



UNC

Center for Urban Education

Leadership Council Chronicle

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What Do Top-Performing Teachers Do?

Two Denver-Area School Districts Weigh In

Has a friend or family member ever told you a story about a particular teacher who made a lasting impact on them? A teacher that radically changed their perspective about their identity as a "good student"? The common theme: That teacher *cared*.

Caring teachers help students feel seen, understood, important, and respected. They value students' differences. They collaborate with students' families and community members. In other words, they are master relationship builders.

The Best Teachers Connect with Students

Pat Sandos, Superintendent of Sheridan School District, agrees that the teachers who perform well in his district are the ones who can build relationships. "We need teachers who can connect with students," said Sandos. "The best teachers are culturally competent and take the time to understand the stories of students and their families," he said.

Know Someone Who Would Be a Great Teacher?

The UNC Center for Urban Education (CUE) is enrolling new students for the fall 2021 semester through July.

Contact Dr. Rosanne Fulton, Director, at 303-637-4334 or [email](#) her for more information.

Watch our [short video](#) to learn more about the CUE teacher-preparation program.

[Watch Video](#)



Pat Sandos, Superintendent, Sheridan School District

"The best teachers are culturally competent and take the time to understand the stories of students and their families."

In the Sheridan School District, it's a huge plus when a teacher has expertise working with students who are learning English as a second language. Students sense the teacher's empathy, which makes them feel safe. "So they are more confident taking risks in learning," Sandos said.

"The UNC Center for Urban Education has a long and strong tradition of producing teachers who can meet the needs of all children in urban classrooms."

Sandos has often turned to the Center when hiring new teachers. "The UNC Center for Urban Education has a long and strong tradition of producing teachers who can meet the needs of all children in urban classrooms," said Sandos. "The graduates from the Center are changing the narrative about what's possible. They create inclusive classrooms, hold all students to high standards, and support them in achieving at a high level," Sandos said.

The Best Teachers Are Guides

Pam Swanson, Superintendent of Westminster Public Schools, also highly values relationship-building skills in teachers. Swanson implemented a district-wide competency based learning system in 2009. Rather than using traditional grades and grade levels, students must demonstrate mastery of a topic before moving on to the next level.



Pam Swanson, Superintendent, Westminster Public Schools (standing, center)

"Our teachers are more like guides," said Swanson. "They work with learners as individuals to determine the most effective instructional strategies for each one," she said. And to do that, teachers must build trust and positive relationships with the students.

"We look for teachers who help students become problem solvers by demonstrating problem-solving abilities themselves."

"We look for teachers who help students become problem solvers by demonstrating problem-solving abilities themselves," said Swanson. "The teachers that do well in our school system support students in figuring out their own path to success and making their own choices. They solicit input from students and capitalize on students' strengths to shape assignments and projects," Swanson added.

She and her team are doing something right. In 2018, Westminster Public Schools was taken off the state Accountability Clock and moved up into the "Improvement" category. In 2019, the district was the only one in the metro area to show an increase in SAT scores. And for 2020, the Colorado Association of School Executives named Swanson Superintendent of the Year.



"Grow Your Own" Programs Yield Caring Teachers

"Our strategies and curriculum closely align with the local school districts' need for teachers with certain skills," said Dr. Rosanne Fulton, Director of the [UNC Center for Urban Education](#).

First, the Center supports the concept of "grow your own" teachers, which means it focuses on enrolling students from the Denver metropolitan community. "The teachers who graduate from the Center understand and care about their students because they grew up here," explained Fulton.

Second, the Center's curriculum emphasizes relationship building and cultural responsiveness. "Our graduates are a

perfect fit for Sheridan School District, Westminster Public Schools, and all of Denver's school districts," said Fulton.

"The teachers who graduate from the Center understand and care about their students because they grew up here."

If you are interested in scheduling an informational session about the Center for your paraprofessionals, or you'd like to learn more about hiring the Center's graduates, contact Dr. Rosanne Fulton at 303-637-4334 or by [email](#).

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