

A Starter Guide to Grow Your Own Educator Programs

By **Amaya Garcia**

Grow Your Own (GYO) educator programs are an increasingly popular strategy for addressing subject-area teacher shortages and increasing the diversity of the teacher workforce. GYO programs use partnerships between school districts, educator preparation programs, and/or community-based organizations to recruit and prepare community members to become and remain teachers in their local schools. GYO teacher candidates are familiar with the context of local schools, share similar experiences with students and families, and are committed to staying and teaching in their own communities.

This approach to teacher development is promising due to the level of supports offered to individual candidates, the focus on

cultivating local talent and promoting community development, and the opportunity to align educator preparation programs with school district needs.

Rapid growth of GYO programs and increasing interest from policymakers means that schools need guidance on program design and development. This brief provides an overview of GYO approaches to teacher preparation, key components of GYO, and considerations for program design and development. While recognizing the growing number of pre-collegiate educator programs in high school, this resource focuses on adult pre-licensure models.

GYO Program Models

Typically, GYO programs fall into two categories: (1) high school pre-collegiate programs that expose students to careers

in teaching and (2) adult pre-licensure programs that provide a pathway to a teaching degree and license to work in PreK–12 schools. These programs use a variety of models, as illustrated in the chart below.

High School¹ Pre-Collegiate	Adult Post-Collegiate, Pre-Licensure
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Career and technical education • Clubs and interest groups • Concurrent enrollment • Youth apprenticeship 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1–2 Year certification program (BA and MA) • Community College Baccalaureate (BA) • K–12 teacher Registered Apprenticeship (BA) • Teacher residency (BA and MA)

¹ For more information on high school pre-collegiate programs, see [Educators Rising](#) and [Career Wise Colorado](#).

GYO programs are highly localized and use a variety of teacher preparation approaches. Below, we highlight the four most common adult pathways—existing and emerging—that are being used within GYO programs.

1–2 year certification programs are one- to two-year programs designed to provide individuals who already hold a bachelor’s degree with the coursework and clinical experience needed to become a certified teacher. Some of these programs help candidates earn a master’s degree and are paired with varying degrees of clinical training. Other certification programs allow candidates who already have some college credits and experience to earn their first bachelor’s degree or provide an opportunity to earn a second bachelor’s degree with a focus on education. These approaches provide a faster track into the classroom than traditional models, as they usually take 15–18 months at the master’s level and two years at the bachelor’s level. Commonly, these programs are offered as alternative certification pathways.

Community college baccalaureate (CCB) degree programs allow students to earn a four-year bachelor’s degree at a community college. CCB programs are currently authorized in 25 states. Of these, 10 offer programs in education. Florida has the most CCB programs in education, with 47 programs spanning the areas of early education, elementary education, secondary education, and special education. State-level CCB policies have arisen out of the need to increase access to four-year degree programs for students that have historically been underserved by four-year institutions. CCB programs serve a broader range of students, including non-traditional students who work full time and need flexible course scheduling, and they offer a lower cost option to earning a degree. CCB programs can help meet local employer demands and workforce needs, like shortages of qualified and certified

educators. Students are able to avoid gaps in transfer credits by staying at the community college to complete their degree.³

Research on the impact of CCB programs on teacher education is still emerging and findings are mixed in terms of their impact on increasing the number of teaching degrees awarded and boosting racial diversity. However, a recent study found that CCB graduates view the pathway as an opportunity to improve their lives and those of their family, and to stay and contribute to their local communities.⁴ A separate study found evidence suggesting that CCB programs may promote greater access to bachelor’s degrees for students of color.⁵

K–12 teacher Registered Apprenticeships provide paid on-the-job training and structured pathways into a variety of in-demand careers. K–12 teacher apprenticeship models pair structured, low-cost training with the coursework necessary to earn a bachelor’s degree in education and a teaching license. Apprentices must be paid during their on-the-job component. This preparation approach has not been widely used outside of early education, but it is gaining traction because of the recent authorization of K–12 teacher apprenticeships by the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL).

Registered Apprenticeships are formally recognized and validated by the DOL or a state apprenticeship agency and meet specified standards and requirements. Registered Apprenticeships in education may include partnerships between school districts, state education agencies, state workforce agencies, and educator preparation programs. These programs are eligible for grants from the DOL and funding from the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) via local workforce boards. However, to use federal workforce dollars to support apprenticeship, programs must be registered with the DOL or a state apprenticeship agency which has federal authority to register programs.⁶

³ For more on CCB programs, see Ivy Love and Iris Palmer, *Community College Baccalaureate Programs: A State Policy Framework* (Washington, DC: New America, 2020),

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/community-college-baccalaureate-programs-state-policy-framework/>; and Iris Palmer and Ivy Love, *Advocacy Tool Kit: Bachelor’s Degrees at the Community College* (Washington, DC: New America, 2020),

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/advocacy-tool-kit-bachelors-degrees-at-the-community-college/>

⁴ Lia Wetzstein, Elizabeth Apple Meza, and Debra D. Bragg, *Washington Community College Baccalaureate Students: How Life Experiences Shape Baccalaureate Education, Employment and Economic Security* (Seattle, WA: Community College Research Initiatives, University of Washington, 2020), <https://uw-s3-cdn.s3.us-west-2.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/158/2020/10/28194457/Newba-dn10.pdf>

⁵ Elizabeth Meza and Ivy Love, *Community College Baccalaureate Programs as an Equity Strategy: Student Access and Outcomes Data* (Washington, DC: New America, 2022),

<https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/briefs/community-college-baccalaureate-programs-as-an-equity-strategy-student-access-and-outcomes-data/>

⁶ For more on Registered Apprenticeships, see Lul Tesfai, *Creating Pathways to College Degrees through Apprenticeships* (Washington, DC: New America, 2019), <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/creating-pathways-postsecondary-credentials-through-apprenticeships/>;

Teacher residencies provide year-long clinical training under the guidance of a mentor teacher paired with bachelor’s- or master’s-level coursework that is aligned with experiences in the classroom. These programs can be led by school districts, or even state education agencies, in partnership with an approved educator preparation program. Some graduates must commit to serving in the host school district for a specified number of years after completion of the program.

Residencies are a high-impact model of teacher preparation, with research documenting positive impacts on increasing educator diversity and retention in the profession.⁷ Residencies can be built into existing school budgets to ensure that they are sustainable, which is a key priority.⁸ States such as Mississippi and California have invested in teacher residencies to help build a workforce equipped with the knowledge and skills needed to support students. Federal funding opportunities, such as the Teacher Quality Partnership, are available to help supplement the cost of launching and operating a teacher residency program.

Essential Elements of GYO Programs

High-quality GYO programs share five elements. These elements are derived from research on the design and structure of GYO programs, with a focus on creating programs that are candidate-centered.

- Strong partnerships across school districts, educator preparation providers, and community organizations
- Community-based recruitment that aims to increase the ethnic, linguistic, and racial diversity of the teacher workforce
- Wraparound supports (e.g., cohort structure, scholarships, licensure test preparation, assistance navigating college admissions process) through the recruitment, preparation, and induction years

- Paid work-based experience under the guidance of an effective mentor teacher that aligns with educator preparation coursework
- Structured pathways for teacher candidates to earn required credentials and certification

Strategies for Designing a High-Quality GYO Program

DEVELOP A THEORY OF ACTION AND PLAN FOR DATA COLLECTION/EVALUATION

At the outset, program developers should identify a problem statement and theory of action to help guide their work and provide a checkpoint for ensuring that the program design aligns with that vision. A theory of action is an “if/then” statement that specifies what will happen if the GYO program is successfully implemented. A logic model can be created to provide a map for the resources, activities, and outputs that will contribute to the short- and long-term outcomes and success of the program. Program developers should consider the outcomes they hope to see as a result of their work and the data they will need to collect in order to measure progress towards their goals. Partners can work together to determine which data points each is responsible for collecting and how they will share data with each other. Partners can set up a system for monitoring progress to help ensure that candidates are staying on track and to provide intervention as needed.

ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS

Partnerships are central to GYO programs and provide an opportunity for collaboration on a teacher preparation pathway that meets the needs of local candidates and the community. Program developers should explore their existing connections and consider what partners could help them achieve their goals. Partners can include school districts, educator preparation programs, and community-based organizations that work closely with schools or with the target population for the program. Outreach efforts should focus on developing a shared understanding of the problem to be

Team CELNA, *Building Strong and Inclusive Economies through Apprenticeship* (Washington, DC: New America, 2019), <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/state-policy-agenda-2019>; and Taylor White and Amaya Garcia, “Teacher Apprenticeship: What Is It and Why Now?” *EdCentral* (blog), New America, February 8, 2022, <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/teacher-apprenticeship-what-is-it-and-why-now/>

⁷ John P. Papay, Martin R. West, Jon B. Fullerton, and Thomas J. Kane, “Does an Urban Teacher Residency Increase Student Achievement? Early Evidence From Boston,” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 34, no. 4 (2012): 413-434, doi [10.3102/0162373712454328](https://doi.org/10.3102/0162373712454328); and Roneeta Guha, Maria E. Hylar, and Linda Darling-Hammond, “The Teacher Residency A Practical Path to Recruitment and Retention,” *American Educator*, Spring (2017): 31–34, 44, <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1137804.pdf>

⁸ For more on teacher residencies, see the [National Center for Teacher Residencies](#); [Prepared To Teach](#); and the [Pathways Alliance](#) report on creating a national definition of teacher residency.

addressed and discussions of the roles that different partners will play in helping the program launch and be sustained.

ASSESS LOCAL TEACHER WORKFORCE NEEDS AND EXISTING PROGRAMS

GYO programs should be designed to address a specific problem or gap within the local teacher workforce, such as a shortage of special education teachers or the need to increase the racial diversity of educators in the district and/or state. Often, GYO programs are designed to remove barriers to teacher education, so program planners should be familiar with existing teacher preparation programs and pathways into the profession and how their program will fit into this landscape.

CONSULT STAKEHOLDERS

GYO is a highly localized strategy that aims to center the needs of candidates and the communities that they will serve. Program developers should identify and convene key stakeholders, organizations, and other interested parties to help cultivate a shared understanding of how and why GYO is a valuable tool for strengthening and growing the teacher workforce. These relationships will also be important for candidate outreach and recruitment, and for advocacy efforts related to promoting GYO policies and funding within the district and/or state.

DETERMINE TARGET POPULATION

GYO programs target different populations in order to meet their goals. Most states have programs that provide high school students with exposure to and experience with a career in teaching in order to motivate them to pursue college, to major in education, or to understand how the education system works. These programs can be designed in a variety of ways—for example, through career and technical education or through dual enrollment—but may lack a complete pathway into postsecondary education and enrollment in a teacher preparation program. States and localities also have programs that focus on recruiting and preparing adult community members, such as paraeducators, after-school staff, and parents. These programs typically span one to two years and are often designed for individuals with some college credits or those who already have a bachelor's degree. This approach provides a faster track into the classroom for teacher

candidates and promotes career and salary advancement opportunities for non-licensed school-based staff.

IDENTIFY ENABLING POLICIES AND FUNDING MECHANISMS

The teaching profession is experiencing unprecedented challenges, and lawmakers across the country are responding by implementing policies to promote more pathways into the profession and to boost the supply of teachers. GYO program developers should assess the relevant policies and funding in their state, including competitive grants for program development, scholarships for prospective teachers (including non-traditional students), teacher diversification funding, apprenticeship, concurrent enrollment, and career and technical education. Program leaders can explore federal funding opportunities that are targeted to specific populations of educators (e.g., Indigenous people), populations of students (e.g., English learners), and preparation approaches (e.g., teacher residency and GYO).

SUPPORT CANDIDATES

GYO programs are often designed to help remove long-standing obstacles to a teaching credential, including the financial cost, bureaucratic higher education system, licensure exams, and more. However, since GYO is a local strategy, programs use a variety of approaches to prepare candidates and offer varying levels of support to candidates. Preparation models may include teacher residency, graduate level certification, undergraduate level certification, and more recently, teacher apprenticeship. Some GYO programs offer financial assistance to candidates to cover the cost of attending a teacher preparation program. Others offer candidates in-depth clinical training paired with aligned coursework and substantial wraparound supports.

Understanding the barriers that program candidates face is a key component of designing a responsive model. New America's research highlights the fact that traditional models of higher education can be a major obstacle, with a lack of attention to the needs of working adults, rigid admissions requirements, and a high cost of attendance.⁹ Many GYO programs work within their institution to create flexible course scheduling, offer individual support with admission and registration, and discount tuition. Some programs offer bridge courses that help candidates transition into the college environment, either as first-time students or as returning students, and help them stay on track with their preparation

⁹ Kaylan Connally, Amaya Garcia, Shayna Cook and Conor P. Williams, *Teacher Talent Untapped: Multilingual Paraprofessionals Speak About the Barriers to Entering the Profession* (Washington, DC: New America, 2017), <https://na-production.s3.amazonaws.com/documents/Teacher-Talent-Untapped.pdf>

program. Some programs use conditional loans that allow candidates to earn a degree at little to no cost, with the expectation that they will work in the district/state for a specified number of years. These examples encapsulate best

practices for GYO programs and should be taken into consideration when determining how to best support candidates (see **Table 1**).

Table 1: Common Supports Offered to GYO Candidate

	Common Practices	Key Questions
Financial Support	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are offered financial assistance to cover most (if not all) of the cost of earning a degree, including tuition, fees, and living expenses: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Conditional loans ◦ Scholarships ◦ Discounted tuition ◦ Stipends ◦ Fees, books, and other associated costs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What funding is available in the state to support candidates? • Does the college/university have flexibility to offer discounted tuition? • How can federal funding support the program?
Advising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are paired with a program navigator who assists with program admissions and offers guidance/support. • Candidates have an academic advisor who assists with course registration, progress monitoring, and program requirements. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can the program offer one-on-one advising? • Does our budget allow funding for a dedicated program navigator? • Who is available to help candidates manage the admissions process?
Flexible Scheduling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Courses are offered at various times and using multiple modalities <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Weekends and evenings ◦ On campus and/or in the community ◦ Hybrid courses ◦ Remote/satellite courses • Schedules build-in coursework (for example, work 4 days/week and class 1 day/week). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the steps necessary to hold classes on-site in the school district? • How can remote instruction be used and what is the needed infrastructure? • Does the school district have flexibility to modify staff hours to facilitate class attendance?
Paid Clinical Experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are paid a salary or stipend while working as a teacher resident, paraeducator, or in another instructional support role. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How can we work with our HR and human capital teams to fill paraeducator roles? • What funding is available for stipends? How much can we afford to pay? • What strategies can we use to build the cost of residency into our existing funding sources? • How can the union help?

Mentorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates work under the direct guidance and supervision of a mentor teacher. • Candidates have field supervisors who offer guidance and support. • Candidates have a district-level mentor/supervisor who helps them navigate issues or challenges. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How do we identify teacher mentors? • How are teacher mentors compensated? • How are teacher mentors supported? • Who is supporting candidates at the district level?
Cohort	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are admitted as a cohort and progress through the program with the same group of peers. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How large will the cohort be? • Can individuals be admitted to the cohort mid-year? • What team-building activities can we implement to foster relationships?
Test Preparation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates are provided assistance and preparation for teacher licensure exams. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What level of support is needed with licensure exams? • Can we offer tutoring and test preparation support? • Are there external organizations that can be partners in this work?
Placement and Hiring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Candidates receive assistance with preparing for interviews, finding open jobs, and securing a placement. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is the policy for program candidates' hiring? Are they guaranteed an interview? Are they required to teach in the district after graduation? • Do candidates need support with preparing for interviews? Finding open positions? Drafting a resume?

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