



Grow Your Own Educators: Talking Points for Advocacy

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New America

What is Grow Your Own?

New America defines Grow Your Own, or GYO, as **partnerships** between educator preparation programs, school districts, and community organizations that recruit and prepare local community members (e.g., parents, paraeducators, uncertified school staff, high school students) to enter the teaching profession and teach in their communities, where they share similar experiences with students and families.

GYO is a **strategy** addressing multiple issues at once, including

- Teacher shortages
- Linguistic and racial disparities between the nation’s teachers and students
- Misalignment between teacher preparation and local needs

GYO programs approach these issues in different ways. Some programs target **high school students** by providing them with exposure to educational careers. Some programs focus on helping **paraeducators** or other uncertified school staff earn teaching degrees by removing barriers to higher education. Other programs offer pathways for **adult community members** or parents.

The GYO approach focuses on **who to recruit**, in order to leverage the community’s assets to meet teacher workforce needs, and **how to support** community-based candidates on their pathway to becoming a licensed educator.

What Are the Essential Elements of GYO?

1. **Strong partnerships** across school districts, educator preparation providers, and community organizations
2. **Community-based recruitment** of ethnically, linguistically, and racially diverse candidates that are reflective of and responsive to the needs of their communities
3. **Wraparound supports** through the recruitment, preparation, and induction years (e.g., cohort structure, mentorship, tutoring, scholarships, licensure test preparation, financial assistance, academic advising, flexible course scheduling, and transportation)

4. **Paid work-based experience** under the guidance of an effective mentor teacher that aligns with educator preparation coursework
5. **Structured pathways** for teacher candidates to earn required credentials and certification at various stages of their careers

What Is the Policy Landscape of GYO Across the U.S.?

Since New America began studying GYO in 2017, attention to these programs has increased at all levels, with proposed federal legislation and considerable investments at the state level.

GYO pathways for paraeducators and other adults exist in 38 states and the District of Columbia, while GYO pathways for high school students exist in 47 states and the District of Columbia.¹ A total of 29 states and DC have a GYO focused policy and 31 states plus DC fund some type of GYO programming. Around 10 states plus DC offer competitive grant programs to support GYO development and expansion. Many programs use a combination of federal, state, local and philanthropic funds to support the work.

However, many programs report challenges with securing sustainable funding due to the structure of state legislative cycles, which generally offer short-term funding (e.g., year-to-year or for two years). Other state policies can also impact GYO, such as transfer agreements, dual enrollment cost and accessibility, free community college, community college baccalaureate, and teacher licensure requirements. These policies must be taken into consideration when developing a GYO advocacy strategy to ensure alignment with existing policy conditions and to push for the comprehensive changes that may be needed to help address teacher workforce needs.

Why is GYO Worth the Investment?

GYO programs use different strategies to remove barriers and increase access to teacher preparation programs:

- Financial assistance for tuition, books, fees, transportation, child care costs, and more
- Admission counseling and academic advising
- Tutoring and test preparation
- Flexible course scheduling
- Clinical training under the guidance of a mentor teacher
- Aligned educator preparation coursework and clinical training
- Individualized support to help candidates persist and graduate

¹ Amaya Garcia, *A 50-State Scan of Grow Your Own Teacher Policies and Programs* (Washington, DC: New America, 2022), <https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/reports/grow-your-own-teachers/>

GYO programs benefit local communities and states by:

- Increasing the potential for higher rates of teacher retention
- Removing barriers and increasing access to higher education and the teaching profession
- Recruiting and supporting linguistically and racially diverse teacher candidates
- Targeting subject-area teacher shortages such as special education and bilingual education
- Promoting community and workforce development

What State-Level Policies Can Support GYO?

- Allocated funding to develop and sustain GYO programs
- Data systems to track program recruitment and completion, job placement, and retention
- Program evaluation to gauge impact on local workforce needs
- Teacher certification and licensure systems that offer multiple approaches to measuring skills and competencies
- Program accessibility for candidates with and without bachelor's degrees through different program models