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Strategies for Designing, Implementing, and Evaluating Grow-Your-Own Teacher Programs for Educators

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Grow-your-own (GYO) teacher programs recruit and train teachers from within communities to bring racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity and skills such as bilingualism into schools. These programs are often partnerships between schools, districts, community organizations, and teacher preparation programs.

GYO programs recruit and train school staff and community members to become certificated teachers. Candidates often include paraprofessionals or teachers with limited teaching certificates. These programs are typically alternative pathway programs, in which candidates work as teachers as they earn their teaching credentials.

WHAT IS THIS DOCUMENT?

This review illustrates common features of GYO programs. It is a tool to facilitate the discussion of existing and potentially new program features among staff and educators who manage or work with GYO programs for adults or are considering creating one.

We examined more than 125 articles written between 1980 and 2017 that describe existing GYO programs for adults in the United States. We selected 15 articles from this pool based on relevance and generalizability. These articles describe GYO program practices and participant experiences but not long-term outcomes.

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This means that we do not know whether these practices are effective. Consequently, this report describes common program features and existing GYO projects but does not provide evidence of impact. Details about specific features are available in the individual articles, which are cited in a references table at the end of this document.

COMMON FEATURES OF GYO PROGRAMS FOR ADULTS

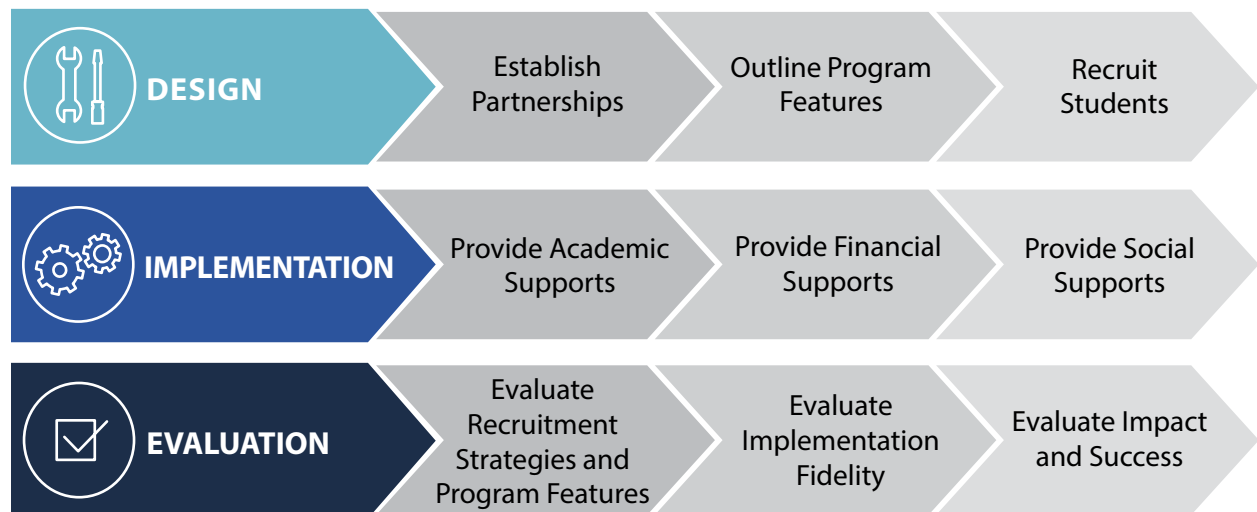
Based on the literature, we created a GYO program framework that organizes program development into three phases—design, implementation, and evaluation.

During the design phase partnerships are established and work to identify needs, articulate goals, outline roles and responsibilities, coordinate activities, and develop strategies for evaluation.

During the implementation phase, district, community, and university partners work together to provide financial, academic, and social supports to ensure student success.

Based on broader education practice, multiple sources of evaluation data are collected during the life of the GYO project to measure progress and guide implementation. Partners use evaluation data to continuously improve GYO programs, helping them meet intended outcomes, and build sustainability.

Grow-Your-Own Teacher Program Framework





Design

ESTABLISH PARTNERSHIPS

Existing GYO programs establish partnerships between districts, community-based organizations, and institutions of higher education to align expectations and roles.

GYO programs partner with community-based organizations and institutions of higher education to identify, recruit, and retain GYO candidates and to ensure that training programs are accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant. In addition, these partnerships establish other key elements of design, such as a shared vision, clearly defined roles, methods for ongoing communication, and procedures for data collection.

Most of the GYO programs described here are partnerships between districts and institutions of higher education, including both universities and community colleges. For example, the *Bilingual Paraeducator Career-Ladder* is a partnership of three school districts in Northern Virginia, George Mason University, and Northern Virginia Community College. Similarly, the *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* is a consortium of Azusa and Charter Oak Unified School Districts, California State University Los Angeles, and Citrus Community College.

A few of the GYO programs also include partnerships with community-based organizations. For example, *Project Nueva Generación* is a partnership of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and the *Bilingual Education Program* at Chicago State University. This project gave community members the opportunity to take university courses that were delivered at a neighborhood school.

OUTLINE PROGRAM FEATURES

Existing GYO programs commonly work with institutions of higher education to coordinate candidates' work experience with student teaching requirements.

Many GYO candidates work as educators while they are students (Osterling & Buchanan, 2003). As a result, some of the teacher training program requirements—such as classroom observations and student teaching—may be redundant. Coordinating these requirements with current and prior work experiences improves the likelihood that candidates will complete their teacher preparation program.

For example, participants in the *Futures in Quality Education* GYO program working in classrooms as paraprofessionals are not required to conduct classroom observations to fulfill the observation requirements for their courses. In addition, university faculty members visit the paraprofessionals at their work settings to observe teaching and provide student teaching credit for their work experience.

Existing GYO programs coordinate among partners for convenient scheduling of courses.

GYO adult candidates typically work during weekdays, often as paraprofessionals. Many of these candidates are also parents (Clewell & Villegas, 1999). GYO programs partner with universities and community colleges to offer courses at convenient times and locations to ensure that candidates can support themselves and their families and successfully complete the program.

Flexible scheduling of classes allows candidates to participate in programs after typical work hours and at easily accessible locations. For example, *Project Nueva Generación* works with its higher education partner to offer evening classes at a local elementary school. Similarly, the *Bilingual Paraeducator Career-Ladder* schedules most of its classes after work hours, and the *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* holds university classes at local schools.

Many programs also offer courses at a nontraditional pace—either faster or slower, depending on individual need. For example, *Futures in Quality Education* allows candidates to take courses on an accelerated schedule. In contrast, the *Bilingual Paraeducator Career Ladder* has some of its candidates take courses on a reduced schedule in order to balance work, life, and school.

RECRUIT STUDENTS

Existing GYO programs coordinate among partners to design and implement active recruitment approaches.

Recruiting sufficient numbers of candidates is an important consideration for all GYO programs. Institutions of higher education often require a minimum number of students in each class. To ensure broad outreach to potential candidates and sufficient student enrollment, partners work together to design and implement active recruitment strategies.

Most GYO programs in our review reach out to potential applicants through newsletters and email. School administrators also identify paraprofessionals and limited-certificated teachers who they think may be interested and may benefit from joining the GYO program.

A few GYO programs administer surveys to potential candidates. For example, the *California Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program* administers a survey to all bilingual and special education paraeducators in California through the Bilingual Instructional Support Department and Title VII Office.

GYO programs may also identify potential candidates through personnel information systems. *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program's* staff members have access to district human resources personnel information systems and scan those data to identify potential candidates and send out individualized recruitment letters.



Implementation

PROVIDE ACADEMIC SUPPORTS

Existing GYO programs provide academic supports to candidates through test preparation and developmental education classes.

GYO candidates bring skills and knowledge to classrooms but may face challenges to success in university. To negotiate these challenges, GYO programs provide academic support to candidates so they can succeed in their studies and become teachers.

The literature describes a wide range of academic supports. Some GYO programs offer test-preparation classes or tutoring to help candidates prepare for application exams like the ACT or TOEFL and credentialing exams like the edTPA. For example, the *California Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program* and the *Illinois GYO Initiative* provide test-preparation workshops and individual support for the credential exams.

GYO programs may also offer developmental education courses to build up candidates' college-level academic skills. For example, *Project Nueva Generación* offers developmental math, writing, and English as a Second Language classes for students who need to refine their skills. They also offer a study skills course. In addition, *Project Nueva Generación* helps applicants obtain foreign transcripts and translate them, as necessary.

PROVIDE FINANCIAL SUPPORTS

Existing GYO programs provide financial support to promote candidates' success.

GYO candidates often come from low-income backgrounds and circumstances and need to support their families (Connally, Garcia, Cook, & Williams, 2017). For this reason, financial supports are a common feature of GYO programs. Many offer resources to help candidates pay for tuition, fees, books, supplies, and living expenses, or help them identify and apply for scholarships and grants. Provisional loans to candidates may also be available.

For example, *Futures in Quality Education* participants receive financial assistance and may qualify for a state program for tuition remission. The program also provides for academic expenses such as books, supplies, and academic courses or exam reviews.

Similarly, the California Commission on Teacher Credentialing provided funding for the *Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program* to pay for tuition, textbooks, and test fees.

PROVIDE SOCIAL SUPPORTS

Existing GYO programs provide social supports such as counseling and peer networking to promote candidates' success.

Many GYO participants have been out of school for a long time (Skinner, 2010) and may find it difficult to balance the academic demands of their GYO program requirements with their family and work life. Most of the GYO programs in our literature review provide ongoing social supports to their candidates to ensure they are successful. These include strategies to foster peer networks and learning communities and counseling to address the challenge of balancing work, family life, and school.

Project Nueva Generación creates peer support networks by having students take classes together. The *Kūkuluao and Ka Lama Education Academy* pairs new candidates with alumni who can offer support and advice. The *Bilingual Paraeducator Career-Ladder* schedules ongoing meetings between candidates, counselors, and academic advisors to help candidates negotiate emotional stress and family, job, and academic demands.

Other supports include cultural seminars to better serve diverse candidates. The *Academy for Teacher Excellence* and the *Kūkuluao and Ka Lama Education Academy* provide novice teachers with mentoring and coaching to help them model culturally relevant teaching strategies and lessons.

The *Academy for Teacher Excellence* and the *Portland Dual Language Teacher Fellows Program* require candidates to attend a summer institute, which prepares candidates for teaching and academic support for their university courses.

Finally, the *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* supports candidates through monthly cohort meetings with a coordinator to help build participants' awareness of academic major and credential requirements, timelines, and sponsored peer-study groups.

Evaluation

EVALUATE RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES AND PROGRAM FEATURES

Existing GYO programs coordinate among partners to collect and analyze data that can be used to evaluate recruitment strategies and program features

Ongoing, systematic evaluation enables GYO program partners to engage in continuous improvement. GYO programs collect and use data to evaluate and improve their recruitment strategies and program features based on broader education practice (Hamilton et al., 2009; Park, Hironaka, Carver, & Nordstrum, 2013).

To evaluate recruitment strategies GYO programs establish goals for the number of candidates to recruit, conduct needs assessments to identify teacher shortage areas, and monitor progress toward these goals. GYO programs then systematically collect evaluation data from candidates, partners, and stakeholders.

For example, the *Kūkuluao and Ka Lama Education Academy* collects feedback from current candidates about the usefulness and timeliness of courses they have taken and the kinds of financial support they need most. The program staff members use these data to improve their program features to meet the needs of future candidates.

EVALUATE IMPLEMENTATION FIDELITY

Existing GYO programs coordinate among partners to collect and analyze data that can be used to evaluate program implementation

Regardless of how well GYO program features are designed, they cannot be effective if they are not delivered with fidelity. GYO programs can evaluate how their features and supports are implemented based on broader education practice (Fixsen, Naoom, Blase, & Friedman, 2005; Patton, 2008).

GYO programs evaluate implementation by examining candidates' course grades; attrition and retention rates; and participation in and access to academic, financial, and social supports.

Most GYO programs evaluate the implementation of their program features by collecting participant feedback. These data can be collected through ongoing and systematic surveys, focus groups, and document reviews.

For example, to investigate implementation successes and challenges of the *Illinois GYO Initiative*, researchers interviewed current candidates and graduates and conducted an annual survey of GYO candidates and graduates. They also interviewed project directors and partners from community-based organizations, districts, schools, and institutions of higher education.

The Pathways to Teaching Careers Program established the following set of metrics on which to evaluate its success

- ▶ **Did the program meet its overall recruitment goal?** *The Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* increased the number of potential minority teachers by almost 15 percent.
- ▶ **What percentage of program participants remained in the program through completion and certification?** Seventy-five percent of candidates completed the program and were certificated.
- ▶ **Did candidates work in targeted districts after completing the program?** Eighty-four percent of program completers worked in teaching jobs in targeted school districts.
- ▶ **Are program completers good teachers?** Program completers were perceived to be effective teachers by experienced supervisors, principals, and an independent evaluator.
- ▶ **Do program completers remain in teaching longer than the typical novice teacher?** Eighty-one percent remained in teaching for at least three years after completing the program.

EVALUATE IMPACT AND SUCCESS

Existing GYO programs coordinate among partners to collect and analyze data that can be used to evaluate impact and success

GYO partners can design ongoing data collection routines to regularly evaluate the effectiveness of their program based on broader education practice (Hamilton et al., 2009; Park, Hironaka, Carver, & Nordstrum, 2013).

This research review did not identify any GYO programs that rigorously evaluate their long-term impact, such as changes in student achievement or cost savings to districts. However, a few articles describe short-term outcomes, such as recruitment numbers, retention and attrition rates for GYO candidates, and job placement rates. The *Pathways to Teaching Careers Program* is one example (see sidebar).

Grow-Your-Own Program Framework: Adult Educators

This framework is intended to guide reflection and discussion about the existing and potential features of your program.

	Components	Features	Discussion Questions
Design	Establish Partnerships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborative partnership • Ongoing communication • Clear vision and goals • Articulated roles and responsibilities • Coordinated data collection 	Does the partnership have a shared vision and clearly articulated goals? How frequently do partnership members communicate? What are the roles and responsibilities for each partner? How will the program evaluate progress and effectiveness?
	Outline Program Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flexible scheduling • Accessible location • Align work experience with program requirements 	What features of the program can be adjusted to accommodate the needs of potential students? How do course requirements, scheduling, and location impact participation and retention?
	Recruit Students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collaborate with community organizations • Conduct widespread marketing • Materials accessible in multiple languages • Conduct Information sessions for prospective students • Provide application support 	What data were used to determine recruitment needs and efforts? What role does each partner play in recruitment efforts? How will information be disseminated and made accessible to potential candidates?
Implementation	Provide Academic Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support for math, reading, and writing • Tutoring • Test preparation 	To what extent are students prepared for college-level work? What types of academic support are offered?
	Provide Financial Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fee waivers • Tuition grants • Stipends for living expenses, materials, and books 	What are the financial requirements needed to participate in and complete the program? What challenges might students have in meeting these requirements? How is the program supporting students with these financial requirements?
	Provide Social Supports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mentoring • Peer groups • Counseling 	How is the program meeting the social, emotional, and cultural needs of students? How is student feedback collected and used?
Evaluation	Evaluate Recruitment Strategies and Program Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Teacher shortage areas • Community feedback • School and district feedback • Recruitment numbers 	How are teacher shortage areas determined? How is feedback from the community, schools, districts, and potential teachers collected and used?
	Evaluate Implementation Fidelity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Course grades • Retention rate • Participant feedback • Participation in and access to academic, financial, and social support 	To what extent are students using the supports? How is the implementation fidelity of the student supports measured? How is student feedback collected and used?
	Evaluate Impact and Success	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program retention and completion rates • Teacher placement rates 	How are impact and success measured?

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Chalkboard Project. (2015). <i>TeachOregon 2015: Year 2 summary report</i> . Retrieved September 26, 2017, from https://chalkboardproject.org/sites/default/files/TeachOregon_Year2SummaryReport.pdf	TeachOregon
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Educators Rising. (2016). <i>Educators Rising standards</i> . Retrieved September 26, 2017, from https://www.educatorsrising.org/uploads/people/Educators-Rising-Standards.pdf	General literature on GYO programs
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