



Rural Centered
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A Monthly Newsletter from the
Colorado Center for Rural Education



Dr. Curtis Garcia, Director of the School of Education, accompanies students and faculty on a rural immersion tour of school districts in the San Luis Valley

Adams State U: Improving the Future of Rural Schools

This month we explore the teacher preparation programs at [Adams State University](#) and how they inspire future educators to teach in Colorado's rural school districts. We interviewed Dr. Curtis Garcia, Professor of Education and the Director of the [School of Education](#), to discuss the school's approach to teacher prep.

Dedicated to Future Rural Educators

The first thing to understand is that the school is dedicated to empowering educational leaders who embrace diversity, facilitate change, and contribute to the learning and inclusion of all students, particularly in rural regions. They want to foster educational leaders who actively participate in school improvement and facilitate school reform while fostering collaboration and cooperation among multiple stakeholders.

The vision of the School of Education at Adams State University is “to leave a legacy by elevating the teaching profession and building strategic community partnerships that promote relationships, inclusivity, innovation, and lifelong learning for future generations of educators.”

That hasn't changed in the 103 years they've been in existence. Adams State started as a teachers' college with a mission to provide teachers for nearby rural districts. The school is located in the San Luis Valley in the south central part of the state. The entity became a university 15 years ago.

“The School of Teacher Education was one of the largest in the state,” said Garcia. “We have alumni everywhere, who help recruit others. That’s how we sustain enrollment and growth, though the low cost is also an important factor.”

The school enrolls students from all over Colorado, not just their local districts. They even have students who reside in other countries but have intentions of teaching in Colorado!



Adams State students, faculty, and staff learn about Expeditionary Learning at South Conejos School District in Antonito, Colorado

Teacher Prep is Changing, A Lot

While the mission has stayed the same, the way they provide education has changed. While the model used to be 100% face-to-face learning in brick-and-mortar classrooms, it has shifted toward remote learning over time, especially after the pandemic. Currently, they provide 80% of their curriculum online, and the number of traditional students is shrinking all the time.

“We adjusted our program delivery models to provide more flexibility,” Garcia said. “For almost all pathways to a degree and teaching certificate, we are now fully online.” The school offers traditional programs and alternative programs, and students can combine their programs with master’s degrees. “We’re responding directly to the needs of school districts,” said Garcia.

Adams State often works with people who are going to teach for the first time. “We are especially suited to people who want to be working professionals while completing their degrees. They are raising families and working, but our flexible programs allow them to earn a degree at the same time,” Garcia said.

Adams State focuses on high-quality teacher training, but they are also mindful of the cost of their program. In fact, Adams State currently offers the lowest-cost teacher prep degree program in the state.

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Just because they offer many online programs doesn’t mean Adams State faculty and staff don’t build meaningful relationships with their students. The core faculty provide field supervision and support. “They travel across the state several times during each semester to observe teacher candidates in the classroom and offer feedback,” said Garcia. That’s how the school maintains aspects of the traditional model—with face-to-face meetings. They also recently received funding to hire a full-time field coordinator who will visit teacher candidates onsite.

We asked Garcia what trends he’s seeing in students earning elementary, K-12, or SPED teaching degrees. The traditional undergrad population tends more toward elementary, with a handful of secondary and K-12 SPED candidates. “On the post-doc side, the number of SPED candidates has doubled,” said Garcia. In the post-doc alternative programs, there are many more secondary candidates.

“One of the biggest trends we see is around SPED,” Garcia said. “We offer a fully online SPED program with an optional master’s degree. Students have flexibility, and that’s appealing. We also have a few elementary candidates who want to earn a SPED endorsement.”



Adams State elementary education teacher candidate, Hannah Blevens, engages students in small group instruction during her student teaching at Mountain Valley Elementary School in Saguache, Colorado

Thinking Ahead

Another way that Adams State is helping to fill teacher positions in rural schools is that they think ahead. Way ahead. Who can they influence now to become teachers when they graduate high school? That's where Project SERVE comes in, which stands for Supporting Early Retention of Valley Educators.

Through Project SERVE, Adams State has partnered with high schools to create regional cohorts of high school students who are interested in teaching. It's a grow-your-own initiative that starts with high school principals and teachers identifying potential future educators, with the intent of diversifying the demographics of teachers. They focus on the people they think will stick around—the ones who are true locals with deep roots and who are going to stay.

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The cohort's activities are varied. They are awarded grants for special field trips. For example, they traveled to meet with administrators at the Colorado Department of Education. They met the commissioner and toured the capitol, which let them see a side of the system they probably never would have otherwise. The school districts pay for the cohorts to get together for lunch or dinner, where the high school teachers encourage them and cheer them on.

Project SERVE has doubled the number of Hispanic students applying to the School of Education at Adams State. Garcia encourages other rural school districts to create similar cohorts and high school concurrent enrollment programs for future educators. For more information, call Curtis Garcia at 719-587-8202 (office) or 303-902-1588 (cell) or email him at curtislgarcia@adams.edu.

Upcoming Application Timelines

National Board Certified Teacher Stipend applications for 2024 accepted:
Until 50 applications are received

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

Colorado Rural Student Teaching Stipend applications for spring 2025 accepted:
July 1, 2024, through October 31, 2024

Colorado Substitute Stipend applications accepted:
Through August 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.



One of our featured partners is the [Colorado Boards of Cooperative Educational Services \(BOCES\) Association](#), which 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.

Robert Fulton, PhD | Director

