



## Attracting Personnel

# GROW YOUR OWN (GYO)

## Description

Grow your own (GYO) is an approach to developing a pipeline of educator candidates to meet specific workforce needs (Cushing, 2019).

## Overview

Communities are increasingly experiencing educator shortages, and GYO programs exist to meet the unique needs of local communities by recruiting and preparing community members to address critical shortages. Considering that 60% of personnel work within 20 miles of where they attended high school, location is becoming increasingly predictive of where personnel begin their careers. GYO programs seek to eliminate any barriers that may prevent local candidates from entering or remaining in the field (Krieg, Theobald, & Goldhaber, 2016; Reininger, 2016).

GYO programs are distinguished from other pipelines by *who* they target and *how*. GYO programs focus on **recruitment of high school students, career changers, paraprofessionals, non-teaching-school faculty, and community members** (Espinoza, Saunders, Kini, & Darling-Hammond, 2018). Districts and institutions of higher education (IHEs) **leverage close partnerships** to reduce obstacles that have historically kept these candidates from entering the profession.

GYO programs historically have found success in implementing the following elements:

- Offering **financial aid** (i.e., loan forgiveness and scholarships) to candidates completing GYO programs (PESB, 2016).
- Conducting **targeted communication efforts** to specific populations, including outreach in high schools (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).
- Establishing systems for candidates to receive **continuous coaching and mentoring** from entrance into the GYO program through early service (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018; Carver-Thomas, 2018). Offering ongoing coaching and mentoring not only is important for attracting candidates of color into GYO programs but is **essential for retaining personnel of color** once they exit the program (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020).

## Research Findings

Extensive research on GYO programs has found the following:

- There are strong connections between GYO programs and effectively addressing shortages in **high-need areas and subjects**, such as in **rural schools** and in **special education** (Jessen, Fairman, Fallona, & Johnson, 2020; PESB, 2016).
- By **reducing financial barriers and leveraging partnerships** with institutions that historically serve students of color, GYO programs have found success recruiting and retaining **diverse teachers** in the schools hardest to staff (Podolsky, Kini, Bishop, & Darling-Hammond, 2016; Dai, Sindelar, Denslow, Dewey, & Rosenberg, 2007).
  - For example, for its GYO program, Mississippi partnered with community colleges, where students of color make up more than 40% of the enrollment (Ma & Baum, 2016).
- GYO programs are most effective at **targeting specific populations** to enter **certain subject areas** when they consider the nuanced reasons these populations may be attracted to education, the **supports they need** to complete a program successfully, and the **culture of partnering institutions** (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).
- Programs that focus on recruiting candidates at the **high school level** may be **more effective than programs targeting adults** (Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).
- GYO programs are **especially successful in rural districts**, which historically struggle to recruit teachers from outside their communities (Carver-Thomas, 2018; Texas Comprehensive Center, 2018).

## Overview (Continued)

- Providing counseling and other mental health and social-emotional supports to candidates.

Many GYO programs are still impacted by **fiscal limitations** related to **episodic funding sources**, such as limited-time Federal grants. This has prevented GYO programs from becoming more widespread (OSEP Summit Attract Panel, 2020). To ensure that programs continue past the limits brought by episodic grants, programs must explore **sustainable funding models**. Given the local nature of the programs, many diverse funding models have been adopted. Some programs, like the [TeachMaine](#) initiative, are statewide and draw on funds from **Title II and Part A of ESSA** to support the development of pathways, while others are entirely **district funded**, like Wichita's GYO Teacher program (Wichita Public Schools, n.d.).

## Research Findings (Continued)

- In many States, GYO programs have had more success in recruiting and retaining a **larger proportion of personnel of color** than their traditional counterparts (Muniz, 2018; Carver-Thomas, 2018).

Researchers have found **mixed results** when investigating whether GYO programs yield increased retention. An Urban Institute report on a national GYO program, the Pathways to Teaching Careers Program, showed that graduates from the program remained in teaching longer than the typical beginning teacher and taught in urban and rural schools at a high rate (Clewell & Villegas, 2001). Other research, however, has not shown that GYO programs lead to greater retention than traditional preparation programs (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017). The difference in the results may be due to the varied nature of the GYO programs. Whatever the reason, researchers do agree that **additional research on the topic** would be useful.

## Exemplars

- [Grow Your Own Teachers Illinois](#). This GYO program helps community members become certified teachers in their neighborhood schools to improve educational outcomes for students. The program offers tuition assistance in the form of forgivable loans, which are forgiven once a graduate has taught for 5 years in a high-needs school or a high-needs position, such as special education. The program assists graduates with job placement and continued professional learning opportunities to enhance and deepen their skills (Grow Your Own Illinois, 2020). Since 2015, 105 graduates started teaching in low-income classrooms, and 152 more are in the pipeline. Forty percent of graduates have filled bilingual and special education positions. Program graduates have been shown to teach for at least 5 years once hired, saving their districts an estimated \$20,000 per new teacher hire and reducing the 40% teacher turnover rate common in low-income schools.
- [Texas Education Agency Grow Your Own Grant Program](#). This program competitively awards State funds to districts that design solutions to develop GYO programs aimed at attracting high school students to pursue certification in high-needs subjects and areas (Texas Education Agency, 2020). In its 2018 funding cycle, the Texas Education Agency funded more than 50 paraprofessionals to become certified general and special educators.
- [Montana Schools Recruitment Project \(MSRP\)](#). The Montana Council of Administrators of Special Education (MCASE) is working with School Administrators of Montana and the Office of Public Instruction to recruit highly qualified speech–language pathologists, school psychologists, special education teachers, special education directors, occupational therapists, physical therapists, sign language interpreters, and any other personnel necessary to accommodate children with special needs in Montana public schools. Recruiters for the MSRP attend national, regional, and local conferences and career fairs; travel to universities to visit professors and students; and post openings online in the belief that the personal touch, including face-to-face contact and personal phone calls and e-mails, helps build relationships with candidates.

(Additional exemplars can be found on the [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).)

# KEY IMPLEMENTATION CONSIDERATIONS

## Critical Components for Success

*(Lists are not sequential)*

### Setting the Stage

- Identify existing relationships between LEAs and institutions of higher education (IHEs).
- Examine data related to the current workforce.
- Identify gaps in personnel related to a specialty (e.g., special education) or to race/ethnicity, gender, or another characteristic.
- Begin a dialogue between LEA and IHE personnel to identify a potential focus area for a GYO program to address one or more of the gaps.
- Investigate existing GYO programs that could serve as models for your own (see exemplars).
- Identify local secondary schools that GYO programs can partner with to recruit candidates at the middle and high school level.

### Initial Start-Up

- Create a formal partnership agreement or memorandum of understanding between the LEA and IHE, and as applicable with middle or high schools.
- Present the strategy to key stakeholders, including IHE administrators, school leaders, school board members, and superintendents at the LEA level, to determine their degree of commitment.
- Select individuals who could serve in leadership roles across the LEA and IHE.
- Develop training to share with chosen LEA and IHE leaders.
- Identify potential funding sources (e.g., Federal or State grants, Title II or IDEA funds, community foundations, and other local business partnerships).
- Determine new data sources that may be useful in evaluating the effectiveness of the program.

### Continuous Improvement

- Iteratively review disaggregated data to discover successes and to inform ongoing adjustments.
- Make refinements to the program based on data and lessons learned.

## Related Services

GYO Programs have become increasingly prevalent in the related service professions. Much like GYO programs focused on teachers, these programs most often **center on recruiting high school and undergraduate students** within their localities (Morrison, Davies, & Noltmeyer, 2020; Public Policy Associates, 2020).

Additionally, related service GYO programs are critical for addressing shortages of personnel serving students with disabilities in **rural and urban localities**. For example, **Iowa's Mental Health Service Professionals Demonstration Grant** aims to support innovative partnerships formed to train school-based mental health service providers for employment in schools and LEAs in rural Iowa. The 5-year grant is administered with the goal of expanding the pipeline of high-quality trained providers to address shortages of mental health service professionals in schools served by high-need LEAs. The first cohort began coursework in January 2020, and the program's goal is to place 10 school psychologists in high-need rural districts in western Iowa by 2024 (Dredge & Van Horn, 2020).

### Critical Components for Success (Continued)

- Publicly recognize personnel prepared through the program to enhance the program's prestige.

### Leveraging Lessons Learned

- Secure additional funding for the GYO program.
- Share success stories.
- Determine the feasibility of sustaining and/or scaling up the program.
- Identify new community partners.
- Develop guidance, resources, and tools.

## Early Childhood

Early childhood professions have found success in **providing targeted pathways** to certification (OSEP Symposium, 2019). One study of three early childhood personnel GYO programs found that all three achieved success in recruiting and retaining a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse pool of educators (Gardner, Melnick, Meloy, & Barajas, 2019). These programs had **three key aspects in common: partnerships** with childcare resource and referral networks, **alignment** with recognized credentials and degrees, and **pathways** for students to **transfer** efficiently from **community colleges to State universities** (Gardner et al., 2019). As candidates in early childhood fields are more likely to pursue certification beginning at the community college (associates) level than other personnel, offering pathways for transferring to IHEs was particularly critical to the success of these GYO programs.

Because of the **variance in State-to-State accreditation** pathways and requirements for early intervention, GYO programs in this field are not as prevalent. More research on the use of the GYO strategy to address shortages of personnel serving infants and toddlers is needed.

## Stakeholder Spotlight

- **School Leaders and Faculty.** School leaders and faculty play a variety of roles in establishing GYO programs. Specifically, they can help build recruitment capacity for GYO programs to exist in their schools. One example is evidenced in GYO programs centered on attracting high school students to the profession; the school leader not only serves as the liaison between the preparation program and their school but also has the responsibility of ensuring that the appropriate school faculty are brought in to support prospective candidates. Successful GYO programs, like other nontraditional preparation programs, center on hands-on opportunities for students to learn and apply skills (Association for Career and Technical Education et al., 2009; Zascavage et al., 2008). The school administrator plays the central role in working with faculty to schedule time for the prospective educators to obtain hands-on practice and be exposed to the population that they will eventually serve. An example of this is [Leander Independent School District](#) in Texas's Grow Your Own program, which centers on building a pipeline for high school students to enter into the teacher workforce in high-needs subjects, such as special education. More information on this and similar programs can be found on OSEP's [Attract, Prepare, Retain resource page](#).

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