Starting a Grow Your Own (GYO) Educator Initiative: A Step by Step Guide

This guide is intended to help district and building leaders navigate the design and implementation of a GYO program. Feel free to skip steps you don't need and utilize the resources in a way that is helpful to you. The Grow Your Own Briefs provide a picture of different GYO initiatives in Colorado. Have questions or need a thought partner along the way? Contact the Educator Career Navigation Team!

Step 1: Establish the Purpose & Vision

Goal: Align around why you are launching a GYO program.

Activities:

- Identify the staffing challenges GYO will address (e.g., special education shortages, diversity gaps).
- Define the long-term vision (e.g., "Build a sustainable, diverse educator pipeline from our community").
- Clarify success criteria (retention, diversity, vacancy reduction, completion rates).
- Understand readiness

Helpful Work Products:

- Vision statement
- High-level goals
- Board/superintendent alignment

Resources:

- GYO At-a-Glance
- GYO Initiative Goal & Success Metrics Examples
- GYO Readiness Assessment
- Sample GYO Implementation Timeline

Step 2: Analyze Workforce Data

Goal: Determine which roles and schools need GYO the most.

Activities:

- Review:
  - Vacancy and turnover data (3–5 years)
  - Hard-to-fill positions
  - Student vs. staff demographic gaps

    - Paraeducator and classified staff demographics
    - Projected retirements

Helpful Work Products:

- Priority cultivated roles - who the program produces (e.g., SPED, bilingual, early childhood teachers)
- Priority populations (paras, HS students, career changers, bilingual candidates, members of underrepresented groups, people committed to public service)
- Data summary for stakeholders

Resources

- Using Educator Workforce Data to Plan a GYO Handout
- Shortage Dashboard
- Retention Dashboard
- Educator Preparation Dashboard
- Colorado Early Care and Education Workforce Data Dashboard

Step 3: Clarify Roles & Responsibilities

Goal: Decide who will do what as you are planning and implementing your GYO initiative.

Activities:

- Define “must-have” internal roles (who needs to run the program)

Helpful Work Products:

- Documented internal roles and responsibilities

Resources:

- Possible LEA GYO Internal Roles

Step 4: Select Your Target Populations

Goal: Decide who your GYO program will serve first.

Common starting points:

- Paraeducators (existing commitment to education)
- High school students (long-term pipeline)
- Classified staff (deep community ties)
- Career changers (mid-career professionals)
- Current teachers seeking endorsements (SPED, ESL)

Helpful Work Products:

- Defined participant groups
- Rationale for each group

Resources:

- GYO Seeds Resource

Step 5: Choose Your Pathway Models

Goal: Select the specific pathways your district will offer.

Examples:

- Paraeducator → Teacher
- High School → Dual Credit → Teacher Prep
- Career Changer → Alternative Licensure
- Teacher → SPED Endorsement
- Teacher → Leadership

For each pathway, leaders should determine:

- Time to completion
- Credentialing requirements
- Coursework and fieldwork expectations
- Estimated cost per participant

Helpful Work Products:

- Pathway descriptions
- Timeline for each pathway

Resources:

- Common GYO Pathway Models
- When is Teacher Degree Apprenticeship Program Development a Good Fit?
- Colorado Licensure Snapshot
- The ICAP

Step 6: Build Higher Education Partnerships

Goal: Secure the right preparation partners and formalize collaboration.

Activities:

- Identify universities or community colleges offering aligned programs
- Negotiate MOUs (tuition, advising, data sharing, field placements)
- Align schedules, coursework, and field experiences
- Establish a shared governance structure

Helpful Work Products:

- Signed MOUs
- Partnership roles and responsibilities
- Joint implementation plan

Resources:

- TEACH Colorado's Program Search Tool
- Sample MOU Between LEA and IHE

Step 7: Design the Program Structure

Goal: Build the operational backbone of your GYO program.

Activities:

- Determine:
  - Eligibility requirements
  - Application and selection process
  - Cohort size
  - Mentor teacher expectations
  - Advising and progress monitoring systems
  - Communication plan

Helpful Work Products:

- Program design brief
- Application materials
- Mentor teacher guidelines

Resources:

- GYO Access & Opportunity Check
- GYO Barriers and Solutions Examples
- GYO Glossary

Step 8: Determine Funding and Sustainability

Goal: Identify how the program will be funded now and in the future.

Consider:

- State GYO grants
- Federal funds (Title II, ESSER, Perkins, apprenticeship funds)
- Local budget allocations
- Tuition assistance models
- Stipends or release time
- Cost-per-participant projections

Helpful Work Products:

- Budget plan
- Funding map (braided sources)
- Sustainability strategy

Resources:

- GYO Budget Line Item Considerations
- GYO Sample Budgets
- GYO Supports Cost Assignment by District Size
- GYO Financial Resources Page

Step 9: Build Candidate Supports

Goal: Ensure participants can succeed academically and logistically.

Supports may include:

- Tuition assistance
- Paid release time
- Mentorship
- Academic advising
- Test prep (Praxis, state exams)
- Childcare
- Transportation
- Cohort model

Helpful Work Products:

- Support package

Resources:

- GYO Supports Inventory
- Sample Candidate Support Agreement

Step 10: Launch Recruitment and Communications

Goal: Attract the right candidates and build awareness.

Actions:

- Create recruitment materials (flyers, videos, info sheets)
- Host info sessions
- Engage principals and building leaders
- Use internal communications (email, intranet, staff meetings)
- Partner with community organizations

Helpful Work Products:

- Recruitment plan
- Communications toolkit
- Info session schedule

Resources:

- GYO Recruitment Plan Template

Step 11: Select and Onboard Participants

Goal: Ensure a smooth start for your first cohort.

Activities:

- Review applications
- Conduct interviews (if applicable)
- Confirm eligibility
- Match candidates with mentors
- Provide orientation and onboarding
- Connect candidates with advisors

Helpful Work Products:

- Cohort roster
- Onboarding materials
- Mentor assignments

Resources:

- Sample Cohort Roster

Step 12: Implement and Monitor Progress

Goal: Support candidates through coursework, fieldwork, and milestones.

Activities:

- Track academic progress
- Monitor field placements
- Provide ongoing mentorship
- Hold cohort meetings
- Troubleshoot barriers (work schedules, childcare, finances)

Helpful Work Products:

- Progress monitoring system
- Regular check-in schedule
- Issue escalation process

Resources:

- Elements of a Basic GYO Progress Monitoring System

Step 13: Evaluate, Improve and Scale

Goal: Ensure the program is effective and sustainable.

Track:

- Enrollment
- Completion rates
- Licensure pass rates
- Hiring rates
- Retention
- Vacancy reduction
- Participant satisfaction
- Cost per candidate analysis
- Representation
- Student outcomes

Use findings to:

- Refine supports
- Adjust pathways
- Scale to additional schools or roles

Helpful Work Products:

- Annual evaluation report
- Continuous improvement plan
- Scaling strategy

Resources:

- Elements of an Annual GYO Evaluation Report