

# GROW YOUR OWN

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Recommendations from Teach Plus  
Colorado Policy Fellows to Address  
Educator Shortages and Teacher Diversity



# INTRODUCTION

Surging educator shortages are reaching critical levels as Colorado school districts struggle to recruit and retain teachers, especially in our most under-resourced and rural communities. In October 2021, there were approximately 3,300 vacant school positions in Colorado,<sup>1</sup> and the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the shortages of K-12 educators. A survey of Colorado Education Association members in 2021 found 67 percent were considering leaving the profession in the near future.<sup>2</sup>

These overall shortages compound the chronic difficulties that Colorado, like other states, has faced in diversifying the educator workforce, a key factor in increasing student outcomes. Research demonstrates that a racially and culturally diverse teacher workforce contributes positively to an array of student measures, such as student attendance, equitable discipline and referrals to special education and gifted programs, access to advanced coursework, social emotional learning, and student academic achievement.<sup>3</sup> Research also shows that while all students benefit from having a teacher of color, students of color especially thrive in classrooms with teachers who share their racial and cultural background.<sup>4</sup> Given the manifold benefits of a diverse and culturally responsive educator workforce, Colorado must find creative new strategies for identifying, recruiting, supporting, and growing diverse talent for our pre-K-12 classrooms. One promising way to attract and develop educators in these rural and diverse communities is through Grow Your Own Programs.

We are a group of Teach Plus Colorado Policy Fellows who teach across grade levels in our state. Our research, building on recommendations from the 2021 Teach Plus Colorado report [“Culturally Sustaining Schools: Recommendations for Retaining Teachers of Color,”](#) led us to focus on the dual issues, particularly in rural Colorado, of educator shortages and diversity. We undertook this research to better understand how to both increase and widen the pathways to teaching, and in this brief we provide recommendations for stakeholders across the state to invest in Grow Your Own programs.

## Recommendations

1. Develop and support robust, targeted partnerships among educator preparation programs, local districts and charter networks, and school-based programs to expand Grow Your Own across the state.
2. Prioritize state funding to expand and replicate successful Grow Your Own partnerships.
3. Eliminate barriers and provide incentives for high school students from diverse backgrounds to become educators.
4. Provide funding and coordinated administrative oversight and support for school-based Grow Your Own programs, as well as ongoing professional development for educator program leaders and mentors.

# METHODOLOGY

In order to gain insight into promising solutions for the dual challenges of educator shortages and the underrepresentation of teachers of color throughout the state, we conducted a literature review of existing programs, policies, and state legislative bills related to GYO programs from October 2021 to January 2022. GYO programs were broadly defined as teacher preparation strategies focused on developing and retaining teachers from within a local community. We also conducted interviews with Colorado GYO program leaders, including Dr. Margarita Bianco, Associate Professor at the School of Education & Human Development at CU Denver and founder of Pathways2Teaching; Michelle Carpenter, director of [Pathways2Teaching](#) in Boulder Valley School District; and Dr. Kathy Schultz, Dean and Professor of Education at the CU Boulder School of Education. Teach Plus Fellows also reviewed potential model legislation from 11 states (AR, CO, KY, MN, MT, NJ, NM, NC, OR, TX, UT).

## HOW DIVERSE IS COLORADO'S TEACHING WORKFORCE?



Currently, Colorado students do not have the benefit of a racially and culturally diverse teaching workforce. While students of color made up nearly 50 percent of the K-12 public school enrollment in Colorado in 2019-20,<sup>5</sup> teachers of color comprised less than 20 percent of the teacher workforce.<sup>6</sup> Across the state, around 4.5 percent of students were Black, but only 1.6 percent of teachers, and the gap is even more stark for Latino students; around 34 percent of students identified as Latino, but only

8.7 percent of teachers. In comparison, 52.5 percent of Colorado students were White, while White teachers comprised a widely disproportionate 86.8 percent of the teacher workforce. And because most teachers of color are concentrated in a few urban districts, state data show that 18 percent of Colorado schools have no teachers of color at all, and nearly 10 percent of Colorado students attend schools with no teachers of color on staff.<sup>7</sup>

Teachers of color report a number of factors that drive them from the classroom including, but not limited to, implicit biases, lack of cultural competence in professional development, and the invisible tax associated with unofficial roles and responsibilities.<sup>8</sup> Additionally, even prior to teachers entering the classroom, there is a significant lack of diversity in formal teacher preparation programs. According to a 2021 report by the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE), the most recent data show White teacher candidates made up 75 percent of candidates, followed by Hispanic candidates at 12.7 percent and African American candidates at only 2.4 percent of program enrollees (compared to Latino and African American student populations of 34 percent and 4.5 percent, respectively).<sup>9</sup> In the same report, Dr. Angie Paccione, executive director for CDHE, wrote, "We have yet to see the full effects of COVID-19 on the educator workforce, but what we do know is that educator preparation providers have an important role in both the recruitment and retention of educators that reflect the increasingly diverse population of Colorado students."

# GROW YOUR OWN: AN INNOVATIVE PATHWAY TO TEACHING

Grow Your Own (GYO) programs typically consist of formal partnerships between school districts, higher education, and community-based organizations to identify, recruit, and provide comprehensive support, such as mentoring and financial support, to community members who go on to teach in local schools. Some GYO programs target individuals already in the profession while others focus on introducing secondary students to the field. GYO programs are a creative strategy for recruiting and retaining teachers of color and rural educators, as they intentionally develop local, talented individuals who are representative of the students in their communities.

GYO programs can be found in nearly all 50 states, varying in programming and funding structures, drawing current high school students, paraprofessionals, and community members onto a teacher licensure pathway.<sup>10</sup> In most states, local districts more often fund and support GYOs when compared to state sponsored programming; however, a number of states have moved to use state funding to support GYO partnerships between local districts and nonprofit and university teacher training programs.<sup>11</sup> Examples include:



- + Tennessee's Austin Peay State University's Teacher Residency program and the state's Clarksville-Montgomery County School System have partnered to create the [first registered apprenticeship program for teaching in the country](#), providing its participants (high school seniors and current education assistants) with direct classroom experience while earning a salary throughout the duration of the program.
- + Montana's recently passed HB403 specifically targets rural and reservation districts to create [teaching pathways for high school students](#) by offering dual credit education classes, work-based learning opportunities, and partnerships with school districts and higher education institutions.

At present, a handful of successful GYO programs operate in Colorado. While the programs differ in aspects such as eligibility, duration, and funding, they are founded on strong partnerships between high schools, districts, and higher education institutions that house educator preparation programs. Additionally, all seek to grow a diverse, local pipeline of educators.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## 1 Develop and support robust, targeted partnerships among educator preparation programs, local districts and charter networks, and school-based programs to expand Grow Your Own across the state.

If Colorado is to address two of its most critical needs in the field of education—the lack of a diverse educator workforce across the state and a shortage of teachers in rural Colorado—state policymakers, district and charter network leaders, and higher education programs need to come together to develop robust, targeted partnerships for GYO programs that can provide licensure pathways that encourage and support new teachers. An effective, sustainable GYO program requires partnership between teacher preparation programs and the high schools where students first enter the educator pipeline, tailoring programs to the specific needs of communities and student populations and ensuring a continuum of training and professional development as educator candidates move through the program.

Several Colorado GYO programs provide models for effective partnerships:

- + [Pathways2Teaching](#), a concurrent enrollment program with CU Denver, gives 11th and 12th grade students experience as elementary education teachers and also allows them to graduate high school with up to nine college credits.
- + [Generation Teach](#) partners with districts and charter schools to provide 11th and 12th grade students, current college students, and recent graduates a stipended opportunity to teach during the summer, with coaching and mentoring as key components in the fellowship.

## 2 Prioritize state funding to expand and replicate Grow Your Own partnerships.

Robust state funding is crucial to building successful GYO partnerships. Colorado policymakers should pay particular attention to providing grants to district- and school-based programs and creating model program criteria and curricula for school districts and networks as they develop local programs.

- + Sustained state funding would support curriculum specialists in creating research-based teacher preparation curricula that can be provided to districts and charter networks, in partnership with higher education teacher preparation programs, to implement GYO programs.
- + State funding would provide accountability for GYO programs through collecting, disaggregating, and publicly displaying longitudinal data on program enrollments and outcomes. GYO program partners will be able to use data to evaluate and adjust programs to ensure long-term impact.
- + State funding would provide grants for current high school teachers to become trained, eligible, and available to teach dual enrollment courses as part of school-based GYO programs.

### **3 Eliminate barriers and provide incentives for high school students from diverse backgrounds to become educators.**

The Colorado Department of Education and local school districts should review graduation guidelines and requirements, and adjust them if necessary, to ensure that students in GYO programs can meet program and graduation requirements in four years. Colleges and universities should expand opportunities for students to receive dual enrollment credits for their participation in school-based GYO programs, incentivizing their jump start into education.

- + To address educator diversity demands, expanded dual enrollment opportunities for teacher preparation should particularly target high schools with racially and culturally diverse student enrollment and rural high schools.
- + Districts should also pay for the concurrent enrollment credits for the students participating in early college or dual enrollment programs, and potentially, like the apprentice program in Tennessee, pay an apprenticeship stipend to high school juniors and seniors in these programs.
- + [EdConnect DPS](#) provides a model for student incentives, allowing 9th-12th grade students to work alongside current Denver Public School teachers and offering paid Teaching Assistant Internships for juniors and seniors interested in serving as Teaching Assistants in the classroom.

### **4 Provide funding and coordinated administrative oversight and support for school-based Grow Your Own programs, as well as on-going professional development for educator program leaders and mentors.**

Districts and charter networks can play a critical role in providing program support to school-based GYO programs. Districts are well-positioned to create targeted goals and monitor data regarding the recruitment and retention of GYO educator candidates, specifically candidates who reflect the racial and cultural composition of the student population. Because high school teachers and counselors are uniquely positioned to support students in exploring and pursuing careers as educators, it is crucial that they receive adequate financial and professional support from school and district administration so that GYO does not become another uncompensated or unsupported task added to educators' workloads.

- + Districts and charter networks can provide staffing and ongoing professional development and mentoring to program leaders and participants, and facilitate partnerships with higher education, community-based programs, and other schools within the district. Additionally, districts can supply school-based GYO programs with required materials such as researched-based curricula, textbooks, access to teacher guides, and pacing recommendations.
- + Ongoing professional support for GYO program leaders would also help local educators connect students with other programs and incentives, such as Colorado College's Stroud Scholars, teacher loan forgiveness, and other support programs with a proven track record of preparing diverse educators.
- + Finally, districts can provide guaranteed job pathways for students who successfully complete the GYO program through educator licensure.

# CONCLUSION

Education leaders in Colorado have an opportunity to remedy widespread educator shortages, particularly in rural districts, and the lack of educator diversity by expanding and replicating successful programs that cultivate a rich Colorado resource: our own students and communities. With several successful Grow Your Own programs already in the state, Colorado is poised to lead in GYO with partnerships that tap into effective teacher preparation programs, district and school expertise in cultural responsiveness to their students and communities, and ongoing development and career paths for diverse, talented educators.



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## ABOUT TEACH PLUS

The mission of Teach Plus is to empower excellent, experienced, and diverse teachers to take leadership over key policy and practice issues that affect their students' success. Since 2009, Teach Plus has developed thousands of teacher leaders across the country to exercise their leadership in shaping education policy and improving teaching and learning, to create an education system driven by access and excellence for all. [teachplus.org](http://teachplus.org)



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# ENDNOTES

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