

Puebla
mexico



2025 INSTITUTE REPORT

The University of Colorado Boulder BUENO Center & Literacy Squared
in partnership with Escuela Primaria Federal Profesor Otilio Montaña
& Escuela Primaria Fernando Amilpa



THE BUENO CENTER
for multicultural education

LECTO-ESCRITURA
AL CUADRADO
LITERACY SQUARED



Introduction and Overview

In the summer of 2025, nearly forty educators from across the United States participated in the University of Colorado BUENO Center and Literacy Squared's educational Institute in Puebla, Mexico. While residing at the historic Hotel Colonial near El Zócalo in downtown Puebla, participants engaged in intensive professional development workshops, attended keynote presentations by distinguished educators from both the United States and Mexico, and explored the cultural and historical landmarks of Puebla and Cholula.

A central and enduring feature of the Institute is the opportunity for participants to visit and learn directly from local schools in Puebla. This year, educators had the privilege of visiting Escuela Primaria Federal Profesor Otilio Montañó and Escuela Primaria Fernando Amilpa. This report highlights the impact of the Institute on its participating educators.

For more than 30 years, the BUENO Center has hosted educational programming in Puebla, Mexico, providing educators from across the United States with opportunities to learn, grow, and engage deeply with the expertise, wisdom, and culture of the region. Central to this work has been the BUENO Center's longstanding partnership with local schools, a collaboration that is essential to what makes this experience meaningful and distinctive for participants.

During school visits, educators from the United States are warmly welcomed through student-led ceremonies that often include performances and celebrations. Participants are then invited into classrooms, where they interact directly with students, teach language lessons, and observe instructional practices across multiple grade levels and subject areas. In addition to these school-based experiences, participants engage in cultural excursions throughout the city of Puebla and attend professional workshops led by renowned educators from both the United States and Mexico. Nevertheless, the most impactful component of the Institute remains the time participants spend in schools alongside teachers, school leaders, and students. The impact of this aspect of the Institute is clearly reflected in the testimonials shared below.

The BUENO Center team extends its deepest gratitude to the many individuals and partners in Puebla who make this Institute possible year after year. We are sincerely thankful to the staff of Hotel Colonial; the teachers, parents, and administrators of Escuela Primaria Federal Profesor Otilio Montañó and Escuela Primaria Fernando Amilpa; our Puebla consultants and friends who support the coordination of activities and logistics; and our new colleagues at the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP).



2025 Puebla Institute By the Numbers

The Institute Participants

Participants **5** different states: Colorado, Illinois, Texas, Rhode Island, and Florida

37 Educator participants from **18** different institutions, school districts, organizations and universities, including program directors, teachers, school and district leaders, educational CEO and Founders, and doctoral educators

The Institute Team

8 University of Colorado Professional Staff Members from the BUENO Center and Literacy Squared

Our Puebla Partners

24 Puebla teachers welcomed participants into their classrooms

12 Puebla teachers from Escuela Otilio Montaña

12 from Escuela Primaria

New partnerships from the Benemérita Universidad Autónoma de Puebla (BUAP)



Testimonials from the Participants

On the final day of the institute, participants completed a survey designed to capture their overall perceptions of the institute, with particular attention to what they gained from their visits to schools in Puebla. Survey responses were systematically collected, reviewed, and analyzed to identify prevailing themes that reflected participants' shared experiences and perspectives. The resulting thematic analysis focused on participants' perceptions of the schools, including the welcoming ceremonies, interactions with teachers, students, and families, and their broader impressions of the institute as a whole. Emergent themes included a pervasive culture of respect and pride, high expectations held by teachers and administrators for their students, students' demonstration of respect, pride, and generosity, and a strong sense of appreciation for the opportunity to engage meaningfully in all aspects of the school visits.

Culture of Respect and Pride

One clear theme arose when the participants described how they felt upon entering the school grounds. At both Escuela Montaña and Escuela Amilpa, participants were greeted with beautiful *Bienvenida* featuring performances from the students themselves. These performances included coordinated dance numbers, a presentation of the Mexican and United States flags and personal welcome messages presented in English and Spanish by select students. After this ceremonial welcome, participants were greeted by students and escorted to their respective

classrooms. This was very similarly described for the *Despedida* the schools provided the participants on their last day's visit. U.S. teachers consistently described their experiences during the *Bienvenida* and *Despedida* as emblematic of a deeply rooted culture of respect and pride permeating the school communities. Participants noted that this culture was evident across all levels of the school environment, including interactions among students, teachers, and administrators, and was reinforced through a palpable sense of warmth, welcome, and belonging. Rather than positioning visitors as passive observers, the schools actively received them as honored guests from the moment they stepped onto campus. Flag ceremonies and student performances were frequently characterized as moving and meaningful, serving as visible expressions of a schooling model that affirms cultural identity, civic responsibility, and collective pride.



As a result, participants reported leaving the visits with a lasting emotional impact, marked by feelings of gratitude, joy, love, and deep appreciation for the values embodied by the school communities. These findings are evident in the following passages shared by the participants:

"It was very impressive to see the way the students honored the flag with such respect and enthusiasm. The dances were absolutely wonderful."

"From the very first moment I entered the classroom, you could feel the respect the students have for one another. I felt honored by the warm welcome and by the happy faces of [the students]."

Culture of Respect and Pride *continued*

"It has been a great honor to come to Puebla and learn from all the teachers and their students. It is truly impressive to see everything they have accomplished throughout the school year. My heart feels very full and happy after witnessing the respect the students show their teachers and vice versa. It was especially meaningful to experience the flag ceremony and the pride in their country that all Mexicans feel during that moment. Thank you so very much for everything. I will carry this in my heart forever."

High Expectations and Exceptional Care

When visiting the classrooms, observing the teachers lead instruction and conversing with the schools' educators and administrators, the participants agreed that the personnel at the schools had just as high of expectations for their students as they did compassion for their students. They noted how teachers and school directors balanced high expectations while educating with love, care and human connection.

Program participants consistently characterized the classroom environments as exemplifying a powerful integration of high expectations and exceptional care. Observations indicated that teachers demonstrated deep regard for students as individuals, with instructional practices grounded in care rather than control. Classrooms were frequently described as familial in nature, marked by calm, respectful interactions and a shared sense of responsibility.

Teachers maintained clear expectations and held students accountable for their learning while fostering cooperative and harmonious classroom cultures. Participants praised the instructional craft of the teachers, noting strong pedagogical strategies, clear organization, and sustained student engagement. In contexts where material resources were limited, teachers displayed notable creativity and resourcefulness in lesson design. Visitors also emphasized the collegiality extended to them, as teachers welcomed guests as professional peers and, at times, as members of an extended community. Across classrooms, instruction was delivered with visible joy, energy, and pride in both the work of teaching and the students themselves, leaving participants with a deep appreciation for the professionalism and relational strength observed. This is made clear when the participants share the following quotes:

"The love not only for the profession but also for each of her students is evident throughout the entire environment. Thank you very much for allowing me to be part of your classroom."

"I deeply admired how the teacher leveraged her empathy and respect for her students rather than use power and authority to engage them in learning while also holding them accountable for learning."

"One aspect that really stood out to me was the sense of community no matter how the teacher grouped the kids. They worked well together. There was no complaining, no trying to switch groups. The teachers have high expectations for the kids and the kids' performance matched the teachers' expectations. There was a loving feeling in the classrooms, and the students were so well behaved. It felt like a family in the classroom."



High Expectations and Exceptional Care *continued*

Participants described Mexican educators as highly skilled, deeply caring professionals who cultivate rigorous, joyful learning environments grounded in empathy, high expectations, cultural belonging, and an unwavering belief in their students. They observed teachers achieving extraordinary outcomes with limited resources.



Student Respect, Agency and Academic Pride

Participants consistently described students in the schools as demonstrating a strong culture of respect toward teachers, peers, and visitors alike. Students were frequently characterized as kind and welcoming, offering generosity through gestures such as warm greetings, compliments, and the sharing of food, which contributed to a sense of openness and community. Participants noted that students were eager to share their learning, posed thoughtful questions, and displayed clear pride in their academic growth. Observations highlighted students' advanced academic vocabulary, strong literacy skills, and notable intellectual and creative capacities. In addition, students were described as exhibiting a high degree of maturity and emotional regulation, reinforcing participants' perceptions of classrooms as respectful, engaged, and developmentally supportive learning environments.

Participants were aligned characterizing the students as kind, respectful, joyful learners who demonstrate strong academic skills, collaborative habits, cultural pride, and emotional maturity. They saw students thriving in environments where relationships and learning are deeply valued. This is evident when they share:

"Such a beautiful experience. The children's energy is incomparable. They were so happy to see us, get to know us, and learn from us. Thank you to the schools for inviting us and treating us so well!"

"I observed the respect that exists between the teachers and the students. The teachers have a deep understanding of their students. The students were very enthusiastic about sharing and asking questions."

"I was also struck by the level of respect the students show their teachers, from the youngest to the oldest. I loved hearing them share with me everything they have learned this school year with such enthusiasm."

"I loved seeing the collaboration among the students and the way they develop their projects. It fills me with great pride and deep emotion to see how they demonstrate their love for their country."

Appreciation for Parents

Participants observed strong family engagement, noting that parents actively support learning through at-home assignments and projects. This collaboration between families, teachers, and the broader community was seen as a vital strength that enriches classrooms and helps make student learning possible. The participants say it best in the following passages:

"The families make it all possible! Collaboration with families helps strengthen both the classroom and the school. There is so much richness within our community!"

"My [host] teacher shared with me the importance of community and collaboration among parents. Parents were involved with at-home assignments, creation of projects, experiments, etc."

Conclusion

Participants expressed deep gratitude and a strong sense of honor for the opportunity to engage in the institute and school visits, describing the experience as transformative, inspiring, and professionally enriching. They valued the mutual respect between teachers and students, the cultural and civic pride observed in schools, and the meaningful exchange of ideas across borders, leaving with renewed commitment, practical strategies, and a lasting desire to continue collaboration between educators in Mexico and the United States. Contributes to the overall program as transformative professional learning rather than tourism. The following remarks were shared about what will stay with them after the experience:

"I'm grateful for the opportunity to connect with local educators and observe classrooms in action. These moments were inspiring and valuable."

"The school personnel and the students were very impactful."

"The cultural values of education in Mexico vs the U.S. The U.S. education system is fraught with control and punishment; however, what we saw in Puebla was a different perspective of what education can look and sound like."

"Seeing key Biliteracy from the Start strategies in action was a big highlight, meeting the teachers from the schools in Mexico was also huge."

"So many things! The school visits were definitely the highlight."

"Being able to spend time in the classrooms and speak with the students and teachers about their experiences."

"Connecting with the teachers and students at Otilia was an amazing experience and will always stay with me."

"Visiting the school will always stay with me because it was such a meaningful experience. The children were so respectful and the teachers so knowledgeable."

Conclusion *continued*

"There was a moment in my observation that captures the strength and resilience of the Mexican students and teachers...It's evident in the passion and dedication to learning, high expectations, patience and empathy for their students."

"I was able to spend time with the teacher at our school. She was truly a joy and beautiful human being. Her story of how she overcame so much to become independent and a loving elementary school teacher is very impressive. She showed courage and compassion to her students. They loved her."

"This has been a transformational experience that I hope I can repeat in the future, and that I hope to share with colleagues. Thank you for the opportunity and for the learning!"
"I will truly never forget the feeling I had in my heart leaving the 1st grade classroom at the Otilio school. I could only describe the feeling as a heart filled with so much love and gratitude from the experience. I am blessed to have been a part of this experience."



The BUENO Center and Literacy Squared program staff all echo the sentiments of the of the institute participants in expressing their gratitude for being welcomed into the schools and community of Puebla, Mexico for this event. The sense of pride and enthusiasm shown throughout Puebla are pervasive and we are deeply grateful to be able to host our institute in this vibrant and beautiful community.

