



## Rural Centered

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A Monthly Newsletter from the  
Colorado Center for Rural Education



*Colorado Learning director Steve Johnston (rear, on right) with principal Kimba Rael (left of Johnston) and several teachers he recruited from the Phillipines in the Centennial School District in San Luis, Colorado*

# Rural Schools: Draw from an International Candidate Pool!

## Highlights from This Article

- Teachers with J-1 visas are highly qualified, dedicated, and exceptionally hard working. They hold advanced degrees and have solid classroom management skills.
- Administrators, if you want to hire from this pool, get your teacher letters of intent out in February. The earlier you let [Colorado Learning](#) know you will have positions available, the better, because there is a limited number of visas.

## Highlights from This Article

[Colorado Learning](#) is a private company formed solely to help highly qualified education professionals find excellent jobs in Colorado's schools - primarily in rural schools, where the need is greatest. The organization has been recruiting for education for many years, and the website's [testimonial page](#) is full of words of appreciation.



*A J-1 visa holder from the Phillipines who teaches in the Centennial School District in San Luis, Colorado*



## Inviting Newcomers to Colorful Colorado

There is a limit to the number of people willing to live in Colorado's rural areas, though. "It gets harder and harder each year to convince U.S. citizens to take jobs in rural schools," said Steve Johnston, the organization's director. Even though the cost of living in rural areas is lower, most candidates focus only on the higher salaries (and possibly better benefits packages) that the urban schools offer.

One way Colorado Learning responds to the lack of candidates for rural schools is to recruit J-1 nonimmigrant visa holders from countries all around the world. His primary source of J-1 teachers, however, is the Philippines. "The education system in the Philippines closely mirrors ours," said Johnston, "so teaching in the U.S. is a smooth transition for them."

He describes the teachers he brings in as highly educated (often with an advanced degree in their subject area), dedicated, loyal, experienced, and hard working. "They do whatever it takes to be successful," he added. Colorado Learning focuses on recruiting teachers for math, science, and special education—the most difficult positions to fill. The organization uses independent testing companies to ensure that the teachers have excellent written and oral English skills.



*A J-1 visa holder from the Phillipines who teaches in the Centennial School District in San Luis, Colorado*

## How the J-1 Exchange Program Works

The [J-1 nonimmigrant visa category](#) is for individuals approved to participate in exchange visitor programs. Those who are teachers are allowed to work in a U.S. school for up to three years. It is possible to extend that term by one or two years, and the schools usually request extensions. "The process is easy, and the sponsoring organization always approves the extension," said Johnston.

In return for a fee, Colorado Teaching matches the teacher to a job, helps them complete the extensive J-1 paperwork, and ensures they have sufficient monetary resources. He also helps them navigate the logistics of moving to the U.S., such as finding a place to live and arranging transportation.

This last academic year, Colorado Learning placed 30 teachers in our rural schools! The J-1 teachers Johnston places immediately start referring other people from their home country to the program. He said he gets 10 or more highly qualified referrals for every person placed.

Once they're settled in Colorado, the J-1 teachers create their own community, according to Johnston. "And they also integrate well with the larger community," he added. Principal Kimba Rael in the [Centennial School District](#) in San Luis, Colorado, said, "These teachers are doing a fantastic job inside the classroom and out. They are building friendships, are involved in several key committees, provide expertise while learning from others' expertise, and have been an incredible asset to our school community."



*Colorado Learning director Steve Johnston (on right) with a J-1 visa holder from Mexico who teaches at a school near Greeley, Colorado*

## Steps Rural Schools Should Take

Bigger districts and schools have the budget to hire for positions and post the jobs as anticipated openings very early in the hiring cycle. Rural schools don't have that flexibility due to budget limitations and restrictions on the intent-to-return process. What does that mean for our rural schools? To get these highly qualified teachers in their classrooms, they have to plan ahead and gather the teachers' letters of intent to return the following academic year much, much earlier than they normally do—in January or February.

Once a school knows it will have an opening, they can advise Colorado Learning about the positions they have available and get the process started. Colorado Learning immediately matches a teacher to that position or searches for the teacher that meets the school's exact specifications. Colorado Learning asks the teacher to complete the job application and assists with the interview scheduling. The school simply writes a job offer for that candidate as they would for any candidate. Colorado Learning then liaisons with the visa company and the teacher to get the J-1 visa approved and issued.

The result? The school fills an open position with a highly qualified teacher who greatly improves student outcomes. "One school was able to add an advanced algebra class and a statistics class that they never would have had before," Johnston said. "What that means is better opportunities for students, higher test scores, and more students going to college. The J-1 program is a win-win for everyone."

If schools wait too long to determine what their hiring needs will be for the coming academic year, it can be too late for Colorado Learning to get a J-1 visa holder into the country for that year. There is a national quota on J-1 visa applications and Johnston has access to a limited number. Visas always sell out and may become unavailable by mid-May.

## Looking Ahead: Bilingual Spanish-Speaking Teachers

In addition to many other places around the world, Johnston is developing pipelines to Mexico and South America. He recruited two teachers from Mexico this year, and two from Colombia the previous year. He's also planning to partner with another company in Texas that has access to more bilingual teachers who want to work in Colorado.

For more information about finding teachers through Colorado Learning, visit the [Colorado Learning](#) website or contact Director Steve Johnston by email at [coloradolearning@outlook.com](mailto:coloradolearning@outlook.com) or by phone at 720-329-2983.

## Upcoming Application Timelines

**Colorado Substitute Stipend** applications accepted: Ongoing

**Rural Inservice Educator Stipend** applications accepted: May 1, 2024 through August 31, 2024

\*\*\*Accepting Applications NOW!\*\*\*

**Colorado Rural Student Teaching Stipend** applications for spring 2024 accepted: July 1, 2023 through October 31, 2023

**National Board Certified Teacher Stipend** applications accepted: January 1, 2024 through April 30, 2024

Visit TEACH Colorado's **Financial Aid and Scholarship Information** page for information about additional scholarships.

For financial aid available to in-service and aspiring educators, download the **Colorado Department of Education's Educator Recruitment and District Supports flyer**

## Featured Partners

Learn more about our [featured partners](#) and how they are helping to solve the teacher shortage in rural Colorado.

[TEACH Colorado](#) and the Colorado Department of Education's Educator Recruitment and Retention (ERR) team created a document titled "[Cheap and FREE Recruitment Strategies](#)" for the recent Colorado Association of School Personnel Administrators conference. It is full of valuable resources, including links for school districts and BOCES leaders!

The [Colorado Center for Rural Education](#) supports educators by providing financial support to pre-and in-service teachers and special services providers. Visit our website for more information about our mission and available stipends.

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Robert Fulton, PhD | Director

