



**New Heights Academy**  
**6951 North Dexter Street, Commerce City, CO 80022**  
**Grades K-12**  
**Director: Denise Duran**

New Heights Academy founder Duane Duran was approached by two middle school students in the spring of 2005. These young students had witnessed a stabbing at school and asked if he knew of a school where they could feel safe. That was the seed that began Mr. Duran's journey, along with his wife Denise, to lead this Hope Online Learning Center in Commerce City, a notably low-income, poorly-educated community.

On average, Hope Online students enter New Heights Academy at least a grade-and-a-half behind academically; none envision a college education. "We'd talk about college and just see blank stares," says Mr. Duran. "'What do you mean college? I can't go to college. I'm just trying to get out of the house when I'm 18.' Then we show them the opportunities they have if they complete high school, opportunities for scholarships and grants, and they see that college really is a possibility."

Without Hope Online, Mr. Duran estimates that the majority of his students would never finish high school. A quarter of the high school students had already been expelled or dropped out. A 15-year-old student with behavioral problems was told by family members that she was going to end up just like her siblings: in prison or pregnant. Today, she is one of Hope Online's exemplary students; she works hard at completing her work, succeeds academically, and enjoys many extracurricular activities.

Many of the Hope Online students did not thrive in the traditional school environment because of poor self-esteem or social skills. Denise Duran, Director of New Heights Academy, says "it is such a wonderful sight when these kids, who were perceived as shy and quiet, become active students who are full of self-esteem".

"Last year, on the last day of school, kids literally cried, hugging the mentors and telling them how much they would miss them, because solid relationships had been built. It affirmed what we believed, that this is why we're here." Parents say that the Durans are "giving these children hope for a better life through education."

## **Learning Center Administration**

### **Denise Duran – Director**

Denise Duran has been the Director of New Heights Academy since its inception. Valuing education and recognizing the need for a safe learning environment, Ms. Duran and her husband, Duane, founded New Heights Academy. Mrs. Duran received a Bachelor of Arts in Education from Southern Arizona Bible College in Hereford, Arizona.

### **Danelle Pacheco – Lead Mentor**

Danelle Pacheco is in her second year as a Mentor with New Heights Academy. Originally from San Antonio, Texas, Ms. Pacheco gained experience working with 1st – 6th graders at Fortress Christian Academy. She specializes in phonics and working with children of all ages.

### **Duane Duran - Founder**

Duane Duran enjoys working with at-risk youth in the community and neighborhood that he serves. Mr. Duran received a Bachelor of Arts from Highlands University in Las Vegas, New Mexico and is a candidate for a Master of Arts.

## **Hope Online Teacher**

### **Mary Jane Geiser – Hope Online Teacher**

Mary Jane (MJ) Geiser is a talented teacher with a Colorado Teacher License whose passion for working with children is demonstrated by her volunteer service with the Special Olympics. After many years in the technology industry, Mrs. Geiser followed her heart and began a teaching career. Mrs. Geiser received a Certificate of Technical Writing from Regis University in Denver CO, an Associate of Science in Computer Science from Aims Community College and a Bachelor of Arts in English from the University of Northern Colorado, both in Greeley, CO.