



Green Valley Elementary School Principal Jennifer Buckland (top), CUE mentor Linda Abeyta (left), and CUE teacher candidate Nidia Arreola

Thinking about Becoming a Teacher?

We are enrolling new students for the spring 2023 semester.

Call Dr. Rosanne Fulton, Director, UNC Center for Urban Education, at 303-637-4334 or email for more information.

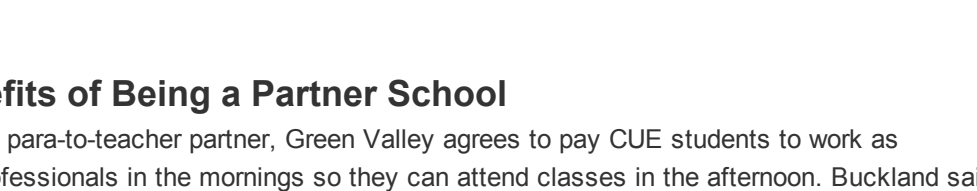
Watch our [short video](#) to learn more about the CUE teacher-preparation program.

[Watch Video](#)

How the Para-to-Teacher Pipeline Works in the Real World

UNC Center for Urban Education (CUE) partners with local K-12 schools to place our teacher candidates in paraprofessional positions while they are earning their degrees. They perform paid work in the morning and attend classes at our Lowry campus in the afternoon. One of our partners is Green Valley Elementary School in Denver Public Schools.

In fact, Green Valley Elementary School ("Green Valley") currently employs two CUE teacher candidates as paraprofessionals and three of our graduates as teachers. We asked Jen Buckland, the principal of Green Valley, to talk about her experience partnering with CUE. We also asked the CUE teacher candidates and graduates what makes Green Valley a successful para-to-teacher pathway site.



<https://greenvalley.dpsk12.org/>

Benefits of Being a Partner School

To be a para-to-teacher partner, Green Valley agrees to pay CUE students to work as paraprofessionals in the mornings so they can attend classes in the afternoon. Buckland said, "We place CUE teacher candidates in positions that offer flexible hours or hire another staff member to balance out the early release for class." She's willing to do that because the CUE students and the para-to-teacher pathway produces excellent teachers for her school.

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"The UNC students bring in fresh perspectives in instructional practices and pedagogy. They are motivated to bring new learning back to the school and refine their instructional practices," said Buckland. They also have the opportunity to establish strong relationships with Green Valley community stakeholders. Buckland said, "By the time they become teachers, they already know our students, families, and staff. They are aligned with our vision, improvement strategies, instructional requirements, and curricular options."

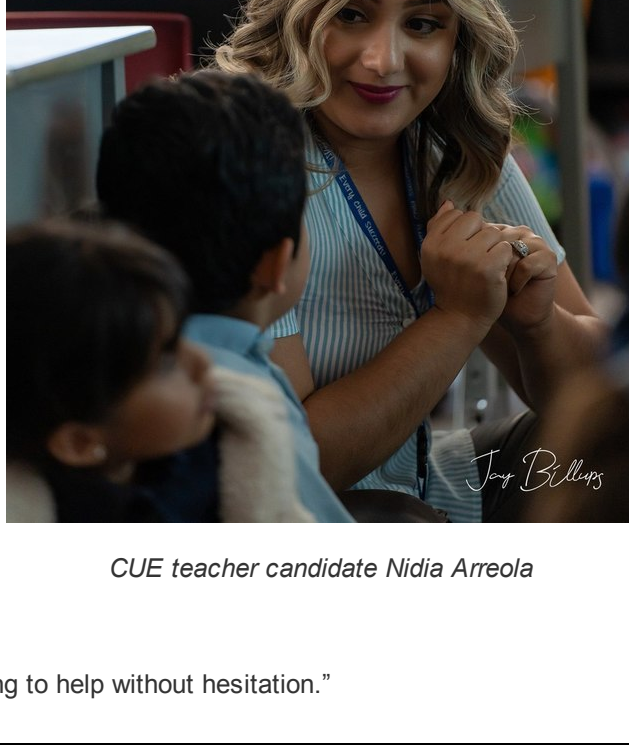
As the teacher candidates transition from paraprofessionals to teachers, they are more than ready for their first year because they have had authentic experiences all along the way.

Working together in this way allows students to get support from the cooperating teachers at Green Valley, from their CUE mentor, and from CUE faculty. "This program provides teacher candidates with real-life experiences to attach their learning to. As they transition to teaching, they are more than ready for their first year because they have had authentic experiences all along the way," said Buckland.

What It's Like to Work as a Para at a Partner School

Nidia Arreola is a CUE student who works as a paraprofessional at Green Valley. Arreola said, "I enjoy it so much that it doesn't feel like I'm actually working. We all support each other and work together. It truly feels like a family environment." She added that everyone is passionate about providing a good education for the children, which is what matters the most.

Though she had no experience working at a school prior to Green Valley, Arreola compared it favorably to other jobs she's had in the past. "I've never felt so comfortable," said Arreola. "The welcoming environment I received from day one was incredible. I can approach any of my colleagues for anything and they are willing to help without hesitation."



CUE teacher candidate Nidia Arreola

Everyone is passionate about providing a good education for the children, which is what matters the most.

Arreola is grateful for the opportunity to attend school, get paid to work in her field, and pursue a career as a teacher. "I would not have been able to do it without the support and flexibility of my school principal and the staff at the UNC Center for Urban Education," she added.

CUE Mentors Are a Key Link in the Partnership Chain

Linda Abeyta is a CUE mentor who works with the teacher candidates at Green Valley. We asked her why the partnership between CUE and Green Valley works so well. "Principal Buckland is a very strong advocate of our program," said Abeyta. "She sees the strengths of the CUE degree program and encourages her staff to take advantage of it. Jen has observed the success of the program firsthand."

Abeyta also attributes the success of the partnership to the Green Valley culture.

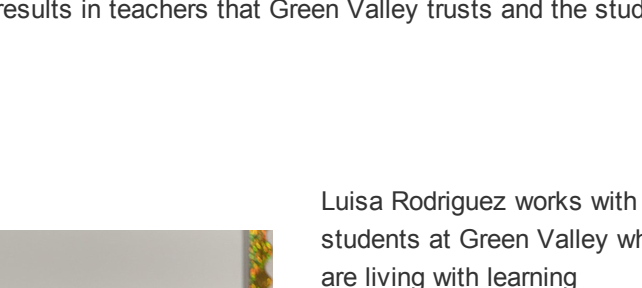
"There is a very warm feeling when working with the staff there; they are helpful and friendly," she said. "I've observed many content smiles."

Caring professionals guide the teacher candidates and give them respect.

Abeyta added that caring professionals guide the teacher candidates and give them respect. CUE students also appreciate that Green Valley has updated technology that gives them access to and knowledge of today's teaching tools.

What It's Like to Work as a Teacher at a Partner School

Yvonne Duran is a CUE student who will graduate in December 2022 and is working as a teacher at Green Valley Elementary School while she completes her student teaching requirements. "I worked as a para at Green Valley for a few years and built strong connections with families and students. As a teacher, I am serving families and students I've known for a long time."

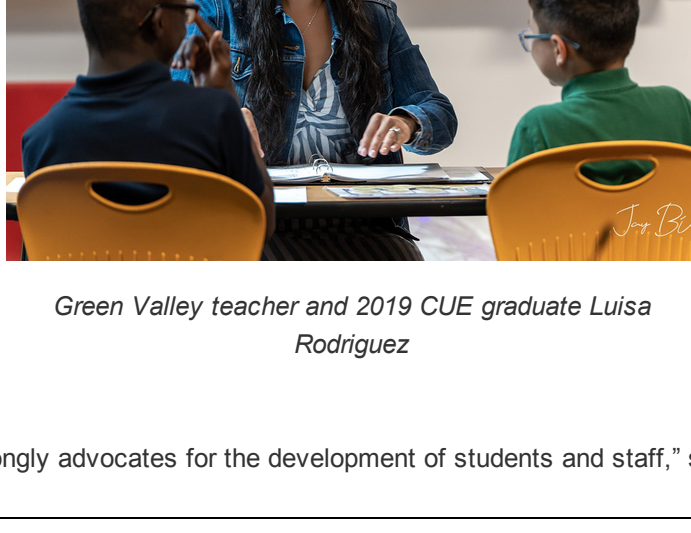


CUE teacher candidate Yvonne Duran

Green Valley has a special place in Duran's heart because she attended it as a child. "Everyone here played an important part in helping me get to this point in my career," said Duran. "I feel like I belong at this school."

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She attributes the success of the CUE-Green Valley partnership to the flexibility that both schools give the teacher candidates. "In time, it results in teachers that Green Valley trusts and the students are already familiar with," said Duran.



Green Valley teacher and 2019 CUE graduate Luisa Rodriguez

Luisa Rodriguez works with students at Green Valley who are living with learning disabilities, emotional disabilities, physical disabilities, autism, or other health impairments. She calls the school her "second home" because she feels appreciated and supported by the Green Valley staff.

"We believe strong relationships are important, and we build community every day with students, staff, and parents. In addition, we are lucky to have Principal Buckland, who

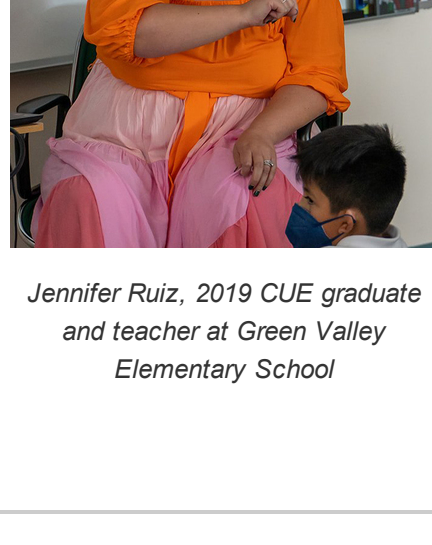
strongly advocates for the development of students and staff," said Rodriguez.

We believe strong relationships are important, and we build community every day with students, staff, and parents.

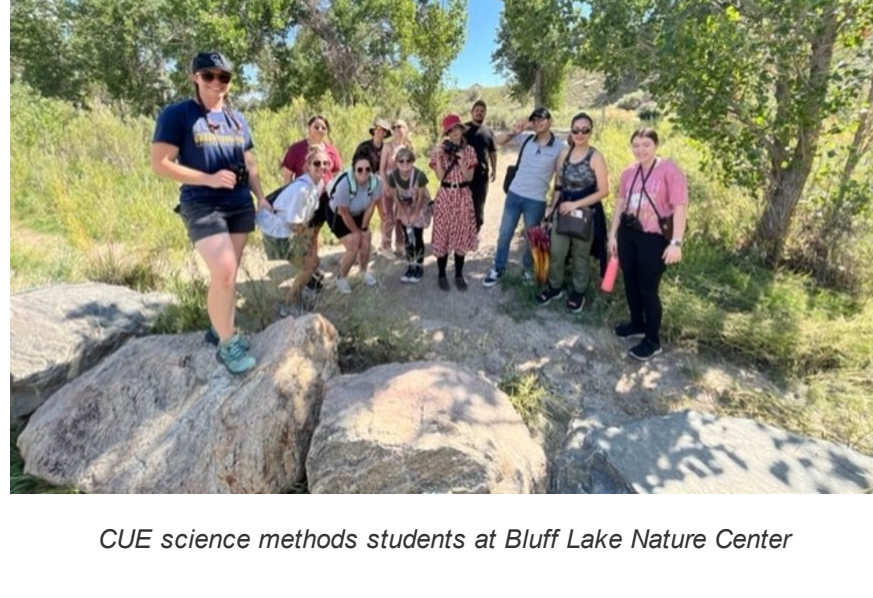
When the CUE students who work as paraprofessionals at Green Valley graduate, they want to teach there, too. "The staff supports career development, flexes to accommodate schedules, provides resources, and gives us opportunities to meet our goals," Rodriguez said.

Green Valley is a shining example of a para-to-teacher pathway partnership, and we thank Principal Buckland and all the staff for their support and guidance of our students.

Thanks to [Jay Billups](#) for volunteering his time to take photos of our partners at Green Valley Elementary School.



Jennifer Ruiz, 2019 CUE graduate and teacher at Green Valley Elementary School

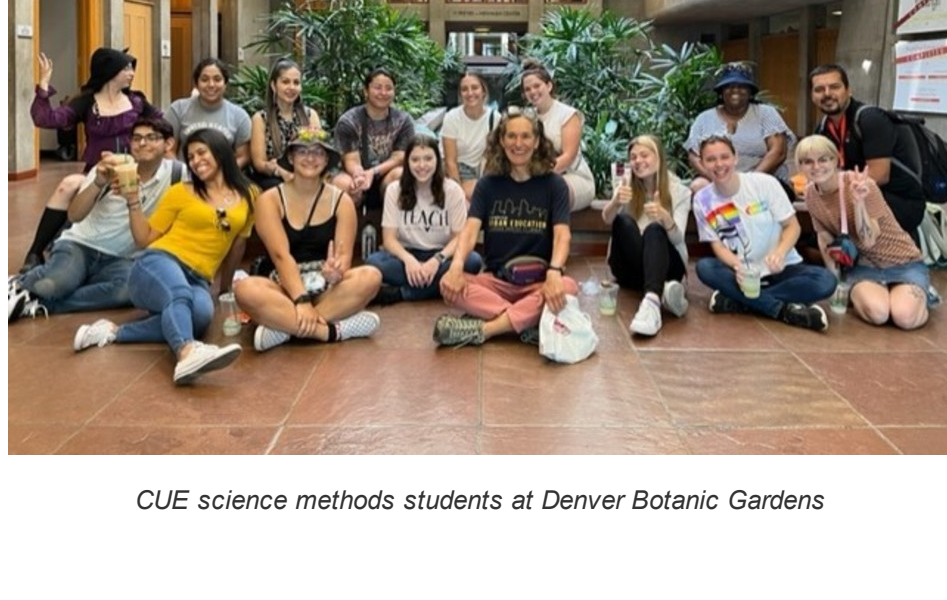


CUE science methods students at Bluff Lake Nature Center

Science Students Learn by Exploring Nature

CUE Professor Jessica Feld facilitated trips for her science methods students to [Bluff Lake Nature Center](#) and [Denver Botanic Gardens](#), where they learned about birds and nature, and how to take advantage of these local resources when educating their own K-12 students. Community member Curt Brown has generously donated over 200 pairs of binoculars to Feld's students over the past five years, and students are always excited to use them to observe birds.

The class met with Executive Director Rachel Hutchens, who gave an overview of the history of Bluff Lake and talked about how to bring school groups there on field trips. Zuza Bohley of [Americas for Conservation + the Arts](#) led the group in forest bathing, connecting with nature, and sensory awareness activities. Bohley ended with a juniper berry and dandelion tea ceremony. Afterward, Feld facilitated a discussion of ways to help children slow down and observe nature.



CUE science methods students at Denver Botanic Gardens

At the Denver Botanic Gardens, Katelin Gaeth, Manager of School and Group Programs, discussed how to bring school groups to the Gardens and gave an overview of the various programs the Gardens offer. Students then took a walking tour around the Gardens.

These visits, the students' first visit to Bluff Lake and the Denver Botanic Gardens. As a result of these trips, the teacher candidates have been discussing ways to make science accessible, meaningful, and fun for their K-12 students.

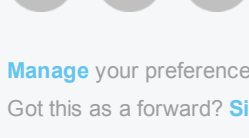
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