



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Acknowledgements	2
Our Organizations	3
Our Focus	4
Our Process	5
APS Progress	6
Language Support in APS	7
RISE Colorado.....	7
The African Leadership Group (ALG)	9
Crawford Elementary: A Success Story	10
The Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA)	11
Next Steps.....	12
For Further Thought	14

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Funders:

- The Denver Foundation
- Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation
- Gates Family Foundation
- Rose Community Foundation

School and Community Partners:

- Aurora Central High School
- Aurora Public Schools
- Aurora Public Schools Welcome Center
- Aurora West College Preparatory Academy
- Boston K-8
- Crawford Elementary
- Jamaica Child Development Center
- New Legacy Charter High School
- Park Lane Elementary
- South Middle School
- Vega Collegiate Academy

Research Partners

- Associate Professor of Higher Education at the
Morgridge College of Education
- The Research Hub for Youth Organizing and
Education Policy at University of Colorado

OUR ORGANIZATIONS

As organizations representing families who have immigrated to the United States, or whose first language often is not English or whose primary culture differs from the traditional culture of the country they call home today, we are committed to working with the Aurora Public Schools to ensure these families and their students receive the supports they need to succeed. Groups joining together in this work through the Aurora Education Coalition include:



RISE Colorado works to Educate, Engage, and Empower low-income families and families of color to RISE as change agents for educational equity in the Aurora Public School system. RISE Colorado is founded on the belief that families are crucial to student and school success. Through knowledge building, organizing and leadership development, families will end educational inequity.



The African Leadership Group (ALG) seeks to provide the professional integration of the African Diaspora by connecting cultures, promoting businesses within our communities here in America and abroad, mentoring the youth and encouraging civic engagement. One of ALG's strategic goals are to achieve educational impact for children and youth of the African diaspora by advocating for improved public school systems and accountability, greater pathways to higher education and leadership development from an early age.

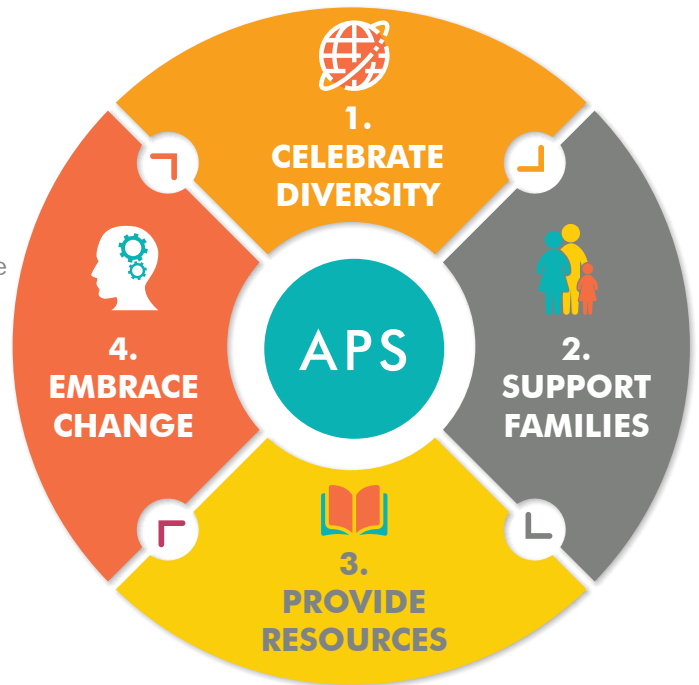


The Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA) endeavors to build the self-efficacy of youth who desire to make change in their communities, pursue social science degrees and social justice careers. The organization encourages and supports disengaged and underserved youth to participate in our communities socially and politically in order to make changes within the community as well as create political and social awareness regarding issues that directly and/or adversely affect our communities.

OUR FOCUS

1. Celebrate Diversity

Aurora Public Schools (APS) is largely acknowledged to be the most diverse in our state in terms of the number and variety of newcomers, those who have immigrated with their families. With 151 languages identified as preferred languages and 131 birth countries represented through those enrolled in APS, that distinction is well placed. While this level of diversity does create challenges for the district, it also creates opportunities for deeper engagement and enhanced opportunities for greater contributions from these diverse families with students in the district.



2. Support Families

APS families are absolutely necessary to driving student success. Students thrive when families invest in their progress and advocate for their rights. Our collective focus is on improving family engagement by removing language and information barriers to their involvement so that all students can achieve. Through our work, we hope to make school communication inclusive of all families – regardless of the language they speak or the culture from which they come.

3. Provide Resources

APS families are interested in learning how the public school system functions, which may be different than their native countries. They need information – in languages they understand – about how to best support their students in school and beyond. When families are empowered with this information in a language that they speak, they can better assist with homework, participate in parent-teacher conferences and advocate for their children. And teachers will have stronger partnerships with families, giving them more resources to support student success.

3. Embrace Change

As Aurora students and parents of Aurora students, we know this work is important and needed. The school district has made steps to support our work including developing a centralized translation service resource and ensuring no student is forced to provide translation services for their classmates. But there is still much progress to be made if we are to reach the educational equity we all seek for every child in the district.

OUR PROCESS

For the purposes of better understanding the information and recommendations contained in this report, it is first important to understand how we define our work. In broad terms, our coalition is dedicated to eliminating the Opportunity Gap. This is the gap that exists when educational inequities create barriers for some students. In our case, these barriers are often linguistic or cultural in nature.

Much has been made of the Achievement Gap for various student groups across the district as well as in districts across the state. While this is a real and persistent problem for our students and many others, our focus on the Opportunity Gap takes precedence for us because without its elimination for our students, little to no progress will be made in improving our students' achievement.

In order to develop this report's findings, our individual organizations used a variety of outreach methods including surveys, phone interviews, in-person interviews and focus group conversations. All information collection occurred within our networks and the communities our organizations serve. Connecting with our networks and communities was intended to improve both the reach of our effort as well as the validity of the information we collected. But it should be noted that this focus is also a limitation of the report in that it does not represent all schools in the entire district.

YOU SHOULD KNOW

Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CLD)

learners span a continuum from recent immigrants to acculturated individuals whose culture background, environment and experiences encompasses more than the mainstream American experience

The ACTION Zone at Aurora Public Schools

is a network of five schools encompassing Boston (P-8), Aurora Central High School (9-12), Crawford Elementary (P-5), Paris Elementary (K-5) and Aurora West College Preparatory Academy (6-12). In 2016, Aurora Public Schools utilized the Colorado Innovation Schools Act to apply for Innovation Status. The status was granted and the Innovation Zone Schools were chosen based on their individual performance metrics and overall structure, as feeders for Aurora Central High School. International Leadership ACTION Zone students are high-achieving international citizens who take action in their communities with support from educators who collaboratively leverage the expertise within each of their schools.

Newcomers are recent immigrant students within the first year of arrival in the U.S. who need additional language and cultural supports to prepare for entry into mainstream classrooms. Newcomer programs are typically designed for students who have little or no English proficiency, and limited or no formal education in their native countries.

APS PROGRESS

YOU SHOULD KNOW

Home Language Survey must be administered to the parents or guardians of all children enrolling in schools in a language the parent or guardian can understand. For example, it must be administered in the home language for parents or guardians who speak a language other than English orally. In most districts, the home language survey has become part of the intake process during registration. The home language survey may take many forms; however, there are three basic questions that are required.

1. Does your child speak a language other than English?
2. Has the child ever spoken a language other than English?
3. Is a language other than English spoken in your household?

Answering YES to any of these questions DOES NOT qualify a student as an English language learner. It does require, however, that the student participate in an approved language proficiency assessment.

English Language Learners (ELL) are students who are unable to communicate fluently or learn effectively in English. They often come from non-English-speaking homes and typically require specialized or modified instruction in both the English language as well as their academic courses.

Refugee resettlement is largely governed by the U.S. Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration which provides aid and sustainable solutions for refugees, victims of conflict and stateless people around the world, through repatriation, local integration and resettlement in the United States. Under the current administration, this program has largely ceased accepting newcomers.

“Every phone call from school is in English so I don’t understand and I don’t know what I have to do so I need every phone call in my language, Karen. I really want to work with teachers and get involved in schools and help my children to be successful in school.”

– Karen-speaking parent of Aurora high school and middle school students from Burma and RISE Parent Leader

While our organizations continue to believe much could and should be done to close the opportunity gap and improve the ability of our students and families to participate more fully and succeed more often across the school district, we are encouraged by recent steps the school district has taken. These steps include:

- Facilitating a School Board Forum to assist our organizations in informing current and potential board members about the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse communities within the school environment
- Allocating resources to create a Centralized Language Services Office aimed at improving translation services district wide
- Approving a districtwide policy prohibiting students from being required to act as interpreters for fellow students as well as their family members or other adults

These efforts are positive steps toward eliminating barriers our communities face. But they are just a start. Our research shows that much more is needed.

LANGUAGE SUPPORTS IN APS



RISE Colorado surveyed 53 Burmese, Karen, Karenni, Nepali and Spanish-speaking families to assess their thoughts on interpretation and translation services in the district.

SURVEY RESULTS



100%

of Spanish-Speaking families received a call from school in Spanish

Only **7%**

of non Spanish-speaking families were called from school in their language

88%

of Spanish-Speaking families received a call from the district in Spanish

Just **2%**

of non Spanish-speaking families were called by the district in their language

Only **8%**

of families received their child's grades in their language

11%

of families received other school-related documents in their language



66%

of families are not aware of how their child is doing in school due to the language barrier

63%

of families don't know how to get an interpreter through the school

Just **28%**

of families have used an interpreter during conferences



"It would mean so much to me and my people in my community if we received letters and phone calls in our own language so we can understand the news and take action if it is required."

– Nepali-speaking grandparent of Aurora high school and middle school students from Bhutan and RISE Parent Leader

LANGUAGE SUPPORTS IN APS



RISE Parent Leaders hosted an APS School Board Forum in January to share about their experiences with interpretation and translation. They also attended an APS School Board meeting in February and spoke during public comment about the need for improved interpretation and translation services. During the January Forum and February School Board meeting, families shared ideas and requests for how to improve interpretation and translation services in the district. Some of those ideas and requests included:

- Allocating resources to create a Centralized Language Services Office aimed at improving translation services district wide
- Recommendation of a districtwide policy prohibiting students from being required to act as interpreters translators for fellow students as well as their family members or other adults
- Cultural awareness training for front office staff, family liaisons, or other staff members that work directly with families provided by the district
- All documents sent at a district level that pertain to academics, health and safety to be translated into the top 10 languages (besides English)

We're incredibly proud to share that all of the above requests were achieved thanks to families' leadership and collaboration with district officials and school board members! Congratulations to families and we applaud them for their incredible courage and hard work to ensure they can support their children's education.

Additionally, RISE Parent Leaders and staff met with APS district officials from the Communications Department monthly to collaborate and share ideas on how to improve interpretation and translation needs in APS. RISE Parent Leaders and staff co-created a document entitled, Parent Interpretation & Translation Protocol, so families can read instructions in their own languages on how to access interpretation and translation services. For families that don't read, RISE Parent Leaders and staff created Language ID Cards to give to front office staff at schools to make it easier to access phone interpretation in the correct language. The APS Communications Department adopted both of these documents and translated them into the top 10 languages (besides English) and incorporated them into cultural responsiveness training for school staff. These trainings will also serve as a way to make sure all schools keep these documents available or families in the front office.

Lastly, RISE Parent Leaders and their work on the CLD campaign was covered twice in Chalkbeat. In both Chalkbeat articles, RISE Parent Leaders were quoted and their experiences were used to illustrate the need for the Centralized Language Services Office and the districtwide policy prohibiting students from being required to act as interpreters for fellow students as well as their family members or other adults.

LANGUAGE SUPPORTS IN APS



The focus of ALG's work in the coalition this year was to learn about the current process for welcoming refugee and immigrant students and families in APS and to recommend improvements moving forward. To do this, ALG conducted a series of surveys, focus groups and interviews with key stakeholders-- families, schools and district staff.

ALG began its work by conducting interviews with 26 elementary, middle and high schools in APS on how they welcome newcomer students. Most schools said they rely heavily on the Welcome Center to acclimate new students and families. The Welcome Center is the first place families go after they register their student at the district's Centralized Admissions office. The Welcome Center then conducts an interview with families to learn about the student's academic background and provides a welcome orientation that includes information about district and school policies, expectations and roles. While the Welcome Center provides a helpful overview of the district for families, it's up to the schools to give a more in-depth, customized orientation for students to feel welcomed and included in the school community. In our phone interviews with schools, we learned that a welcome orientation for newcomer students and families can look very different. While 77 percent of schools reported giving newcomer students a tour of the school, 32 percent of them include parents on the tour. More than half of schools provide the tour in English only and some admitted to using students to translate.

Through interviews with schools and key district personnel, ALG learned that it's critical to think beyond just a welcome orientation in order to familiarize families with the school culture and make them feel like included members of the community. Crawford Elementary School was recommended as a school that's been doing this for several years. ALG visited Crawford to learn more about how they welcome immigrant and refugee families in an ongoing way.

RECOMMENDATIONS BASED ON OUR FINDINGS



Through interviews with schools and key district personnel, ALG learned that it's critical to think beyond just a welcome orientation in order to familiarize families with the school culture and make them feel like included members of the community. Schools need to provide ongoing engagement and offer targeted programs that meet the cultural and language needs of newcomer families and students.



Moving beyond year one, more support help is needed for families and students as they continue their resettlement journey in years two through five as financial resources for organizations that often provide those supports go away.

CRAWFORD ELEMENTARY: A SUCCESS STORY

Through interviews with communities and APS district staff, Crawford Elementary School was recommended to ALG as a school that's invested a significant amount of time and effort around engaging families beyond just a welcome orientation. ALG visited Crawford to learn more about how they welcome immigrant and refugee families in an ongoing way.

Crawford Elementary, a school in the district's innovation zone also known as the ACTION zone, is unquestionably diverse. Nearly 75 percent of its 534 students in preschool through fifth grade are English Language Learners. In the school's halls and classrooms, 90 languages are spoken and 30 percent of its students have refugee status.



The school's success is built around intentional programs that seek to introduce families and students to their new environment and then to intentionally support them in an ongoing way as they transition. These programs include a culturally-based orientation program for international students. The project includes a group of culturally and linguistically diverse elementary school students who have been trained to help new students to the school and to answer common initial school questions. Crawford Leaders will act as "friends" to their newly arrived peers by welcoming them to the school, providing a school tour, clarifying expectations, and explaining rules in their native languages. Other programs include:

- **Crawford Community Center:** Crawford acts as a community hub by offering space to local service providers to better serve the Aurora community.
- **Parents in Action:** Parent leadership groups in five languages are developed and trained each year in community leadership. Together, they identify projects to support the school in reaching their school goals and support families at Crawford.
- **Community Dinners and Family Workshops:** Crawford hosts several events and workshops throughout the year for parents to connect with one another and learn ways to support learning at home. The topics of the parent workshops are identified by parents. Interpretation is provided in seven languages.
- **Storytelling Project:** The family-based storytelling project is for immigrant and refugee students to write stories about their culture to present to peers, Crawford staff and the community.

Annually, Crawford faces challenges to fund these projects as budgets are always tight. In addition, many grants for immigrant and refugee students are only for their first year in the United States. This leaves schools and districts with very few resources to build on engagement opportunities during the second through fifth years of resettlement.

LANGUAGE SUPPORTS IN APS



During the 2017-18 school year, the **Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA)** met weekly with their Youth Council, comprised of middle and high school students in three APS Innovation Schools: Boston K-8, Aurora West College Preparatory Academy and Aurora Central High School.

YAASPA's Youth Council is led by their Youth Organizer who mentors, encourages and helps youth advocate for community and school issues that they find important. Students have a chance to engage with their peers and community members socially and civically. Students engaged at different levels of governance from the school level to the district level. Students engaged their school leadership in order to build the partnerships necessary to cultivate a multilingual peer ambassador program. Students also engaged at the district level by supporting RISE Colorado with testimony in support of the Centralized Language Service office. In order to support the aforementioned civic engagement efforts, the focus of the Youth Council this year was around a polling project to collect student feedback on how multilingual students are being served in their schools. The goal of the polling project was to assess the needs of their peers and with that data, proceed to advocate for necessary changes within their school.



110

TOTAL STUDENTS POLLED

- BOSTON P-8: 50
- AURORA WEST: 30
- AURORA CENTRAL: 30

POLL RESEARCH FINDINGS

Results from the polling project found that 87 percent of students don't think their school does a good job at welcoming incoming, multilingual students. In their written responses, students noted a lack of connection and communication between their multilingual peers and the school staff. After reviewing the survey findings, students came up with the idea of a peer mentorship program for newcomer students to feel welcome and oriented with the school and community. Through conversations with school staff, we then learned that such a program has existed in the past. Due to lack of resources to train student mentors and turnover of those leading the ambassador program (students graduating and teacher turnover), the school was unable to sustain the program more than a few years. For an ambassador program like this to be implemented well and yield long-term success, it's important for schools to consider succession and transition of students. A way to ensure sustainability of a student ambassador program is for schools to identify and optimize resources available to them. For example, there are a few community-based organizations in Aurora that provide resources and training for student mentorship programs that serve refugee and immigrant students.

NEXT STEPS



We will be building an Ambassador Program at Aurora Central and Aurora West. At Aurora Central, we are focused on gathering a list of interested students who would want to mentor students for Fall 2018. At Aurora West, we plan to launch the Pilot Ambassador Program by the end of this school year through partnership with the Assistant Principal.

OUR GOALS:

- 1. Foster relationships between ESL/Immigrant Refugee Students.** Research shows that ELL Ambassador programs are a good way of trying to eliminate boundaries between English speaking students and ELL students. The Ambassador Program would allow native Students to give tours and become assigned buddies through the school year with new ESL/Immigrant Refugee Students. By engaging in welcoming activities and forming friendship through buddies, this would help bridge the separation gap between non ESL/Multilingual Students.
- 2. Incorporate shared participation.** Incorporating shared participation can be done through language socialization opportunities/interest based learning. This would be done by incorporating outside community members who speak the same language as the incoming immigrant and refugee students. The purpose of bringing outside community members would allow students to receive tutoring services and support from those who understand. Community members would also have a chance to bond with students personally.
- 3. Provide positive impact.** Through academic support Ambassador programs create real support in areas such as English development, academic success and increased perception of acceptance at school. This encourages them to interact with diverse groups of people.

*“Everywhere immigrants have
enriched and strengthened the
fabric of American life.”*

~John F. Kennedy



FOR FURTHER THOUGHT

Based on these findings and follow-up research conducted across our three organizations, we would offer the following recommendations for further consideration.



ONGOING TRANSLATION AND INTERPRETATION NEEDS

There is clear and compelling evidence that families are critical partners in a child's education. The greater that engagement, the greater the likelihood of better outcomes and more success. Yet a small percentage of newcomer parents – 8 percent in our research – receive even their child's grades in their language. This lack of interpretation and translation services for critical information related to their child's education joins a gap in other more logistical information such as school closures and updates, information about school events and information about summer offerings, to name just a few. If we truly believe families are allies in successful outcomes for all students, we must do more to engage these families in their native languages.

CHALLENGES WITH USABLE DATA

Current methods being used to identify where newcomer students are coming from fall short. As noted earlier, the Home Language Survey is used for all newcomer students and their families. But questions on the survey do not necessarily assist the district in assessing countries of origin as well as linguistic and cultural needs flowing from those origins. Nor is the survey reported to individual schools in a way that could be useful to them in providing the supports at the family and student level.



IMPROVED SUPPORTS AFTER YEAR ONE

While many supports are available to assist families in their first year of resettlement, our research identifies the need for services in years two through five of the resettlement process. It is essential that during these important years – where families and students are actively continuing to learn and establish patterns to assist them in future success – they continue to receive supports. Currently, they are given little to no help during this critical stage.

FOR FURTHER THOUGHT



COMMUNITY ORGANIZATIONS ARE KEY

With limited district resources, the breadth and depth of supports needed for newcomer families will be difficult to achieve. Well established community organizations already exist in the district that could provide assistance. These organizations, which already enjoy the trust of their communities in other arenas, should be better engaged to partner with the district. At the school level, there are already examples of this engagement and the benefits it brings. But no larger scale effort has been organized to encourage or assist additional schools in this engagement.

STUDENT MENTORSHIP OPPORTUNITIES

Research indicates that an achieved ethnic identity is tied to academic and career self-efficacy. With this in mind, it is critical that multilingual students have institutionalized peer mentoring opportunities such as the peer ambassador program. Programs such as these can serve as a conduit toward increased academic achievement and integration within the schools for multilingual students and families. Drawing on the knowledge that students bring into schools provides a rich opportunity for students to connect and build relationships for academic engagement and success.



“ An individual has not started living until he can rise above the narrow confines of his individualistic concerns to the broader concerns of all humanity.”

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

