



2019-2020

Annual Report

RootED

Funding great schools.
Rooted in community.

Our Team



Pat Donovan
Managing Partner



Victoria Scott-Haynes
Partner, Community
Relations & Administration



TeRay Esquibel
Partner, Community
Advocacy & Partnerships



Ashley Martinez
Director of Operations



Letter from the Team

Since the inception of [RootED](#) in late 2017, we have seen historical shifts within the Denver Public Schools (DPS) ecosystem and in the nature and delivery of public education in the United States. People of color continue to fight for equity in the classroom and in their communities, and a pandemic has forced all of us to stop in our tracks and rethink systems. We know that the injustices and shortcomings of the systems are not new, they are simply coming into clearer view. We have seen strength; we have seen division. We have seen pain; we have seen love. Through all of this, RootED is committed to collectively building a shared positive vision for the future in which we are obligated and fortunate to participate.

We believe that a quality education is foundational to the ability of children and communities to self-determine their future. Achieving access to high quality education requires deep investments in schools and community needs, ideas, and leaders. It requires schools and systems that are inclusive and responsive to the communities they serve. It requires access to transparent information. It requires innovation and a willingness to adapt, work across ideological lines,

and question stale processes. Moving backward, or staying stagnant, will not create an equitable, sustainable education system for all students. We must move forward with a positive vision that builds on the successes of the past and a critical eye on the areas where we need to improve.

As funders in the public education sector, it is our responsibility to shift historically inequitable practices if we hope to find the solutions that will lead to equity in public education. We start by recognizing and validating the lived experiences of the leaders who live and work in the communities they serve every day. RootED has partnered with, invested in, and learned alongside the communities we serve. We are excited to share our progress through this annual report. We will continue to develop authentic relationships, invest in autonomous schools and community organizations, and push the ecosystem to respond to the needs of the students and communities that look to public schools as essential to realizing their potential, and to building up democratic institutions that are genuinely answerable to the people. [R](#)



Board of Directors



Hollie Velasquez Horvath
RootED Board Chair
Senior Director of State Affairs and
Community Relations at Xcel Energy



Brenda J. Allen, Ph.D.
RootED Board Member
Professor Emerita



Erin Brown
RootED Board Member
Deputy Chief of Staff and Equity
Officer for Mayor Michael B.
Hancock



Luis de la Fuente, Ph.D.
RootED Board Member
Independent Consultant



Ethan Gray
RootED Board Member
Partner with The City Fund



Jesus Salazar
RootED Board Secretary
Co-founder, President, and
CEO of Prosono



Abigail Schaller
RootED Board Treasurer
Senior Program Officer at
Colorado-based Gates Family
Foundation

We invest in community-driven organizations, schools, and strategies that advance racial equity in education—to ensure that all Denver Public Schools students receive a high-quality education that recognizes and values individual and community strengths and cultural difference, enabling students to attain academic achievement, personal growth, and college and career success.

Our ultimate aim is an equitable, accountable, responsive Denver Public Schools system where racism is no longer a barrier to excellent student outcomes.

Prioritizing Racial Equity

Success must be measured not just by what is achieved for students as a whole, but what is achieved for student groups that have been historically underserved by the public education system, particularly Black, Latinx, and Indigenous students.

Centering the Strength in Lived Experience

Public school students, their families, and communities bring strengths, perspectives, and knowledge—developed through lived experiences and rooted in identity and culture—that are vital to improving public education systems and individual outcomes.

Community-Driven Change

Change in public education should be directed by those with the most at stake: families and the local communities that schools serve.

Reciprocal Relationships

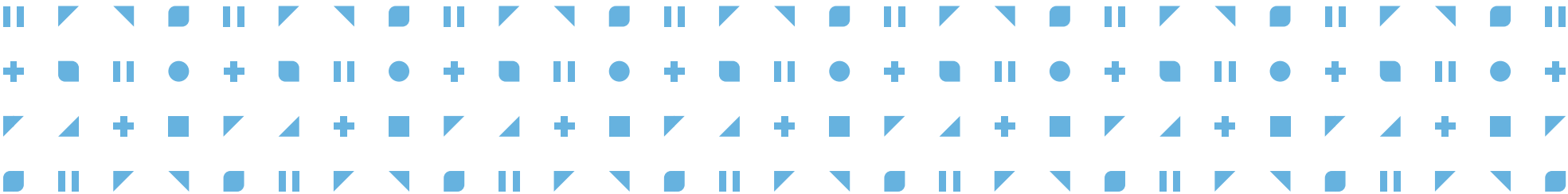
Relationships across the public education ecosystem—whether between communities and schools, school leaders and ecosystem leaders, or funders and grantees—should offer meaningful value in both directions.

Collaboration Across Difference

Leaders in public education must be willing to work together, including across lines of ideological difference, to effect lasting change.

Continuous Innovation and Improvement

Dramatically expanding access to high-quality education means developing, evaluating, and iterating on new approaches. With racial equity at stake, we cannot move backward nor accept the status quo; we must chart a bold new path forward.



55 SCHOOLS



RootED invested in **11 Charter Management Organizations (CMOs), charter schools and innovation zones** helping to directly fund a total of **55 schools**

19 GRANTS



27% of grants have gone directly to these schools totaling

\$3,537,950
or **57% of grant dollars**

STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

	Who We Fund	DPS Overall
Native Indian or Alaska Native	1.80%	0.70%
Asian	2.80%	3.10%
Black or African American	15.30%	13.40%
Hispanic	58.40%	53.00%
White	18.90%	25.30%
Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander	1.80%	0.40%
Two or More Races	3.90%	3.90%
Free/Reduced-Price Lunch	70.10%	63.40%
Special Education	12.20%	11.60%
English Language Learners	46.40%	36.40%

TOTAL NUMBER OF STUDENTS SUPPORTED BY GRANTEES = 23,847

ROOTED HAS DISTRIBUTED **\$6,172,600** IN FUNDS ACROSS **70 GRANTS**



Toward funding new community-driven schools totaling **\$292,000 or 4.7% of grant dollars**



Have gone to community organizations totaling **\$1,717,400 or 28% of grant dollars**



To support innovation zones totaling **\$1,675,000 or 27% of grant dollars**



Have gone to charter schools (independent/CMO) totaling **\$1,768,750 or 29% of grant dollars**



Have gone to advocacy or talent programs totaling **\$490,000 or 8% of grant dollars**



Have gone to various organizations to help with COVID-19 response totaling **\$229,450 or 4% of grant dollars**



Have gone to organizations led by people of color totaling **\$2,198,650 or 36% of grant dollars**

STAFF COMPOSITION
75% of RootED staff identify as people of color

BOARD COMPOSITION
71% of RootED board members identify as people of color

FOCUS ON EQUITY:

Montbello Organizing Committee

Building leadership from within the community is a key practice of the [Montbello Organizing Committee \(MOC\)](#). Supporting emerging leaders to serve in school-level governance and giving voice to the need for high quality/diverse school options — including strong support for the return of a comprehensive high school to the Montbello Campus — MOC works to galvanize residents to address the issues affecting their quality of life.

Executive Director Donna Garnett has written in MUSE, “DPS hasn’t had the best track record of building and nurturing trust in this community. People here have long memories. They remember what it meant to be a Warrior and how Montbello High School was the heart of the community — how it bridged many differences and brought people together.” A bond proposal before voters in November 2020 includes \$130M in funding for the Montbello Campus. MOC will engage the community in efforts to design the future high school.

MOC employs a number of strategies to ensure young people in Montbello and Denver’s far northeast have the support they need to be successful. Surveys of the community inform the direction for their organizing efforts. Residents’ top concerns include the lack of a full-service grocery



store, crime, poorly performing schools, youth violence, lack of affordable housing, and limited options for youth. Regular communication and engagement of families occurs via [Montbello Urban Spectrum Edition \(MUSE\)](#), a bi-monthly publication produced jointly with Denver Urban Spectrum.

The Montbello FreshLo Initiative is an ambitious economic development program that will center around a food market, affordable housing, and spaces for entrepreneurs, nonprofits, artists and public gatherings and events. A component of the FreshLo Initiative is a six-mile walkable loop connecting nine schools: Academy 360, Marie L. Greenwood, Monarch Montessori, McGlone, Escalante Biggs, Barney Ford, Farrell B. Howell, Maxwell, and Oakland. Each of these schools has an urban farm, supporting a community-based food system that improves food access. The Farm-School Network produces 10,000 pounds of healthy food each season. Educators align math, science, and social studies curricula to enhance learning during growing and harvesting, and funds are set aside to pay parents and youth to manage each of the school farms.

With the COVID-19 pandemic further limiting the availability and affordability of food, MOC worked with families



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to boost self-sufficiency by distributing seedlings and transplants to 350 home gardeners. With rising unemployment brought on by stay-at-home orders, the food pantry MOC runs jointly with the Struggle of Love Foundation has seen demand increase tenfold. Twice-monthly food distribution has helped to keep food on the table for students and their families. These efforts have been covered by [CBS4](#), [9News](#), [Fox31](#), and [The Denver Channel](#).

MOC is also working with a number of community and government organizations to improve mental and behavioral health. Hosting regular virtual gatherings of a mental health community circle, collaborat-

ing with Academy 360 on a wellness camp for younger students and with Struggle of Love to serve older students, MOC wants to increase neighborhood attachment in order to prevent youth violence. The organization is forming a circle of love and action around young people with youth safe zones, virtual and in-person mental health services, and creative programming for out-of-school time, among other supports.

Reflecting on the past year, Garnett shared in MUSE, “In some ways I believe we might actually be seeing with 20/20 vision what we have refused to see for a very long time. The inequities have always been there ... what will we do with that clear vision?” [R](#)

A woman with glasses and a lanyard is speaking to a group of students. She is wearing a white and black striped shirt. The students are in the foreground, looking towards her.

FOCUS ON QUALITY: DSST Middle School @ Noel

RootED is committed to dramatically expanding access to high-quality education options for students in Denver, supporting schools that value individual and community strengths and cultural difference. In late 2019, [DSST Middle School @ Noel](#) earned ratings as the No. 1 school in Denver. Student Nile Hudson said, “We worked hard and supported each other even when we faced lots of challenges.” Principal Brandi Chin told [CBS4](#), “The biggest thing we do here is bust every myth you hear about our kids. All the myths you hear about kids from low-income backgrounds, kids of color. They can achieve at the highest levels if you hold them to a really high bar and support them to get there.”

At [DSST Middle School @ Noel](#), 93% of students identify as students of color, and 73% receive free and reduced-price lunch. In English and math, the school scored first for student growth among DPS middle schools and earned “exceeds” status in the categories of student proficiency and reduction of academic gaps.

Advisory groups limited to 15 students meet with the same teacher every day, enabling the forging of strong relationships and accountability for success. These small groups provide each student with support to ensure that no one slips through the cracks. Advisors are expected to know what’s going on with each of their students and to help them when they may be in need. They also act as a resource for families so that there is another person at the school to contact about their child’s time at school.

While a close focus on academic data is essential, staff emphasize that school culture, educator coaching and feedback, and collaboration are just as critical to ensuring that every child has the opportunity to reach the highest standards. Knowing each student as an individual is key to delivering equity. English teacher BreOnna Tindall said, “I want my students to know that they belong here, and that they are loved here. We do an affirmation in my classroom where we say that this is a safe space for me to use my creativity and to grow.”

Teachers are constantly honing their skills with coaching that occurs every week. Found-


ing Director of Curriculum and Instruction Alana Raybon adds that collaboration between teachers, and across the network, are key to the excellent academic outcomes. “Teachers visit other classrooms regularly, gaining insight on a particular practice or observing a student in a different setting. Administrators meet with leaders from other schools to gather ideas and solve problems,” Raybon said. “Each staff member knows that education does not occur in a vacuum, and everyone contributes to each

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student’s achievement.”

The school strives to provide students with opportunities beyond academics and reports high participation in sports and clubs that are based on student interest, including a Justice League, Bulldog Tech Club, and Art Club. Student Nile Hudson adds, “Because of the staff at Noel, I will have the best chance of getting a college experience and having great job opportunities to become a doctor. I am thinking about my future, and Noel middle school and high school are very important to it.”

While Black and Latinx students have been underserved in the region, at DSST @ Noel, Colorado Measures of Academic Success

A student is working on a project, possibly a poster or a display, in a classroom setting. He is wearing a blue shirt and is focused on his work.

(CMAS) scores for Black students for the most recent year available (2018-2019) showed the highest combined middle school growth in DPS and the second highest in the state. CMAS English Language Arts and Math achievement for Latinx students was the fourth highest in the state.

About the DSST network, Tindall said, “I believe deeply in our mission to eliminate educational inequity in Denver. I believe that as a network we are not afraid to do the hard work of equipping all students with a world class education and a strong foundation of character.” [R](#)

COVID-19 Education Innovation Fund (EIF)

The COVID-19 pandemic has upended education as we know it. It has radically shifted the way our young people connect with peers on a daily basis and has placed additional pressure on families already stretched to their limits by the demands of work and life. While many students have reported missing the human connections of school, the forced schooling-at-home has exacerbated long-standing inequities in public education.



In spring 2020, RootED joined a coalition of partners to create the COVID-19 Education Innovation Fund. Together with the Gates Family Foundation, Lyra Colorado, Empower Schools, RESCHOOL Colorado, the Donnell-Kay Foundation, and Colorado Succeeds, RootED committed to creating this flexible fund to promote resiliency in this time of upheaval and to stimulate new approaches to meeting learners’ needs, by supporting ideas that are transformative, systemic, and sustainable.

Of the COVID-19 EIF funds distributed, 34% have been awarded to organizations led by Black, Indigenous and other People of Color, and half have supported projects considered transformational, such as the new K-12 umbrella school for home-based learners, [Denver Independent School \(DIS\)](#).

DIS works to remove barriers preventing underrepresented groups from accessing their right to home-educate their children. Citing a study from the *Journal of School Choice*, DIS states, “Almost all academic obstacles present in other school models disappear when Black children are homeschooled ... they outperform public school students of all backgrounds.” The Kulan Village Home-school Group is providing culturally relevant enrichment programming and connections to other families. The initiative will determine if students thrive academically and emotionally and whether families believe the model enables sustainable educational outcomes.

The [Colorado Association of Black Profes-](#)

[sional Engineers and Scientists \(CABPES\)](#) also received support to move its after-school and summer science, technology, engineering, and mathematics enrichment courses online during the pandemic. CABPES launched the first virtual version of its Junior Engineers Tomorrow’s Scientists (JETS) and Math Enrichment Program (MEP). 102 students engaged in the JETS program, and 70 students enrolled in the MEP class, which utilized the popular and effective IXL mathematics application. Students in the MEP class solved a collective 75,000 math problems over five months.

[Wyatt Academy](#), a K-5 community-centered elementary school serving children and families in the Cole and Whittier neighborhoods, also received support to engage families during summer via a hybrid learning plan featuring virtual and on-site resources to support learning. Parent Maria L. said, “As a parent, it is important to know that we have a voice and we are heard. Working on this committee helped us to build the remote learning program at Wyatt and make sure that it would suit the needs of families in our community.”

[Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism \(YAASPA\)](#) also received a grant to support a five-week summertime Social Sciences and Policy Institute to lead students of color through learning initiatives designed to equip them with the civic tools and knowledge to work to end racism and advocate for systemic change. [R](#)

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2020 RootED Grantees

[A+ Colorado](#)
[African Leadership Group](#)
[Beacon Network Schools](#)
[Climb Higher Colorado](#)
[CLLARO](#)
[Colorado League of Charter Schools](#)
[Colorado Succeeds](#)
[Colorado Education Organizing \(CEO\) Funder's Collaborative](#)
[Denver Green School Northfield](#)
[Denver Journal of Education and Community](#)
[Denver Public Schools](#)
[DSST Public Schools](#)
[Ed Board Partners](#)
[Ednium: The Alumni Collective](#)
[Education Reform Now](#)
[FaithBridge](#)
[Girls Athletic Leadership Schools of Denver \(GALS\)](#)
[Highline Academy Charter Schools](#)
[COVID 19 Education Innovation Fund - Gates Family Foundation](#)
[KIPP Colorado Schools](#)
[Lyra](#)
[Montbello Organizing Committee](#)
[Moonshot edVentures](#)
[Northeast Denver Innovation Zone](#)
[Our Turn](#)
[Radian](#)
[Relay Denver](#)
[ReSchool Colorado](#)
[Rocky Mountain Prep](#)
[STRIVE Prep](#)
[Teach for America](#)
[Transform Education Now \(TEN\)](#)
[UCD Leadership](#)
[University Prep](#)
[YAASPA](#)

Financial Metrics

RootED finished fiscal year 2019-2020 in a **strong financial position** with cash in excess of

\$7,000,000

and a healthy operating reserve of

130 DAYS 📅

GRANTS AND PROGRAMS  **93%**

ADMINISTRATION AND OVERHEAD  **7%**

The most recent audit highlighted that **93% of RootED expenditures are related to grants and programs** and 7% is associated with administration/overhead.

RootED

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Rooted in community.

RootED is passionately committed to ensuring that every child in Denver has the opportunity and support to achieve success in school, college and their chosen career.

We believe students, schools, and communities thrive when they have the access, tools, and resources to drive change, so we provide funding and strategic support to schools and organizations that authentically engage their communities to create world-class public schools.



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