

edge

CU Denver
School of Education
& Human Development

INNOVATION
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A LETTER FROM THE INTERIM DEANS

As many of you know, we've had a tough year at the School of Education & Human Development. Not only have we been educating and serving our public mission during the COVID-19 pandemic but we also have been honoring the memory of Dean Emerita Rebecca Kantor, EdD, a forward-thinking, influential education champion who passed away in April from a terminal illness.

Serving as co-interim deans, we are humbled to have the opportunity to lead our school community during this time. *Edge* magazine helps us celebrate and highlight how our diverse faculty, alumni, and students continue to make lives better for individuals, families, schools, organizations, and communities. They tirelessly advance SEHD's collective vision of justice and equity, no matter the circumstances. Our faculty and staff are resilient, visionary, and extraordinarily productive.

In this issue, you will meet members of the SEHD community who are truly dedicated to lifelong learning, teaching, research, creative work, and service. You'll meet Dr. Melody Brown (pictured on the cover), whose expertise in intersectionality in couples and family therapy is respected and celebrated on our campus and across the country. Other faculty featured include Dr. Amy Ferrell, equity researcher in Special

Education, and Dr. Ron Tzur, a math aficionado whose major grant work supports mathematics growth and success for teachers and students. Alumni featured include Elena Sandoval-Lucero, who is helping us launch a new higher education concentration for master's students, and Joselyne Garcia-Moreno, who has become a tremendous spokesperson for Pathways2Teaching.

It's always hard to select students to highlight because they are all such bright and dedicated people. This year we are featuring Eric Trujillo, who is pursuing an online Learning Design and Technology master's degree so that he can be the most effective teacher possible during COVID-19; Cassie Knellinger, who openly shares her experiences with a disability while maintaining a very high GPA; and Carolina Lechuga Contreras, who describes the impactful connections she has made with SEHD faculty. Their inspiring journeys illustrate for us all a sense of what's possible.

With gratitude and admiration,

Scott C. Bauer
Barbara L. Seidl

Dr. Scott Bauer and Dr. Barbara Seidl
Interim Deans



IN MEMORIUM

This year in particular, if you feel moved to do so, please consider joining us in honoring Dean Kantor's legacy by making a gift to the Dr. Rebecca Kantor Memorial Fund at ucdenver.edu/DeanKantorMemorial or the Doctoral Equity Scholarship at giving.cu.edu/DoctoralEquityScholarship. You can learn the unique attributes of each giving opportunity at their respective websites. We can't overemphasize the need for financial support among our students and our commitment to helping them reach their important career goals.

INTERIM DEANS

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FRONT COVER

Dr. Melody Brown, clinical assistant professor in the Couple and Family Therapy program, stands in Larimer Square. She has learned to value her intersecting identities and is committed to passing this appreciation on to students from all backgrounds. Turn to page 8 for more.

PHOTOGRAPHY

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ABOUT

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\$2.3 MILLION GRANT WILL HELP TRANSFORM ECE TEACHER PREPARATION IN COLORADO



“This initiative is perfect timing for Colorado.”

—Gov. Jared Polis

Top: Dr. Kristie Kauerz
Bottom: Dr. Diana Schaack

At the heart of high-quality early care and education (ECE) are the knowledge and skills of the thousands of adults who care for and educate young children in Colorado each day. The SEHD recently received a highly competitive \$2.3 million grant from the Early Educator Investment Collaborative (EEIC) to transform early childhood teacher preparation in Colorado through policy reform and higher education innovation.

Through partnerships between Colorado state government and Institutions of Higher Education (IHE), the grant is intended to remove barriers that have historically limited access to effective and efficient degree pathways for the ECE workforce, ultimately ensuring educators possess the knowledge, skills, and dispositions needed to promote healthy learning and development among Colorado’s diverse young children. The grant is also designed to support policy reforms that align ECE teacher qualifications across various state agencies and promote policy efforts to fairly compensate early educators so they can enjoy a long, fulfilling career in the field.

ECE is experiencing a profound moment in time in Colorado. In November 2020, Colorado overwhelmingly voted for a nicotine tax to provide funding for universal preschool. In addition, Gov. Jared Polis, a longtime ECE champion, signed a bill establishing the Colorado Department of Early Childhood, which expands access to ECE for Colorado’s children and families by consolidating the many different ECE programs and funding.

At the same time, there is a shortage of early educators, and the new EEIC grant will help address Colorado’s need to increase this workforce by 25 percent over the next 10 years.

“This initiative is perfect timing for Colorado,” said Polis. “This coordinated statewide effort will support effective ways to expand our skilled early childhood workforce, which is so critical to preparing to implement voter-passed free universal preschool across the state in two years.”

Through funding from the grant, the SEHD will lead an IHE consortium across the state—including Metropolitan State University (MSU Denver), the University of Northern Colorado (UNC), CU’s Colorado Springs campus (UCCS), and the entire Colorado Community College System (CCCS)—to address access, quality, and efficiency of degrees. Together, the consortium will enhance courses of study with an intentional focus on inclusion, culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy, trauma-informed care, and dual-language learning instruction across the birth-to-age-eight continuum. The consortium will also innovate to improve student success services and to develop shared course credit transfer and credit for prior learning processes across the institutions.

“Another very exciting part of this project is that each IHE is receiving funding from the grant to pilot different strategies to improve equitable access to degrees,” said Dr. Diana Schaack, coprincipal investigator for the project. “Strategies include increasing the pipe-



Brenda Perry with students at Clayton Early Learning in Denver, in February 2019, before the coronavirus pandemic. Courtesy Scott Dressel-Martin/Clayton Early Learning

line of racially and linguistically diverse teachers, increasing the pipeline of teachers in rural communities who have historically had limited geographic access to BA programs, and reducing the time to degree completion.”

Through grant funds, CU Denver will launch an ECE program in the San Luis Valley and in northeastern Colorado. CU Denver’s Partnership for Rural Educator Preparation, or T-PREP, will bring the second two years of a BA and scholarships for rural students to Trinidad State College and to Northeast Junior College. UCCS will launch the first online Inclusive ECE BA program in the state. UNC and CCCS will develop a credit-for-prior-learning assessment to increase degree efficiency, and MSU Denver will partner with Westminster School District to provide onsite

teacher preparation coursework and clinical residency placements.

“This project includes deep partnerships between state government and ECE policy leaders, which means the innovations that are successfully piloted in our consortium can hopefully feed back to future ECE workforce development policy,” said Schaack.

Policy change is indeed front and center. “In early childhood, state policy reform and higher education innovation rarely intersect,” said Dr. Kristie Kauerz, coprincipal investigator. “This grant provides an unprecedented opportunity to bring together multiple IHEs and state government to collectively focus on improving early childhood teachers’ access to meaningful, credit-bearing pathways toward BA attainment.”

Dr. Kauerz will spearhead a policy group of deans; leaders from the governor’s office; the Colorado Departments of Education, Human Services, and Higher Education; and the Early Childhood Leadership Commission to advance ECE workforce policy in ways that increase financial assistance and compensation for students studying to be early educators and bring greater alignment to the numerous ECE teacher qualification standards.

This grant is an important legacy of the SEHD’s late dean, Dr. Rebecca Kantor, who had the vision and passion to reimagine both the ECE workforce and higher education and understood the importance of intersecting higher education and policy for transformational change. She is dearly missed.

LEARNING TO SELF-ADVOCATE AND THRIVE



Cassie Knellinger smiles broadly when she mentions that she has a 3.9 GPA at CU Denver. She credits self-advocacy and courage for her positive experiences and academic success.

Knellinger made enormous strides in her undergraduate NxtGEN teacher education program classes and practicum experiences at Munroe Elementary School after seeking mentorship from Dr. Tania Hogan, director of undergraduate student success in the SEHD. Hogan was at her side as the pandemic hit. Together, they recognized an academic challenge, discussed academic testing, and implemented a testing plan through CU Denver's Office of Disability Services. Now that she has an official diagnosis, Knellinger shares her experiences with disability with her college classmates and professors.

"The first semester when I needed anything, Tania's number was in my phone," she said. "I could call her. That was really helpful. I was just honest with her about what I was going through. In turn, she helped me put things into perspective and gave me real advice that I could trust."

"Cassie is someone who can embrace a challenge, tackle it head on, and never give up on what she wants to achieve in life," said Hogan. "I'm so proud of the persistence, openness, and courage she has demonstrated. She is authentic, creative, excels at teaching, and is transforming her own instructional practice, which then impacts the learning of her students."

I look forward to what more will come after graduation when she has a classroom of her own!"

Knellinger visited CU Denver's Future Teacher Expo with her high school teacher cadet program in 2019. "Just being on campus really sealed the deal," she said. "It's a really beautiful campus and very easy to walk everywhere in the city."

She started as a college freshman in spring 2020, after taking a few months off to volunteer in Bolivia. Her plan is to join SEHD's BA to MA next year. That program will facilitate her ability to earn her bachelor's in Elementary Education in 2024 and her master's in Culturally and Linguistically Diverse Education in 2025.

"Many teacher education programs only allow students to teach in schools in the last year or last two years," she said. "That just didn't seem like enough time for me. CU Denver's Teacher Education program allows me to do preservice teaching from freshman to senior year."

Her practicum experiences at Munroe Elementary have been outstanding. "They've always made me feel like staff at Munroe," she said. "The experience gives you a realistic idea of what the teaching profession will be like."

Growing up, Knellinger did not enjoy elementary, middle, and high school. She said her teachers didn't give her the time of day because she had an undiagnosed disability. "I never want another student to feel like that. I want to take those hurt feelings and turn them into something productive: school days filled with love, joy, happiness, and learning."



"The experience gives you a realistic idea of what the teaching profession will be like."

Her favorite university course has been Math for Elementary School Teachers, MTED 3040 taught by Amy Smith. "That course really put me in the mindset of a student who is just learning how to add, subtract, and understand fractions," she said. "It really broke down mathematics learning and made me feel like I was learning math all over again."

Knellinger appreciates CU Denver dorm life because it offers a "buffer period" between living at home and living on her own. The dorms provide excellent access to city living, including great restaurants and cultural attractions, such as the Denver Botanic Gardens and Denver Art Museum.

Her advice for future students at CU Denver comes graciously and thoughtfully: "If you are a disabled student, you may feel like you need to hide it, or just get through with your classes. I think the second you stop doing that, and stop trying to please other people, your life gets so much better. It's not easy. But you can just be yourself. There are so many people and systems that want to help you. You deserve to be in college. And, you need to be here."

Above: Cassie Knellinger student teaching at Munroe Elementary in Denver Public Schools. Left: Cassie being mentored by Dr. Tania Hogan.



INSPIRED TO SERVE CULTURALLY DIVERSE FAMILIES



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“... the Human Development and Family Relations program gives students life lessons that we can apply in our everyday lives and for our own good.”

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Carolina Lechuga Contreras, an undergraduate student in the Human Development and Family Relations (HDFR) program, is building her professional credentials through powerful classroom learning experiences, field-based service-learning, study abroad, and frequent faculty mentoring sessions.

“She is a wise and generous individual, fluent in Spanish and English, and extremely passionate about social advocacy and justice for multilingual families,” said Dr. Ruben Viramontez-Anguiano, HDFR program lead. “She is dedicated to her studies and the community. And she’s worked hard for numerous years to pay for her education.”

Lechuga Contreras entered CU Denver with an undeclared major; however, she was certain she wanted to serve children and families in a major way. After taking an HDFR prerequisite class called Families in Global Perspectives, taught by graduate instructor Omhagain Dayeen, the decision fell into place. She declared her major as HDFR.

She finds the program highly gratifying and valuable. The experience has instilled more acceptance in her soul and illuminated pathways and life lessons along the way. For instance, everything she learned in child development classes deepened her relationships with her niece and nephew.

She will graduate in December 2021. Next, she plans to attend graduate school to become a licensed social worker who positively impacts the lives of Spanish- and English-speaking children and families. “My family’s Mexican roots, my empathy for others, and my Spanish and English writing and speaking skills are a perfect combination for pursuing social work,” she said.

Lechuga Contreras can’t say enough about the extraordinary faculty in the HDFR program who immerse students in the latest theories and discoveries. They are always accessible to students as mentors and advocates. She credits welcoming classroom environments where multilingualism and multiculturalism are celebrated, where coursework is immediately applicable, and where there is a great sense of belonging. She describes Viramontez-Anguiano as “literally another father figure to me.” He’s always trying to help her save money on college costs and pursue graduate studies. He even sends encouraging texts out of the blue to tell her that he is proud of her.

She characterizes her fellow student community in HDFR as thoughtful and diverse. “I feel like I’m surrounded by people who want to put themselves in other people’s shoes. I was telling one of my classmates that I had a paper to write and that I was stressed about it. She said, ‘Girl, you got this!’ I felt so supported.”

Her practicum experiences at Sister Carmen Community Center in Lafayette have been eye-opening and amazing. This nonreligious agency has supported the community in east Boulder County since 1978. “The Sister Carmen nonprofit organization goes out of its way to help their participants with all types of basic needs, including food security, rental and utilities assistance, transportation support, and mental health services. Julie Piller, who is the community and family education manager, makes everyone feel like family,” said Lechuga Contreras.

A fellow HDFR student, Billy Nguyen, interns at Sister Carmen as well. “Billy is just a compassionate person,” said Viramontez-Anguiano. “He genuinely cares about his classmates, and he cares about the community. He’s a dedicated young man who is going to do some incredible things in this world.” Nguyen is building webpages for Sister Carmen’s Bridging the Digital Divide program.

When Lechuga Contreras heard about the chance to study abroad in Spain as part of her HDFR major, she jumped at the chance. “I wanted to have that experience! I really enjoyed it.” she said. “I met some really good friends. We took classes abroad and helped refugees learn new skills. During our free time, we visited cathedrals, art museums, and beautiful sunflower fields.”

The study abroad trip provided a unique opportunity to develop relationships with faculty, just like the HDFR program at home. Instructor Jennifer Greiving was on that particular trip. “I got a really bad sunburn, and I wasn’t able to sit down, lay down, or anything,” Lechuga Contreras said. “Ever since then, Jenn has called me ‘Crispy,’ and our relationship has been super great. And I just feel like that’s the best thing. It’s that connection that you have with your faculty member, even though you don’t have any more classes with her. When I run into her, she always says ‘Crispy, how are you?’”

Lechuga Contreras goes out of her way to recommend CU Denver and the HDFR program to her friends and relatives. “CU Denver is just a really diverse university. You will always find a major that interests you and people with whom you can connect. And the HDFR program gives students life lessons that we can apply in our everyday lives and for our own good.”



NEW MA IN COUPLE AND FAMILY THERAPY FOCUSES ON

INTERSECTIONALITY

Dr. Melody Brown with CU Denver students in Larimer Square.

Dr. Melody Brown, clinical assistant professor, knows firsthand the importance of intersectionality. This makes her an asset to the SEHD, where she teaches in the MA in Couple and Family Therapy (CFT) program, which was established this year.

Brown, a licensed marriage and family therapist, uses herself as an example to illustrate intersectionality: “I talk about who I am and my various identities and how those impact me as I walk through this world. I am an African American, I’m able-bodied, I don’t identify as heterosexual because it doesn’t fit for me. I grew up in a religious family, and while I don’t attend church, I do hold dear the tenets of love and equality.” She is also the oldest child of a middle-class family.

“Think about all those things coming together,” said Brown.

Her own research focuses on African Americans in therapy with white therapists, grounded in broader research that shows clients tend to feel more comfortable with therapists who understand their culture. She believes an effective therapy curriculum should have a holistic approach—because every individual is made up of many intersecting identities. “People want someone who can identify with their experience and their pain, and that often means someone who looks like them,” said Brown.

However, effective multicultural training can help therapists work with people from backgrounds different than their own. Brown teaches future therapists how

to develop culturally sensitive approaches, which is an important part of the new MA in CFT. The program, accredited by the Commission on Accreditation of Marriage and Family Therapy Education, intentionally focuses on intersectionality.

“From the very onset, we need to be thinking about the clients in their context—what values they have, their cultural lens, any sociopolitical identities they might have, their economic status, and how they all intersect,” Brown said.

If overlapping identities are complex in individuals, they are even more complex in relationships. CFT clinicians are studying the intersectionality of a couple or the family system. “Our job is to think systemically,” Brown said. “With couple and family therapy, it’s

more about the interactions that are happening that lead to the things that are problematic when multiple people are operating within a system.”

Dr. Diane Estrada, director of the CFT program, said a systemic approach is vital because “individuals develop in the context of relationships that shape who they are and how they respond to the world.”

Brown uses interracial couples as an example. “Some years ago, I heard that Denver is one of the cities with the highest number of interracial relationships,” she said. The nationwide average of interracial couples is 17 percent; in Denver, it’s 22 percent. While interracial couples may not have struggled with race-related issues in the past, recent events could bring up new concerns. “Last year may have been a time when things got quite tense because there were things that weren’t talked about before,” Brown said. “Maybe couples hadn’t talked explicitly about race because the world had not stopped like it did when George Floyd was murdered.”

Every person in couple or family therapy has their own complex identity, which stems from the culture they grew up in. “We come to our relationships with our own sets of values,” Brown said.

Understanding how intimate relationships work can also increase understanding of larger systems. “We believe that the context of people’s lives based on their intersectional identities is an important part of how we connect to each other and stand up for one another to develop a sense of community and belonging in a more just society,” said Estrada.

Social justice is part of CFT’s curriculum. “We want to create a pool

“... the context of people’s lives based on their intersectional identities is an important part of how we connect to each other and stand up for one another to develop a sense of community and belonging in a more just society.”

of diverse therapists in Denver, and we want to train students to reach people outside their own identities,” Brown said. Estrada emphasized this holistic approach: “Our program centers its philosophy on developing ethical, culturally responsive clinicians who are equipped to work with a variety of clientele with a focus on honoring their multifaceted cultural experiences.”

Graduate students in the CFT program get real-life experience with diverse clients at the Student and Community Counseling Center on campus, where they provide services to CU Denver students and people in the greater Denver community. After completing their course of study, students receive mentored counseling and therapy experience with live supervision and continual feedback from licensed clinicians, including Brown.

This clinical training, coupled with a CFT program that stresses equity-focused services, produces culturally informed graduates—something vital to successful couple and family therapy. “Not just from my own experience, but also from research, you hear time and time again that the element of safety and identification is really important,” said Brown.

For more information, visit education.ucdenver.edu/cft.

Dr. Diane Estrada counsels a family.



NEW PROGRAM ELEVATES STUDENT SUCCESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Amid an everchanging sociopolitical climate and a growing diverse student population, Colorado and the rest of the country are in dire need of education leaders and policy makers who are prepared to effectively advance institutions of higher education.

Dr. Elena Sandoval-Lucero (MA '95, PhD '04) is a clinical assistant professor in the SEHD who has served as vice president of student affairs and campus vice president at various Colorado community colleges. She has spent decades developing methods for education leaders to enact institutional change, with equity and social justice as focal points. She recognizes the urgency and readiness education leaders must possess to empower the coming generations of higher education students.

Sandoval-Lucero is bringing her equity-minded framework of student success and retention to the new MA in Leadership for Educational Organizations (LEO) concentration in Leading Change for Student Success in Higher Education.

The new concentration takes five semesters to complete and is fully online. It is designed for individuals from higher education institutions, policy and research organizations, and governmental and nonprofit entities who are looking to transition into new roles within higher education. It was developed with the midlevel professional in mind. "They have obligations balancing their professional roles and families. An online degree is accessible to individuals all over the country and is ideal for working professionals and candidates who find evening in-person classes logistically challenging," said Sandoval-Lucero.

The degree is not solely limited to education majors. "You can have any undergraduate experience," she added. "Most emerging professionals gain experience as student employees on campus or find themselves involved in student life or student government. Upon graduation they often find entry-level positions in housing, advising, admissions, or orientation. Whether they majored in history, political science, business, or psychology, if they want to move up and take a leadership role in higher education, they need a master's degree."



Dr. Elena Sandoval-Lucero

"The curriculum integrates current issues with historical, philosophical, and theoretical foundations to help candidates discover, explore, and effect change in higher education and related organizations."

The program's online classes use highly interactive instructional design principles that contribute to engaging and motivational student experiences.

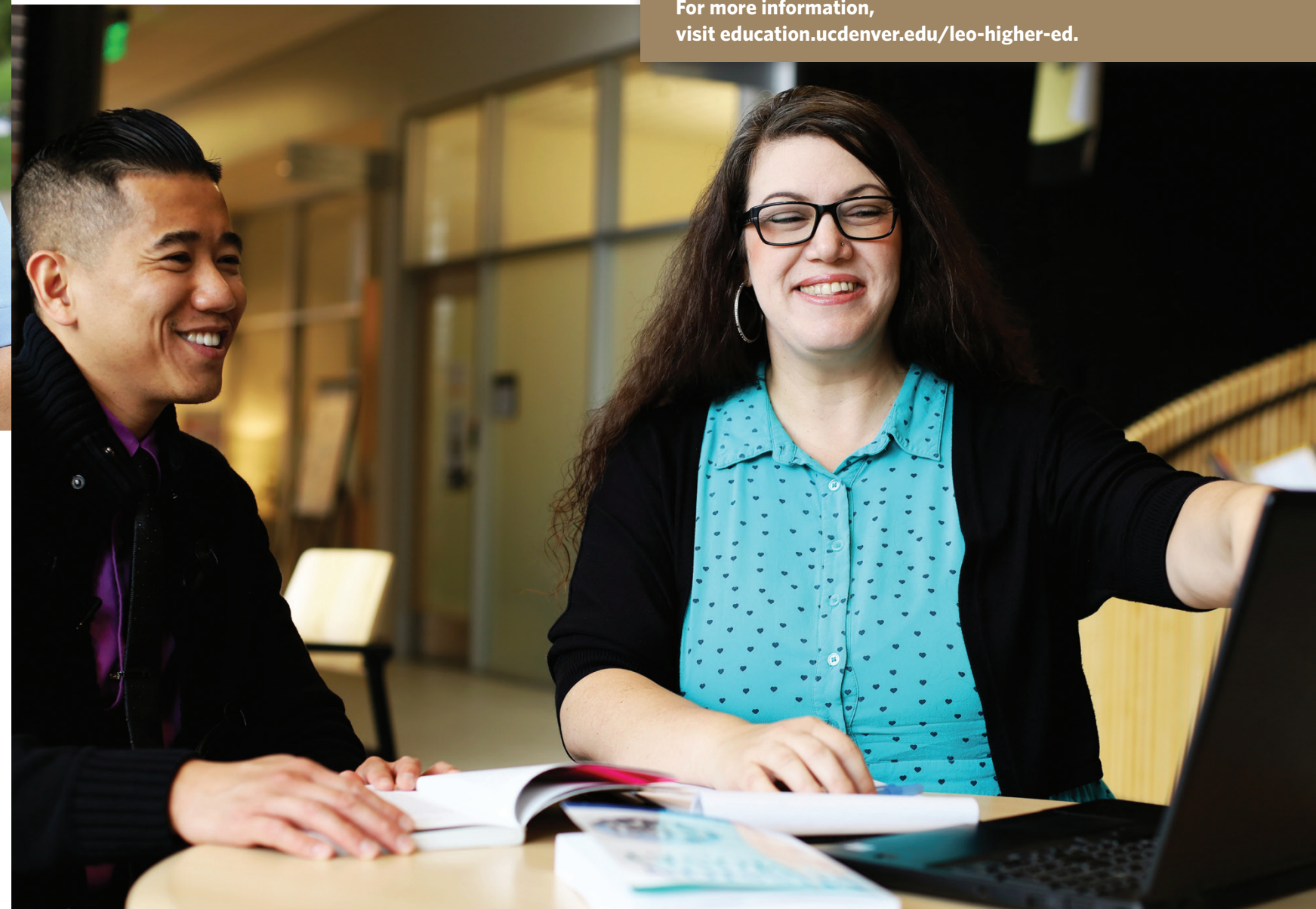
According to Sandoval-Lucero, the higher education retention models are shifting toward a more robust focus on student success and degree completion. "It's about the institution meeting students where they are and taking them where they need to be," she said.

Student success is not simply providing access to tutoring and resource centers. To Sandoval-Lucero, it ultimately comes down to the connection and belonging that is developed by valuing the assets students bring with them to the college experience. "If we focus on an asset-based framework of student success, achievement increases and outcomes improve," she noted. Higher education institutions need leaders with innovative perspectives on what it means to be an equitable organization, how to engage diverse student populations, and advocate for social justice.

This new program sets itself apart from other national higher education degree programs not only by creating a model for student success but also by "looking at what future higher education leaders need to know," said Sandoval-Lucero. "Higher education is not separate from what's going on in the world, our communities, and in our regions. The program looks at the greater higher education context and how that impacts education leaders' work."

Through this specialized degree, students will learn to evaluate the cultural, governmental, and sociopolitical influences of higher education in America and internationally, and critically analyze educational policy and structures that lead to inequitable campus environments. They will also investigate intentional leadership practices for responsive change. Graduates will be highly prepared to provide culturally informed, equity-focused leadership and pursue a wide range of roles within educational organizations, including student affairs, academic affairs, and diversity and inclusion roles.

For more information, visit education.ucdenver.edu/leo-higher-ed.



HIGH SCHOOL TEACHER EXPANDS HIS SKILLSET TO ENRICH STUDENT SUCCESS

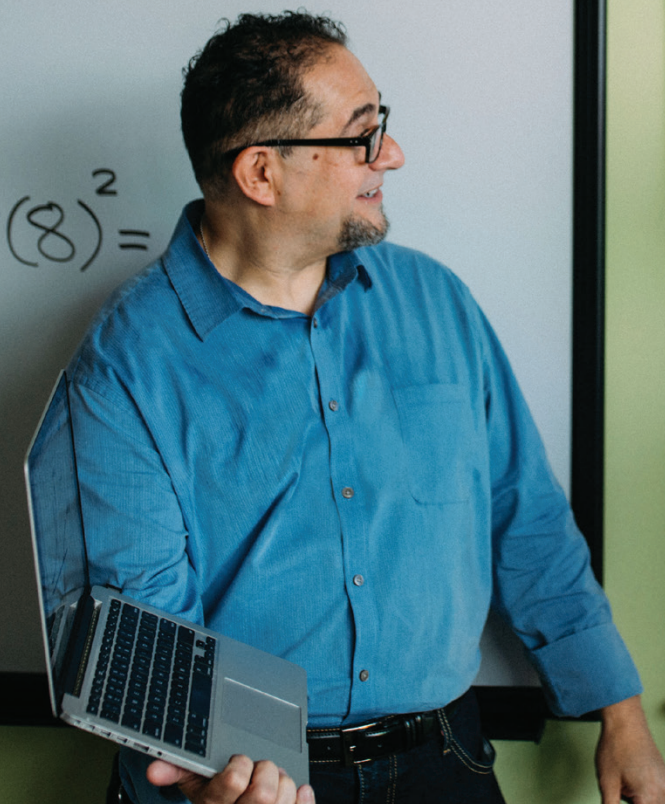
Eric Trujillo (BS, '92) has spent the past two decades inspiring math students at Colorado's Finest High School of Choice, an Englewood school centered on family-like supportive education. The alternative high school champions connective relationships to flexibly serve its young learners. Connection and flexibility were key factors in Trujillo's decision to enroll at CU Denver for a second time.

Trujillo is currently pursuing an online master's degree in the Learning Design and Technology (LDT) program. After

completing his bachelor of science degree at CU Denver, he enjoyed a successful career in automotive engineering. When he realized he needed to shift gears in search of more fulfilling work, his love for both math and kids led Trujillo to start a second career in teaching.

Enthusiastically describing his work as an educator, Trujillo conveyed his passion for student success. "I get to know my students very well. I mentor them, hold them accountable, and support them toward graduation. We build a really close relationship, a support system that's in addition to the standard supports offered by a high school. It's my favorite part of the job—I'm a family teacher, and I love that."

Eric Trujillo with one of his high school students.



Eric Trujillo participating in an online class.



However, when the pandemic forced Trujillo and his students to pivot to remote teaching and learning, he found he needed to expand his skillset to continue being the most effective teacher he could be. Though it was his first time in a formal degree program in decades, Trujillo found the same style of close, compassionate support he has worked to provide to his own students.

"All of the support in the LDT program has been really helpful to ease me back into that university mindset that I've been out of for a while," he said. "The processes you have to navigate at a university can be really overwhelming, but I feel I've been so supported in navigating those processes successfully."

Because he was still working full-time as a teacher during the pandemic, Trujillo also appreciates the program's online flexibility. "It really allows me to balance my time accordingly between my job and my family," he said.

CU Denver's focus on inclusion was something that appealed strongly to Trujillo, even years ago as an undergraduate. "There were students from

all different life situations, all ages, and from all over the world. The campus was so diverse, and it still is. I just love that it's kept that."

Emphasizing the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion is echoed by Dr. Laura Summers, LDT program leader and 2021 recipient of SEHD's Lynn K. Rhodes Faculty Award: "We provide tremendous opportunities for school professionals to gain credentials while celebrating diversity and intersectionality. Our graduates recognize that all learners are affected by a confluence of social location, identity, and implicit bias. School district leaders appreciate the hard and soft skills that graduates gain in the program."

Sean Michael Morris, a senior instructor who led Trujillo and other students through a critical digital pedagogy summer course, noted how much Trujillo himself contributed to the learning environment. "Eric's keen mind is an example of the critical consciousness that students develop while part of LDT," said Morris. "He weighs materials and information from the class against his own experience—one of the advantages of being an adult learner—and his contributions

to class discussion and collaborations represent an integration of his own knowledge and background with the evolving discourse of the class." He calls this "emergent learning," which is the kind of critical thinking that is vital for 21st-century schools and businesses.

Bolstered with fresh insights from Morris and other professors, Trujillo immediately worked to integrate his learnings into his own teaching. "One of my goals is to create a social justice math class and apply mathematic concepts to social justice. As a family teacher, I help my students look at the world in new and different ways. I want the best for them, and I will challenge them. It's all to help them achieve their goals," he said.

LEARNING DESIGN AND TECHNOLOGY PROGRAMS

The master's and certificate programs in Learning Design and Technology provide scholars like Trujillo the opportunity to learn leading-edge methods and best practices applicable to a variety of professional roles and settings. The stackable courses and certificates adapt to suit each scholar's unique interests and goals, offering explorations through a suite of techniques, such as critical digital pedagogy, media and maker projects, digital storytelling, and creative instructional materials design. No matter the class, all instruction remains grounded in a philosophy of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

For more information, visit education.ucdenver.edu/LDT.



FINDING EMPOWERMENT

IN COMMUNITY

There are many times when students teach adults big life lessons. This is one of those stories. In it, a group of elementary girls benefiting from special education instruction teach researchers (and the rest of us) that power is about relationships. And true power is within yourself.

Dr. Amy Ferrell, associate professor in the SEHD Special Education program, recently authored “Exploring critical literacy for elementary students with disabilities” in a forthcoming edition of the *Journal of Equity and Excellence in Education*.

“The students in this study—three girls of color in special education, living in Denver—went against my structural definitions of advantage,” said Ferrell. “Instead, they focused on interpersonal levels of power as they spoke to the necessity of truth, vulnerability, and self-worth when understanding who has an advantage. We studied topics like Indigenous erasure, gentrification, untold history, even friendships. They insisted that they have advantage because they know the full truth of their situations, are empowered to change, and can stay committed to their passions when faced with racism and sexism.”

This investigation ties into Ferrell’s other work on community. Her study published in 2017 in *Harvard Educational Review* showed that many of the goals for people with disabilities are assimilative ideals toward nondisabled norms, such as independence within “the community.” Community is often described as something outside of individuals or schools, as if it is only a static social establishment based on geography or common affiliation.

However, the girls in the recent study teach us to conceptualize community as fundamentally relational. Because “community is the antithesis to oppression,” Ferrell says the girls’ insights speak to the need to continually examine power at both the structural and interpersonal levels, focusing especially on self-empowerment.

“Community is what people do together more than what people are together,” she said. “As we navigate massive power imbalances in the world, we need to understand that community heals us when there is reciprocity and agency.

Everyone’s gifts are valued, and people speak their truth, especially during conflict, in order to continually attune to both individual and group needs. So, it’s a dynamic formation. The girls in this study spoke about advantage as being empowered and seeing the truth. We can all learn so much from that characterization.”

In her research, Ferrell challenges common conceptions of literacy, success, inclusion, and community. She uses Freirean principles to offer critical approaches to literacy education for students with disabilities. She disputes ubiquitous purposes for education, such as capitalist presumptions of job attainment and U.S. dominant ideals of independence and competition, and suggests education is instead the liberation of becoming beloved.

One of Ferrell’s greatest joys is advising CU Denver doctoral students who are studying racial equity in education from a variety of vantage points in their respective roles. All are gifted leaders with tremendous expertise and passions. “What I love most is that we can be real with each other, given all of the struggles and joys of the doctorate journey. Being researchers allows us to ask tough questions and try to learn something that can facilitate our own and others’ liberation. For instance, one of my advisees, Karen Jaramillo, may use photovoice as a research methodology, where marginalized communities

take photos of themselves to communicate their stories and situations and advocate for change.”

Doctoral students say that Ferrell’s classes stand out due to the high degree of interpersonal trust and kindness, as they have fun, laugh, question, learn from each other’s brilliance, talk about serendipitous challenges, and scheme. They describe themselves as a buffalo herd, running straight through storms to find rainbows waiting on the other end. They yearn to build their supportive interactions outside of the classroom, on mountain hikes and more frequent weekend get-togethers.

“Special education students in my research and doctoral students in my classes have different ways of teaching me about the edification of each person’s belovedness and the importance of enacting community,” said Ferrell. “I’ve found that intentional community results in liberation through wholeness and truth, and that the important outcomes aren’t found on test scores. They’re found in happiness, safety, curiosity, health, students’ agency to discern their paths forward, and visible tenderness toward ourselves and others who are experiencing life’s losses and transitions.”

From left to right: Gabriel Castaño, Jennifer Sobanet, Karen Jaramillo, Amy Ferrell, Christina Sigala, Erin Lynne, standing in front of St. Cajetan’s

Like the photovoice method, St. Cajetan’s symbolizes Ferrell’s students’ topics of racial equity, combined with her own and her students’ spirituality. They want to revive its history as a site of activism and healing. The residents who once lived on the land that is now the Auraria Campus enacted community. They affirmed each other’s sacred worth through reciprocity before their displacement.



IMMERSIVE MATH KNOWLEDGE

FOR TEACHERS LEADS TO DEEPER STUDENT LEARNING

The answer to improved math learning within a school district lies in a partnership package comprised of teacher professional development (PD) and playful, student-adaptive (centered) teaching methods.

This rings true in Sheridan School District #2 (SSD-2). Grants from the National Science Foundation and Rose Community Foundation allowed a team from SEHD, led by Dr. Ron Tzur, co-principal investigator and mathematics education professor, to work with the district between from 2016 to 2021. The district recently partnered with Tzur's expert team again to extend that initial work for three more years to further enhance their mathematics education.

A key impetus for the extension was the unprecedented student growth on

4th and 5th grade math state assessments in 2019 during the first PD partnership with CU Denver. The PD also produced more confident math teachers and improved student reasoning. Given these outcomes, Sheridan District leaders approached CU Denver in March 2021 with a plan to allocate \$400,000 in COVID-related federal funding for PD to deepen and expand student-adaptive math education capacities and knowledge for their K-5 and special education teachers.

"The stars aligned with the COVID grant money," said Shirley Miles, SSD-2 chief academic officer. "We were able to bring CU Denver in for these additional math trainings. This program has proven results. Fifty-seven percent of our students had growth that exceeded that of their academic peers. So we know that



student-adaptive math pedagogy works. Now our job is to figure out how we can build it here, and then also sustain it."

The project will expand the group of teachers who are developing a student-adaptive pedagogy mindset and practices for math teaching. Working with 25 to 30 teachers, the SEHD team promotes PD toward a constructivist-informed, student-centered approach that builds and fosters students' conceptualization of number and advances their multiplicative and fractional reasoning. Concurrently, the SEHD team will collaborate with Maegan Daigler,

SSD-2 research and evaluation director, to assess the project's impact on student learning and outcomes.

"We are so excited that, through our partnership with CU Denver, we now have multiple measures to collect evidence of mathematical teaching and learning," said Daigler. "These data will be extremely valuable in helping us understand how we can design our system to support student learning in math for many years to come."

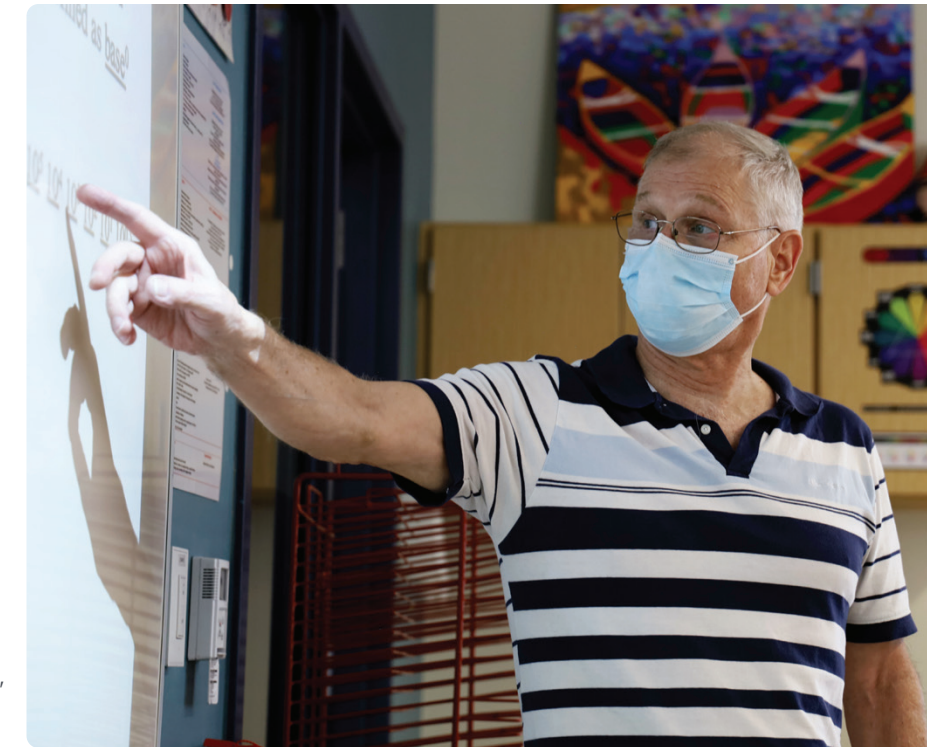
The first day of teacher training took place in August 2021 during a Summer Institute at Ft. Logan Northgate School in Sheridan. To start building a community of learners, the teachers and administrators all enjoyed learning some Israeli dancing. Next, the teachers played a hands-on math game called the M&M activity. Four or five learners sat around each table and pretended to be workers at an M&M factory that produces lots and lots of single candies (i.e., 1s). Each table constituted a "production post in the factory" and were tasked with figuring out the complex challenge for the factory "supervisors" of counting the ever-growing, high volume of M&Ms. No competition is involved. Rather, each small group is provided with ample opportunities to interpret and solve complex problems involved in organizing those 1s into number systems (e.g., coding by M&M colors) that quickly show large quantities without counting.

Using the M&M activity as an example, Tzur told the teachers, "The obvious goal related to promoting your math pedagogy is for you to promote thinking, problem solving, and outcomes. In the M&M activity, students can begin to deeply understand concepts, like place value based in number systems, multiplicative reasoning, symbols, and exponents. It all starts with the concept of number; multiplicative reasoning comes next."

Then, the team presented the anchor method of the PD, known as buddy-pairs. Teachers were paired with their buddies to work with SEHD's experts to help co-lead math activities and student math assessments.

Pat Sandos, the SSD-2 superintendent who pushed for this partnership extension, said he couldn't be more thrilled. "I have witnessed the outstanding student excitement, engagement, and joy for math that results from fun math activities. Individuals who didn't feel skilled in math have become 'math persons.' Those who love math have excelled. That's exciting for our students and families."

Left page: Teachers in Sheridan School District #2 engage in the M&M math activity during a teacher professional development session. Above right: Dr. Ron Tzur fosters teachers' conceptualization of number.



"I have witnessed the outstanding student excitement, engagement, and joy for math that results from fun math activities."

The principal at Fort Logan Northgate, Verónica "BJ" Jeffers, was also extremely excited. "We witnessed some magic here during the first project with CU Denver," she said. "Our youth were just growing and learning so fast. I'm even getting chills, just thinking about what this is going to do for our kids."

Tzur succinctly summarized this project as "an education professor's rarely seen dream-come-true. Practitioners and administrators approached our university because they recognized the empowering impact of theory- and research-based practices. We are thrilled."

In addition to Tzur, the members of the SEHD Project Team are Dr. Alan Davis, co-PI and professor, Research and Evaluation Methods; Dr. Nicola Hodkowsky, co-PI and SEHD PhD alum; and Cody Harrington, math education consultant.

YEAR IN REVIEW



LAUNCHING THE FIRST COHORT OF THE NEW PHD IN EARLY CHILDHOOD POLICY

Amber Minogue, Lindsay Shields, Karolina Villagrana, and Jane West were welcomed into the first PhD cohort in Early Childhood Policy, launched by SEHD faculty members **Dr. Kristie Kauerz** and **Dr. Diana Schaack**. This doctoral concentration prepares candidates to be leaders, policymakers, policy advisors and analysts, faculty members, and researchers who successfully shape, direct, implement, and evaluate early childhood services, infrastructure, and policy. [Learn about our PhD pathways at education.ucdenver.edu/PhD](https://education.ucdenver.edu/PhD).



1,500 PATHWAYS2TEACHING ALUMNI ACROSS THE NATION

Joselyne Garcia-Moreno, a student in the Secondary Mathematics Education master's program, has become an ambassador and spokesperson for Pathways2Teaching based on her own experience as an alum of the program. In 2021, she was interviewed on 9News and in *Education Today*. "This program teaches you how to really believe in yourself and your culture," she said. This "grow your own" high school teaching program was founded by SEHD's **Dr. Margarita Bianco**. [Learn more about the program and how it actively addresses teacher diversity gaps at pathways2teaching.org](https://pathways2teaching.org) and giving.cu.edu/pathways2teaching.



MITIGATING HEALTH AND EDUCATION DISPARITIES AFFECTING LATINX FAMILIES DURING COVID-19

As board members of the Colorado Association for Bilingual Education, **Dr. Lucinda Soltero-Gonzalez** and **Dr. Tania Hogan** advocated for multilingual families who were deciding whether to have their children tested for English proficiency during the pandemic. ACCESS testing involves speaking and listening on shared equipment and must be done in person. In Colorado, COVID-19 has disproportionately hit the Latinx population, which makes up the largest portion of emerging bilinguals.

Soltero-Gonzalez and Hogan helped create public service announcements for local Spanish-language radio and television, and participated in press interviews, including for 9News and *Chalkbeat*, to let multilingual parents know their rights and that they had a choice and could opt out of the testing.



REACHING 300 PEOPLE ON SIX CONTINENTS DURING DIGITAL PEDAGOGY LAB 2021

Imagine presenting a multiday tech event across 20 times zones. **Sean Michael Morris** and his team made it look easy last summer. The attendees to the 2021 Digital Pedagogy Lab learned from keynote speakers Ashley McCall and Matthew R. Morris, both K-12 teachers who spoke eloquently about topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Other digital learning topics covered everything from an introduction to critical digital pedagogy to speculative fiction. One track even produced a book of micro fiction called *Tiny Tales from the Digital Pedagogy Lab 2021*, available at <https://microdpl.pressbooks.com>. Interested in attending next year? [Visit digitalpedagogy.com](https://digitalpedagogy.com).

YEAR IN REVIEW



SPOTLIGHTING LIVEDX FOUNDER AND SEHD FACULTY FEATURED IN FORBES NEXT 1000 LIST

Dr. Geeta Verma is powering diversity, equity, and inclusion work in education through AI technology. LivedX, her new online platform, leverages machine learning and artificial intelligence technologies to accelerate opportunities for minoritized and marginalized youth. Growing up in India, Verma recognized the glaring educational and economic disparities in society. Her background and her work in STEM education motivated her to create LivedX, which was recognized by *Forbes*. LivedX is partnering with school districts nationwide to provide an aspirational tool to minimize disparities and translate the lived experiences of all youth into formal academic credentials. Interested in exploring if your school district is a good fit for LivedX technology?

[Visit livedx.com](https://livedx.com).



RECEIVING \$150K TO BUILD A DIVERSE WORKFORCE IN EARLY LEARNING DURING COVID-19

Dr. Rebecca Vlasin (PI) and **Dr. Michael Barla** (co-PI)—faculty in the Early Childhood Education program—were awarded a \$150,000 Early Childhood Workforce Innovation Grant to deepen and sustain their Designing for a Diverse Workforce: A Place-Based ECE BA Pathway. The funding supports 20 to 25 practicing early childhood educators who earn their bachelor's degree while working full time. This award honors the memory of Dean Emeritus Rebecca Kantor because her vision and insight were instrumental in designing the innovation. Transforming the Early Childhood Workforce in Colorado is a public-private partnership led by Early Milestones Colorado and includes Gary Community Investments, Buell Foundation, Colorado Department of Education, and Colorado Department of Human Services.

Above: Courtesy Patricia B. Smith/Sewall Child Development Center

NEW FACULTY

Dr. Elena Sandoval-Lucero, clinical assistant professor in the Leadership for Educational Organizations (LEO) program, earned her PhD in educational leadership and innovation from CU Denver. She has served in numerous leadership positions for Colorado higher education



institutions. Her credentials include vice president of the Boulder County campus of Front Range Community College (2017-2021), vice president of student affairs and dean of student success for Community College of Aurora (2011-2017), and director of admissions and outreach at Metropolitan State University of Denver (2006-2009). In addition, she has worked for the SEHD in various roles, including student services, extended studies, and grant-funded programs (1993-2006). Sandoval-Lucero is currently leading the launch of the new fully online MA in Leadership for Educational Organizations: Leading Change for Student Success in Higher Education. See pp. 10 and 11 for more information.



CELEBRATING EARTH DAY 2021 IN THE "BACKYARD SHED OF SCIENCE"

During the pandemic, CU faculty members developed creative approaches to teaching their classes online. In celebration of Earth Day, **Chancellor Michelle Marks** joined SEHD's **Dr. Robert "Bud" Talbot** virtually in his "backyard shed of science" to talk about air pollution. The Chancellor got a firsthand look at how Talbot uses innovative, engaging methods to teach scientific literacy to preservice teachers. He used an aquarium, dry ice, and soap bubbles to model Denver's "brown cloud." CU Denver has a "strong reputation for STEM education and for preparing future STEM teachers," said Marks. "It's terrific that you're finding ways to make learning interesting and fun during the pandemic."

GAIN SKILLS AND CONFIDENCE TO ACHIEVE YOUR CAREER GOALS: ONLINE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT, OPTIONAL UNIVERSITY CREDITS

The SEHD Office of Continuing and Professional Education offers a suite of innovative professional development programs dedicated to addressing the changing needs of educators. Participate individually or as part of a school district team while receiving optional university credits. You will learn proven strategies and pedagogies that you can implement immediately.



Executive Coaching for Educational Equity Certificate

Launched in June 2021, this certificate, with credit or noncredit options, is perfect if you are considering a career that includes coaching as part of your leadership role. Executive coaching helps build capacity within the teams in your organization, or it can help fulfill your personal goal of becoming an independent coaching consultant. You will learn how to actively listen and ask questions that promote self-reflection and professional growth as you also build awareness of your own values.

"It's designed for leaders within learning organizations, school districts, and institutions of higher education," said SEHD associate professor Dr. Laura Summers, who oversees the program. "In this year's cohort, we have a group of five executive leaders from a school district, in addition to individual participants from other districts along the Front Range. Everyone is optimizing this opportunity to network, discuss transformational change, build inclusive practices, and undertake critical discussions around equity and diversity."

The course modules align with International Coaching Federation (ICF) competencies and include one-on-one professional sessions with a coaching expert. The next cohort starts in April 2022. Register early, by February 15, 2022, and save on tuition.

Visit education.ucdenver.edu/executive-coaching-certificate.

P-3 Leadership Certificate: Leading to Address Early Learning Inequities

Launched last summer by CU Denver's National P-3 Center, this certificate provides you with the skills and knowledge to lead systemic improvements and implement reforms that support preschool and primary grades. You will participate in a blended format of modules completed through synchronous and asynchronous sessions. The courses can fulfill continuing education units (CEUs) or be converted into nine graduate credits. In its first year, the program enrolled 135 administrators from 13 different states.

"While school readiness and ready schools were priorities before the pandemic, they have become even more important as school districts, ECE programs, state agencies, and other stakeholders grapple with the inequitable opportunities provided to our youngest learners," said Dr. Kristie Kauerz, clinical associate professor and director of the National P-3 Center. "Individuals in our current cohort are taking the time to reimagine and invest deeply in their skills and knowledge to foster school cultures and dismantle historic inequities."

Visit education.ucdenver.edu/p-3-leadership.

Online Early Childhood Options in Partnership with Boulder Journey School

The CU Denver/Boulder Journey School partnership is designed for innovative educators working in infant and toddler through third grade classrooms who not only want to advance their career goals but who also care deeply about promoting the rights of children and their opportunities for early learning.

Offerings are two ECE professional development courses, a three-course ECE Pedagogy certificate (9 credit hours), and an Innovative ECE MA (30 credit hours). All three options are inspired by the schools for young children in Reggio Emilia, Italy.

"You'll learn alongside colleagues from around the world," said Dr. Lori Ryan, associate professor in ECE, who co-leads the partnership. "Currently, we are educating students who live locally, around the nation, and across the globe. The learning experiences are deeply rooted in the Reggio approach, the latest in digital pedagogy, and nestled in this wonderful partnership that originated with our residency program at Boulder Journey School."

The offerings are flexible and portable. Courses may articulate into certificates and MA programs.

Visit education.ucdenver.edu/reggio-emilia.

Explore additional professional development opportunities at education.ucdenver.edu or by email at cpe@ucdenver.edu.



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