

The inspiration for [Proposition 119](#), which would create the Learning Enrichment and Academic Progress Program (LEAP) came, in large part, from the human-centered design work that [RESCHOOL](#), a Colorado-based education nonprofit, has been doing for the past seven years in partnership with families and community-based organizations.

## The Origins of RESCHOOL's Work and How it Evolved

**2014:** RESCHOOL partners with the housing authority in Boulder (Boulder Housing Partners) to learn *from* residents about their experiences navigating their children's learning needs. We wanted to understand directly from parents what was working for them, what questions they grappled with regularly, what opportunities they sought after, and what challenges they faced. Following this shadowing experience (we lived a day in the life of a number of families over the course of two weeks), we started to see shared interests, ideas, and trends across families and partnered with the families and a handful of education experts from the community to brainstorm solutions to address these challenges and/or open up new opportunities. [A New Vision of Early Learners](#) shares more details about this initial engagement and the concepts stemming from it.

### Key Learnings and Work Driven by this Experience

**Learning Dollars:** Activities outside of school can be very expensive and programming that fits many families' and/or children's unique needs isn't always the programming that is free. The financial barrier of accessing out of school programming disproportionately affects children from lower income households. Providing family-directed [learning dollars](#) would narrow this opportunity gap.

**Learning Happens Everywhere:** Kids spend 80% of their waking hours outside of school, yet parents face difficulties finding information easily about the learning opportunities that exist for children during this time. Working parents have the added challenge of needing to find learning providers that offer programming that aligns with their work schedules, in addition to other factors. It can be difficult and time-consuming to sift through all the information, web sites, etc. so RESCHOOL has found ways to make this process easier, including the most recent resource that we created, DISCOVER Learning: [a tool](#) where parents can quickly identify local organizations and programs that fit their needs and values as well as their children's interests.

**Learner Advocates:** Navigating learning for your child is complex, especially for parents with multiple jobs or rigid work schedules or whose children are transitioning to a new school, have learning challenges, different abilities, or educational interests and aspirations that aren't being met in school. A [learner advocate](#) can support families in navigating these challenges and connect them to opportunities and resources that align with their needs.

## The Evolution of Learning Dollars and the Supports Needed to Make it Accessible

Evolution of Learning Dollars	Evolution of Supports Needed to Make Learning Dollars Accessible
<p><b>2015:</b> RESCHOOL raised \$3,500 in learning dollars reaching 7 families (20 young people) through Boulder Housing Partners. Families received pre-loaded debit cards to spend on learning for their children. <a href="#">Opportunity to Learn</a> tells the story of this experience in greater detail.</p> <p><i>It becomes clear to RESCHOOL that in order to provide equitable access to learning dollars, services like the Learner Advocate Network and tools to discover what programming is available must be provided alongside it.</i></p> <p><i>This only became more apparent in the years to come.</i></p>	<p><b>2015:</b> Parents we partnered with through Boulder Housing Partners are matched with a learner advocate from their community (a fellow parent who lived in the community) to support them in navigating questions they have about their children's learning, including how to spend their learning dollars.</p> <p>RESCHOOL responds to feedback that it is difficult to know what opportunities are available outside of school by creating a central Excel document with this information and shares it with Boulder Housing Partner Families as it aligns with their needs and interests. RESCHOOL creates a paper picture booklet that offers ideas about how learning dollars could be used.</p>
<p><b>2017-2021:</b> RESCHOOL raises \$25,000 in learning dollars through RESCHOOL's partnership with Saint Joseph Hospital and Lutheran Medical Center where RESCHOOL provided the <a href="#">Learner Advocate Network (LAN)</a> as a benefit for working parents employed by the two hospitals. In this learning dollars model, families told their advocate how they wanted to use their learning dollars and their advocate purchased activities and resources on behalf of families.</p> <p>In addition to distributing learning dollars directly to families, RESCHOOL brokered a variety of partnerships with learning providers in the Denver area that unlocked additional scholarship dollars for families. Large providers like the <a href="#">Denver Center for Performing Arts</a> and <a href="#">Avid4Adventure</a> have camps that fill up fast, often before the scholarship slots have been claimed, leaving thousands of dollars in scholarships unused. These providers worked with RESCHOOL to make their programming more accessible by holding scholarship slots for families working with RESCHOOL. Other local providers like</p>	<p><b>2017:</b> RESCHOOL launches its employer-anchored <a href="#">Learner Advocate Network (LAN)</a>. This approach came from our conversations with families who shared that opportunities to meet about their children's learning with a teacher or learning provider were difficult to attend given their work schedules. In this model, meet with parents at their workplace, on their breaks and when it is convenient for them. Parents talk to advocates about their children's interests, how and when they need their kids in activities with supervision so they can work, and what barriers their children encounter in school. The need for financial resources to meet these needs consistently surfaces, hence the continued need for learning dollars.</p> <p>RESCHOOL partners with the Clark Fox Family Foundation to launch Blueprint4SummerCO, a free, mobile-friendly tool that puts all summer activities in one place to make it easier for families to learn what is available to them. This was building off of</p>

<p><a href="#">Craftsman and Apprentice</a>, <a href="#">Bladium</a> and the <a href="#">Art Garage</a> provided discounted rates to their programming for RESCHOOL families. The DCPA, Art Garage and others also extended this opportunity to a buddy the child could bring so they felt more comfortable in an environment that didn't always reflect their identity. These partnerships unlocked an additional \$10,000 for families participating in the LAN.</p>	<p>the need to provide information and easy ways to look for learning experiences over summer break.</p> <p><b>2019:</b> The LAN expands to another hospital in the SCL Health Network, Lutheran Medical Center, proving to be an important benefit to parents, especially those earning low-wages and whose primary language is Spanish. The LAN model evolves from only being a service families engage in frequently over a long period of time to one that families can also engage in on an as-needed basis. Advocates work with over 50 families deeply in 2019 and have an additional 1,700 conversations with hospital staff, volunteers and patients about children's learning.</p> <p>Blueprint4SummerCO highlights 115 learning provider organizations across 90 zip codes with programming in the arts, outdoors, sports, academic, STEM and cooking</p>
<p><b>2020:</b> RESCHOOL partners with seven other organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic to launch learning dollars through the <a href="#">Education Innovation Fund</a>, distributing \$24,000 to 71 families (160 youth) across Colorado. Funds were given directly to families based on the method they chose and were used to support at-home and online opportunities while in-person programming was largely unavailable.</p>	<p><b>2020:</b> The LAN moves to a virtual model in response to COVID-19. Though we hadn't planned on this shift, it made us think creatively about how to get resources to parents. As a result, we create and send more resources to all 1,000 parents working at the two hospitals.</p> <p>RESCHOOL adapts Blueprint4SummerCO to include online and at-home programming to respond to the innovative ways learning providers continued to provide programming during the pandemic. Because RESCHOOL was licensing Blueprint, there were limitations on what we could change. As a result, we began developing a new tool, <a href="#">DISCOVER Learning</a>, that would take the place of Blueprint. DISCOVER reflected the feedback we'd received over the years from families and providers and captured the programming available any time young people weren't in school, not just during the summer. It also included online and at-home options, like grab and go kits, and has a special focus on uplifting local community-led providers. This expands our thinking about what the learning</p>

	<p>provider landscape includes and where learning dollars are needed.</p>
<p><b>2021:</b> RESCHOOL raises \$400,000 in learning dollars to launch the Learning Dollars Initiative, reaching 350 families (800 young people) in urban, suburban and rural areas across Colorado. Funds were deposited into a family learning account and families were able to choose how to use the funds in their learning accounts to purchase resources and experiences from a variety of providers listed on the learning account platform.</p>	<p><b>2021:</b> RESCHOOL builds out its “advocate cloud” concept that there are a variety of advocates in a families’ life that support them in navigating learning. While they sometimes need a trusted advocate with a background in education or specific expertise about a specific topic, other times they lean into their natural networks and the expertise of their community. All of these advocates can share knowledge with each other about how to apply for and spend learning dollars, for example. The cloud gets after RESCHOOL’s desire to build out an advocate model where one single person is not expected to know everything as that is unrealistic and unsustainable. This model is in direct contrast to other advocate models (teacher, social worker) which causes significant burnout.</p> <p>DISCOVER learning launches in Spanish and RESCHOOL positions it as a tool for families to explore their options prior to spending learning dollars.</p>

Each time RESCHOOL ran a learning dollars fund, it centered around families directing the funds and making the process accessible. The design was rooted in feedback we’d received from families about previous funds. Each method for distributing funds came with benefits and challenges. Testing these methods, as well as the supports that came alongside the learning dollars for families, is important in understanding what type of mechanism would work for families should learning dollars be available on a large scale as it would be through LEAP.

## Positive Outcomes of Learning Dollars for Families

Families have consistently shared over the years how much joy learning dollars has brought to their children. Parents with multiple children often comment on how impactful it was to be able to direct dollars toward different experiences and resources for each of their children, based on their interests and needs. We hear time and again that learning dollars opened opportunities and resources that were previously unobtainable. Without prompting by RESCHOOL, this process got families together, talking about how to use the funds and having conversations about learning. To illustrate one example of this, we’ll lift a quote from a mom that had four children participate in the

Learning Dollars Initiative in 2021. She said, "This has changed so much for us, with such a small amount of money. Each kid has their own personality, and we sat down and decided what they really wanted to do. You could see it in his eyes that he thought we were going to shoot it down, because normally that would be the case. But this time, we were able to say yes."

Learning dollars have sparked connection, growth, exploration, and excitement for youth and families, especially during the pandemic.

RESCHOOL operates under the guiding belief that parents and young people know what they need and want, and that our work is about building a system that supports them in accessing that learning. This spirit, along with RESCHOOL's learnings from testing the concept of learning dollars over the last seven years, played a large part in informing LEAP.