Strategies for Establishing and Sustaining Partnerships in Grow Your Own Educator Programs

By **Alexandra Manuel**

Community Transformation Collective

Establishing Strong Partnerships

Partnerships are an essential component of supporting the identification, recruitment, preparation, placement, retention, and growth of educators in a Grow Your Own (GYO) program. GYO programs require strong, collaborative partnerships between districts, educator preparation programs, and community-based organizations to provide teacher candidates intensive support that will help them persist and earn professional certification.

Typically, GYO programs are implemented by a partnership between school districts, tribal compact schools, charter schools, educational service districts (ESDs), community-based organizations, and approved educator preparation providers such as community colleges and four-year universities. Partnership roles should be explored through a collaborative asset mapping process and build off strengths of the individual organizations. Districts, preparation programs, and community organizations should determine roles that support a successful pathway for completion for the candidate. Partners can creatively collaborate in areas such as selection of candidates, job placement, and support services.

Partnerships may be formalized through a memorandum of understanding (MOU) that specifies the roles and responsibilities of each party. These agreements can also be formalized as a contract, district-specific policy, and/or other formalized agreement focused on policy, programming, and funding efforts to support candidates on the path to become educators.

Partners can develop infrastructure to create and track pathways for employees, community members, and career changers. Ideally, each entity will be an active collaborator in the planning and design process to ensure that the GYO program meets local teacher workforce needs. In addition, partners should engage a wide range of stakeholders to get feedback and identify any gaps in the program's design. Planning groups might include university partners, such as teacher preparation program leaders and student groups; district partners, such as the superintendent and human resource staff; professional development partners, such as ESDs; community partners, such as teacher unions and coalitions focused on the teacher workforce; and other advocacy groups.

Key Partnership Activities

As programs are being designed and implemented, partners can work together to:

- Recruit candidates from populations systematically excluded from the educator workforce that reflect P–12 student demographics in the community, such as paraeducators, high school students, parents, and other school-based staff.

- Implement a cohesive and culturally responsive set of support services and structures to guide candidates through the program and into job placements.

- Prepare candidates to address content area or geographic shortages by conducting a needs assessment and tailoring programs to fill those gaps.[1]

- Provide a clear pathway from recruitment to employment by offering candidates one-to-one advising to help them navigate each step of the process.

- Offer candidates and mentor teachers job-embedded learning, where candidates are an integral part of the school community and student learning improvement strategy.

- Support candidates to meet program and teacher certification requirements and assist in removing barriers.

- Provide credit or early program completion for prior relevant coursework and experience.

- Evaluate coordinated GYO candidate support services to identify what is working and what needs improvement.

- Define culturally responsive practices to support a diverse teaching staff.

- Update job descriptions to reflect equity and skills in cultural responsiveness and to differentiate roles of program participants in schools (can be done in collaboration with the union).

- Engage with student groups to help market the program and attract potential candidates.

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[1] For an example of a teacher shortage report see, Washington State Professional Educator Standards Board, *Addressing Washington's Educator Shortage: A Review of Promising Practices and Systemwide Approaches*, (Olympia, WA: Professional Educator Standards Board, 2021), https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hW1lqGD3prleyTu3yZR3dd16Y7K0OTW-/view

Centering Equity in Partnerships

Cross-sector collaborators should focus on promoting equity in the pathways into teaching and preparation of future educators, including ongoing training around equity and culturally responsive practices for educators.[2] This work is important because it models how to advance equity in the preparation and practices of educators and how to advance racial justice in education through inclusive and collaborative partnerships.

GYO program partners can use the following equity-centered approaches:

- Implement recruitment, preparation, and hiring strategies that center racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, and community representation within the educator workforce.

- Advance change in policies, practices, and institutional cultures to amplify equity, antiracism, and racial justice across the education system.

- Champion community-driven change to ensure the work reflects and is guided by the voices and needs of the community.

- Focus on partner coalitions to advocate for systems change and the removal of barriers for candidates and educators.

- Collaborate with partners to bring people, resources, and ideas together across government, local communities, and the private and philanthropic sectors.

- Build on the talents and strengths of a diverse education workforce to improve relationships with and experiences of students, families, and educators, especially within communities of color.

- Include racially and linguistically diverse staff in the development and implementation of the program.

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[2] For more on culturally responsive practices see, Jenny Muñiz, *Culturally Responsive Teaching: A Reflection Guide* (Washington, DC: New America, 2020), https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/policy-papers/culturally-responsive-teaching-competencies/

Sustaining Strong Partnerships

To help ensure that the GYO partnership stays strong over time, partners can work together to:

- Cultivate a district-wide equity strategy, action plan, and sustainability plan.
    - District-wide strategy often focuses on policies or priorities for the students and workforce of the district and can be at the school board or leadership level.
    - An action plan is the mobilization of the strategy: what it will take to make these priorities happen, who needs to be involved, and the steps of the process.
    - A sustainability plan is focused on how to maintain the strategy and increase its impact.

- Assess program success and responsiveness to the needs of diverse teacher candidates on a continuous basis. Surveying candidates, providing support services, and monitoring program recruitment data and retention data are ways to do this, as is convening a community-centered advisory board to monitor the program.

- Identify a variety of funding sources and strategies to support program candidates and long-term program sustainability.

- Review teacher support practices beyond the first year of teaching to ensure that educators of color are heard and supported in their careers. This support can be given in several ways:
    - Affinity groups focused on particular educator identity (i.e., race, ethnicity, gender, or role) or on new teacher engagement practices.
    - Cascading mentorship, which looks at mentor and mentee opportunities, since we learn the most from those just ahead of us on our path as well as those just behind us.
    - Leadership opportunities, which can include asking current educators to support and recruit new educators into the profession through fellowships, recognition as instructional coaches, or leading a high school teacher academy course.

When done well, all of these strategies can lead to better retention for educators of color.