

Research Agenda: Grow Your Own Teachers

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Author's Note: *Grow Your Own programs are rooted in the needs of local communities. Many of these programs are designed to create opportunities and strengthen education for those that need it most. We have endeavored to create a research agenda that can be used and applied in a variety of contexts that are operating under different policy conditions.*

Introduction

Grow Your Own (GYO) is a teacher recruitment and preparation strategy focused on developing and retaining teachers from the local community. GYO is often used to address teacher shortages and strengthen the teacher workforce; it relies on local community pathways and reciprocal relationships between institutions of higher education, community organizations, and local school districts.

Now more than ever, as federal priorities shift, states and local communities are being tasked with the responsibility of addressing teacher shortages and ensuring a high-quality teacher workforce that can sustain educational opportunities for all. We must understand the impacts of these programs to help strengthen teacher preparation, promote teacher retention and continue targeted investments in community teachers.

As of 2024, all 50 states and the District of Columbia had at least one GYO program.² The number of states that provide funding for GYO program development and implementation has doubled since 2020, from 18 to 35, plus DC. In 2022, at least 900 school districts were engaged in GYO.³ Historically, the federal government has also played a role in supporting GYO programs through competitive and discretionary grants from the US Department of Education.⁴

Despite increasing interest and investment in GYO programs, little is known about the extent to which these programs achieve their purposes; the features, participants, and conditions that are needed for them to be effective; the cost and return on investment; and unintended consequences. **We developed this research agenda to identify key questions and data sources that can be used to uncover how GYO programs shape education, influence teacher outcomes, affect school and district performance, improve student outcomes, and impact the larger community.** We recognize that different policymakers, researchers, and program designers will approach these questions from their own vantage points and interests. In developing this agenda, we offer central research questions around which the field can direct its efforts.

What Are Grow Your Own Programs?

GYO programs are partnerships that recruit and support community members to become educators. The programs target many different populations and offer a variety of programming to meet community needs. Certain features of GYO programs contribute to their effectiveness:

- **Strong partnerships** across school districts, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and community organizations;
- **Structured pathways** to help participants earn teaching credentials and certification;
- **Community-based recruitment** to increase the retention of the teacher workforce;
- **Preparation support** to help participants complete their programs and earn teaching credentials;
- **Financial support** to increase access to teacher preparation programs;
- **Wraparound supports** through the recruitment, preparation, and induction years; and
- **Paid work-based experience** under the guidance of an effective mentor teacher

The Purposes of Grow Your Own Programs

Teachers are the most important within-school factor for student success.⁵ However, many students, especially those from rural areas, low-income families, multilingual students, and students of color, lack the same access to well-prepared and experienced teachers as their peers.⁶ In response to this issue, districts, states, and EPPs have increasingly invested in GYO programs.

GYO programs recruit and support youth and adults, especially those who face financial and other barriers to earning a teaching degree, to become teachers in their own communities. These programs address teacher workforce challenges, and many seek to enhance the quality of teaching and learning, foster community engagement and empowerment, and promote equal educational opportunities.⁷

We outline four purposes of GYO programs below. It is critical to note that few of these purposes have a direct research base. In other words, most are assumptions based on anecdotal or inferred evidence.

1. Increase the Supply of New Teachers in Schools

The supply of teachers to work in U.S. public schools is threatened by lower levels of interest in education careers,⁸ and high levels of teacher attrition within the first five years.⁹ At the same time, the demographic composition of the teacher workforce is not keeping pace with demographic changes in the student population.¹⁰ GYO programs are thought to:

- **Increase the supply of new teachers** by recruiting community youth and adults into the teaching profession, drawing on untapped sources of talent.¹¹
- **Address teacher shortages** by recruiting teachers locally who can be prepared to meet the needs of the community and the local labor market.¹²
- **Improve representation** in teaching by recruiting local teachers, who are more likely to share the demographic, socioeconomic, and experiential backgrounds of their students.
- **Improve teacher retention** by recruiting local teachers, who have higher retention rates than other novice teachers.¹³

2. Reimagine Teacher Preparation

To increase EPP enrollment, teacher retention, and overall interest in education as a career, programs must be relevant to the experiences of teachers and their students. The limited population of students in traditional EPPs reinforces their conceptual and geographic “distance” from communities with teacher shortages. GYO programs are thought to:

- **Reduce barriers to entry** to preparation programs and certification by creating new pathways to the profession, increasing access, and eliminating financial barriers and licensure constraints that deter individuals from becoming teachers.¹⁴
- **Provide coherent clinical experiences** by partnering with districts, offering programming to meet district needs, and aligning preparation with future job placements.¹⁵
- **Tailor preparation to candidates’ academic and professional needs** by including preparation designs with particular values¹⁶ and practices¹⁷ that deepen their knowledge and understanding as learners and educators.

3. *Improve Educational Opportunity and Student Success*

Our education system is plagued with inequalities that contribute to disparate outcomes among different student groups. Many students attend inadequately resourced schools and lack access to teachers who represent their local community.¹⁸ GYO programs are thought to:

- **Increase student access to teachers who share their backgrounds** by recruiting and retaining local teachers who have similar characteristics and experiences.¹⁹
- **Promote rigorous and relevant teaching** by training teachers to adopt effective teaching methods to meet the varied needs of students.²⁰
- **Raise academic achievement, improve student engagement, and increase long-term success** by having a stable, high-quality, and effective teacher workforce with high retention rates.

4. *Support Community Development*

Early GYO efforts were characterized by the desire to promote educational advancement and spur community development by providing pathways into teaching for community members.²¹ Many contemporary GYO programs share a focus on building a strong teacher workforce that is reflective of the community and a commitment to strengthening educational opportunities and outcomes for the benefit of the entire community. GYO programs are thought to:

- **Enhance community engagement and voice in schools** because community members are embedded as educators, improving school-community relations and integrating community perspectives into educational environments.
- **Improve community economic well-being** by improving the economic well-being of the community members who become teachers; they gain a stable career with benefits and a moderate salary.

Our Call for Research

Research Questions

Our questions below reflect the need to understand the direct effects and influences of these programs on teachers, students, and communities by examining the extent to which GYO programs increase the number and representation of teachers, improve their preparation, improve educational opportunity and student success, and support community development. We also believe that it is important to understand the extent to which, and how, GYO programs transform current educational systems.

- **How do GYO programs influence teacher supply, retention, representation, preparation, community development, student success, and educational opportunities and outcomes?**
- **How do GYO programs transform educator preparation programs, schools, districts, and communities?**

At the same time, it is vital for us to expand the research literature by furthering our understanding of the experiences of program participants and partners.

- **How do program participants and partners experience GYO programs, what challenges do they face, and what assets do they bring?**

Finally, we need to understand how and why impacts and experiences may vary from program to program. There is a great deal of variation in GYO programs: They focus on different groups (e.g., high school students, paraeducators, or parents); they provide different kinds of supports (e.g., scholarships, wraparound supports, or academic supports); and they have different structures and partnerships.²² By examining different program types and their features, researchers can identify the conditions that make GYO initiatives successful. Understanding variation by student, teacher, and community characteristics can help GYO programs to meet the needs of all students.

How do impacts, experiences, and processes vary by GYO program features, implementation conditions, and participant characteristics?

Data Needed

To address these questions and understand the direct effects of GYO programs on teachers, students, and communities, we need reliable, identifiable, and longitudinal qualitative and quantitative data from a variety of sources. Prior research has been hampered by limited data sources, which typically reflect a brief window of time from individual participants in single GYO programs. To understand the influence and ability of GYO programs to transform educational systems, we need data which are:






- **Identifiable.** GYO participants and programs must be identifiable across all data sources so we can track their outcomes over time. We do not necessarily need personally identifiable information, but we do need to be able to distinguish GYO participants from nonparticipants, and to link participation to relevant demographic and personal characteristics as well as relevant outcomes, such as hiring and retention as an educator.

- **Comparative.** To fully understand the impact of GYO programs, we need to examine the outcomes of both GYO participants and non-GYO participants. GYO and comparison group data must have the same demographic and outcome data so we can ensure a valid comparison.
- **Longitudinal.** Many of the benefits of GYO programs take years to emerge. We also need to understand how GYO effects, transformations, experiences, and program variation change over time. A single data point is instructive but does not tell us whether these impacts or transformations are temporary or reveal how participants' experiences change over time. GYO is considered a long-term solution and we need longitudinal data—both qualitative and quantitative—to measure this.
- **Detailed.** To understand how GYO program features, conditions, and participant characteristics are related to system transformations and participant experiences, we need to have details about the characteristics of GYO programs and the participants and communities they serve.

Our Call to Action

Enacting this research agenda will require a variety of key constituencies, all of which have a role to play in supporting the development and implementation of high-quality GYO programs (see Figure 1):

Figure 1 | Role of Key Constituencies in Supporting High-Quality GYO Programs

Philanthropy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Facilitate capacity building and partnership development. • Offer strategies for sustainable funding. • Fund GYO program evaluations. • Monitor investment impacts. • Promote systems change by advocating for community-oriented approaches to teacher development.
Local and District Decision-Makers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop GYO programs by partnering with educator preparation programs. • Collect and analyze data on shortage areas to align GYO programs with hiring needs. • Ensure data systems capture key metrics required for comprehensive evaluations. • Implement recruitment strategies that identify and support strong GYO candidates through the application and hiring process.
State and Federal Policymakers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Require data collection and reporting. • Support development and expansion of teacher workforce data systems. • Prioritize increasing access to teacher preparation through enabling policies. • Offer strategies for sustainable funding.
GYO Program Leaders 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use data to inform program improvement. • Partner with external research organizations to support program evaluation. • Advocate for continued investments in GYO.
Researchers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Provide research briefings to policymakers, philanthropists, and other audiences. • Engage in media outreach to help publicize and share research widely. • Advocate for the development of robust data systems.

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Conclusion

We believe in GYO as a strategy for strengthening and retaining a high-quality educator workforce. We need a strong evidence base to ensure that investments in GYO are sustained, to help guide program development and implementation, and to influence policy development. This research agenda can be used to better understand the impacts of GYO programs on students, teachers, and communities. For more detailed guidance on what we need to know and the data we need to answer these questions, please see the [appendix](#).

Notes

[1] Authors are listed alphabetically by first name. Suggested citation: Amaya Garcia, Bradley Carl, Conra D. Gist, Danielle Sanderson Edwards, Jason Greenberg Motamedi, Jennifer Seelig and Roey Ahram, *Research Agenda: Grow Your Own Teachers* (New America, 2025).

[2] For more on statelevel GYO policies, see Amaya Garcia, *Grow Your Own Teachers: A 50-State Scan of Policies and Programs* (New America, 2024).

[3] For more about GYO program types and design, see Danielle Sanderson Edwards and Matthew A. Kraft, *Grow Your Own: An Umbrella Term for Very Different Localized Teacher Pipeline Programs*, EdWorkingPaper 24-895 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2024).

[4] For more examples of federal grant programs, see “[2024 NPD Grantees](#),” National Clearinghouse of Language Acquisition and “[Teacher Quality Partnership Program](#),” U.S. Department of Education.

[5] For more on the impact of teacher characteristics on teacher quality, see Jennifer K. Rice, *Teacher Quality: Understanding the Effectiveness of Teacher Attributes* (Economic Policy Institute, 2003).

[6] For more on student experiences, see Jessica Cardichon, Linda Darling-Hammond, Man Yang, Caitlin Scott, Patrick M. Shields, and Dion Burns, *Inequitable Opportunity to Learn: Student Access to Certified and Experienced Teachers* (Learning Policy Institute, 2020); Richard M. Ingersoll and Henry Tran, “[Teacher Shortages and Turnover in Rural Schools in the US: An Organizational Analysis](#),” *Educational Administration Quarterly* 59, no. 2 (2023): 396–431; Evan Rhinesmith, J. Cameron Anglum, Aaron Park, and Abigail Burrola, “[Recruiting and Retaining Teachers in Rural Schools: A Systematic Review of the Literature](#),” *Peabody Journal of Education* 98, no. 4 (2023): 347–363; Christine Montecillo Leider, Michaela Colombo, and Erin Nerlino, “[Decentralization, Teacher Quality, and the Education of English Learners: Do State Education Agencies Effectively Prepare Teachers of ELs?](#),” *Education Policy Analysis Archives* 29, no. 100 (2021); and Lucrecia Santibañez and Patricia Gándara, *Teachers of English Language Learners in Secondary Schools: Gaps in Preparation and Support* (UCLA Civil Rights Project, 2018).

[7] For more on the purposes of GYO, see Conra D. Gist, “[For What Purpose? Making Sense of the Various Projects Driving Grow Your Own Program Development](#),” *Teacher Education Quarterly* 46, no. 1 (2019): 9–22.

[8] For more on perceptions of the teaching profession, see Matthew A. Kraft and Melissa Arnold Lyon, *The Rise and Fall of the Teaching Profession: Prestige, Interest, Preparation, and Satisfaction over the Last Half Century*, EdWorkingPaper 22-679 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2024).

[9] For more on teacher attrition, see Richard M. Ingersoll, Elizabeth Merrill, Daniel Stuckey, and Gregory Collins, *Seven Trends: The Transformation of the Teaching Force* (Consortium for Policy Research in Education, October 2018).

[10] For more on the demographics of the K–12 teacher workforce, see Katherine Schaeffer, “[America’s Public School Teachers Are Far Less Racially and Ethnically Diverse Than Their Students](#),” Pew Research Center, December 10, 2021.

[11] For more on the barriers paraprofessionals face in entering teaching, see Kaylan Connally, Amaya Garcia, Shayna Cook, and Conor P. Williams, *Teacher Talent Untapped: Multilingual Paraprofessionals Speak About the Barriers to Entering the Profession* (New America, 2017).

[12] For more on teachers’ preferences on where they work, see Michelle Reininger, “[Hometown Disadvantage? It Depends on Where You’re From: Teachers’ Location Preferences and the Implications for Staffing Schools](#),” *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis* 34, no. 2 (2012): 127–145.

[13] For more about the localized nature of teacher labor markets, see Mimi Engel and Marisa Cannata, “[Localism and Teacher Labor Markets: How Geography and Decision Making May Contribute to Inequality](#),” *Peabody Journal of Education* 90, no. 1 (2015): 84–92.

[14] For more about a GYO program that removes barriers, see Margarita Bianco, Nancy L. Leech, and Kara Mitchell, “[Pathways to Teaching: African American Male Teens Explore Teaching as a Career](#),” *Journal of Negro Education* 80, no. 3 (2011): 368–383.

[15] For more on student teaching experiences, see Sheila W. Valencia, Susan D. Martin, Nancy A. Place, and Pam Grossman, “[Complex Interactions in Student Teaching: Lost Opportunities for Learning](#),” *Journal of Teacher Education* 60, no. 3 (2009): 304–322.

[16] For more on how GYO influences teacher development, see Conra D. Gist, “[Shifting Dominant Narratives of Teacher Development: New Directions for Expanding Access to the Educator Workforce through Grow Your Own Programs](#),” *Educational Researcher* 51, no. 1 (2022): 51–57.

[17] For more on community teacher development, see Conra D. Gist, “[**The Community Teacher: How Can We Radically Reimagine Power Relations in Teacher Development?**](#),” *Equity & Excellence in Education* 55, no. 4 (2022): 342–356.

[18] For more on the experiences of students in schools, see Lisa M. Yarnell and George W. Bohrnstedt, “[**Student-Teacher Racial Match and Its Association with Black Student Achievement: An Exploration Using Multilevel Structural Equation Modeling**](#),” *American Educational Research Journal* 55, no. 2 (2018): 287–324; and Kari Dalane and Dave E. Marcotte, [**The Segregation of Students by Income in Public Schools**](#), EdWorkingPaper: 20–33 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2020).

[19] For more on the impacts of same-race teachers on student outcomes, see Seth Gershenson, Cassandra M.D. Hart, Joshua Hyman, Constance A. Lindsay and Nicholas W. Papageorge, “[**The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers**](#),” *American Economic Journal: Economic Policy* 14, no. 4 (2022): 300–342.

[20] For more on culturally responsive teaching, see Geneva Gay, “[**Preparing for Culturally Responsive Teaching**](#),” *Journal of Teacher Education* 53, no. 2 (2002): 106–116.

[21] For more on the early history of GYO programs, see: Conra D. Gist, [**Grow Your Own Programs: Examining Potential and Pitfalls for a New Generation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Community Teachers**](#) (National Education Policy Center, 2022).

[22] Sanderson Edwards and Kraft, [**Grow Your Own: An Umbrella Term**](#); and Garcia, [**Grow Your Own Teachers: A 50-State Scan**](#).

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