Project REACH, based at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, works to meet the rapidly growing need for bilingual and bicultural educators in the state. Project REACH supports paraprofessionals in obtaining an associate degree, bachelor’s degree, and initial licensure in elementary education, as well as an English as a Second Language certification.

Project REACH is part of a group of educator pathway programs housed at the University of Arkansas. The program uses a cohort structure and offers teacher candidates academic advising, mentorship, financial resources, test preparation, and counseling support. The success of Project REACH over the past few years has paved the way for Project ELEVATE (Ensuring Learner Equity Via Advocacy and Teacher Education), a pathway expanding the university’s Grow Your Own work in two rural school districts with growing culturally and linguistically diverse learners.

**2017**
*Year Established*

**18**
*Program Graduates to Date*

**4.5**
*Years to Complete Program*

**17**
*Graduates Teaching in the State*

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**Project REACH recruits:**
- Paraprofessionals

**Project REACH focuses on preparing teachers who are:**
- Bilingual/Multilingual
- BIPOC

**Project REACH partners with:**
- Northwest Arkansas Community College
- Springdale Public School District

**Project REACH is funded by:**
- District funds
- Federal funds
Reflections from Diana Gonzales Worthen, Principal Investigator and Director

Few teachers mirror the multilingual, culturally and ethnically diverse students they teach. Yet, paraprofessionals who have years of experience, have the desire to teach, and can connect to students and their families remain an untapped pool of teachers. The richness among these members of the community can counteract missed opportunities for access and equity in education for students and their families.”

Diana Gonzales Worthen, Principal Investigator and Director

What are the greatest strengths of Project REACH?
Our GYO program embraces socioculturally mediated academic advising with mentoring. [These practices] include: (1) an asset-based, holistic perspective using a community cultural wealth framework, (2) mentoring from an ecological perspective using student-centered GYO seminars or group and peer mentoring, and (3) employing advisors who advocate for equity. The GYO advisor is an English Language Specialist with intercultural competence, which is a critical attribute when working with bilingual/bicultural paraprofessionals who were once English learners, are foreign born, and are first generation/non-traditional college students.

What are some of the greatest challenges that your programs face?
We have a waiting list of potential teacher candidates, but do not have the funds to support them. We will work on locating resources and additional funds to sustain our GYO program.

What have candidates said about their experiences in your program?
“It’s more personal. Like when you go to a normal advisor, you’re just a student with an ID number, but [the REACH advisors] know you, they know your history, they know what you need...They really try to work with you, which is nice.”

“I will be an example of persistence to my kids and grandkids. I will help my daughter pay for her college.”

“I have a higher sense of self-worth and this experience proves to me my capability to be successful. With that in mind, I know that I can and should always advocate my work and worth in situations where it may come into question.”

What advice would you give to others looking to start a GYO program?
We recommend starting with a pilot program, especially where there have not been any attempts and you are breaking new ground in an area experiencing emerging diversity. Our pilot program, Project MAESTRO, enrolled four bilingual/bicultural paraprofessionals in 2014. The pilot program allowed us to work through the challenges of recruiting, applying to the program, enrolling, advising, mentoring, scheduling evening classes, assisting students with accessing financial aid, purchasing textbooks, preparing for required teacher licensure exams and working closely with the partnering school district, community college and teacher education program. All four candidates graduated and are now teaching.