

# Deep in the Heart of Education: Addressing Texas Teacher Shortage with Grow Your Own Initiatives

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## Abstract

*This paper explores how Grow Your Own (GYO) educator initiatives can mitigate the pressing teacher shortage by unpacking the nature of the shortage and key factors of recruitment and retention. GYO proposes a solution by specifically targeting districts that often report the most frequent shortages: urban and rural schools. Our approach to recruitment expands the teacher pipeline and strives for retention by offering a strategy that capitalizes on asset-based community development and notions of heart work to assist in removing barriers that historically have kept Black, Latinx, Asian and other communities from pursuing teaching careers. Recommendations outline several current grant funding opportunities that can be utilized to establish a GYO, and encourage the exploration of partnerships with community-based organizations.*

The nationwide teacher shortage has reached a point of crisis. After nearly a decade of educational researchers ringing the alarm over the imbalanced educator supply and demand, the COVID-19 pandemic has escalated the national teacher shortage to the point of emergency. Prior to the pandemic, teachers left their classrooms at an annual rate of 8% (Goldring et al., 2014). Recently, 55% of teachers surveyed by the National Education Association (NEA) expressed intent to leave sooner than anticipated, with many citing excessive burnout specifically due to the pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022). The NEA found that there are 567,000 fewer teachers in public schools now than prior to the pandemic (Jotkoff, 2022). Compounding this exodus is a decrease of incoming teachers: enrollment into educator preparation programs has steadily declined over the last decade, with the number enrolled in such programs falling by one-third between 2010-2018 (Sutcher et al., 2016) and data illustrating the

same declining pattern post COVID-19 pandemic (Hill-Jackson et al., 2022).

Texas is not exempt from the concerns and issues pertaining to teacher shortage. A troubling pattern was found that an increasing number of Texas educators were leaving the field and fewer students choosing teaching as a career (Raise Your Hand Texas, 2023). In March of 2022, Governor Greg Abbott established the Teacher Vacancy Task Force (TVTF) which examined teacher recruitment and retention challenges across the state. The TVTF, composed of school system administrators and teachers from a variety of school districts, identified eight policy recommendations to mitigate teacher vacancy throughout Texas. One of the endorsements of the TVTF was for the state legislature to increase funding and expand high-quality Grow Your Own (GYO) pathways for students and paraprofessionals to become certified teachers (Texas Education Agency, 2023).

Many solutions presented to mitigate the teacher shortage serve as temporary quick-fixes that eschew the core issue: how do we keep our current teachers, and how do we motivate more people to enter the field, especially those of Black, Latinx, and Asian identities? Addressing these questions requires us to focus on why teachers leave, and why potential teachers never make it into the classroom at all. In order to resolve the shortage, long term investments must be made to address the factors that have led to this point. While there is no panacea that will solve the various issues faced by our educators, GYO educator pathways offer a strategy to mitigate the teacher shortage in some of our most high-need school districts. We employed the conceptual frameworks of *asset-based community development* (ABCD) (Haines, 2014; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993) and #heartwork (Dillard, 2006; Farinde-Wu, 2017; Madden & Gonzales, 2017) to advance GYOs as a viable stratagem of addressing both declining educator preparation enrollment and teacher turnover.

## Background & Context

### The shortage

For an extended period, Texas schools have been understaffed as it relates to teachers. The pandemic exacerbated circumstances, but other factors such as low wages, inadequate benefits, and divisive state politics, also played a role (Lopez, 2022). Sutcher et al. (2016) attributed the teacher shortage to four key factors: “1) a decline in teacher preparation enrollments, 2) district efforts to return to pre-recession pupil-teacher ratios, 3) increasing student enrollment, and 4) high teacher attrition.” For the purposes of this research, we focus on the decline in teacher preparation enrollments and high teacher attrition rates as it pertains to the shortage.

Today’s teacher shortage is not a recent development. The then-looming teacher shortage emerged as a topic of discussion in 2015, as school districts worked to rehire teachers following waves of teacher layoffs during the Great Recession in years prior, only to be met with challenges in finding qualified teachers in many high-need fields (Sutcher et al., 2016). These challenges opened the door to “*emergency permitting*” allowing uncertified teachers to step into these roles—a solution that has since become increasingly popular amongst legislators. In 2017, for example, Arizona passed what many referred to as the

“warm body law,” allowing for anyone with five years of experience relevant to a subject to be hired as a teacher. This approach continues to pick up steam today: legislators in Tennessee and Michigan have recently proposed similar policy, arguing that “a warm body in the classroom is better than none.” (Mojica & DelPilar, para. 8, 2022). True, someone is better than no one in these classrooms, however, whether or not these solutions actually address our teacher shortage is questionable: research has consistently pointed to higher turnover rates amongst inexperienced teachers lacking comprehensive preparation versus experienced educators with traditional educator preparation (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

The teacher shortage is more than a labor issue: the inability to find and keep teachers impacts our students. A shortage of qualified educators in high-need subjects such as math or science can be detrimental in any school district, but in rural schools it could result in the elimination of entire course offerings for students. Quick-fix solutions such as “warm body” policies can prove detrimental to student success, yielding negative implications on student test scores and attendance rates (Kini & Podolsky, 2016; Ronfeldt et al., 2013). With underqualified and inexperienced teachers being employed at disproportionately higher rates within school districts that serve high populations of Black, Latinx, and low-income students, these negative impacts are often experienced by some of our most vulnerable and underserved populations (Hill-Jackson et al., 2022; Williams et al., 2016).

These “solutions” rob our students of a high-quality education, and contribute to the ongoing deprofessionalization of the teaching profession by undermining the significance of proper educator preparation. It is not enough to find teachers that will show up: our goal must be to recruit, cultivate, and support justice-oriented teachers who will stay. Bearing this in mind, it is necessary to support programs that will invest in the support and development of teachers who will stay in “hard-to-staff” urban and rural schools.

### Who chooses to teach?

In order to understand what makes an individual enter the profession, we must examine the current state of the teacher workforce. It is no secret that the education field lacks diversity. In 2020, the National Center for

Educational Statistics reported that, as of 2018, 79% of teachers in the United States were White, in contrast to the 52% of public school students identified as Latinx, Black, Asian/Pacific Islander, American Indian/Alaska Native, or two or more races (Spiegelman, 2020). In Texas, as of the 2021-22 academic year, 57% of teachers were White, (Texas Education Agency, 2022a) while White students made up 27% of the total state student population (Texas Education Agency, 2022b). To attribute this lack of variance to a mere recruitment issue or a lack of interest would be a misstatement; history and research has shown us that the dearth of Black, Latinx, and Asian educators is not a random occurrence but a byproduct of systemic exclusion (Carver-Thomas & Darling-Hammond, 2017).

Though the 1954 *Brown v. Board* decision is heavily lauded for desegregating public schools, it also resulted in the closure of Black and Latinx community schools. These closures led to the displacement of roughly 38,000 Black and Latinx teachers between 1954 and 1965 (Oakley et al., 2009; Tillman, 2004). The requirement of the National Teacher Examination, “designed by and for middle-class white teachers” (Oakley et al., p. 1279, 2009) worsened this displacement over subsequent decades. By the 1980s, Black teachers continued to be pushed out of schools through the abolition of tenure laws in areas of high concentration of Black educators, dismissal without cause, and the assignment of Black teachers outside of their content areas. Those teachers who were not pushed out through policies and administrative decisions were placed in work conditions that drove them to exit the teaching field (Oakley et al., 2009).

The effects of these tactics to keep Black and Latinx educators out of schools are still seen today. Institutional disciplinary policies, curriculum centered in Whiteness, and admission and certification exams deter many impactful, would-be teachers from pursuing careers in education (Perry, 2017). Further, many pre-service Black and Latinx teaching candidates cite feelings of isolation while navigating traditional educator preparation programs and a lack of financial security as factors that lead to them opting to exit higher education prior to the completion of their degrees (Skinner, 2010).

Recruitment issues extend beyond a lack of diversity in the field: attitudes towards teachers indicate that, while the profession is respectable, it lacks appeal for a significant

percentage of Americans as a whole (Bill et al., 2022; Phi Delta Kappan, 2018). In a survey conducted by Phi Delta Kappan (PDK), although 61% of Americans have trust and confidence in teachers, 54% of parents were opposed to their child becoming a teacher—the lowest percentage reported since 1969 (Phi Delta Kappan, 2018). Of the responding parents, 67% of Latinx parents, 51% of Black parents, and 40% of White parents expressed support for their child pursuing teaching as a career.

The majority of White, degree-holding parents expressed a lack of support for their child entering the profession. The reasons most frequently cited for this lack of desirability were low teaching salaries and poor benefits, with additional concerns including college affordability, the value of a degree (in connection to a high paying job), and opportunities and expectations “based on family income, racial or ethnic group, and urbanicity” (Phi Delta Kappan, p. K4, 2018). More recently, a survey conducted at the University of Maryland found that the pandemic has resulted in a notable decrease of interest in teaching among undergraduate students, with 35% (almost 500) of respondents reporting a decreased interest in teaching, versus 12% reporting an increased interest due to the field’s job security and level of high need (Bill et al., 2022).

### **Who chooses to leave?**

While recruitment has drawn teachers into the classroom, additional efforts are needed to keep them there. Attrition and teacher turnover remains an equally—if not potentially larger—contributing factor to today’s teacher shortage. Extensive research has pointed to several recurring factors leading to teacher attrition such as inadequate pay, a lack of professional support, institutional pressures surrounding assessment exams, and general stress and burnout arising from heavy workload and over-expectations of teachers. The average annual attrition rate has hovered around 8%, however, the instability and stress that emerged in the pandemic and the rising cost of college and having to pay back student loans have many fearing that this rate will increase. 55% of teachers indicated a desire to leave the profession due to COVID-19 burnout, many of whom had not previously expressed a desire to leave (Jotkoff, 2022).

Additional factors, such as increased assignment to under-resourced schools and a lack of autonomy within

their classrooms, contribute to an increased rate of attrition amongst Black, Latinx, and Asian educators. The experience of a Teacher of Color (TOC) has been described as one marked by performance pressures due to high visibility, heightened boundaries resulting from core differences between themselves and White colleagues, and being cornered into serving as a representative for their race (Kelly, 2007). These factors create an undue burden on TOC, adding stress to an already stressful job, and leading to many TOC leaving the classroom. Additionally, the shared culture that allows TOC to connect with their classes can result in them being perceived as enforcers and disciplinarians rather than respected as educators (Brown & Thomas, 2020; Thomas et al., 2022). TOC can find themselves called upon to act in disciplinary roles, enforcing institutional policies that harm the students that they seek to support (Brown & Thomas, 2020; Thomas et al., 2022). In reducing TOC to disciplinary experts, schools fail to credit these educators for their other strengths such as content knowledge and pedagogical strategies thus, these teachers choose to leave (Thomas, 2023).

The teacher shortage is not limited to an issue of either a lack, or mishandling, of diversity. Especially when considering school districts reporting the highest shortages, we must consider the communities most impacted. Rural schools and urban schools have continually faced among the greatest difficulties in staffing, most recently reporting the highest number of shortages at 65% and 75%, respectively (Buttner, 2021). Thus, policy solutions must pursue programs that focus on these “hard-to-staff” districts in order to ensure that the most underserved schools are being supported.

### **Grow Your Own Educator Initiatives**

“Grow Your Own” (GYO) teacher initiatives present one strategy for cultivating teachers from within their local communities, most often framed within rural and urban areas. These customizable programs create pathways through which community members—ranging from high school, middle school, or college students, to paraprofessionals and parents—may obtain their teaching certification to then return to their communities to serve as educators. By pursuing individuals already rooted within the community, GYOs intentionally recruit participants who are personally motivated to return to teach in their home school districts and less inclined to turnover. Many

GYOs are structured to provide participants with financial and academic support while navigating educator preparation programs, and mentorship and job security upon completion of the program. These initiatives tend to, as Gist (2019) stated, “last between 2 and 8 years; reflect a partnership between local schools, higher education institutions and nonprofit organizations; and are funded by a variety of entities” (p. 13). As of 2020, 29 states had policies regarding GYOs, with 21 of those states providing some form of funding for such initiatives (Garcia, 2020).

### **Various Models**

Due to the localized, grassroots nature of a GYO initiative, GYOs can be customized to fit district-based needs. Distinguishing the goal of a GYO is necessary to understanding its purpose and to implementing an effective structure that will achieve said goal. Gist (2019) identified four categories of GYO projects based on district needs: 1) the economic project (a fiscal solution to reducing teacher turnover); 2) the workforce development project (increasing teacher diversity and representation in classrooms); 3) the educator preparation project (reimagining teacher preparation and development); and 4) the justice project (reimagining recruitment and pedagogy in order to address equitable education opportunities for all within the school and community). Further, GYOs can utilize a variation of models. Valenzuela (2017) identified four distinct program models: 1) pre-collegiate, selective; 2) pre-collegiate, non-selective; 3) community-originated, community-focused; and 4) community-originated, university educator initiated (Valenzuela, 2017).

These models vary based on: a) the entity pursuing and recruiting teacher candidates, and b) who is being pursued and recruited. Central to both Gist and Valenzuela’s examinations is the notion that a successful, synergistic GYO must be community-focused. This means that the program not only sources its participants from the community, but it grounds its purpose within the community, seeking to address their needs and centering decisions around community input and feedback. As such, GYOs are strengthened through partnerships with community-based organizations who establish relationships and trust within the community, and advocate for and alongside them.

### **Conceptual Frameworks**

## Asset-Based Community Development

Eurocentric theorizing of cultural capital has reified a deficit perspective of teachers and students from marginalized contexts. For example, Bourdieu and Passeron (1977) argued that, within a highly stratified society, knowledge possessed by the upper and middle classes was deemed normative and of value. Through this lens, however, familial and communal knowledge beyond White normativity was not only discounted within schools, but these ways of knowing and being were simultaneously positioned as both inferior to and in need of Eurocentric cultural wealth. One primary goal of Carter G. Woodson (1933), “the Father of Black history,” was to highlight Black intellectualism in spite of racist ideology and practices upheld by legal, social, and psychological means. Despite research that has shown the prevalence of deficit perspectives amongst middle-class, White teachers (Ladson-Billings, 1994) holding external-outsider identities (Banks & Banks, 2019) in relation to the diverse contexts in which they serve, alternative teacher training initiatives like Teach for America (Popkewitz, 1998) continue to recruit this demographic of teachers from Ivy League and liberal arts institutions to transmit elitist forms of cultural wealth with a messianic zeal.

Rather than drawing from theories that reproduce such deficit tropes, we remain theoretically aligned with the culturally relevant promise of GYO teacher initiatives and scholars committed to constructing endarkened ontologies and epistemologies as culturally rich rather than absent of enlightenment (Boutte & Johnson, 2021; Epstein, 2010; Moll, 2000). In our analysis of GYOs, we specifically drew on notions of *asset-based community development* (ABCD) (Haines, 2014; Kretzmann & McKnight, 1993). ABCD is an approach that focuses on leveraging a community’s strengths, resources, and values as opposed to concentrating solely on its needs and perceived deficiencies. ABCD highlights the significance of community participation, collaboration, and empowerment in bringing about sustainable change by identifying potential teacher candidates who are already invested in the community and have a deep understanding of its cultural context. Informed by sociocultural theories’ intentional centering of Outsider perspectives to transgress normative forms of knowledge, community-based scholars (Banks & Banks, 2019; Wilson, 1992) have argued that marginalized

groups contribute various forms of capital to school and societal settings in unique ways that standard theory does not acknowledge or often appreciate. Through the elements of authentic ABCD – one void of overbearing top-down implementation, recruitment and retention of communities of color is enhanced by 1) *mapping*: evaluating resources, skills, and experience available in community members; 2) *visioning*: articulating future direction and desired outcomes; and 3) *mobilizing*: taking appropriate action (Green-Harris et al., 2019; Misener & Schulenkorf, 2016).

Several studies have utilized this framework to substantiate GYO’s emphasis on the recruitment and training TOCs from local communities (Gist, 2019; Gist et al., 2019; Worthen et al., 2022). Taking this conceptual framework into consideration, we employed ABCD to frame the recruitment and retention of TOCs via an asset-based lens. The parroting of deficit and stereotypically simplistic TOC recruitment tropes around carceral-like discipline and surrogacy (Brown & Thomas, 2020; Thomas et al., 2022) undermines the pedagogical, curricular, and socio-cultural knowledge amongst this teacher population. Thus, we utilized ABCD as a humanizing construct to provide substance to GYOs recruitment efforts of TOCs.

## #Heartwork

Teaching involves more than the ability to carry out quantifiable acts within the classroom. In the field of education, heart work refers to the unwavering care and emotional labor for students throughout their learning journeys (Madden & Gonzales, 2017). Studies suggested that heart work is an essential component of effective teaching as it can help cultivate meaningful relationships with students helping to improve learning outcomes and student motivation (Noddings, 2013). Nasir et al. (2018) explored the relation between increased student engagement and academic achievement when teachers created an environment of care and support. In a similar vein, Farinde-Wu et al. (2017) discovered teachers who engage in heart work report greater levels of job satisfaction and experience improved rates of retention. At a fundamental level, caring relationships are an essential aspect of education and teachers should prioritize the well-being and emotional needs of students (Noddings, 2013).

Interestingly, scholarship has noted the ways Black, Latinx and other diverse educators have specifically

prioritized heart work within their profession. Often addressed as a consciousness assisting in relation to all things (Dillard, 2006), Black spirituality within education has been necessary for issues concerning community uplift, resilience, protest, and combating internalized inferiority (Johnson, 2022; Johnson & Nicol, 2020). Valenzuela (2010) argued the importance of caring about children in a cultural and political context, particularly with Mexican American students. Substantial evidence illustrated students of color benefit from having teachers who share their cultural identity (Adams & Morton, 2022). In as much, we rejected the “soft-care” (Antrop-Gonzalez & Jesus, 2006) that often accompanies liberal, multicultural approaches that see underserved populations as deserving of sympathy and less capable of succeeding. Instead, we advanced Zhu’s (2020) notion of “authentic care” – the supportive reciprocal rapport between teachers and students.

It must be noted that heart work especially within underserved communities can be emotionally draining – causing compassion fatigue and requires adequate administrative support as well as self-care (Christian-Brandt et al., 2020). Pogere et al. (2021) examined compassion fatigue in educators and its mental and emotional toll. As a result, it is essential to acknowledge and value heart work undertaken by teachers who are often unappreciated and equip them with the necessary resources in order to thrive amongst the pressures in the classroom.

### **Methodology**

In the fore of our analysis, was a fusion of this study’s conceptual frameworks of ABCD and heart work. This study’s comprehensive, strength-based strategy emphasized the disregarded skills and social-emotional involvement of individuals and communities.

The steps taken in arriving at the findings started with a thorough review of literature pertaining to the current state of national and state-wide teacher shortages. This was followed by examining existing strategies put forth by scholars and practitioners to address educator, but specifically, teacher shortages. Next, data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential information to ascertain the impacts of GYO initiatives. We then extracted approaches that focused on traditionally unacknowledged community resources and the importance of cultivating human capacities and relationships within educational

spaces. The data was reviewed for credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Findings were arranged into three significant themes: 1) GYO recruitment strategies expand the teaching pipeline; 2) GYO recruitment enhances probability of teacher retention; and 3) GYOs as significant yet only part of the solution. The details outlining this study’s findings follow.

### **Findings**

This following section explores the ways in which GYOs have the potential to address the teacher shortage through transformational recruitment and retention measures that eliminate barriers that have historically kept many teaching candidates from pursuing careers in education.

#### **GYO recruitment strategies expand the teaching pipeline**

While addressing the teacher shortage and increasing teacher diversity can be viewed as diverging issues, GYOs served to expand the teacher pipeline by inviting students and community members into the education field. Many GYOs— such as those that likely fall under Gist’s Workforce Development, Educator Preparation, or Justice models— are structured to eliminate barriers that may prevent those from underserved communities from pursuing a career in education. These programs often provided participants with funding, academic support, and mentorship, increasing access to traditional educator preparation programs for a wider range of participants who may have previously not seen teaching as a viable option (Gist, 2019).

GYOs offered support that encourages student persistence. An often-cited barrier for Black and Latino teacher candidates are feelings of isolation while navigating traditional educator preparation programs (Irizarry, 2007). GYOs cultivated a network of support for students through their cohort model, partnerships, and their close proximity to the student’s family within the community. This network of support has been noted as a feature that has helped many students complete their preparation programs and earn their degrees (Irizarry, 2007; Skinner, 2010). Additionally, the frameworks employed by many GYOs—community cultural wealth and culturally relevant, and culturally

sustaining pedagogies—disrupt traditional models of teacher preparation that have been criticized for being historically centered in Eurocentrism (Gist et al., 2019). In cultivating networks of support and utilizing pedagogical approaches that affirmed one’s identity and nurtured critical consciousness, GYO fostered environments in which underrepresented teaching candidates persisted both during and after completing the program (Valenzuela, 2017).

By widening the teacher pipeline, GYOs pursued candidates that traditional educator preparation programs often failed to consider. Grounding their mission within the community and valuing their existing funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992), GYO recognized an “untapped pool of potential teacher talent” (Garcia et al., p. 74, 2019). This is evident in Washington, where GYO efforts have created a statewide pathway that supports paraeducators through two years in an alternative certification program, providing them with a Paraeducator Conditional Loan Scholarship under the agreement that they will teach within the state for two years once certified. Through this program, Washington has utilized GYO recruitment strengths to develop their education paraprofessionals to address a statewide shortage of bilingual educators (Garcia et al., 2019).

### **GYO recruitment enhances probability of teacher retention**

Inherent to the GYO mission is the recruitment of teachers who are personally invested in their community and are therefore naturally motivated to stay. In a recent study, Brantlinger et al. (2023) found that ten years into the profession, the retention rate of teachers identified as community insiders was significantly higher (over 62%) than the retention rate of elite college graduates who did not have local community ties (31%). Research has found that, more than any other profession, teachers are more likely to work close to their hometown (Goldhaber & Ronfeldt, 2020)—with teachers residing a median distance of 13 miles from their hometowns versus the 54-mile median distance between other college graduates and their hometowns (Reininger, 2012). That distance increases to 30 miles for teachers from rural communities, in contrast to 74 miles moved by other rural college graduates pursuing other careers. Reininger (2012) offers that the desire to stay local can create staffing challenges for communities who

“do not produce a large supply of college graduates” (p. 140). Edwards et al. (2022) suggested “teacher supply in a given area likely varies depending on the number of teachers who grew up there and [Educator Preparation Programs] programs located nearby” (p.7). GYOs presented a solution for communities and created opportunities for individuals who may not have previously considered pursuing higher education to obtain their certification.

Though more research is needed, GYOs have demonstrated positive trends in retention. Retention rates have been especially notable amongst paraprofessionals who completed the program, with several GYOs reporting a majority retention rate after six years within the profession. Graduates of the Armstrong Atlantic State University GYO reported a 95% retention rate after ten years (Gist et al., 2019). An early GYO, Pathways to Teaching Careers, yielded a retention rate of 81% overall, and an even higher rate of 88% amongst paraprofessionals, three years after entering the field (Heller, 2021). This high level of retention has been attributed to several things, namely the experience and connections paraprofessionals gain in their careers before even entering the profession. Research has further suggested that TOC who complete a GYO program tend to remain in the classroom “largely due to their ability to draw from their sources of [community cultural wealth]” (Gist et al., p. 15, 2019). By not only valuing these strengths in the recruitment process but structuring the initiative to further cultivate them, GYO attracted and further cultivated educators committed to serving their communities.

### **GYOs as significant yet only part of the solution**

It is necessary to note GYOs are only part of a solution to mitigating the current teaching crisis. GYOs are a small-scale, long-term solution. A few cycles of GYOs have not filled the 60,000+ teaching vacancies, nor has it generated an immediate wave of new teachers. Moreover, though GYOs are a powerful strategy to address the shortage by expanding the teaching pipeline, they are not the panacea to issues that have caused the field of education to lose appeal. We cannot in good conscience look to Black and Latinx educators as the saviors of a struggling profession.

In 2022, 34% of Texas teachers surveyed by the Charles Butt Foundation reported feeling valued by their

communities, 17% felt supported by their fellow Texans, and only 5% reported feeling valued by elected state officials. Conversely, almost all of the teachers surveyed stated that a positive work culture and environment—something only 51% of respondents felt they had—would heavily impact their decision to remain in the profession. Improving current teacher work conditions will yield immediate results for our educators without further harming our students, in contrast to warm body laws.

GYOs are part of a two-prong approach that must include policy to improve dismal working conditions for our teachers, including salary increases, reduced institutional pressures, funding that allows schools to obtain the resources and support needed to prevent teacher burnout. Working in tandem with policy that improved school conditions, GYOs offered a strategy that increased the flow of qualified teachers who were personally compelled to teach in their communities long-term. Put simply, GYOs opened the door to teachers who intentionally sought to do the heart work it takes to be caring and effective educators in their communities.

### **Recommendations**

A significant challenge faced by GYO programs is sustainable funding. Currently, only 21 of the 29 states with GYO policies provide some form of funding, much of which is in the form of competitive state grants. Similarly, federal funding is extended through discretionary grant opportunities, for which GYOs are only one of many programs eligible for funding. Because of the importance of grant funding in establishing and sustaining a GYO initiative, we encourage readers to both familiarize themselves with several of the following funding vehicles available to support these programs, as well as consider valuable partnerships in order to best take advantage of them.

### **Current GYO funding opportunities**

GYO has been lauded for its potential to develop qualified educators and has received support at the federal level from Dr. Miguel Cardona, US Secretary of Education, as well as President Joe Biden. That support is reflected in policy and funding. President Biden’s most recent budget request for fiscal year 2024 includes \$132 million in funding for the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) program

and \$93 million in funding for Supporting Effective Education Development (SEED)— an increase of \$62 million and \$13 million from their 2023 enacted levels, respectively. Additionally, Dr. Amy Loyd, Assistant Secretary for the Department of Education’s Career, Technical, and Adult Education, recently penned a “Dear Colleague” letter encouraging local education agencies to consider career and technical education (CTE) efforts as a way to implement high-quality educator preparation programs that help address the teacher shortage (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). Loyd specifically cites GYOs as an allowable strategy for the funds appropriated annually through the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins, 2006), as amended by the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). This signals that the federal government recognizes the need to address the nationwide teacher shortage, and that these funds can (and should) be utilized for GYO purposes.

Texas also recognizes the need to address the statewide teacher shortage, with the TEA awarding funds explicitly for GYO initiatives in the form of a competitive statewide grant. Operating on a two-year grant cycle, the TEA invites GYOs that employ two possible approaches: implementing a training program for current high school students, or supporting paraprofessionals in the pursuit of their teaching credentials.

### **Center community-based organizations in partnerships**

Central to GYOs (as well their successful procurement of grant funding) are the partnerships they are built upon. In addition to standard partnerships between local education agencies and institutions of higher education, we encourage those committed to impactful GYOs to prioritize partnerships with CBOs. As suggested by Valenzuela (2018) and Gist (2019), partnering with a CBO ensures that the GYO program is authentically rooted within the community, placing the community at the heart of the program rather than on the sideline. By partnering with a CBO, a GYO program can be better plugged into the community it seeks to serve and therefore better able to address their needs and goals. As Philip and Brown (2020) argued, diversifying the teaching workforce should be only part of a larger movement toward school reform. Working with organizations committed to community advocacy and



justice also can bolster the mission of the GYO and ensure that it is structured effectively.

Further, CBOs offer an additional layer of sustainability that may not be otherwise possible, especially in our present state of understaffing and turnover in schools. CBOs are also often more equipped than many local education agencies to pursue funding sources should additional resources be needed. As such, CBOs committed to the mission of GYOs should be encouraged to explore opportunities with local education agencies or institutes of higher education, and likewise, educational entities seeking to pursue GYO initiatives authentically grounded within the community should explore partnerships with CBOs.

### **Discussion & Conclusion**

We must continue to invest in GYO programs in the face of post pandemic-based budget cuts, and to push for both their implementation and continuation. With a focus on both recruitment and retention, GYOs offer school districts a localized solution that seeks to cultivate teachers who are prepared to be effective, long-lasting educators and leaders – invested in the success of not only their students but also the school and community. As Hopson & Hopson (2021) put forth now is the time to take justice-oriented approaches and culturally responsive pedagogies from “passive nouns to active verbs” (p. 76).

The challenges encountered by teacher education programs to recruit and retain are numerous. When coupled with issues of cultural fluency, these difficulties appear even more formidable. That said, GYO initiatives are not an instantaneous remedy to today’s teacher shortage, but by targeting two issues central to staffing teaching positions: 1) declining educator preparation enrollment and 2) teacher attrition, they have the potential to produce long-term results as research continues to point at GYOs as a strategy to fulfill positions at “hard-to-staff” schools (Valenzuela, 2017; Gist, 2022/ 2019). Additionally, as Love (2023)

suggests, learning how to retain (Black) teachers should be just as important as recruiting new (Black) teachers.

Using ABCD as a framework encourages educational policymakers to examine the teaching profession with an explicit emphasis on educational justice and consciousness (Bianco & Marin-Paris, 2019; Freire, 1992). As such, policymakers can more accurately address historical and present educational inequities that have plagued underserved communities and schools. Also, by employing #heartwork as a conceptual frame, we can better understand and support teachers who embrace education as an emancipatory strategy to nurture the minds, bodies, and spirits of our youth (Johnson & Nicol, 2020; Dillard, 2006). GYOs inherent support of teachers involved in heart work is vital because even the most committed educators can experience discontent and burnout. Therefore, ABCD’s unearthing of cultural capital, local engagement, cultivation of educational role models, and tackling of systematic barriers shifts challenges into opportunities.

Our stated approach is not predicated on discourse hinged to deficiencies and lack but rather the multiple sources of capital to help comprehend the strengths Black, Latinx, Asian and other underserved populations bring to the profession. As this nation’s PK -12 student population becomes increasingly racially heterogeneous, it is vital to understand the intentions and implications of how teacher recruitment and retention efforts reify or counter stereotyped discourse that has marginalized the quantity and quality of TOCs. We offer this study to amplify GYOs as a viable option to not only address our state’s and nation’s teacher shortage, but to do so whereby a caring and academically thriving environment is cultivated.

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