



**Cornerstone Learning Center**  
**1902 Saint Claire Avenue, Pueblo, CO 81004**  
**Grades: k-12**  
**Director: Dave Arellano**  
**Manager: Celina Apodaca**

Most of Pueblo's public schools have implemented school uniform requirements for their students. However, for students on the city's predominately low-income south side, uniforms represent an expense families cannot absorb. With drop-out rates high and many children at risk, school uniforms represent just one more barrier to education.

Hope Online's Cornerstone Learning Center Manager, Celina Apodaca, does not see uniforms as a priority. Instead, Cornerstone focuses on essentials. "We have students who are one-to-two years behind where they should be academically," says Ms. Apodaca, "we even had a 2<sup>nd</sup> grader who didn't know how to read at all."

Most of the Hope Online students at Cornerstone live with their grandparents or in a single-parent home. Thus, Cornerstone works diligently to keep family members involved. Each month, the students' families receive a memo describing the center's activities and inviting them to participate in student events, such as field trips. The center also gently shares tips on discipline.

"We're here to help parents, not tell them what they're doing wrong," Ms. Apodaca says. "But we do share our reward and discipline techniques. When our students do their work, they have some free time in the afternoon; when they don't, free time is spent getting the work done."

One 6<sup>th</sup> grader has made a remarkable turn-around after being constantly in detention, suspended and finally expelled at her previous three schools. She enrolled in Hope Online as a 5<sup>th</sup> grader and proceeded with lessons her Hope Online teacher and Cornerstone Learning Center mentor knew she could do. Coinciding with the appropriate level lessons, she was made a "helper" with younger students to build her self esteem. A year later, her grades have improved from Ds and Fs to Bs and Cs, and she is completing 7<sup>th</sup> grade coursework in some subjects.

Like our 6<sup>th</sup> grader, other older students are often asked to tutor younger students, providing a sense of leadership and being part of a team. As Apodaca affirms, "If we do not succeed as a team, we all fail. We must continue to encourage each other."

Ms. Apodaca loves her job and parents regularly tell her how much they appreciate all that she is doing for their children and community. She is excited to go to work every day, in part, because, "We set the atmosphere for our kids. We need to show excitement so they are excited. When we come in ready to work, then they are ready to work. It all starts with us."

## **Learning Center Administration**

### **Pastor David Arellano – Director**

With each passing year Pastor David Arellano finds his work with Cornerstone Learning Center more rewarding. Pastor Arellano is committed to giving back to his native southern Colorado community by providing an educational opportunity to an underserved population.

### **Celina C. Apodaca – Manager**

Celina Apodaca is in her third year as Manager and Mentor for Cornerstone Learning Center. Ms. Apodaca, since graduating from South High School in Pueblo, has over 16 years of experience working with and counseling inner city youth. Throughout her career she has acquired experience in program administration and management.

### **Michele A. Arellano - Mentor**

Michele Arellano is passionate about educating children. Since she was 12 year old, Ms. Arellano has volunteered for community organizations working with children age's seven to ten.

## **Hope Online Teacher**

### **Kimberly Craig – Hope Online Teacher**

Kimberly Craig is an experienced teacher specializing in elementary education. Her expertise educating children led to her involvement in community-based activities and educational training. After teaching 2<sup>nd</sup> grade for 13 years in Summerville, SC, Ms. Craig moved to Colorado, obtained a Colorado Teacher License, and began teaching students in Colorado Springs and Douglas County. Ms. Craig received a Bachelor of Arts in Education from the College of Charleston and a Bachelor of Science in Clinical Psychology from The Citadel, both in Charleston, SC.