A New Vision for Early Learners
Started in 2013 by the Donnell-Kay Foundation, ReSchool Colorado is a game changing, multi-year effort to create a new state public education system. ReSchool’s ultimate goal is to design and implement an education system that pushes the boundaries of current thought and practice, and better prepares learners to be happy, productive, and healthy people and professionals.

The DK Foundation has spent the last year examining potential entry points for this new system. Much of this work has focused on those who are currently non-consumers of the existing education system, including the more than 60 percent of families in Colorado with 0-5 year olds who rely on a network of friends, families, and neighbors (FFN) for the early learning and care of their children instead of licensed preschools and child care centers.

Further research and advice from leaders in the field pointed to a more targeted population who could benefit from a reimagined education system — immigrant families navigating the family, friends, and neighbor network of care.

The partnership with DK, Boulder Housing Partners, and Greater Good Studio was formed in order to engage such learners and their caregivers in the design of a new system. In particular, to understand the experience of immigrant families navigating FFN care from their perspectives, and to elevate the challenges and assets that this community faces to inspire insights around the role a new system might serve in supporting the learning and care of their children.
What would it look like if early childhood education was completely user-centered?

That’s the question we sought to answer throughout the research and design process.

Outreach

First, we found five families who were very happy with their childcare situations, because these parents represented positive deviants — folks who were succeeding despite similar constraints to those around them. Positive deviants are ideal folks from which to learn, because their uncommon behaviors and strategies are often inspirational and can be translated to the broader population.

Research

Next, with each family, we “followed the child” from home to care and back again. Our research team observed real life and asked parents and caregivers questions when appropriate, about everything from schedules and transportation, to teaching and learning, to meals and payment. The goal was to understand all the elements that make up the FFN ecosystem, and the unmet needs and overlooked assets of each person involved.
Brainstorming

After identifying patterns of unmet need and opportunity, our team brainstormed hundreds of ideas for new system components, alongside a cohort of selected advisors and experts in Colorado’s early childhood arena.

Feedback

Finally, we shared sketches of the strongest concepts with small groups of parents and caregivers. Their honest feedback and original ideas have shaped the collection of concepts contained in this book.
Meet Maria.

Maria is a mother of two small children, Jose and Daniela, ages 3 and 14 months. Her family immigrated to the US from Mexico a few years ago, and she lives in a housing development on Boulder’s north side. Her community is full of families just like hers - working families and young children.
Maria knows that her parents moved to the US partly because of educational opportunities, and she believes strongly in the importance of educating her children. So in addition to making sure her son Jose is enrolled in preschool, she buys him workbooks whenever she can, and helps him practice his letters and numbers.

Maria has picked up a little English over the years, but she feels most comfortable speaking Spanish. Maria has never worked with a computer before, but her smartphone is always by her side. She uses it to text with friends, check Facebook and take pictures of her kids.

Maria works part-time at a restaurant, and on work days she drops Daniela at her sister’s house. She’s usually home in time to pick Jose up from preschool, but sometimes she has to work a second shift. On those days, her sister walks to the bus stop to get him.

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Maria and her family were excited to be a part of ReSchool because it allowed them to access new educational opportunities in ways that work for them, better aligning their values with their daily experiences.

Maria’s husband works off and on as a painter and they don’t have a lot of disposable income. She and her husband share one car, which he usually needs for work. It’s a good thing that her sister lives right down the street in the same housing complex.
Rosa, a Learner Advocate, visits Maria and her children in their home. Because Rosa and the family have built trust with each other, the family feels comfortable talking openly with her about their lives.
Learner Advocate

This person serves to support multiple generations of learners in navigating the educational ecosystem.

- Makes monthly home visits to each ReSchool parent and caregiver.
- Facilitates regular conversations about the children’s educational goals as well as the adult’s own career and parenting goals.
- Uses a digital tool to track each household’s progress and connect them to relevant resources.
During her visits with Maria’s family, Rosa uses the ReSchool Digital Platform to help structure their conversation. The platform enables families and Advocates to stay on the same page about everyone’s goals and progress.
ReSchool Digital Platform

A digital tool that helps Learner Advocates and families record goals, track progress, and connect with local resources.

The platform curates appropriate, local resources based on each family’s goals, such as musical instrument rentals and computer classes.

Parents can update the platform via text, or login on their mobile devices to view their resource list and check goals.

The platform is a central and accessible place for Learner Advocates to store and manage all the information they collect about families and local resources.
Rosa gave Maria a Progress Portfolio that describes the developmental changes that Jose will make over the next few years. The family keeps it handy so they can celebrate his progress and keep an eye out for what’s next.
Progress Portfolio

A fold-out poster that introduces the whole family to the process of early childhood development.

An engaging illustration explains a child’s growth as a learner over time and describes the continuum of development.

Space is available for families to record their own goals, which help guide future sessions with the Learner Advocate.

Families can mark their child’s progress towards each goal with drawings, stickers or stamps.
Maria is asked to work on her day off, and her sister is in class that day. She uses the Caregiver Directory to quickly search for someone else she can trust, making sure that they are affordable and within walking distance.
Caregiver Directory

A mobile website listing local, in-home care providers for children 0-5.

Care providers are listed by neighborhood, helping parents focus on the options that best fit with their commutes.

Provider profiles list the names of parents in the neighborhood they’ve worked with, so Maria can ask a friend how it went before contacting the caregiver.

Caregivers list their preferred methods of contact (phone, text, or in person) so parents always know how to get in touch.
Maria’s neighbor Victoria has agreed to watch her kids, and Jose brings his ReSchool backpack with him to her house. Jose swaps out his backpack every few weeks, so he always has something new and interesting to play with and learn from, wherever he is.
ReSchool Backpacks

Branded backpacks filled with materials that children can borrow and exchange

Each backpack contains a collection of age-specific educational materials such as tablets with learning games, toys, books, and puzzles.

The backpacks can be swapped out weekly at the Learning Bus, or when a Learner Advocate visits their home.

Strong, consistent branding encourages other parents to explore ReSchool, while kids can personalize each backpack they get with patches they choose.
Victoria has become the kids’ regular caregiver, and every Tuesday afternoon, she walks them to the Learning Bus. Without having to leave their neighborhood, Jose, Daniela and Victoria are exposed to a wide range of people, lessons and resources.
Learning Bus

A mobile education station staffed by at least two people providing learning opportunities and materials for both children and adults.

Inside the bus, there is space for both children and adults to learn together and practice new activities.

The bus contains a rotating library of materials, which children and adults can choose to “check out” and return next time.

Text messages encourage participation by reminding parents and caregivers when the bus will be in their neighborhood.
Each morning, Maria receives a **Texting Tip** from ReSchool with one simple idea their family can try that day to help Jose and Daniela learn. Maria’s often able to try the tip right away, and it makes her feel more confident in her parenting.
Texting Tips

A text service that sends daily messages about children’s learning and development to parents and caregivers.

Each text provides an immediately-actionable, age-appropriate tip on topics such as pre-academic skills, wellness, social skills, discipline, and self-confidence.

Texts may link to additional bilingual content, such as short videos, articles, or websites.

Parents and caregivers can select the language and adjust the delivery time to best fit their family’s needs and schedule.
On Mondays, Maria often sends Jose and Daniela on Learning Adventures with other children from the neighborhood. The leader takes care of all the logistics, and kids spend time at exciting new places.
Learning Adventures

A weekly field-trip service that leads small groups of children on explorations of nearby destinations.

Adventure Leaders provide door-to-door service, picking up and dropping off children and parent volunteers from their homes.

Field trips explore a new place each week, from the children’s museum to the zoo to the mountains.

Reminder texts with this week’s trip details help families plan to participate regularly.
When Maria mentioned wanting to sign Jose up for swim lessons, Rosa suggested she use their Learning Dollars to purchase the lessons at a discount at the local Rec Center.
Learning Dollars

A monthly pre-loaded debit card for families to use for educational enhancement supplies or activities.

The card may be used at a wide variety of local stores, organizations, and events. These partners are clearly listed on the back of the card for quick reference.

Partners provide additional discounts and special offers for cardholders.

Parents can sign up for text reminders if their desired purchase isn’t immediately available.
Thank you.

We hope that the ideas found here represent the beginnings of a new educational system for Colorado — one that is designed with and for today’s learners and their families.

The ReSchool team would love to hear your thoughts on these ideas! Please reach out to Amy Anderson or Colleen Broderick at Reschoolcolorado@dkfoundation.org, or call us at (720) 932-1544. Thank you and we look forward to hearing from you!