



*From left to right: CUE graduate Jeremy Alvarez, CUE graduate Ashley Crowe, CUE graduate Jennifer Ruiz, Maxwell Elementary Principal Nivan Khosravi, CUE graduate Stephanie Gonzalez, CUE teacher candidate Jazmín Ubaldo, and CUE teacher candidate Maria Salas*

## **Partner School Maxwell Elementary Attracts CUE Teacher**

[Maxwell Elementary](#) is a [Denver Public School](#) that develops “students’ independence, critical thought, and enduring love for learning” in partnership with parents. Three [UNC Center for Urban Education](#) (CUE) students currently work as paraprofessionals at Maxwell, and four CUE graduates work there as teachers. It’s unusual to have so many of our CUE students and graduates working at one school, so we decided to investigate the dynamics at this particular partner school.



*CUE Graduate Jeremy Alvarez and his classroom at Maxwell Elementary*

## **Fully Inclusive SPED Program**

CUE graduate Jeremy Alvarez works at Maxwell as a 3rd/5th grade special education (SPED) teacher. When we asked him what attracted him to working at Maxwell, he said, “Maxwell runs a fully inclusive SPED program, meaning it provides all SPED services in the general education setting, with a strong focus on integrated co-teaching. That’s what drew me to Maxwell and what has kept me here.”

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Alvarez believes all children should be taught in the general education setting to the greatest extent possible. Thanks to the inclusive environment at Maxwell, Alvarez said the students have a deep understanding of equity versus equality.

Alvarez also said that he’s always felt supported at Maxwell. “Because I’m in a graduate program on top of being in a profession where there is always a long to-do list, I sometimes feel like I am awful at my job,” said Alvarez. “But everyone at the school—my coach, my co-teachers, and the administrators—understand. They give me, and each other, grace.”

When we asked him how he felt the program at the Center for Urban Education had prepared him for teaching in an urban school, Alvarez said, “Learning how to teach in an elementary classroom is so different from actually teaching in one. The typical college classroom doesn’t teach you about staff shortages or the deadlines teachers face outside of lesson planning and assessment.” He said that working as a paraprofessional while earning his undergraduate



degree allowed him to immediately apply the theories he learned to the classroom.



*CUE teacher candidate Yesenia Ibarra*

## **Rigorous Hiring Process**

Nivan Khosravi worked for six years as a teacher before becoming the principal at Maxwell Elementary, where he has been proudly serving students for 10 years. When we asked him about the numerous CUE students and graduates who work at his school, he said, “We have a rigorous hiring process, and the CUE students and graduates met those requirements. We look for a growth mindset. Candidates must demonstrate that they focus on equity and carry that value in their heart.”

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“We hire folks who want to serve in our community, serve our students, and connect with students’ families,” said Khosravi. “It’s a special community and our students need to believe in our teachers. We are definitely pushing back against stereotypes,” said Khosravi. Seventy-five percent of the staff at Maxwell are BIPOC.

Khosravi said that they hire paraprofessionals that have skills far beyond those needed to complete simple clerical duties. “Our paraprofessionals must be able to work with small groups in instructional settings,” said Khosravi.

The Maxwell model is fully inclusive with regard to special education. “We are the only DPS school with that philosophy,” Khosravi said. “We provide as much staffing support as possible to support every student, and every paraprofessional and teacher has to buy into that model.” In return, Khosravi said the school works hard to motivate and keep strong teachers.



*CUE graduate Stephanie Gonzalez and her kindergarten class at Maxwell Elementary*

## **Strong Relationship Between Community and Staff**

Jazmín Ubaldo, a CUE student working as a paraprofessional at Maxwell, said she wanted to work at Maxwell because of the inclusive environment. “I can make a connection with each student, and every child is accepted and learns in a safe environment. We create a community together,” said Ubaldo.

Yesenia Ibarra, another paraprofessional at Maxwell, said she was drawn to Maxwell because the school has created a strong relationship between the community and staff. “I enjoy walking into Maxwell every morning and feeling that warm, welcoming hug from the students,” she said. “I also enjoy learning from each student and being able to teach them new things every day. It’s fulfilling to help students discover their strengths and talents.”

Ibarra also said that she is fortunate to work with a talented team at Maxwell. “I feel like I have a second family away from home,” she said.

Stephanie Gonzalez is a kindergarten teacher at Maxwell who wanted to work there because, “It is the leading inclusive school in DPS.” She said, “I love working at Maxwell because I have the opportunity to make a positive impact on my students’ lives, especially those with special needs.”

Gonzalez said that her education at the UNC Center for Urban Education has prepared her for her work in an urban school like Maxwell because, “The program was designed to allow me apply what I had learned the previous afternoon and apply it in the classroom the next morning in my role as a paraprofessional,” said Gonzalez. She noted that her mentor and professors helped her throughout her journey and gave her “amazing feedback” that helped her become a better teacher.

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In summary, the inclusive environment at Maxwell attracts a certain type of candidate—the person that focuses on equity in education. So it's not surprising that CUE students and graduates are a good match for Maxwell. "We integrate culturally responsive teaching strategies into our curriculum and demonstrate how our teacher candidates can do the same," said Dr. Rosanne Fulton, the director of the Center for Urban Education. "We're thrilled that Maxwell Elementary and their inclusive model has proven to be a good fit for so many of our students and graduates. We look forward to continuing to strengthen our partnership."

## Thinking about Becoming a Teacher?

We are enrolling new students for the fall 2024 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.