

2024

ANNUAL REPORT



# Keeping Kids at The Heart of All We Do



Every student deserves access to a high-quality education.



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**MISSION** We fight for education justice and opportunities for Indianapolis students by training courageous community leaders, holding them accountable for their policy decisions, and organizing our community to improve our public schools.

**VISION** We believe all children deserve an excellent education that prepares them for graduation and beyond.



# Letter From Our CEO

Dear Friends,

My passion for revitalizing public education began at home. As a child, I watched my parents make sacrifices to ensure I had a high-quality education. As a mother of three, I'm passionate about supporting my own children — and the children in our community — in the same way. That's why I founded RISE INDY in 2019.

When I reflect on our work in 2024, two of our RISE INDY values come to mind: passion and accountability. Our team is passionate about our work; we're also driven by results. We're parents, community leaders and public-school graduates, and we're committed to cultivating an educational environment that sets kids up for success. We believe education is the vehicle to build a strong and prosperous Indianapolis. At RISE INDY, we're uniquely positioned to champion education by enlisting the full community to prioritize the success of public schools and improve student outcomes.

Last March, when RISE INDY testified at the Indiana Senate Chambers in support of the "Every Child Learns to Read" bill (Senate Enrolled Act 1), I shared my daughter Nadia's story — how it took time and resources to get her reading at grade level. That's something I, too, navigated as a child. As I spoke, I realized that, although at RISE INDY we focus on making a measurable impact, the work we do is personal. It's about Nadia and children like her — real kids, real families and real communities.

This annual report presents our 2024 outcomes, including insights about the 575 teachers we surveyed for our Teacher Report, the 5,000+ parents we engaged in our mission, the 14,755 students who will benefit from the successful literacy education bill we supported and the record-setting number of donors who contributed to our work last year.

I'm so grateful for the commitment provided by this community — and for yours. At RISE INDY, we get to do a lot, and we have a singular focus: keeping the needs of children at the heart of all we do. Thank you for joining us. Our efforts are changing lives.

Jasmin Shaheed-Young  
President and CEO, RISE INDY



# How We Help Kids

RISE INDY is a local nonprofit organization committed to making sure every student is prepared for college or career. We believe all schools need funding and all kids need access to quality schools. That's why we keep students at the center of all we do as we collaborate with schools, families and the community to improve student outcomes.

The chart at the right shows how we make an impact: through policy to increase resources, elections to support student-centered candidates and programming to engage people and schools. Our team supports students, leaders and schools in Indianapolis, Marion County and across Indiana.

## What RISE INDY Does

**Increase resources** for schools and students via elections, policy and programs so every child is prepared for college or career.

**Give every student access** to a high-quality school by working at the intersection of education and public policy.

**Lead multigenerational literacy programming** that helps parents read alongside their children at home and become full-time employees in schools.

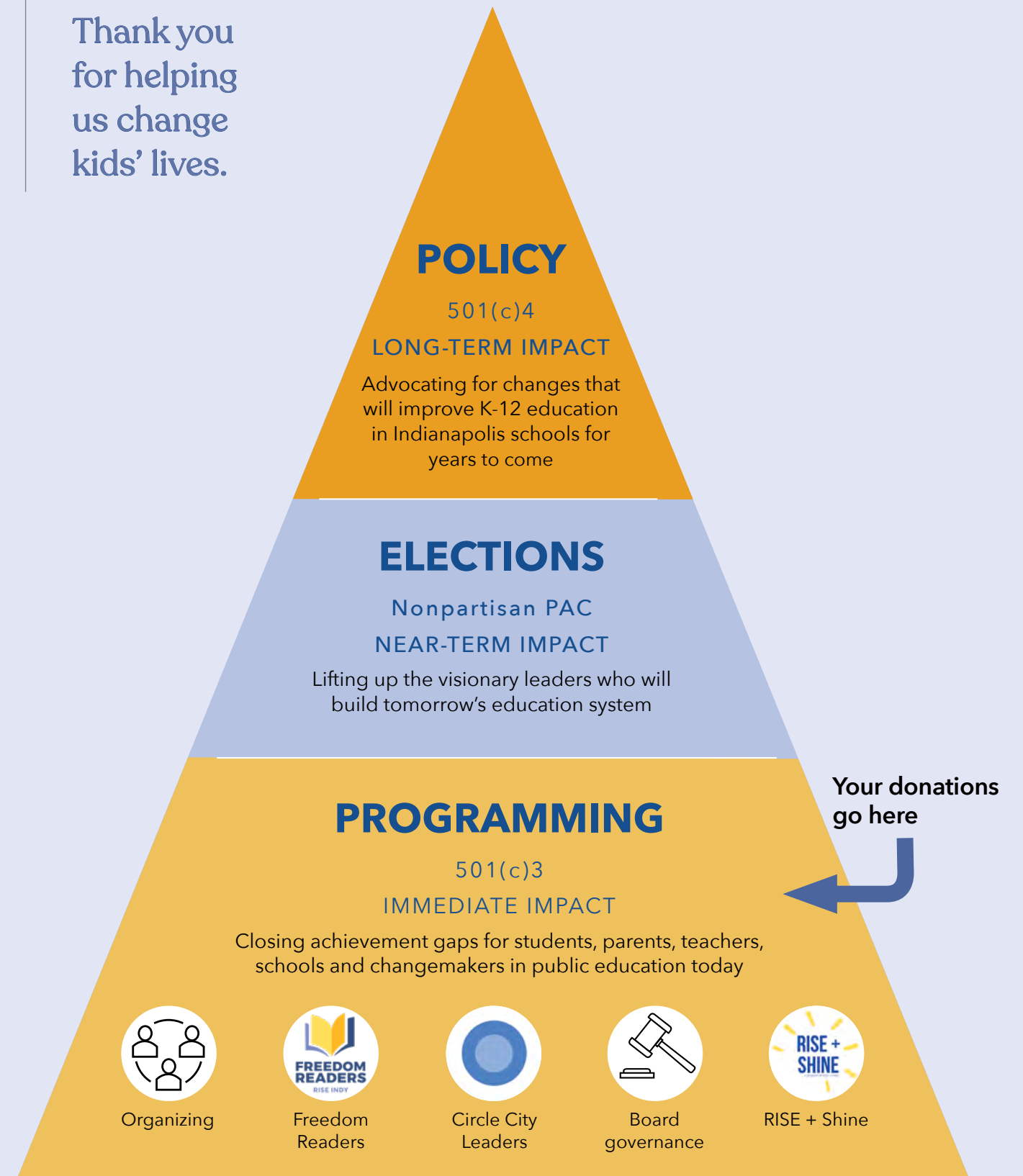
**Amplify community voice** and advance educational opportunity for students by shaping policy and supporting schools.

**Transform education systems** so all students — regardless of background — can thrive in college, career and life.

**Activate local leaders** to improve outcomes for students in public schools.



Thank you for helping us change kids' lives.



# Why We Need RISE INDY

RISE INDY exists to build education champions who advocate for increased resources in schools, ensuring that graduates are better prepared for college, career and life. Here are answers to some common questions about our work and impact.

**Is there an achievement gap in Indianapolis schools?** Yes, there is. Disparities in education outcomes have been an issue for decades. In Marion County public schools, 71% of students in grades 3-8 read below grade level.

**Why aren't students performing?** There are many reasons: lack of resources, social determinants of health and systems that require educators to go beyond teaching and carry significant responsibilities with minimal support.

**How does RISE INDY help?** By engaging, educating and organizing a diverse group of local residents to improve public schools and student outcomes. We work with people at both the grassroots and the grasstops level — from parents and teachers in the community to influential leaders and those close to them. This approach gives us a unique opportunity

to identify issues, find solutions and create sustainable change by building programs that engage the community, training bold leaders and organizing our network to hold elected officials accountable for their promises to create student-centered policies that improve conditions for students and teachers.

**Is RISE INDY nonpartisan?** Yes. We focus on what's best for *all* students and families, regardless of political affiliation. Our advocacy is driven by one simple question: Does this policy help all students succeed?

**How does RISE INDY measure impact?** We measure the impact of our work by tracking the number of students served by our programming and advocacy, resources provided to kids as a result of our work and people engaged with us to improve student outcomes. (See "By the Numbers" on page 8 for 2024 metrics.)

**How is RISE INDY funded?** We're grateful for support from a variety of sources — hundreds of local individual donors, foundations and businesses. To make a gift or pledge, contact [give@riseindy.org](mailto:give@riseindy.org) or visit [riseindy.org/donate](https://riseindy.org/donate).

"We believe education is the vehicle to build a strong and prosperous Indianapolis. We're uniquely positioned to champion education by enlisting the full community to prioritize the success of public schools and improve student outcomes."

JASMIN SHAHEED-YOUNG  
President and CEO, RISE INDY

# 59%

Indiana students in grades 3-8 who didn't pass the English language arts portion of the 2024 ILEARN exam



# 71%

Marion County students in grades 3-8 who didn't pass the English language arts portion of the 2024 ILEARN exam

Source, both stats: Indiana Department of Education, 2024



# Programs with Purpose



## Freedom Readers

◀ Confidence starts at home. Freedom Readers equips parents and caregivers with literacy tools that build student skills, knowledge and confidence. Parents receive training in science of reading principles to connect classroom learning to home to help every reader, no matter what level, grow toward literacy mastery.

## Freedom Readers Fellowship

▶ Learning creates positivity across generations. Upon completion of this 12-week program, parents and caregivers can qualify for school-based employment — unlocking economic opportunity for their families and helping struggling readers achieve success in the classroom.



## Circle City Leaders

▶ Education transformation takes resources and voices at all levels. This initiative empowers individuals to confidently advocate for change by learning the foundational principles of effective campaigning. Whether they serve on elected or education boards, CCL alumni champion policy to get more resources to students, from additional tutoring hours for kids below grade level to increased funding for our schools.



## Board Governance Training

◀ From the classroom to the boardroom: We train individuals to effectively alleviate critical education issues and confidently serve on nonprofit and public boards. We offer research, data and tools for financial oversight and advisement so students have representation and leaders who prioritize their success.



## RISE + Shine

▲ Conversation drives change. Open to all, this speaker series builds connection and invites individuals into critical conversations shaping the future of education. Attendees learn about the most pressing issues and disparities in our education system and share solutions to ensure every kid is successful.

Alayna Wilkening/Mirror Indy (both photos)



Diana Hernandez, shown with her children outside of their Speedway home, said Freedom Readers workshops empowered her to help her kids learn and succeed.

# Free to Read

Diana Hernandez, a dedicated mother of three, has seen the difference the Freedom Readers program makes. Participating in the program, she learned how to interpret test scores and found reading exercises she could do with her children at home with the help of an English-to-Spanish translator. Since then, she has embraced the program's daily reading routines and interactive techniques with all three of her children.

Hernandez also plays games with her kids and practices interactive reading. She learned those techniques through RISE INDY's Freedom Readers program, which she said has empowered her to get more involved with her kids' school and made a difference in her kids' relationship with reading.



Diana's daughter Amy Alfonseca earned the President's Award for Educational Achievement at her dual-language school.

**“Our children only need a little push. When they see that we’re involved in their education, it can get them anywhere they want to go.”**

DIANA HERNANDEZ,  
Freedom Readers participant

Regardless of where they are, Hernandez makes sure her kids read 45 minutes a day. If she can't read with them, she asks them questions about what they've read. At the end of the school year, her daughter, Amy Alfonseca, received the President's Award for Educational Achievement at her dual-language school, Global Preparatory Academy.

Hernandez is one of about 324 parents who have seen their children tackle more challenging books and develop a deeper love for reading. RISE INDY and Freedom Readers empower families with the tools to support their children's literacy at home, fostering a love for reading that extends beyond school.

Source: Carley Lanich, "Indy group helps parents understand how kids learn to read," Mirror Indy, July 11, 2024

# 2024 Highlights

## Transforming Policy

### Five Legislative Wins for K-12 Education

► In 2024, RISE INDY supported five key bills to improve K-12 education outcomes in Indiana. **Senate Enrolled Act 1** strengthens early literacy by requiring summer school and in-school high-dosage tutoring for second and third graders not reading on grade level. RISE INDY successfully advocated for multiple amendments, including allowing trained tutors — not just teachers — to staff summer school. **Senate Enrolled Act 2** expanded eligibility for early pre-kindergarten. **Senate Enrolled Act 6** created a process to identify and support students in grades 4-8 at risk of not being proficient in reading. **House Enrolled Act 1042** helps address Indiana’s teacher shortage. **House Enrolled Act 1243** established requirements and grants for literacy coaches.

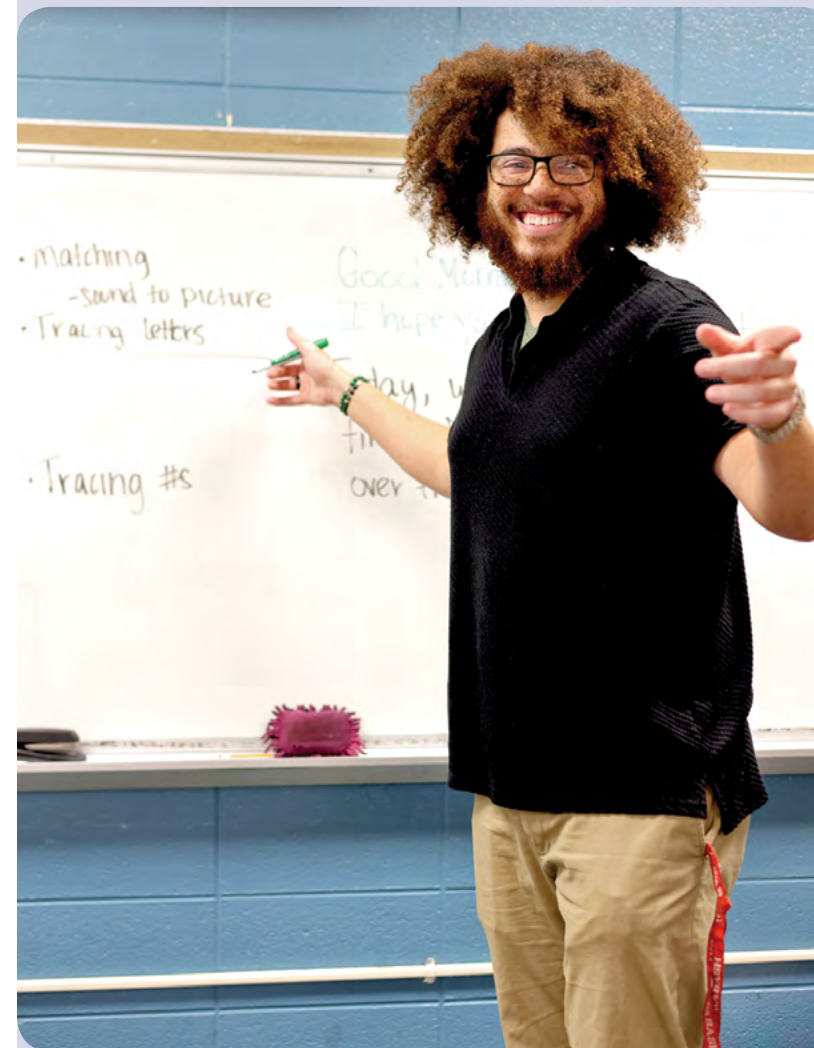


### A Place for Everyone in the Education Conversation

◀ In January 2024, we brought together over 75 students, parents and educators at our annual Statehouse Day, where we dove into the legislative process and spoke with our legislators. Statehouse Day coincided with the Senate Committee on Education and Career Development meeting.

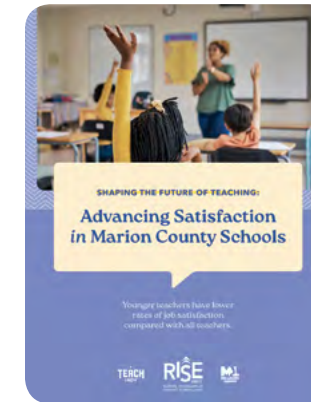
## Uplifting Teachers

Throughout the year, we raised awareness about issues such as raising teachers’ take-home pay and providing benefits to enhance work-life balance. We listened to educators to inform our 2025 legislative agenda, reinforcing our focus on engaging the full community in improving student outcomes.



### Supporting Our Teacher Pipeline

RISE advocated for teachers through House Enrolled Act 1042 to help address the state’s teacher shortage by providing a pathway to attract and retain educators: allocating funds for transition-to-teaching scholarships.



◀ In partnership with MelantED Leaders and Teach Indy, we published a report to illuminate teacher voices and shared challenges and recommendations to support our educators. The **report** is based on a countywide teacher survey.

## Engaging Parents and Students

▼ In May, we hosted our first Freedom Readers Rhythm and Read Workshop, where parents learned a new way to bond with their children through reading and music.



## Investing in Future Leaders

► In 2024, our Circle City Leaders alumni (pictured here at our RISE as One gathering) served on boards and in elected positions that impacted **57,631** Indianapolis students.



▲ In March, we hosted Dr. Howard Fuller, a longtime civil rights advocate and champion for equitable education, at our **RISE as One Educational Summit**.

## Championing Equitable Education



### Bringing Leaders and the Community Together

▲ In April, local leaders engaged in open discussion with students from our partner schools BELIEVE Circle City High School and Purdue Polytechnic High Schools. Pictured left to right are Councilman Keith Graves, Senator Andrea Hunley and Representative Blake Johnson.



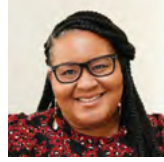
▲ The RISE team and the IPS Schools team, which includes Superintendent Dr. Aleesia Johnson and Chief Learning Officer Lela Simmons (both at center, in leather jacket and scarf), took a trip to Oakland, Calif., in February to learn about the success of an in-school high-dosage tutoring program. Their visit helped build the Freedom Readers Fellowship.

▼ We wrapped up the year announcing our inaugural cohort of Freedom Readers Fellows.



# Our Visionary Leaders

RISE INDY's board of directors is comprised of leaders from Indianapolis and beyond who support our work to engage, educate and organize our community to build an equitable education system. Dr. Rose Mays and Marianne Glick served on the board in 2024.



**Kimberly Neal-Brannum**  
Board Chair, RISE INDY  
Founder, BELIEVE Schools  
Indianapolis



**Justin Christian**  
President and CEO  
BCforward



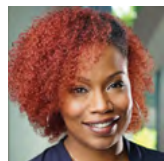
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Administrative Officer  
Indy Chamber



**Jasmin Shaheed-Young**  
Founder and CEO  
RISE INDY



**Bill Shrewsberry**  
Founder  
Shrewsberry & Associates

“True educational reform stems from understanding the unique challenges of a community and by mobilizing that community to become part of the solution. It is this ethos that sets RISE INDY apart.”

JUSTIN CHRISTIAN  
President and CEO, BCforward  
RISE INDY Donor and Board Member

# Our Generous Donors

Thanks to the unwavering support of our donors, we're able to drive meaningful change where it matters most. This list represents the 2024 RISE INDY donors.

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Let Them Talk  
Lumina Foundation  
Old National Bank  
The Mind Trust

# Ways to Get Involved



## Be a Changemaker

As a leader in our community, you're already making Indianapolis stronger. We need your engagement to create an education system that produces, attracts and retains world-class talent. Learn more about RISE INDY's Circle City Leaders and how to join our next cohort at [riseindy.org/circle-city-leaders](https://riseindy.org/circle-city-leaders).



## Join a Coalition

RISE INDY's community coalitions are groups of mission-driven community members who are determined to build sustainable change. To join a coalition for students, parents, teachers, school leaders, policymakers or education champions, fill out the form at [riseunited.org/rise-coalitions](https://riseunited.org/rise-coalitions).



## Make a Donation

Your support drives the impact we deliver — reaching farther and deeper every day. Financial contributions go directly to RISE INDY programs such as the RISE + Shine speaker series, Circle City Leaders, the Freedom Readers parent education program and the Freedom Readers fellowship. To make a gift, go to [riseindy.org/donate](https://riseindy.org/donate).



## Stay Informed

To stay informed and learn more about education issues in the Indianapolis community, subscribe to RISE INDY news updates on our website, [riseindy.org](https://riseindy.org).



## Vote Down Ballot

Make a difference in K-12 education by educating yourself on who's running in local school board races and supporting candidates who have a students-first agenda. Then vote for school board candidates you support, and tell others to do the same.



## Connect On Social

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-  [@riseindy](https://facebook.com/riseindy)
-  [@rise\\_indy](https://instagram.com/rise_indy)
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When we  
put **students**  
at the center,  
we all rise  
**together.**

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