



How CUE's Mentors Support Teacher Candidates

A key feature of the UNC [Center for Urban Education](#) (CUE) Grow Your Own teacher preparation program is the mentorship that teacher candidates receive from highly experienced teachers, principals, and administrators. CUE mentors provide continuous mentorship to teacher candidates throughout their program. Mentors and mentees meet individually and in small groups on a regular basis.

Additionally, mentors visit teacher candidates in the schools where they work as paraprofessionals. These site visits are crucial, as they allow mentors to provide specific and actionable feedback and wraparound support to each teacher candidate. Mentors model how to build strong relationships, and mentees use that knowledge and experience to build strong relationships with the K-12 students in their classrooms.

Mentorship is a key aspect of success for many college students and is especially important for first-generation or BIPOC college students. Research demonstrates that teacher candidates who have mentor relationships throughout their program feel that they have increased confidence in their teaching skills and a larger professional network ([Smith et al., 2024](#)).

What Mentoring Relationships Look Like in Real Life

David Craven has been a CUE mentor since 2014. He said he’s always loved being a mentor and working with CUE students. “They are so excited to be teachers and so willing to do whatever they need to do to get themselves ready for a classroom of their own. I can bring my own experiences and expertise to the relationship, but ultimately, it’s their hard work, dedication, and willingness to learn that pay the greatest dividends.”

Tucker Beard is a CUE teacher candidate who will graduate in December 2024. He has been mentored by David Craven throughout his degree program. He said that having a mentor is an amazing experience. “Somebody is there to support me behind the scenes—someone who observes me in the classroom and discusses and reflects with me about what I’m doing well and how I can improve.”

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Craven backs this up with his explanation of how he communicates with his mentees. “You ask more than you tell. By asking questions, you allow students to reflect and respond. There is no better way to get students to take ownership of their own learning.”



CUE teacher candidate Tucker Beard

Mentoring Best Practices

Here are the practices we've found to be the most effective and can recommend as a solid foundation on which to build a mentoring program:

1. Match the right mentor to the mentee. We consider a variety of factors: race, gender, culture, and areas of interest (e.g., expertise in special education).
2. Take time to build trusting relationships with the mentees and get to know them on a personal and professional level.
3. Stay in regular contact with mentees and give them the opportunity to communicate through multiple channels—Canvas, phone, email, and text.
4. Visit teacher candidates to observe them working with students in the classroom and provide targeted, supportive instructional feedback. Use reflective questioning and ask students to examine their own instructional practices. Help them connect their reflections to what they are learning from their coursework.
5. Support the “whole person” to decrease barriers that may impact the mentee’s role as student or their success working in an ECE–12 classroom.
6. Provide opportunities and experiences to build mentees’ professional networks outside of the classroom.
7. Discuss and model 21st-century instructional strategies and strong, positive relationships so that teacher candidates are prepared to connect with each of their students.
8. Maintain knowledge about current resources at your university and other outside organization, including financial aid (e.g., scholarships, grants) and resources for BIPOC and first-generation college students.

Former Educators Create the Best Future Teachers

CUE mentors—all former educators with decades of experience—report that their mentees rely on their intuition more when they are teaching compared to traditional student teachers. “They blossom during their time student teaching,” said one mentor. “You can see them building confidence.” Because they have been working in classrooms, completing coursework, and receiving high-quality mentoring for three or four years before becoming student teachers, CUE graduates make tremendous contributions as teachers.

“We couldn’t be prouder of our teacher candidates and graduates,” said Dr. Rosanne Fulton, Director of the Center for Urban Education. “They work hard and they are absolutely passionate about teaching and making a difference in the world.”

If you’re interested in becoming a partner school or hiring CUE graduates, email Dr. Fulton at Rosanne.Fulton@unco.edu.

Miss Our Last Issue?

Visit the [newsletter archive](#)! In the [July issue](#), we recommended titles for your next three reads. In the [August issue](#), we featured two teacher candidates who were awarded scholarships by the Tamarac Optimist Club.

Looking for a Path to Becoming a Teacher?

We are enrolling new students for the spring 2025 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.

[Center for Urban Education](#)



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