

Rural Centered

A Quarterly Newsletter from the Colorado Center for Rural Education

February 2023

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Featured Partner: Western Colorado University

Finish Your Degree and Get a Teaching License—100% Online!

Over the past decade, the demographics of college students have changed dramatically and will continue to evolve as our societal needs and priorities shift. Higher education has had to pivot to provide access to new and shifting pockets of students.

More and more institutions have moved to online learning, and Western Colorado University (WCU) is no exception. Their new [Adult Degree Completion plus teaching certificate program](#) gives paraprofessionals the opportunity to finish their undergraduate degree and obtain a teaching license, all while staying employed in their existing jobs.

Dr. Terry Schliesman, Director, Adult Degree Completion, at WCU, said, "With our Adult Degree Completion program, we can better serve the estimated 800,000 Coloradans who have some college credits but have not finished their degree. It's been amazing—it really has—to evolve my role from traditional face-to-face professor to leading the effort to educate this newer student population."

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Dr. Robert Fulton, State Coordinator of the Colorado Center for Rural Education, agrees that rural Coloradans desperately need access to higher education, especially online opportunities. "Lack of access to higher education comes up in nearly every meeting with school representatives in our rural communities," said Fulton.

Most future rural PK–12 educators live too far away from our colleges and universities to attend in person. Many of them have been attending institutions that are out of state, like Western Governors University or the University of Phoenix. That means they can't access stipends from the Colorado Department of Education or the Colorado Center for Rural Education. Fulton said, "To best serve our constituents, we have to give rural Coloradans access to public 100% online undergraduate education programs. One such exemplary program is the Adult Degree Completion program at Western Colorado University."

"We toured rural districts, and they consistently asked us for help getting paraprofessionals into the teacher pipeline," said Sherri Anderson, Director of Educator Preparation at WCU. "So we created this program where they could transfer credits, finish their bachelor's degree, and obtain a teaching license after completing a residency in their final year," Anderson said.

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Another feature of this program is that learning is asynchronous. That means the students can maintain their existing paraprofessional positions while earning their degree, so they don't suffer a loss of income.

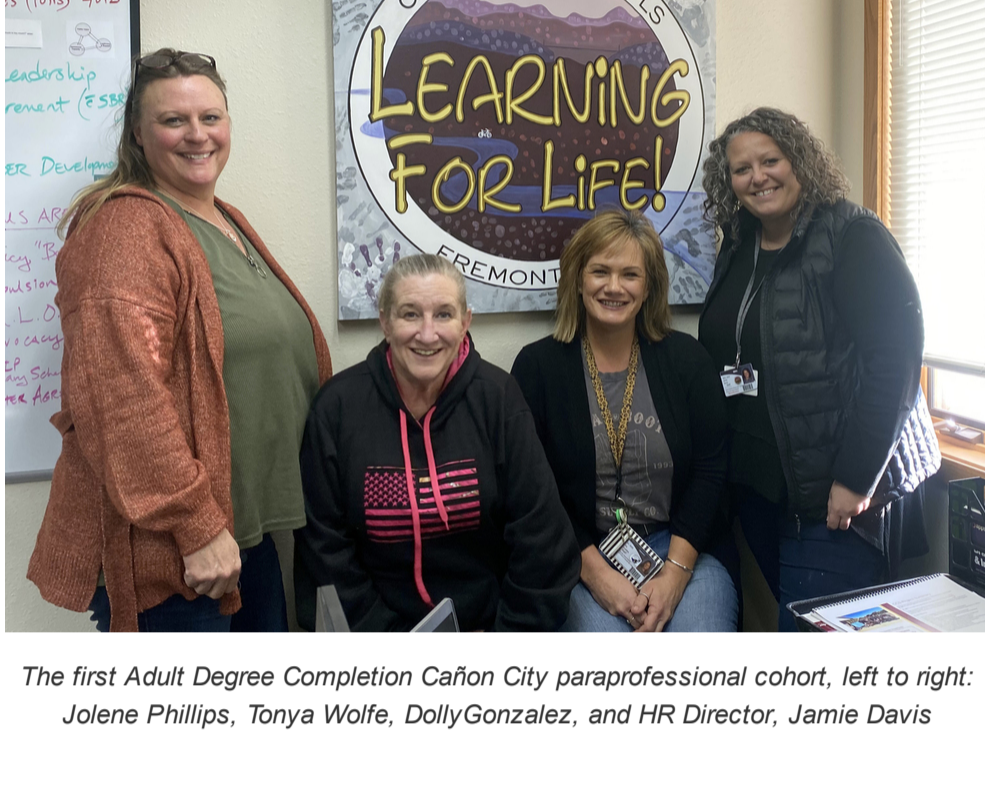
After eight months of operations, there are 35 students enrolled who are earning their bachelor's degree and teaching licensure in the WCU program. Ten of them are starting their one-year licensure unit (i.e., residency) this fall. A few interesting statistics:

- Average age of students: 40
- Average credit hours transferred: 65
- Average tuition discount (see explanation below): 85%

There are two scholarship opportunities that make this program financially feasible. First, WCU was awarded a multi-million-dollar, four-year grant from Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI). "Ninety-seven percent of our students receive COSI scholarship funds, which brings down the tuition rate substantially," said Anderson.

Second, the Colorado Department of Education is offering a one-time \$10,000 stipend to paraprofessionals seeking a bachelor's degree through the [Educator Recruitment and Retention program](#). Recipients must agree to serve for three years in rural schools or shortage areas. Effectively, these students can finish their undergraduate degrees for just a few thousand dollars.

"I was a teacher for 14 years in rural schools," said Anderson. "I saw five paraprofessionals leave for other careers because they didn't see a realistic way to get a teaching license. Now there is a way. We can fill teaching positions with people who want to teach, know the families, and are tied to the community. This is the best way to serve our PK–12 students."



The first Adult Degree Completion Cañon City paraprofessional cohort, left to right: Jolene Phillips, Tonya Wolfe, Dolly Gonzalez, and HR Director, Jamie Davis

Jolene Phillips is one such teacher candidate. "I am a 50-year-old wife and mom of three and have worked in education as a paraprofessional for 20 years. The WCU degree completion program and the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative are allowing me to finish my bachelor's degree at the end of spring 2024 with my Special Education Teaching license. I am truly appreciative."

To help us get the word out about this program, please share this newsletter with potential future teachers and those who hire teachers. Encourage them to [subscribe](#) to this newsletter to stay informed about other programs we highlight in the future. We all need to work together to support the teacher pipeline!

UPCOMING APPLICATION TIMELINES

[Colorado Rural \(Student\) Teaching Stipend](#) applications for fall 2023 accepted: December 1, 2022 through March 31, 2023

[National Board Certified Teacher Stipend](#) applications accepted: January 1, 2023 through April 30, 2023

[Rural In-service Educator Stipend](#) applications for fall 2023 accepted: May 1, 2023 through August 31, 2023

[Special Services Provider Stipend](#) applications for fall 2023 accepted: May 1, 2023 through August 31, 2023

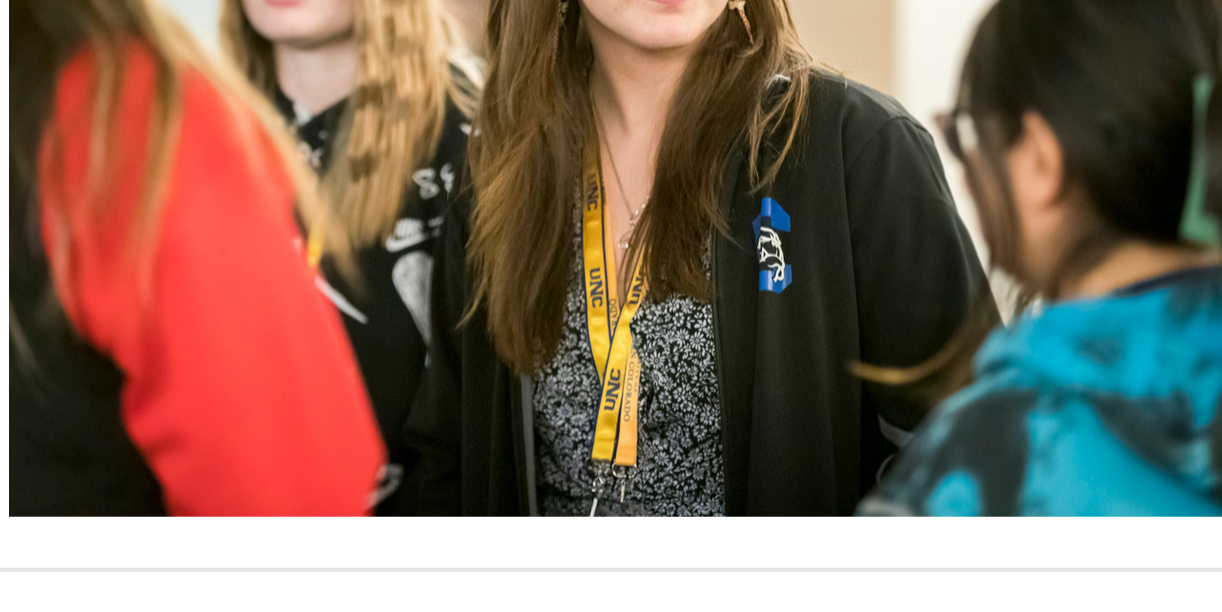
Visit TEACH Colorado's [Financial Aid and Scholarship Information](#) page for information about additional scholarships.

For financial aid available to in-service and aspiring educators, download the Colorado Department of Education's [Educator Recruitment and District Supports flyer](#).



UNC Future Rural Teachers Summit Was a Success

More than 90 high school and community college students attended the Future Rural Teachers Summit on February 2, 2023, where they learned about what it would be like to teach in rural Colorado school districts. Colorado's 2022 Teacher of the Year, Autumn Rivera, gave the keynote address. Her message focused on the strength of community connections in rural areas.



Our Featured Partners

Western Colorado University

Western Colorado University's 100% [online teacher preparation program](#) allows adults to complete their degrees and obtain a teaching license. The program is entirely online and allows individuals to maintain their existing employment while attending classes.

Marzano Research

[Marzano Research](#) offers sophisticated rural education research and consulting capabilities with a collaborative, small-business approach. Whether you want to grow your teacher pipeline, improve work-based learning pathways, or position your students for postsecondary success, we can help you develop and use actionable strategies leading to rural school success.

TEACH Colorado

[TEACH Colorado](#) provides licensure coaching; resume, cover letter, and testing guides; application fee reimbursements; and scholarships to non-licensed school staff, high-school students, career changers, and all others who are interested in teaching. TEACH Colorado also provides unique resources and support to teacher preparation programs and school districts across the state. For more information on partnering, please reach out to Annette.

Colorado BOCES Association

The [Colorado BOCES of Cooperative Educational Services \(BOCES\) Association](#) provides educational services to two or more school districts that alone cannot afford the service, or find it advantageous and cost-effective to cooperate with other districts.

Regis University

[Regis University](#) offers 100% online teacher licensure programs for those with a college degree and those seeking degree completion. Programs are available for elementary education, secondary education, and special education. Attend a virtual information session for more information. Contact the [Student Success Coach](#) for more information.

CU-Boulder

The University of Colorado at Boulder offers an online [Teacher Leadership Program](#). Students earn stackable graduate certificates in subjects such as "Social and Emotional Learning" and "Teaching Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Students" that can lead to an MA in Teacher Leadership.

Colorado Department of Education

As the administrative arm of the State Board of Education, the [Colorado Department of Education](#) is responsible for implementing state and federal education laws, disbursing state and federal funds, holding schools and districts accountable for performance, licensing all educators, and providing public transparency of performance and financial data.

Contact Us

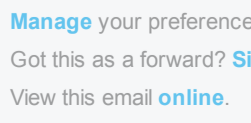
The [Colorado Center for Rural Education](#) supports educators by providing financial support to pre- and in-service teachers and special services providers. Visit our [website](#) for more information about our mission and available [stipends](#).

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