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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 9, 2020

Denver Families Need To Be Valued As Partners By Public Schools

*DPS Board Must Elevate Community Responsiveness
As It Writes the Next Chapter on School Performance*

DENVER, Colo. - RootED recently commissioned [a study](#) to look at the ways in which Denver Public School (DPS) families make decisions about their children's education and options for schooling. The researchers - Drs. Antwan Jefferson and Plashan McCune - were interested in knowing whether the information provided to parents by DPS included what families consider valuable or important to their decision-making.

As the Board of Education prepares to deliberate on recommended changes to the School Performance Framework (SPF) this week, [the research](#) is helpful for understanding more broadly the guidance that is useful to families, including, but not limited to, the SPF.

The report [found](#) that families rely upon a range of information sources for school choice, including from the district and individual schools but also from personal experience and their community. The research also found families find the information DPS provides is wanting. Families want to know more. What is the school like? How does it work? And how does it reflect our community context?

Report Findings

Academic Success Matters: Parents and families want their children to thrive academically. The question for parents throughout Denver is how to know if their child is doing well academically and what are the inputs that lead to academic success. Those inputs vary by student and family; there is a difference of opinion about what defines academic success. Academic preparation must happen in school, but not at the exclusion of other important indicators. Academic rigor and whole child supports are mutually reinforcing.

Families use a variety of sources of information in making school decisions: Community context and family needs are two driving factors of school decisions. Families rely on sources they trust to fill in the gaps of context not provided by the district or schools. Bottom line, parents need additional context before making a decision on where to send their kids to school.

RootED Takeaways

Parents need to be valued as partners: To be an effective partner you need quality communication channels and trust. To build relationships, families need to know who it is they will be partnering with and to whom they will be entrusting their child/ren. Miscommunication and misinterpretation are inevitable, as is uncertainty about school quality, when there are not quality communication channels between families and schools. This seems to be something so foundational that it is hard to understand why we do not have this information widely available already. **RootED will support the district implementation of the [Reimagine SPF Committee's recommendations numbers 2 and 3](#)**, to design a dashboard providing this information and to focus on accountability for continuous improvement around academics, whole child and school culture and climate. The education system cannot claim to serve individual needs when it predetermines those needs without listening to student voices nor the voices of their families and communities.

Community responsiveness is a foundational pillar to quality education: Families need trusted sources of information. Often those trusted sources are those who families feel represent them. The district is 75%+ students of color. Community organizations of color who can fill this gap are [historically underfunded and have less flexibility in their funding](#). As funders in the education sector, it is our responsibility to shift practices if we hope to find the solutions that will lead to an equitable educational system. *RootED will prioritize its funding to fill this gap.*

We need new ideas and structures devoid of entrenched ideologies that do not have students and families at the center of decision making. For too long the conversations about progress have been clouded by political interests and a lack of direct community voice. Equity and community-driven change cannot be accomplished if institutions on all sides seek a rubber stamp, or token approval, rather than true co-creation. *RootED will continue and improve investments to center and amplify voices directly from communities throughout Denver and work to implement structures that serve those communicated needs.*

We need a shared definition of quality: There is not consensus throughout the district on what a quality education means. Therefore the debate around how we achieve this becomes futile. RootED has a [working draft](#) of what quality means. *We will partner and work directly with families in Denver as well as community organizations with representative leadership to try and build a working definition of quality that will guide our investments.*

About RootED

RootED works to ensure all students in Denver have access to public schools that provide academic rigor and authentically partner with and are responsive to the students, families and communities they serve. We invest in autonomous schools and community-driven, community-led work to promote equity, quality, opportunity and accountability. RootED is passionately committed to ensuring every child has the opportunity and support to achieve success in school, college and their chosen career. To learn more, visit <https://rootedenver.org/>.

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