICES

through community partnerships to support families with food, mental health, housing assistance, direct cash assistance, and other essential needs.

ASK FOR FAMILY FEEDBACK AND INPUT OFTEN

during rebuilding and reimagining schools so families' needs and challenges can be met in real time.

SHIFT MINDSETS AND BEHAVIORS

to recognize that marginalized families of color are partners and experts in their children's education.

DEVELOP A NETWORK OF COMMUNITY PARTNERS

and train family liaisons to support families with essential needs and connections to vital services.

TRUST STUDENTS AND FAMILIES AS EXPERTS

and create space for honest communication and authentic collaboration. Co-create solutions with students and families to ensure that the education system transforms to address challenges and better meet the needs of all students.



A TIME FOR

SOLIDARITY



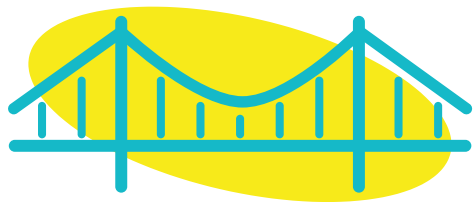
HOW TO SUPPORT DURING THIS TIME OF NEED
Donate to the [RISE Together Emergency Relief Fund](#) to provide direct cash assistance to families of color who have been disproportionately impacted during the pandemic.



DONATE TO [AURORA PUBLIC SCHOOLS FOUNDATION FOOD AND CRISIS RELIEF FUND](#) TO CONTINUE PROVIDING ESSENTIAL FOOD SERVICES TO FAMILIES IN NEED.

[SUPPORT LOCAL EDUCATORS AND SCHOOLS WITH SUPPLIES.](#)

A key element in responding to crisis is **access**: access to accurate information, access to medical aid, access to food, access to online educational resources, and much more. RISE Colorado's **core commitment** during the COVID-19 crisis is to ensure families have access to what they need to not only survive but thrive.



RISE acts as a **bridge** connecting Aurora's most impacted families to the crucial organizations providing the resources families need during this challenging time.

Talk to your [elected officials and policymakers](#) about passing legislation that is created with - not to or for - families. [Families are brilliant architects of policy](#) and have the best solutions to our most pressing challenges. A truly equitable education system is one in which [families, students, and educators work together](#).



Thank you for being a part of this movement. With your support, educational equity isn't just possible — *it's coming.*

Thank you so much to **all of the incredible organizations** that collaborate with RISE Colorado to ensure families receive the **vital resources** needed during this challenging time.

We'd like to thank APS Nutrition Services, APS Language Services Supervisor Efren Ortiz, Denver Metro Emergency Food Network, Family Independence Initiative, Left Behind Workers Fund, *be well* Health & Wellness Initiative, Latina Safehouse, Servicios de la Raza, Kokoro Japanese Restaurant, Village Exchange Center, Mango House, and Glasswing International.

Deep gratitude to all of the amazing local and national funders for their generosity and support. Thank you for partnering with us and providing families with the support they need and deserve during this trying time, **to ensure their humanity and dignity is centered.**

FAMILIES ARE RESILIENT.

Families and students are incredibly strong and resilient. Even in the midst of a global pandemic and racial and social injustices, they continue to lead the movement for educational equity to transform our public education system. **Families are architects and not just objects of policy.** We believe in and trust families and know they have incredible ideas and solutions for our most pressing challenges. We, as a collective community, must do everything we can to support students and families with holistic and wrap-around services to ensure their basic and essential needs are being met so they can thrive in school, and in life - **not just survive, but thrive.**





RISE Family Leader Summer Celebration 2018

RISE-COLORADO.ORG

OCTOBER 2020

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