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Former DPS Principal Launches New Micro School in Denver

Kyle Gamba and a team of K-8 educators open “La Luz” to empower middle school students with an innovative and responsive learning approach.

(Denver, CO) August 26, 2021: When asking families what they want from a middle school, Dr. Kyle Gamba has never heard the answer of “excellent test scores.” Families have shared that they want a middle school that helps their child become who they want to be, and to be a good person. Students want fun, engaging ways of learning, good friends, and to be ready for high school.

After 10 years of leading schools across Colorado and Mexico, Gamba took this feedback to heart. On Tuesday August 24, 2021, [La Luz](#), a micro “unschool,” opened its doors. The middle school empowers students with a radical education unlike anything they have experienced. Through highly-engaging, student-driven, community-based learning, students are developing the skills, mindsets, and inspiration to become changemakers who improve the world.

What does this look like, in real life? At La Luz, learning principles and approaches involve hands-on experiences that promote community building, social emotional education, self awareness, and civic and environmental engagement. An example might be a one-week camping trip where students work on developing their character or a six-week project at the Denver Zoo focused on conservation.

La Luz was founded by Dr. [Kyle Gamba](#), a bilingual educator and school leader who previously served as a school principal at [Denver Public Schools](#). These experiences taught him that educational inequity is not just about gaps in academic performance - it is also about gaps in

access to deep relationships, shared experiences, and self discovery. In the summer of 2020, deep in the middle of a global pandemic, Kyle found himself wondering: how will we come through this shared traumatic experience? Will we, as educators, return to a state of “normal” that perpetuated inequities, or might we radically and dramatically reimagine normal?

These questions inspired Kyle to imagine La Luz, which launched this week with its first class of 15 students and 3 educators, two of whom were interviewed and hired over the summer by the families of the students. Educational counselor, Jubitza Figueroa, grew up in North Carolina as the daughter of Honduran and Salvadoran immigrants, and proudly intertwines her identities in everything she does. Lead educator, Alfredo Cervantes, was raised in southwest Denver and joined La Luz after serving as a middle school science teacher at [GALS](#).

“I am from the community that La Luz is serving,” said Cervantes. “Both Jubitza and I are very proud of who we are, in our culture, and being Latinx. Putting together the team was very intentional and highlights some of the downfalls that other schools face that we are avoiding. Many other Denver schools' upper echelons of educators and administration are white. How are the kids supposed to strive for leadership roles if they can't see themselves in those positions? At La Luz, we are changing that.”

The parents at La Luz are eager to be a part of something unique. “We choose La Luz because it is a different type of school that gives students a chance to come into themselves,” said Ivone Gutierrez, a La Luz parent. “With the activities that La Luz students are involved in, it'll give them a chance to be more independent and responsible. I'm very excited to see how the year goes!”

During its first year of operations, La Luz has intentionally only designed the first 18 weeks of programming. La Luz works directly with students and families to determine the focus of the coursework, and parents have already requested that students spend time learning about financial literacy and health and nutrition. For this reason, the school has already begun looking for community partnerships that can meet this need.

“Education is a different place than it was a hundred years ago!” shared Gamba. “Being small and flexible, co-creating authentic learning experiences with our families and actually learning in the community feels like the antidote to some very outdated practices in education. We need to do school differently.”

La Luz is seeking necessary funding, volunteers, and community partners to provide the best possible learning experience for students during its inaugural year. The best way to create opportunities for La Luz students is to make a contribution directly on La Luz's [website](#). Those interested in making a major contribution are encouraged to contact Kyle Gamba at kyle@laluzeducation.org. Media outlets interested in visiting the La Luz community should contact Margie Thirlby at 206.992.5512.

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About La Luz Education: La Luz is a micro “unschool” that empowers middle school students in Southwest Denver with a radical education unlike anything they have experienced. It is time for us to HUMAN BETTER: to take action to ensure we live in a society that is truly just for all, as well as caring about our planet. La Luz believes that through authentic learning experiences in the community students will learn about themselves, others, their community and the planet. Highly-engaging, student-driven, community-based learning will lead to the optimal middle school experience. Learn more at laluzeducation.org.