

40 YEAR ANNIVERSARY



Leadership Class of 2023-24



40 YEAR ANNIVERSARY

Introduction

In 10 short months, Leadership Aurora class members experience an intensive mountain retreat, followed by monthly immersion in the best Aurora has to offer: medical facilities, educational institutions, nonprofit organizations, police and fire facilities, the military, city management, and more. The class also selects, plans, and implements projects

designed to give back to the community.

The Aurora Chamber of Commerce has supported the development of community leaders through the Leadership Aurora program for 40 years, and while much has changed, the program continues to incorporate a laser focus on meeting the city's need for strong, skilled, and participatory leadership. The program is funded by The Chamber, in-kind donations, and class tuition. The Leadership Aurora Board steers the program, develops its curriculum, and oversees its success.

Ask a member of this year's class or a graduate of the program about their experience - you will be inspired!



Acknowledgements

The Leadership Aurora class of 2024 acknowledges the many individuals and businesses that provide invaluable support to make this one of the most outstanding leadership programs in the United States.

Our appreciation goes to the guest speakers and personnel who took us behind the scenes of organizations throughout the city. Gratitude is also extended to the Leadership Aurora Board, Program Director Rene Simard, Assistant Director Mitzi Schindler, and the Aurora Chamber of Commerce – for collectively cultivating this top-notch program.

As we graduate, we look forward to meeting the individuals who will join us as Leadership Aurora alumni in the years ahead. Together, we will take Aurora confidently into the future.





Yvonne Valdez

Leadership Aurora
Board Chair
Yvonne Valdez,
Citywide Banks

In honor of this

celebration of 40 years of Leadership Aurora, I want to congratulate the class of 2024 for being a part of this milestone anniversary, and for their positive affect as a contributor to the story of Leadership Aurora in the community.

When I met each of you in Breckenridge, I could sense the nervousness of the unknown. I told you then, that by the end of that weekend, you will have created unexpected bonds - and will go on to have incredible experiences - that are unique to this program.

As I expected, this class of exceptional leaders can boast a successful year, to include their class project of remodeling the break room of the Aurora Mental Health & Recovery Crisis Center - along with monthly mini projects of gathering socks, coats, gloves, hats, toiletries, and canned goods for organizations serving our community.

It has been my honor to serve as the board chair for the class of 2024. I met amazing people and have had numerous heartwarming and hilarious experiences. It has also been my privilege to work with an amazing board for the past six years and want to thank each of them for all their hard work and dedication to ensuring each class has the best experience possible. I would especially like to thank Past Chair Alan Antolak and Incoming Chair John Wolfkill, for all their support throughout the year. As the board

Chair's Letter

for this impactful program, we could not do it without everyone's commitment. I also want to thank Rene Simard, Mitzi Schindler, and the entire Chamber staff for all their support and guidance to keep us organized and on point.

I joined the Leadership Aurora board after my graduation in 2018, or as our class said, Class of 20-GR18! I was motivated to join the board so I could continue sharing the Leadership Aurora experience with the classes that came after me.

As with my class, I look forward to seeing this class continue to serve our community, and again want to thank each of you for allowing me to serve as the board chair for this special 40th anniversary year!

Yvonne Valdez, Citywide Banks/HTLF



CLASS OF
2024

Hello to my classmates of the 40th anniversary class of Leadership Aurora – Class of 2024!

First, thank you for giving me the opportunity to serve as your president. I genuinely enjoyed it and hope I did well for you. Personally, I am coming out of this experience with new friendships, a much broader understanding of our community, new areas of hope for our citizens, and the inspiration to do more.

When I applied and was accepted into the class of 2024 last fall, multiple people told me, “You are going to fall in love with the City of Aurora.” This sounded strange to me, because I already had great appreciation and respect for Aurora, and pride in my professional life of caring for its citizens. But I realize now that I did not fully understand how much more I would learn about the city, further intensifying my love for it.

In addition to loving the city, and being grateful for my experiences in this program, I am immensely proud of the impact our class has made in the community. We organized mini class donation projects, including more than 100 sets of hats and gloves donated in December and 30 winter coats in January. We also collected bags of menstrual hygiene products for a couple of the homeless shelters. These projects made it obvious how quickly and easily a group of people can come together and provide something for others.

And then, the class took on the larger class project of refreshing and reinvigorating a rundown staff kitchen and breakroom within an Aurora Mental Health & Recovery building. It was obvious to anyone entering that kitchen prior to the renovation that it was not a comforting space to have a meal or take a break. Now, it is an amazing space that can provide respite for mental healthcare workers to recharge and then return to the task of helping people in need.

As I mentioned, the opportunity to learn about the City of Aurora and its citizens was fantastic. Many of us had powerful experiences, like the ones that made me want to change jobs to work in a water treatment facility, or to return to high school and learn how to repair plane engines. But in February, my own passions were renewed when I saw the power of mental and physical healthcare at its best. It was fantastic to see my fellow classmates as excited as I was: curious, compassionate, and ready to advocate and help.

I now ponder the task of maintaining this momentum, and encourage each of you to come up with your own answers to the following questions: If you also fell in love with Aurora, how can you show this moving forward?; If you had memorable moments and moving experiences as a class member of Leadership Aurora, how can you keep those emotions flowing into new projects and opportunities?; And if your eyes are opened to groups, needs, victories, and compassion in our community, how do you make sure they do not close again?

— Courtney Klein



President & Vice President Letters

Hello, Best Class Ever (BCE) '24!

Wow! The 40th class of Leadership Aurora also happens to REALLY be the best class! I can't believe that just ten months ago, 39 strangers met in Breckenridge, CO, unsure of what to expect and what we would experience. From the retreat that started this unbelievable journey, to all the amazing and diverse experiences we have shared over the last several months, I can honestly say that I have learned, grown, and become a better person because of each of you. It has been such a rewarding journey, and I know I am not alone in appreciating the lifelong friendships that began through Leadership Aurora.

Not only have we created and fostered relationships within our class we have also been in the company of amazing professionals within the community. The support and friendships developed through the Leadership Aurora Board and Alumni, is unparalleled.

Together, our class raised money for a number of causes, all benefiting businesses within the community of Aurora. Additionally, we gave back to mental health and recovery professionals, by improving a space for them to eat and take a break, as they continue the important work of helping those needing support.

We have learned about countless organizations and programming within the community of Aurora, and, together, we have all grown as leaders and members of this vibrant community. These experiences will connect us for years to come. You should all be so proud of yourselves and what we have accomplished - it's nothing short of extraordinary.

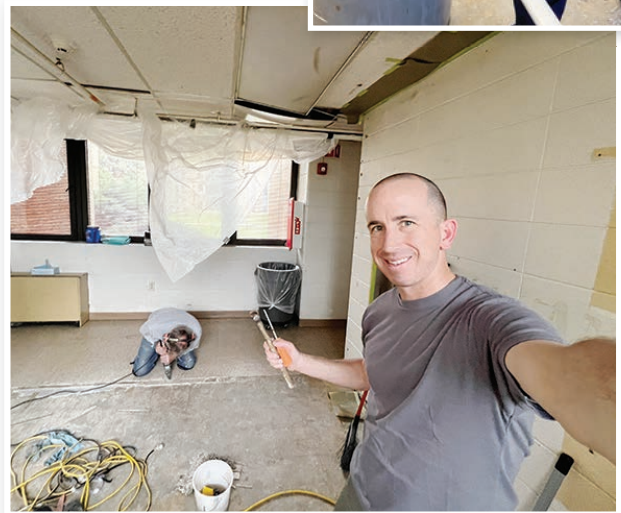
As our official time together ends, I want to thank you all for being the most incredible group of humans I could have ever been a part of. I hope that we continue to lead together and make Aurora the best place that it can be. I know this isn't goodbye and I so look forward to the next chapter together and the wonderful things we will accomplish!

All My Best,
— Joe DeHerrera



Class Project

The Leadership Aurora Class of 2024 took on the task of renovating the break room for Aurora Mental Health & Recovery staff, to provide them with a sanctuary for relaxation amid their demanding duties, enhancing their ability to serve the community's mental health needs. Aurora Mental Health & Recovery, a community mental health center serving thousands in the city of Aurora and the surrounding area, offers services in 43 languages, including meeting with students in schools, families in their homes, individual therapy for all ages, substance abuse and recovery support, and crisis intervention.



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Opening Retreat

On Thursday, September 14th, 2023, we launched the two-day retreat for the Leadership Aurora Class of 2024, at Beaver Run Resort in Breckenridge. The retreat focused on creating community amongst the 39 participants, learning more about leadership styles, and committing to making a difference in the Aurora community during the next 10 months – and beyond

The retreat was a complete success with opportunities for learning, competition, laughter, reflection, planning, vulnerability, commitment, and relationship building.

For example, on the first evening, each participant was provided a bingo card, with a random fact about each class member. The challenge: be the first to match your classmates to the correct fact. It was a tough game to win because everyone was so engrossed in learning about each other!

Wonderful connections, reflections, and inspirations occurred during those two days – as just the beginning of an incredible journey of learning, competition, laughter, reflection, planning, vulnerability, commitment, and community building.

— Wendy Renee





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CLASS OF 2024



Timi Aguilar
Aguilar Public Relations



Sara Avalos
MD Solve



James Beckwith
Nelnet



Taylor Boldt
FirstBank



Mordecai Brownlee, EdD
Community College of Aurora



Cindy Camp
Aurora Police Department



Dave Campbell
Aurora Fire Rescue



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Joseph DeHerrera
Jefferson County Juvenile
Assessment Center



Junho Doo
Aurora Public Schools



Amanda Duraes
Kaiser Permanente



Brittany Fabrizio
Juvenile Assessment Center



Byron Ferguson
Nelnet



Kayla Gordan
140th Wing (COANG)



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Colorado Access



Susan Harman
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Polica Houston
Big Brothers, Big Sisters



Courtney Klein
Aurora Mental Health
& Recovery



Julia Lamb
Aurora Mental Health
& Recovery

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Community College of Aurora



Benjamin Martin
Ent Credit Union



Chartashia Miller
TT Coaching with Results



Abraham Morales
City of Aurora, Library &
Cultural Services Dept.



Ashley Muramoto
Denver Public Schools
Foundation



Patrick Nay
140th Wing (COANG)



Ruthanne Orihuela
Colorado Department of
Higher Education



Wendy Renee
Montessori Del Mundo



Alicia Rose
Inked Land Company



Ethan Ruterbories
Falck Rocky Mountain



Marc Scherschel
UCHealth



Ryan Seely
Cherry Creek School District



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Mitch Stillman
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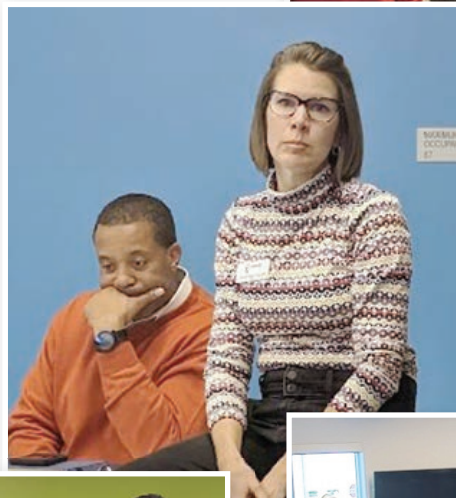
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Community Day

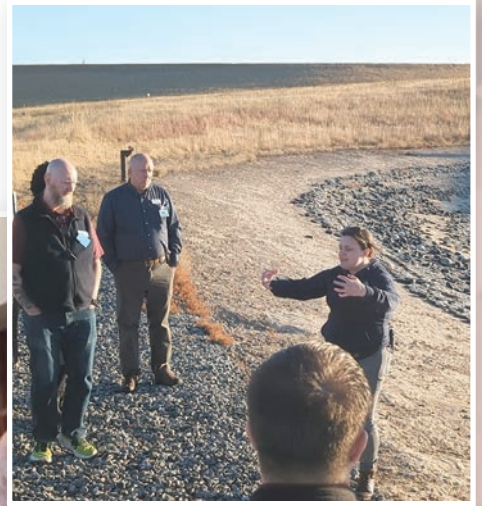
Community Day was quite an introduction to the Aurora community. The class divided into groups and started the day with visits to local organizations like Downtown Aurora Visual Arts (DAVA) and The Village Institute, showcasing their vital work with children and refugee families. Groups also visited crisis centers, detox centers, faith-based support programs, shelters, and more. It was inspiring to see first-hand the important work these organizations do, and to understand how much they need our support.

In the afternoon CROSSPURPOSE led us through a poverty simulation exercise during which participants experienced a month of living in poverty condensed into an hour. The exercise emphasized the numerous obstacles such as being a single parent, disengaged government workers, minimum wage jobs, and lack of childcare. The simulation underscored the dire choices families must make, sometimes resorting to crime to feed their children. The exercise was a poignant reminder of the harsh realities faced by those in poverty.

— Paula Stolebarger



City of Aurora Day



The City of Aurora Day was an exhilarating exploration of the city's governance. Council Members Sundberg and Coombs actively engaged the class in dynamic discussions about local issues and shared their perspectives on the future vision of Aurora. The class then delved into a simulated City Council session, where they grappled with the complex issue of a homeless camping ban. The session was enriched by class members providing public input, which highlighted the diverse perspectives on this topic, underscoring the vital role of community voices in decision-making processes.

The Leadership Aurora class then flexed their budgeting muscles as they broke into teams and dove into an exciting competition to stretch \$1,000 across various city departments - each with crucial projects. The Office of International and Immigrant Affairs

emerged as the winner and top recipient of funds, reflecting the city's commitment to immigrant and refugee integration.

The day concluded with informative tours of Aurora's water facilities. From the Southeast Area Maintenance Facility to the Binney Water Purification Facility, Leadership Aurora participants gained insight into the rigorous processes ensuring the city's water quality. Despite the surprising revelation of artificial sweeteners in the water, the group left with confidence in Aurora's commitment to provide its citizens with top-quality drinking water.

— Julia Lamb



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Media Day

Media Day was incredibly informative and fun. We began by discussing our roles at our respective companies and how we can collaborate. Our first stop was a tour of Denver7, led by News Anchor Nicole Brady and Station Operations Manager Rory Schmalzried, where we learned about news production, weather reporting, and traffic updates.

In the afternoon, we attended a PR panel with Patricia Billinger from Intermountain Health, who emphasized that good service delivery is key to effective PR; Diane Simard, who spoke about building a meaningful legacy through purposeful communication; and Kathleen Deal from Ground Floor Media, who highlighted the power of social media in community building.

We concluded the day by creating a short film with students from the Community College of Aurora, where we experienced various filmmaking roles. The day was filled with learning, collaboration, and enjoyment, leaving us grateful for the opportunity to engage with our community.

— Brittany Fabrizio



Education Day

Education Day, “Pathways of Purpose and Work-based Learning,” highlighted promising initiatives for Aurora’s youth. The day began at Cherry Creek Innovation Campus, where they offer seven career pathways for students from Advanced Manufacturing to Hospitality to Transportation. Superintendent Chris Smith highlighted the district’s unique mental health focused school, Traverse Academy.

Next stop was Pickens Technical College where Aurora Public Schools’ Superintendent Michael Giles shared his vision for the district. Pickens Tech Executive Director Teina McConnell highlighted the diverse programs available to high school and adult students. Participants enjoyed a lunch prepared by culinary arts students and heard from a diverse panel of students.

Last stop was at Community College of Aurora’s Lowry Campus, where President Dr. Mordecai Brownlee shared the fascinating history of the college and their plans. We learned CPR from EMT instructors and experienced how truly exhausting it is to do lifesaving compressions for 2 minutes. The day concluded with a panel discussion on the educational lifecycle, addressing challenges and opportunities for Aurora’s students and families.

— Paula Stolebarger



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Military Day

The 2024 Leadership Aurora “Best Class Ever” had an exceptional day at Buckley Space Force Base. The day kicked off with comprehensive mission briefings, detailing the base’s operations, including its role in global combat support and missile warning systems. Participants learned about the establishment of the Space Force and its plans, including potential growth areas such as cyber and intelligence. Then, a flightline tour included learning about the maintenance of F-16s, highlighting the challenges of flying these aircraft.

Following the exhilaration of being up close to F-16s, a panel of recently enlisted military members provided insights across various branches, and some class members experienced a thrilling tour of downtown Denver and Red Rocks in Blackhawk helicopters – thanks to Leadership Aurora graduate and Chief Master Sergeant Ed Hauschild. The day concluded with a visit to the Colorado Freedom Memorial, where Executive Director Rick Crandall shared poignant stories of fallen service members, and how the Freedom Memorial honors their sacrifice.

— James Beckwith



Healthcare Day



Healthcare Day offered profound insights into how important our medical systems are, and how the City of Aurora has access to some of the most advanced medical procedures and technologies, making it a truly unforgettable and enriching experience.

It is without question that the evolving post-pandemic world has brought mental health into the limelight, transcending gender, race, socio-economic status, and social status. Because of this, Healthcare Day started with a visit to Aurora Mental Health & Recovery. Chief Strategy and Operations Officer Kathie Snell, shared the organization's evolution from a grassroots movement in 1975 to its present-day extensive services, including mental illness and substance abuse treatments, and adult behavioral health programs.

The Day continued at The Medical Center of Aurora (TMCA) - a Level 2 Trauma Center, providing 24/7 access to all essential medical specialties, staff, and equipment needed to treat significant trauma. CEO Scott Rausch talked about TMCA's operations, and then we visited the ICU, catheter lab, operating room, and interventional radiology. We also learned about TMCA's world-renowned Stroke Treatment Centers.

The day culminated with an engaging visit to UHealth's University of Colorado Hospital, where Senior Director of Trauma Services Regina Kreil, and COO Pradipta Komanduri, provided an overview of the hospital's operations and extensive services.

At the end of the day, there were tours of the Falck Advanced Life Support Center, the Critical Care Transport



and Mobile Simulation Unit, the emergency department, and the hospital's helipad – where a group found themselves locked out. Thankfully, class member and Senior Director of Pre-Hospital Care at UCHospital Mark Scherschel, came to the rescue by opening the doors to let the group back in.

It was an unforgettable day, highlighting the incredible medical services and care providers here in Aurora!

— Ryan Seely



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Police Day

Interim Police Chief Heather Morris began the day by sharing her goals of the Aurora Police Department (APD) achieving milestones in crime reduction and recruitment. Leadership Aurora graduate and APD Captain Sam McGhee emphasized policing as a lifestyle, as reflected in APD's adaptability and community service. This includes holistic officer wellness initiatives led by Sergeant Carlos Wilkendorf, the "30 by 30" program aiming for gender diversity, and APD's Victim Advocacy team that provides crucial support.

The class also learned about specialized units like SWAT and K9 – that ensure public safety, and got hands-on law enforcement experiences, including PIT and K9 demonstrations.

The day was such an eye-opening view into the training, commitment, and pride of the APD.

— Amanda Duraes



Fire Day

On May 16, 2024, Leadership Aurora experienced an engaging and educational day at the City of Aurora Public Safety Training Center for Fire Day.

The day kicked off with Aurora Fire Rescue (AFR) Assistant Chief Hunter Hackbarth and Leadership Aurora graduate and Battalion Chief Eric Franks warmly welcoming us and sharing insights into AFR's mission and values. Captain Mike Ackman (Ret.), AFR Historian, captivated the audience with a rich history of the fire department, highlighting its evolution and contributions to the community and the growth of the City of Aurora. The morning continued with an introduction to AFR's new EMS Branch by Commander Brandon Sauder, highlighting the department's commitment to enhancing emergency medical services. The EMS branch also showed off their mobile simulation ambulance for a hands-on experience.

After the (of course) Fire House Subs lunch– the class geared up for demonstrations on fire department skills and operations. We rotated through various drill stations, including wildland scenario, auto extrication, search and rescue operations, and fire attack. Each station provided invaluable real-world experience, reflecting the challenges and skills required of AFR personnel.

The day concluded with a debrief session and then off to the last official social hour.

— Dave Campbell



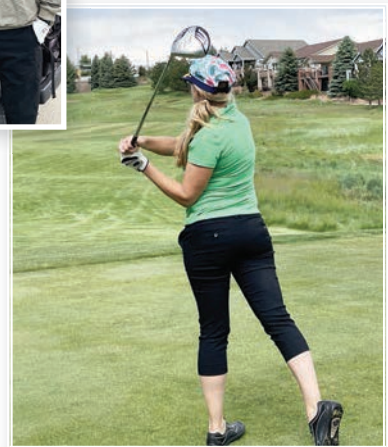
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Leadership Aurora Golf Tournament

The Leadership Aurora Golf Tournament has been a signature fundraising event of the Aurora Chamber of Commerce for 26 years. The monies raised from the tournament help support the Leadership Aurora program that annually introduces class members to a variety of information about, and resources for, the Aurora community. Because of generous sponsors of this Pay it Forward event, The Chamber can give financial assistance to incoming applicants, as well as fund the team building retreat that is so vital to the success of the program and its participants.

There are many ways to participate in the tournament, from volunteering to a variety of sponsorship options. Contact Rene Simard for details, 303-365-4923 or rene.simard@aurorachamber.org



Social and Having Fun

Ask anyone, and they would tell you that the Socials were just as meaningful as the well-planned monthly sessions. Whether it be a tall glass of wine, various craft beers and margaritas, or a refreshing glass of iced water or a soda, the Socials were full of conversation, laughter, and bonding. It was a terrific way to debrief from an eventful day and spend time with our classmates, all while enjoying good eats and drinks at our local Aurora favorites.

— Brittany Fabrizio



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Leadership Aurora Board

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AXL Academy

Ryan Anderson
Adolfson & Peterson Construction

Alan Antolak (Past Chair)
Adolfson & Peterson Construction

Natalie Artibee
Nelnet

Maureen K. Barker (Mo)

Casey Bloyer
Launch Pad Brewery

Jordan Clark
Iron Sharp Community Foundation

Sarah Ellis
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Eric Franks
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Robert M. Fryberger Jr.
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Danielle Jackman
Aurora Mental Health & Recovery

Anne Keke (Secretary)
Aurora Public School Board Member

Shaunna King
Falck Rocky Mountain

Karen Lovett
UCHealth

Kynn timer Martin
IMA Financial Group

Teina McConnell
Pickens Technical College

Sam McGhee
Aurora Police Department

Suzanne Pitrusu
Community Banks of Colorado

Krista Robinson
Downtown Aurora Visual Arts (DAVA)

Priscilla Sandoval
Home Mortgage Advisors

Michael Schaefer
Assembly Networks, LLC

Mitzi Schindler
(Assistant Program Director)
Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Mary Sarah Schweiger
Citywide Banks

Rene Simard, (Program Director)
Aurora Chamber of Commerce

Yvonne Valdez (Chair)
Citywide Banks/HTLF

John Wolfkill (Vice Chair)
Community College of Aurora
Foundation

Andréa Wright
City of Aurora, Housing and
Community Services

Mandy Young
Aurora Public Schools

Sarah Young
City of Aurora – Water Department



Thanks to the Yearbook Committee!

Yearbook Committee, left to right: James Beckwith, Julia Lamb, Cindy Camp (chair), Chartashia Miller, Amanda Duraes, Junho Doo, Brittany Fabrizio, Dave Campbell.



THANK YOU!

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CONGRATS!



Congratulations to the class of 2024 and our very own Vice President of Programs, Polica Houston, for completing Leadership Aurora and expanding the reach of our impact on youth in our community!



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Mordecai Ian Brownlee, Ed.D.
President



Angela Marquez, Ph.D.
Vice President of Diversity, Equity
and Inclusion and Chief of Staff

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