

# Cultural Ambassadors

## Centennial BOCES

### Greeley, CO



COLORADO  
Department of Education

The Centennial BOCES, located in Greeley, provides several supports for migrant families and students. The goal is to ensure the voices of *all* migrant families, including culturally, linguistically and ethnically diverse groups of parents, are represented, honored and heard through the Northern Region’s Migrant Education Program.

In response to a significant, ongoing demographic shift in Colorado’s Northern Region over the past five years, Centennial BOCES (CBOCES), the grant administrator of the Northern Region Migrant Education Program, recognized a need to reach out and engage with “newcomer families,” many who had just recently moved into the region as refugees from Africa and Asia. For decades, the vast majority of migrant families in the Northern region had spoken Spanish as a primary home language, and they shared a cultural heritage based in Latin American roots.

To start, CBOCES reached out to members in various subgroup communities to identify natural leaders and sought their input. It didn’t take long to realize they needed to partner, *truly* partner, with newcomer neighbors by treating them as equals. CBOCES hired parent leaders who reflected the culture and languages of the newcomer, immigrant, migrant and refugee subgroups.

CBOCES created Cultural Ambassador positions and hired people from the community who spoke fluent Burmese, Karen, Karenni and Somali. The Cultural Ambassadors worked “as needed” to assist in translation, interpretation and cultural communication. CBOCES started with four Cultural Ambassadors and now have over a dozen on call staff!

The Cultural Ambassadors provide more than just language support; they held the keys that opened doors to true partnership. They continue to serve as parent representatives on the Regional Parent Advisory Council (PAC) and as well as on the State PAC. Cultural Ambassadors have co-presented with staff at national conferences, and continue to support our work by sharing their wisdom, knowledge and ideas to assist in better identifying students’ needs and in the design of educational support services delivered by the Northern Region Migrant Education Program.

CBOCES is already seeing a positive impact on students. By engaging newcomer parents in the education their children, CBOCES has noticed an increased enrollment in preschool and school readiness programs, increased attendance of children in school, and improved relationships between newcomer parents and the community at large. When parents feel welcomed, valued and respected, they engage more deeply in their children’s education in ways they find to be meaningful and effective.