As the largest graduate education program in the state, the School of Education & Human Development is making a significant impact on the policy and practice of education in Colorado. With its solid academic reputation, award-winning faculty and renowned researchers, the school contributes in making the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center a premier urban institution.

—M. Roy Wilson, Chancellor

2005–2006

Programs:

Initial licensure programs
- Elementary Education
- Secondary Education (all core subjects)
- K-12 Special Education
- Early Childhood Special Education

Graduate degree programs
- Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies
- Counseling Psychology and Counselor Education
- Curriculum and Instruction (ESL, literacy, math and science)
- Early Childhood Education
- Educational Leadership and Innovation
- Educational Psychology
- Information and Learning Technologies
- School Psychology
- Special Education
Impact. It’s a short, crisp word that has a great deal of meaning for our faculty because they care most about the difference that their research makes in education and mental health. In their work as researchers, some faculty are focused on influencing national practice and policy through their research; others are focused on affecting practice and policy in local school districts, in the state of Colorado, in local mental health services, in corporate training, and even in their own practice as professors working to make their preparation programs the best they can be.

In this Edition, you’ll get to know faculty and student researchers who collaborate to impact the actions and thinking of others in current areas of inquiry, such as immigration. You’ll read about researchers who are passionate about building and investigating preparation programs so that they not only inform the renewal of programs inside the school, but also convey their findings to program leaders across the nation. You’ll learn about the funded work of several of our centers—work that is strategically shared at national policy forums to broadly impact practice. You’ll also meet researchers who establish learning opportunities for K–12 or university students and then study those opportunities to inform school renewal or university preparation and study.

For those of us who have been at the university long enough to want to impact the next generation of education professors and professionals, the research of our students/alumni is something that keeps us at the university, sometimes after retirement age. We have highlighted the work of several of our doctoral students, who are now professors or working in higher education as administrators. Although new to research, their ideas and their research are important.

Finally, we celebrate a teacher whose life work has a foundation of inquiry and a commitment to impact. She is Linda Alston, a kindergarten teacher in Denver Public Schools and a 1994 graduate of our Reading and Writing Program. Linda’s extraordinary work has affected generations of children in poverty by enriching them in ways that change their lives and their futures. She is the winner of the Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award, at $100,000, the largest prize for a teacher in the United States. Linda and the researchers profiled in this Edition have in common a desire to understand and improve the environments that are designed to increase the quality of life for not only children, but all people.

Sincerely,

Lynn K. Rhodes, Dean

LYNN K. RHODES
DEAN, SCHOOL OF EDUCATION 
& HUMAN DEVELOPMENT
Learning in Leaps and Bounds: Positive Outcomes for Children with Autism

“You were a miracle worker. You came in, got us focused, helped us get organized.”

“In the beginning his eyes wouldn’t register that he understood. Now he gets it. He’s learning in leaps and bounds, and we never thought we’d get to this place.”

“It’s a lifeline to have someone there who understands and is helping you. Sometimes that’s the most important thing.”

These are the comments of parents whose children have been diagnosed with autism spectrum disorder and who have participated in a model program called LEAP.

LEAP—Learning Experiences…An Alternative Program for Preschoolers and Parents—was developed by Phil Strain, research professor, in 1981 and has been continuously funded by the U.S. Department of Education. LEAP is housed in UCDHSC’s Positive Early Learning Experiences (PELE) Center; Strain has directed the center since its inception in 2001.

Autism Spectrum Disorder is characterized by a series of developmental deficits in social interaction, verbal and nonverbal communication and by repetitive behaviors or interests. Children with ASD also may have unusual responses to certain sounds or the appearance of certain objects—responses such as panic or tantrums.

The LEAP preschool program, currently replicated in 50 school district sites around the country, is based on solid research findings, not unproven hunches. More sophisticated diagnostic techniques have led to an increased number of diagnosed autism cases—and with it, a proliferation of alternative treatments. Equine therapy, swimming with dolphins, and other alternative treatments may be well intended, Strain says, but they are not proven.

PHIL STRAIN
PROFESSOR AND DIRECTOR OF THE POSITIVE EARLY LEARNING EXPERIENCES CENTER

For more information about ongoing research, contact Phil Strain, at 303-556-3353 or phil.strain@cudenver.edu. To inquire about training opportunities, contact Ted Bovey at 303-556-6631 or ted.bovey@cudenver.edu. For information about intervention manuals and instructional videotapes, visit www.ttoolbox.com.
Early Intervention

Early intervention, and the right amount of it, is what works for children with ASD. Part of that intervention includes parents who learn specific parenting skills from LEAP modules and get support from LEAP intervention specialists and other parents in the program. Intervention specialists go to homes to coach parents on helping their children with routines such as getting up, getting dressed and going out into the community.

“We’re concerned about relieving the obvious pain and anxiety that parents feel when they learn they have a child with significant special needs,” Strain says. “Providing training and support for families is key to helping children with this disorder.”

Inclusion

The other critical component of LEAP is inclusion; the LEAP preschool program integrates autistic children with typically developing children. Early on, Strain and his colleagues found that even the most highly skilled adult mediators had limited long-term effects on the children. The children weren’t maintaining their skills or generalizing them to new settings.

“If you deliver dosages of intervention early enough, with peers as intervention agents, you can turn profoundly nonsocial beings into social beings,” Strain says. “Peer relationships, begun early on, are the most powerful predictor of where you wind up as an adult.”

“Inoculation” Against Stereotyping

Another benefit of LEAP is what it teaches typically developing children. Strain refers to it as “inoculation” against stereotyping. “Kids who’ve been part of LEAP are very forgiving of kids who aren’t having success. In another world, the typical kids might view the autistic kids as needing to be punished.” LEAP teaches typically developing peers to facilitate social and language skills of children with autism.

“I’d like to see a time when the majority of kids with autism get a shot at being in inclusive settings early on in life,” Strain says. “And I’d like to see a set of professional standards in the field such that if you said you were doing intervention, any parent could assume they were going to get standard proven treatment.”

LEAP helps children, their families and their teachers learn to live with autism spectrum disorder and maximize autistic children’s potential. “We’ve learned over the past 30 years that the outer limits of what kids are capable of is pretty phenomenal,” Strain says. “And in 30 years it will be even better.”

“...Strain’s research into peer-mediated social skill interaction is one of the 10 most influential discoveries in the field of behavioral disorders.”
— National Autism Center
Immigration:
Research That Affects Policy, Practice

Long before the word “immigration” generated heated debate and daily media coverage, a group of education faculty and graduate students engaged in research and teaching that focused on the experience of immigrants in Colorado—from a sociocultural, political, and institutional perspective. Here is a collection of researchers who are dedicated to impacting governmental, institutional and educational policy, as well as teacher education and K–12 classroom instruction as it relates to immigration.

The Faces of Immigration and Learning

Sheila Shannon, associate professor, has centered her research on Mexican immigrants to the United States. Initially, she examined language issues and explored the dynamics of the hegemony of English in classrooms. Shannon is considered a pioneer in the field of children as translators, a common phenomenon in immigrant communities. She has recently extended her work in schools and communities to Mexico and to exploring how U.S. schools adjust ideological positions in the face of increasing numbers of Mexican immigrant children and pressures for accountability.

Maria Thomas-Ruzic, senior instructor, is interested in how immigrant youth acquire language skills as second-language learners as well as how they integrate socially and culturally in their new U.S. school settings and in out-of-school contexts. Returning to the university after spending a year as a visiting Fulbright scholar at the Benemérita Autonomous University in Puebla, Mexico, Thomas-Ruzic brought new perspectives on U.S.-Mexican immigrant youth to her research and work in teacher education. She continues to be involved with her Mexican host university through teaching and research, and she is working on forging an institutional relationship that will support more faculty exchanges and collaboration across a range of disciplinary areas.

Honorine Nocon, assistant professor, has focused on learner identity and on creating learning environments that engage students outside the classroom. Her research entails collaboration with teachers and school administrators to identify challenges and solutions that optimize learning opportunities for students in dual-language environments. El Águila, an after-school learning activity club Nocon created at one of SEHD’s partner schools, provides an informal learning lab for research as well as a service to the school community. The club is featured as a separate article on pages 10-11 of this publication.
Diversity Within Immigrant Communities
Natasha Watson, who recently completed her doctoral work, investigated how Russian-speaking immigrant youth academically and socially adapt in their new environments. At various schools and cultural sites in the metro Denver area, Watson investigated the experiences of 36 high school students who came to the United States from the former Soviet Union within the last five years. She observed a generalization of the students as “one monolithic group,” even though they negotiated their new academic and social surroundings and responded to negative stereotypes and low expectations in different ways. As a result, the youth did not become part of the schools’ social fabric and had limited contact with their U.S. peers. “Students from the former Soviet Union might benefit when their previous educational experiences are validated and when educators recognize how their students’ diverse cultures greatly influence their current adaptation processes,” notes Watson.

Sally Nathenson-Mejia, associate professor, works with second-language learners in elementary schools with significant numbers of Spanish speakers from Central and South America, as well as students who are Asian and Russian immigrants. She explores issues of diversity within communities; how long the immigrant-students have been in this country relative to how tied they are to their countries of origin and how they adjust to the U.S. school culture. She also looks at how mainstream, monolingual teachers are able to address the needs of these students through culturally and linguistically responsive teaching.

Nathenson-Mejia is collaborating on a book with alumna María Uribe, PhD 2004, of Denver Public Schools. The book will help mainstream teachers understand how to help English language learners successfully transition from their native languages to English. The two also plan a research project to examine instructional practices that will help English language learners learn to demonstrate what they know about text through successful retelling in English.

How Immigrant Students See Themselves
Ruth Brancard, senior chair at the Center for Educational Advancement at the Community College of Denver, is a doctoral student researching the transition of students from secondary to higher education. She has developed programs for immigrant youth at Denver high schools to improve their English skills and expand the possibilities of higher education. Brancard organized college visits to help these students see themselves as capable of doing college-level work, engaging them in interviewing immigrant students enrolled in college classes. Through these and other activities, she has documented the impact of visits by immigrant high school students to colleges.

Alan Davis, associate professor, researches middle and high school culture, youth identity and school achievement. Through students’ autobiographical story telling, including movie making, Davis learns how young people—particularly African American and Latino—imagine their futures. His research examines the implications for helping high schools retain students through graduation and become more successful learning environments for a diverse set of adolescents.

The Language of Policy
René Galindo, associate dean, researches immigration and educational policy, focusing on analysis of policy documents and news coverage. Galindo is especially interested in the language we use—or don’t use—and what it reveals about our national psyche and culture. For example, he says, “Nativism is an anti-immigration sentiment peculiar to American culture, but it is a term that is not found in media accounts.” His work examines how such attitudes have translated into policy and procedures.

The work of these individuals and others dedicated to education has practical consequences—if not in schools and classrooms, then in policy circles, says Mark Clarke, professor of language, literacy and culture. “The realities of the global economy and commitment to social justice, not borders, should drive education policy.”
Marsha Wiggins was a Methodist minister for 15 years, but her true calling was to teach.

A professor of counseling psychology and counselor education since 1993, Wiggins says she entered ministry without enough training in counseling. “There is a gap between ministers who know counseling and counselors who address spirituality,” she says. “As counselors, we can’t ignore our clients’ religious and spiritual persuasions.”

Historically, for psychology to be accepted as a discipline, it had to be grounded in science and divided from religion, Wiggins explains. “We need to consider people as whole people. Empirical research suggests that spiritual practices correlate to mental and physical health.” Wiggins takes what she calls a more practical approach to help graduate students and counseling professionals develop and use skills to address the overall well being of their clients.

Wiggins is talking about all kinds of spirituality. “It’s a large net. Anything having to do with a person’s sense of meaning—who am I, why am I here, what is my purpose in life—these questions suggest spirituality.” She doesn’t recall anyone telling her about spirituality when she was in school.

“Counseling a client in a holistic way is like trying to understand why your car isn’t working. It’s the difference between going to a brake shop or a dealership,” Wiggins suggests. Counselors who integrate spirituality in their practice look at the whole human engine, not just its parts.

“The counseling field has been in flux. Multicultural counseling—the need to address ethnic and racial differences—has emerged as a topic for new counselors to understand.”

Wiggins’ interest in spirituality grew out of an interest in multiculturalism: “Religion and spirituality are both part of culture. Counselors must understand that and bring it into their practice.”

Her work also addresses gay and lesbian issues, women at midlife, domestic violence perpetrators and women in the clergy.

The cover of her book, Integrating Religion and Spirituality into Counseling, depicts a long, winding path—no doubt a fitting illustration of Wiggins’ own journey, one in which she has “intersected two strands of my career. The ministry and higher education make sense to me. Teaching and counseling both provide guidance and support, as well as challenge. They both help people become their best selves.”
Evidence suggests children’s school readiness and success in life depends more on early social skills and behavior than on cognitive or academic skills. That’s the idea at the heart of the Center for Evidence-Based Practice: Young Children with Challenging Behavior, a national research and training center funded by the U.S. Department of Education’s Office of Special Education Programs, led by Barbara Smith, research professor.

Developed by UCDHSC professors Smith and Phillip Strain with investigators in five other universities, the center researches and promotes the use of evidence-based practices for children up to age six who have or are at risk of developing problem behavior. Such behavior includes aggression, noncompliance, and social interaction difficulties—behavior that interferes with the child’s ability to succeed with peers and adults.

“There’s a lot of focus on literacy, but a child’s ability to learn to read is hindered if the child can’t sit still or follow direction,” Smith says. “Learning is a social event.”

One of the ways in which the Center for Evidence-Based Practice accomplishes its mission is through the annual Policy Makers’ Summit, which Smith established and coordinates. The conference meets in Washington, D.C., and draws attendees from federal agencies, Congress and national organizations who influence federal and state policy.

“Most policy makers are so busy dealing with high visibility issues such as crime or violence in the schools, and with older kids, they often don’t focus on very young children,” Smith says. “Our whole purpose is to bring policy makers together, to send a unified message about the importance of preventing and addressing challenging behavior early—to communicate what works and what doesn’t.”

The summit creates a forum for discussion, reviews research findings and identifies initiatives to improve social and behavioral outcomes for young children.

Smith reports that those who attend the summit have found it helpful, and it has grown in attendance since its inception in 2003.

Smith also coordinates the center’s formal partnership with six national professional associations. The partnerships—as well as the Policy Makers’ Summit—enable the center to share research information nationwide. “National associations can carry on the work we do by disseminating information about best practices to their members,” Smith says. “Together, we can reach hundreds of thousands of people.”
Teachers take a hands-on approach to scientific research during a paleontological dig at the Nail Quarry in Medicine Bow, Wyo.
According to Michael Marlow:

Educators who are connected to each other as a community and who are actively engaged in science are more likely to continue teaching and foster a sense of excitement in their students.

To learn more about Marlow’s upcoming adventures, call 303-556-8111 or e-mail Mike.Marlow@cudenver.edu.

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“We found that the teachers gained a deeper understanding of themselves and the experience and recognized that they are part of a worthy profession.”

After the conference, the teacher-students were asked to use digital technology to record how their experience affected their sense of professional self. The “digital stories,” as they’re called, are data used to assess the impact of the experience.

“To be a good science teacher you have to really understand how science is done—to engage in ongoing inquiry yourself.”

As director of science curriculum and pedagogy, Marlow also works to ensure that students experience science by conducting research of their own—whether it’s geological observation at the Grand Canyon, marine studies in the Galapagos Islands, or paleontological studies at digs in Medicine Bow, Wyo. Such expeditions, which are grant- and student-funded, give teachers skills to take back to their classrooms—technical skills, engagement with the subject and an understanding of how science works.

“The best teachers are born,” Marlow says. “We just give them the tools.”

FIELD RESEARCH

Research Creates Community Among Science Teachers

Who among us can’t recall at least one science teacher who droned, who couldn’t get us excited about the subject? Such teachers probably characterize the reported 30 percent who quit after only a few years.

“A lot of teachers are isolated,” says Michael Marlow, associate professor of science education, who has taught science at various levels for 42 years.

The way he sees it, educators who are connected to each other as a community and who are actively engaged in science are more likely to continue teaching and foster a sense of excitement in their students. It all comes down to how science teachers feel about their profession.

Creating professional identity is at the heart of Marlow’s research, and it is why he and a group of graduate students with varying levels of teaching experience presented five workshops at the National Science Teachers Association Conference—the largest conference of science educators in the country—last spring. About 18,000 teachers attended.

The workshops were part of a mentoring and leadership program to connect first- and second-year science teachers with more experienced teachers. The graduate students presented on a range of topics related to teaching science—from inquiry to legal issues to bridging science with social studies—but, Marlow explains, the product was less important than the process.

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El Club del Águila: Research into Learning

For two days each week during the school year, students at Fairmont Elementary School, a dual-language Denver Public School, gather for an after-school learning activity—but teacher candidates and doctoral students are learning, too.

The after-school club, El Águila (the Eagle), provides an opportunity for its 20 or so volunteer members to practice their writing skills and learn to use computers to exchange stories with international counterparts. El Águila was established in 2004 by Honorine Nocon when she was the site professor at Fairmont, working with the university’s teacher candidates, doctoral students and Fairmont’s administrators and teachers.

The club is based on a scientific model called Fifth Dimension, an international network of labs dedicated to learning. Nocon became acquainted with Fifth Dimension while a doctoral student at the University of California-San Diego, where the learning model was established. The 5-D model is based on the premise that children accomplish more with more capable or experienced peers than they can on their own.

“We don’t strive to measure academic achievement,” Nocon explains. “We look at potential. El Águila provides opportunities for the kids to feel like successful, capable learners and take that confidence back to the classroom.”

Nocon recalls “Carlos,” a boy with significant difficulties in class who was referred to the club. When a computer was beeping and no one could get it to stop, Carlos figured it out. Nocon thanked him, saying, “We are so lucky to have you with us!” The look on his face was amazing. It meant everything to him.”
Students and Teachers Learn Together

The young students aren’t the only ones benefiting from the club. “We believe it’s a good learning opportunity for teacher candidates because it’s a very different approach to learning,” Nocon says. “It’s cooperative; it has an element of play, and because it’s based on a scientific model, it has a substantial research base behind it.”

Culture

Much of Nocon’s research has focused on the role of culture in language and content acquisition. Her more recent work addresses how to build cooperative activity among diverse groups—in this case, university researchers and K–12 educators. El Águila provides an informal learning lab for research in both areas and, at the same time, provides a service to the school community.

New Ideas

The club also acts as a catalyst, “a change lab where I can introduce new tools or ideas.” For example, the club brought keyboard and study guide software to the school, and Nocon and her associates have been asked now to help train the school’s teachers in using it.

“The most interesting impact has been a change in the nature of the relationship around research,” she says. “We’ve been able to use the club to bring about change gently and cooperatively, by introducing such new tools as the software.”

Diversity

Another advantage of the club for its young members and the teacher candidates who work there is better understanding of the school’s diversity. While 90 percent of the children are Latino, only about 50 percent are Spanish speaking. Some are recent immigrants; others’ families have been here for generations. Diversity within a group is lost on some teachers, Nocon says, but the teacher candidates along with the children learn about their own diversity because the club encourages talking and interaction. “Children often get chastised for talking in a classroom, but here we encourage it. They can socialize as well as help each other solve problems.”

Word of the club has spread, and another Denver school wants to replicate it. Small wonder: El Águila is a place where young eagles, like Carlos, can soar.
If there’s one word that alumna Tricia Ferrigno says captures what she gleaned from her three years as a doctoral student, it’s collaboration.

During her studies, Ferrigno and Rod Muth, professor in Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies, collaborated on research aimed at preparing school principals to be successful educational leaders. Aspects of their research had an impact on the Administrative Leadership and Policy Studies program at UCDHSC and then provided the building blocks to create a nationally recognized Principals Excellence Program. Ferrigno directs the program at the University of Kentucky, where she has been an assistant professor of educational leadership studies since 2001, following her graduation.

Under Ferrigno’s direction, the Principals Excellence Program involves collaboration among practicing principals, assistant principals, administrator-certified teachers and district administrators in a local school district. Their ultimate goal was to ensure the best possible learning for all students in high-need rural areas of eastern Kentucky.

While at the School of Education & Human Development, Ferrigno worked with Muth to conduct research about the impact of mentoring, cohort learning and authentic work projects in preparing candidates to become effective leaders.

“We learned from our research—surveys and interviews with students—that mentoring is essential,” Muth recalls. “If you want to give your students a leg up, provide good mentoring.” As a result, mentoring is a key component in principal preparation at UCDHSC and at the University of Kentucky, where students are mentored by successful school leaders and administrator educators. Muth and Ferrigno currently are collaborating to continue their research on mentoring in higher education.

Another result of their research is the importance of a cohort environment and field-based projects. Cohort learning provides a cohesive community, Muth explains, and it is one of the most effective aspects of the programs in Colorado and Kentucky. Ferrigno points out that when participants explore “real problems of practice” by conducting comprehensive research with mentor principals in actual settings, theory and practice are linked.

Since new principals will inherit a school culture, Muth explains, “it’s important that they understand what that culture is and how to work within it to make it a productive and healthy place for students and staff to work.” Cohorts in the Colorado program study school cultures, and researching school culture is a major component of the school improvement courses Ferrigno teaches at Kentucky.

As a doctoral student, Ferrigno learned the value of action research as a change strategy and uses it regularly. Today, she and fellow educators are investigating problems and sharing solutions aimed at transforming high school cultures by engaging stakeholders in various leadership responsibilities.

For educators like Muth and Ferrigno, certain principles are universal. From Colorado to Kentucky, the best principal preparation develops facilitative, innovative leaders. For that, Ferrigno says, “CU-Denver prepared me well.”
Khushnur Dadabhoy recalls teaching a 4 p.m. class in delinquency and criminology the day the Columbine shootings occurred. “A student approached me and said she had lived a gang-related life but that education had turned her life around.”

That’s what planted the seed for her doctoral dissertation: Resisting the Odds—From the Prison Track to the College Track: The Voices of Former Delinquent Women of Color.

Dadabhoy, associate director of student life at the University of Colorado at Denver and Health Sciences Center, didn’t use what she calls traditional research methodology—surveys and questionnaires—to complete the three-year project. Instead she focused on the personal accounts of six women who made successful transitions from dysfunctional, abusive homes, life on the streets and juvenile detention to completing college and leading self-directed, hopeful lives.

The student who approached Dadabhoy after class that day now has a master’s degree in social work. Of the women whose lives Dadabhoy researched, one had become a mother at 17 while on the streets to escape sexual abuse; now, she and the baby’s father are rearing the child together and giving back to their community. “They are doing all the right things,” Dadabhoy says.

In fact, Dadabhoy discovered that most of the women had made changes in their lives that were directly tied to having a child. “Several participants commented on the importance of getting out of gang involvement as a result of having children and that the child figured greatly in their changed lives.”

For some, change took longer, and spirituality played a role in their transformation. One woman who struggled with managing a two-year-old was in utter despair, Dadabhoy recalls, quoting from her story: “Then one day…I just had like a nervous breakdown, I was so done with all of this. I got down on my knees and asked God if he would… help me. And ever since that day everything changed.”

No matter how the women transformed their lives—through education, motherhood, spirituality or a combination thereof—“these women felt a sense of achievement. They wanted to talk about their successes, not their failures.”

Dadabhoy admits that tracking the lives of six women over an 18- to 24-month period is only scratching the surface. “Future research that explores positive change in behavior is of utmost importance for social service providers, educators, policy makers and law enforcement officials in supporting and promoting positive change.”

Dadabhoy says that researching the lives of six previously incarcerated women has been “the best experience of my life. Seeing abused, neglected women discovering their skills, discovering their talents—it was incredibly powerful.”
The American dream becomes reality in the kindergarten classroom of Linda Alston. The Denver Public Schools teacher was honored for her role in realizing dreams with the nation’s first Kinder Excellence in Teaching Award. The KIPP Foundation, which stands for Knowledge is Power, administers the program.

Alston received the award in Washington, D.C., from U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings. Philanthropists Nancy and Rich Kinder of Houston sponsored the largest unrestricted amount ever given to a K–12 teacher. The $100,000 award was intended by the Kinders as a statement about the salary level that excellent teachers deserve.

In addition to the Kinder award, Alston has won a Milken award and a Disney award as well as other honors. Teaching at Fairview Elementary, a school at which 96 percent of its students are on free or reduced-cost lunches, Alston’s eclectic teaching style incorporates experience, imagination, and academic challenge. The outcomes are remarkable.

• Uriel Villegas describes why classmates quickly clean up after a family-style breakfast: “We cleaned up with alacrity so we could start our reading and writing.”

• Her students read excerpts from the “I Have a Dream” speech by Martin Luther King, Jr., to a crowd of 17,000 at an MLK celebration.

• Children grow organic sunflower and buckwheat sprouts, called the “Moveable Feast.”

• Anthony Nguyen and Jackson Aly adopt a Shakespearean way of honoring their families. “Shall I compare my mom to the moon? My mom is nicer and more glowing.” “Shall I compare my little brother Elijah to the rain? He is softer and more wet.”

Alston was recruited from Milwaukee in 1989 to teach in Denver’s first public Montessori school. When the school was relocated out of the low-income minority community, she chose to stay where she could make a significant difference.

Every child is honored, loved and empowered to become his or her “most magnificent self” in Alston’s classroom. She lifts children out of poverty through reading, writing, history, the arts, play, character building, grace and belief in self. Her five-year old students reach achievement levels far exceeding district targets.

The School of Education & Human Development helped shape Alston’s approach to education. In “Teachers as Readers and Writers,” taught by Lynn Rhodes, “I started to see my ability and divine calling to teach. The class set the tone and stage for the rest of the program and was a powerful experience,” says Alston. “In other courses, the professors gave me permission to draw on the best practices from everything I’ve studied.”

“One of the most powerful lessons I learned was the knowledge of my authentic self as the teacher—the gifts I have and what I bring to teaching and learning,” she continues. “I learned to be reflective of myself as a learner.”

Despite evidence that high-quality early education has long-term impact on achievement, kindergarten is not required in Colorado. Alston’s abiding commitment to her students has far-reaching and long-lasting consequences—it gives them access to the American dream.
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<td>Paraeducator to Special Education Teacher (2004–2006)</td>
<td>French, Nancy $296,399 Colorado Department of Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rocky Mountain Middle School Math Science Partnership (2004–2009)</td>
<td>Kimbrough, Doris (College of Liberal Arts &amp; Sciences); Basile, Carole $12,499,644 (shared with the College of Arts and Sciences) National Science Foundation</td>
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<td>Southern Colorado Collaborative Training Opportunities in Mathematics Education for Instructional Teams (2006)</td>
<td>Chopra, Ritu $81,638 Colorado Commission on Higher Education</td>
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<td>Teachers Learning in Networked Communities of Support (2005–2007)</td>
<td>Young, David $50,000 National Commission on Teaching and America’s Future</td>
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If you want to know what the School of Education and Human Development is doing to make the world a better place, go to the center. That would be the Center for Collaborative Educational Leadership (CCEL).

Centers within the CCEL sponsor research and policy studies, engage in model demonstration and product development, conduct longitudinal studies on the effectiveness of early intervention procedures, provide education and training to people across the country and collaborate with professional organizations and local communities.

CCEL is the locus for 37 externally-funded research and development projects with contracts exceeding $36 million. Graduate and undergraduate students have the opportunity to participate in the extensive research and services in the various centers and institutes in CCEL.

Center for Evidence-Based Practices in Early Learning (CEBPEL)
Barbara Smith, research professor
CEBPEL aims to develop, implement and evaluate comprehensive early intervention systems that address the developmental needs of young children with special needs, their families and the personnel who serve them. CEBPEL raises awareness and increases implementation of positive, evidence-based practices for the prevention and remediation of challenging behavior with a database to support those practices.

Colorado Principals’ Center
Frank Bingham, director
The Colorado Principal’s Center inspires and develops courageous leadership in principals and other educational leaders. The center provides professional enrichment, renewal and training for practicing principals, assistant principals, aspiring principals, central office supervisors and others in instructional leadership positions.

Colorado Teaching, Learning and Technology (CTLT)
Julie O’Brien and Dan Morris, co-directors
CTLT’s innovations in technology and data-driven decision making are making a positive impact on pre-K to post-secondary educators across Colorado through professional development, mediating the educational technology marketplace, and providing Web resources and state leadership in technology.

Evaluation Center
Bonnie Walters, director
Provides program and project evaluation assistance to schools, districts, universities and other nonprofit educational agencies to improve decision making and student performance.

Front Range Board of Cooperative Educational Services for Teacher Leadership (BOCES)
Susan Sparks, executive director
The Front Range BOCES for Teacher Leadership seeks to improve student achievement through collaborative and quality professional development and is funded by 19 member districts and the School of Education & Human Development. Last year, 3,000 educators in 65 school districts (in Colorado and beyond) enrolled in 32 professional development training opportunities.

National Center for Culturally Responsive Educational Systems (NCCRESST)
Elizabeth Kozleski, professor
NCCRESST supports state and local school systems to assure quality, culturally responsive practices, early intervention, literacy and positive behavioral supports.

National Institute for Urban School Improvement (NIUSI)
Elizabeth Kozleski, professor
NIUSI is developing powerful networks of urban districts and schools that embrace and implement a data-based, continuous improvement approach for inclusive practices. Districts include Chicago, Cincinnati, Clark County (Las Vegas), Denver, the District of Columbia, Hacienda La Puente (Los Angeles), Houston, Miami-Dade, New York City (Region 10 and District 75).

Paraeducator Resource and Research Center (PAR2A)
Nancy French, research professor
PAR2A promotes optimum learning for all students through research and training on the roles, responsibilities, career development, preparation, supervision, and employment of paraprofessionals and is designed for paraprofessionals, school professionals and administrators in public education.

Positive Early Learning Experiences Center (PELE)
Phil Strain, professor
PELE develops, implements and evaluates comprehensive, early intervention systems to address developmental needs of young children at risk for school failure or with special needs, including severe behavioral disorders.

Professional Development in Autism Center (PDA)
Laune Sperry, assistant research professor
PDA ensures students with Autism Spectrum Disorder have access to high-quality, evidence-based educational services in local school districts. Training and support is provided for school districts, families and communities including awareness, consumer, implementer and leadership training.
National Art Contest

Learning Together: Every Kid is Special

Professor and researcher Elizabeth Kozleski wanted to find ways to “engage children in our work.” An art contest seemed like the perfect way to do that.

Kozleski, director of the National Institute for Urban School Improvement, and institute staff judged 100 entries from NIUSI’s nine urban school system partners around the country. NIUSI calls these districts Synergy Sites for their leadership role in developing inclusive schools that respond to the needs of all children, including those with intellectual, physical and emotional disabilities.

Viviana Cervantes-Lopez, a fourth-grader from Harrington Elementary in Denver, won the Grand Prize for her drawing. Her entry, titled “Every Kid is Special,” illustrated one of several themes that were the basis of the contest: What Does An Inclusive School Look Like? Learning Together, Diversity in My School, and My Community and My School. Her drawing depicts children of different races and abilities who attend an inclusive school. Viviana understands disabilities: Her mother has multiple sclerosis, and her brother is in a wheelchair.

Viviana won a trip to Washington, D.C., with her father and told the audience at the Synergy Site meeting that she knows “what it is like to feel left out because you are different.”

“Art is full of the voices of children,” Kozleski says. “We need to listen to children as a touchstone for making change.”

The National Institute for Urban School Improvement is located at UCDHSC. For information visit www.urbanschools.org or call 303-556-3990.