



Grow Your Own Teachers Initiative
Vision
Principles
Best Practices

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Grow Your Own Teachers Initiative Vision, Principles and Best Practices

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The Illinois Grow Your Own Task Force, formed three years ago and made up of major institutional supporters, from university colleges of education and community colleges to school districts and school employee and teachers unions, has provided powerful institutional support. Thanks to all of you.

Five years ago, ACORN, a community organization that was conducting a campaign for high quality teaching in the west and south side neighborhoods of Chicago where it is active, convened a coalition of community organizations in Chicago to improve teaching and learning in low-income school classrooms. The group called itself the Chicago Learning Campaign, later to become Grow Your Own Illinois. It included the Logan Square Neighborhood Association, a community organization that was helping to prepare parents to become teachers through their Nueva Generación program with Chicago State University, a program that would become the model for the campaign. It also included the Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform, an organization with a history of working with community organizations to advance quality education. The coalition's goal became to institutionalize the Nueva Generación approach to teacher recruitment and training for low-income schools statewide, and it required powerful collaborators. Therefore, the coalition added three additional Chicago community organizations, all of whom were multi-issue organizations with a history of successful work to improve schools: TARGET Area Development Corporation, in the Auburn Gresham neighborhood, Kenwood Oakland Community Organization, from the mid-south side, and Southwest Organizing Project, in the Gage Park/Chicago Lawn neighborhood.

We take this opportunity to acknowledge the thousands of grassroots members of our partner community organizations who continue to plan and carry out the Grow Your Own campaign, from strategizing in leadership sessions to boarding buses for the state capital and holding informational meetings in the neighborhood. It is their vision and determination that created and sustains Grow Your Own.

**Grow Your Own Illinois
May 10, 2006**

Vision

Grow Your Own Vision for a Highly Qualified Teacher Force

Our vision of schools is of institutions deeply grounded in their communities. They are schools whose doors are open to families, where teachers and parents can collaborate, and where children feel secure in their second home. These schools understand the broader needs of students and their families, and provide a community of learning where the whole neighborhood can grow.

The Grow Your Own Teachers (GYO) initiative stems from this vision. Schools can support the growth and development of families; community leaders--parents, paraprofessionals and others committed to the children and their education--can become teachers prepared to lead this school-community collaboration.

Community leaders who become teachers will stay in their communities to teach, stabilizing teacher staffs while building the bridges needed to strength school-community collaborations.

Grow Your Own Teacher programs address several important and related problems at the same time.

- 1) GYO creates a pipeline of teachers much more likely to stay long-term in low-income communities, thus saving the school district money and creating stability for the students, while leading over time to a more seasoned teaching force.
- 2) GYO brings teachers into schools who know the history, culture and language of the community, and can understand the needs and issues of students and families as co-equals and neighbors.
- 3) GYO teachers can communicate and collaborate with parents. These community-people-turned-teachers can, in turn, involve parents in the schools, and draw on the skills and knowledge of *these particular parents* to strengthen the schools.

Most important, GYO teachers are also passionate about *these particular students*, who are their own children and the children of others.

In order to develop these teachers, GYO must recruit candidates who are rooted in their communities, who have experience with children, and who have demonstrated their interest in the schools and students while serving as volunteer and active parents, as school paraprofessionals and as community leaders. The GYO teacher preparation must build on and develop the knowledge and skills that candidates possess, and deepen their understanding of their own communities, as well as prepare them academically. GYO initiatives must not “unlearn” its candidates their knowledge and passion about their own communities. It must return its candidates to their communities as stronger leaders, not as detached professionals.

The GYO Illinois initiative was developed by a group of Chicago-based community organizations working closely with university educators. Thus, the voices and interests

of active community residents have shaped this initiative. And GYO itself grows out of a national movement of community organizing for school improvement in low-income neighborhoods. Community organizations have been advocating for more equitable and effective policies from districts and states, and at the same time developing the relationships at the local school/community level which can transform schools through collective community efforts. The on-going partnership of community organizations required in GYO implementation means that community interests will remain at the table long-term to ensure that the programs meet community needs and academic requirements. The development of the programs should hopefully be an educational process for both community people and for educators.

Carrying out the GYO vision will be different in different communities – whether they are long-term disinvested African American urban neighborhoods with high teacher turnover; or increasingly immigrant neighborhoods where the teaching force no longer reflects the language or culture of the new student population. In both cases a pipeline of GYO teachers can help provide that critical mass of stable community-based teachers who can facilitate bridge-building beyond the school walls.

GYO will help facilitate the development of collective efforts to improve learning, first through the supportive cohort model of GYO, and later through the strengthening of broad-based learning communities where GYO graduates go to teach.

This document contains a record of our practices and understandings to date. GYO Illinois will continue to develop best practice as it expands to new communities.

Principles

The basic principles of Grow Your Own programs follow.

1. Low-income communities of color are places with enormous assets that can be tapped for GYO and for education of the community's children.
2. Strong and creative relationships among parents, students, community residents, paraprofessionals, teachers, administrators, community colleges, schools and school districts, higher education institutions, teacher and school employee unions and community organizations are a major source of power for quality education.
3. Community organizing can mobilize these resources and bring them together to win and sustain good policy and good programs over the long haul.
4. Community organizations are central to a successful Grow Your Own program by providing an independent parent/community voice at the table where decisions are made.
5. Lower achieving students in lower achieving schools have a right to the best teachers with high levels of content knowledge, excellent teaching skills and good experience
6. Adult, non-traditional teaching candidates need the same elements of high quality academics and pedagogy that we hope to find exemplified in the classroom practice of those candidates once they become teachers, including teaching that

- engages students, respects the knowledge of students and draws on their experience.
7. Leadership training and organizing training can help prepare teachers who are problem solvers, lifelong learners, collaborators, trust builders and powerful players in the public arena.

Research

Community Organizing: Central to School Improvement

All of the principles have as their basis a strong belief that communities and community organizing are central to school improvement, especially in low-income communities. Research that supports that viewpoint follows.

There has been growing recognition in the last decade that community organizing on education is a vital strategy for improvement in low- and moderate-income communities. Because community organizing groups are made up of members directly affected by the issues they work on, their educational change campaigns are relevant and accountable to the families and students affected by problems in education.¹ Community groups have ties to families that schools usually do not have and can help them advocate for school improvements, making schools more accountable to parents. Unlike schools and districts that continue to use ineffective methods to engage parents in their children's education, (e.g. sending home flyers that end up on the sidewalk, making announcements of meetings through the media in languages many parents don't understand), community organizations reach out to families by finding out what is important to them, listening to them, and bringing them together with others who share the same issues.

Recent interest in the field of education organizing has resulted in several important studies. Two research studies are highlighted below:

Strong Neighborhood, Strong Schools

Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform

Rather than looking inside the school or school district to examine school reform, Cross City Campaign's study, *Strong Neighborhood, Strong Schools*, looked at the dynamics between schools and communities. The charge of this study was to identify indicators of the impact of community organizing on school improvement. The researchers examined five community based groups in-depth and documented their organizing strategies and the improvements in education that resulted. Based on an analysis of the five case study sites, they developed a theory of change that explained how accomplishments in eight indicator areas—broad categories that describe the work of education organizing leading to improved schools and stronger student achievement. The eight indicator areas in which accomplishments could be identified are:

- Leadership development
- Community power

¹ Moore, R. B and Sandler, S. (2003) A report on Supporting the Education Organizing Movement: An Exchange Between Intermediaries. Justice Matters. San Francisco, CA.

- Social capital
- Public accountability
- Equity
- School/community connection
- Positive school climate
- High quality curriculum and instruction.

Community organizing groups develop parent and community leadership and build community power. These achievements produce social capital, relationships and trust among individuals and organization.

The dynamic of leadership, power and social capital results in broadened accountability for children’s school success. When educators, parents, community members, and politicians feel mutually accountable, finding solutions to the problems of urban schools becomes a collective responsibility, lessening the tendency of parents and educators to blame each other for school failure and those within school and political bureaucracies to dodge their responsibilities.

This process creates the political will that enables community organizing groups to advance issues of equity and school/community connection and bring new influences to bear on school climate and curriculum and instruction. When there is broad public acknowledgement that equity and school/community connection are important goals, community groups advocate for more resources for schools in low-income areas and schools often turn into centers of the community. Respectful relationships among parents and teachers and students can develop, expanding ownership for the educational experience of children. Expectations for children are raised as teachers see how much parents care about their children’s education. The potential also increases that curriculum and instruction will be both rigorous and culturally responsive.

Cross City Campaign found that community organizing groups added value to school reform efforts by:

- Sustaining the vision and momentum for change over time
- Persisting despite obstacles and setbacks
- Building political capital and creating the political will that motivates officials to take action
- Producing authentic change in policies and programs that reflects the concerns of parents and community

The study showed, “that when school reform goes hand-in-hand with building strong communities, schooling itself changes fundamentally, increasing the chances that reform will be carried out and sustained.”²

² Gold, E., Simon, E, Brown, C. (2002) Strong Neighborhood, Strong Schools: The Indicators Project n Education Organizing. Cross City Campaign for Urban School Reform. Chicago. IL (To download document, see www.crosscity.org).

Organizing for School Reform: How Communities are Finding their Voice and Reclaiming their Public Schools

Institute for Education and Social Policy

Another important report on the influence of community organizing on school improvement, *Organizing for School Reform*, summarized a longer document that examined the work of 66 community groups that were organizing to improve public education in low-performing schools and districts. These groups focused on engaging public school parents, low-income families, and students in efforts to improve their schools. The report describes the diversity of approaches groups used and reports on the groups' organizing achievements and challenges. They found that school reform organizing plays a significant role in creating the political context in which change can happen. Organizing groups focus schools on critical issues, identify and build support for key interventions, and establish a stronger sense of accountability between schools and communities. They are increasing the ability of young people, parents, and community residents to participate in local reform efforts, and they are helping members to raise essential school performance questions forcefully and persistently.³

Best Practices

Grow Your Own Teachers Program: How To

The Grow Your Own Teacher program is designed to build relationships as well as to prepare highly qualified teachers from and for the community. The initial relationships that are central to this initiative are among the members of the community and the consortium—community organizations, higher education institutions, schools or school district(s), teachers and school employee unions-- who agree to work together to develop a GYO program, to recruit and support the teacher candidates, and contribute their special strengths to the undertaking.

A. Forming a Consortium

The Grow Your Own legislation defines the membership of a GYO consortium. Only two members were required to apply for the planning grants that were awarded in March 2006. A planning grant consortium must have:

- A community organization
- A higher education institution with a college of education
- A letter or letters from a group of schools or a school district expressing interest.

To apply for a full implementation grant, a consortium is to be made up of the following:

- A community organization
- A higher education institution with a college of education

³ Mediratta, K., Fruchter, N., and Lewis, A. (2002) *Organizing for School Reform. How Communities are Finding their Voice and Reclaiming their Public Schools*. Institute for Education and Social Policy. New York, NY.

- A group of schools or a school district(s)
- The consortium may also have a community college and a teachers union and/or school employee union

Each consortium member plays a critical role in the GYO work. Grow Your Own was designed by community organizations, working with higher education partners. The community organization is intended to be the lead organization in initiating GYO initiatives

The Roles and Resources of Community Organizations

A community organization is a not-for-profit organization, usually working in low-income neighborhoods, that has the capacity to train, develop, and organize parents and community leaders into a constituency that will hold schools and school districts accountable for achieving high academic standards.

Community organizations have an enormous stake in improving education, for families and their children who live in their communities and for their future. The multiple roles and resources of community organizations are essential to implement GYO initiatives successfully.

- **Constituency (ownership).** Community organizations bring together large numbers of people to decide key issues and develop solutions. Large numbers of well-informed, supportive members and community residents will help to overcome challenges and to communicate the importance of the GYO strategy statewide and nationally, creating a grassroots movement for truly high quality teaching and helping to insure the sustainability of this important initiative.
- **Membership (recruitment).** The members of community organizations are people who live, work, and go to church in the community. They know and trust each other and the organization.
- **Leadership (focus on assets).** Community organizations invest in their members, tapping their assets and their strengths. Through training, experience, opportunities, and access, they help members grow personally and create a more promising future, enabling many of them, non-traditional candidates, to become teachers and all of them to advocate for learning communities in their schools.
- **Relationships (building consortia).** In many ways, developing relationships is the work of community organizations. Reaching out to others, such as parents, students, community residents, school staff and teachers, school districts and higher education institutions, they understand the interests of others and craft solutions that are both innovative and inclusive. Developing relationships across institutions, some of whom may never have worked together before, is a critical part of the GYO work.
- **Understanding of high-need areas.** Community organizations work in high-need areas and understand the dynamics of these communities.
- **Training and technical assistance.** Community organizations have experience conducting training and developing leaders among their members.

As GYO consortia have developed, community organizations have played roles that include:

- Organizing the consortium
- Preparing the planning or implementation grant
- Providing the coordinator for the program
- Recruiting candidates
- Providing or finding the support services for the potential cohort, including:
 - tutoring
 - child care
 - counseling
 - regular meetings
 - leadership and organizing training
 - site visits in classrooms at targeted schools
 - celebrations and involvement in other community events.

The Roles of Community Colleges and Four Year Higher Education Institutions

The four-year higher education institution is the degree- and certificate-granting institution. Thus, it has the critical role of preparing the students to be academically qualified for their teaching careers and insuring that they are prepared to pass all required tests, including the Illinois Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), a language proficiency exam (for bilingual teacher candidates), content area tests and the professional teaching examination. If a community college is involved, which is likely, its role is to provide an excellent education in the developmental courses and the general education courses, electives and prerequisites for admission into the college of education of the four-year university partner. The community college also has the assignment of preparing students for the basic skills test, because that is taken before admission to the college of education.

In addition to the obvious academic responsibilities, the institution of higher education should play an active role in the community, with the community organization, in the lives of the students. The non-traditional students who participate in GYO cohorts may be the first in their families to attend college. The university partner works with these students and teaches them how the institution works and gradually transitions them into their role as college students. The university personnel are also present in the community and involved in all aspects of the cohort. This involvement ranges from regular academic advising to social activities involving the students and professors. For the higher education institution, Grow Your Own provides a recruitment and support mechanism that may allow them to be successful in placing their graduates in hard to staff schools, which has long been a goal for many colleges of education. It may also increase their number of students of color and colleges of education graduates of color, another important goal.

In considering working with a higher education institution, it is important to determine the flexibility the institution may have. For instance, is it able to waive admission criteria, such as ACT test scores? Will it make room for the GYO students in its college of

education, and can it be flexible with the scheduling and location of the required courses for that program, in order to meet the needs of non-traditional adult students?

It is worth stressing that where both a community college and four year institution are working together, it is essential to coordinate the counseling programs and articulation agreements between them, so that no student wastes time and resources taking courses that are not required or that will not be transferable. One of the most valuable aspects of Grow Your Own will be the ability, indeed the necessity, of developing articulation agreements and training counseling staffs to insure that every course taken by every participant is one that will advance that candidate towards their teaching certificate and degree.

The Role of Schools and School Districts

The schools in the consortium are low-income schools that are hard-to-staff or that have hard-to-fill positions. Those terms are defined in the law and regulations. The school district(s) is the district that includes low-income schools that are hard-to-staff or that have hard-to-fill positions. The GYO program is geared to address seemingly intractable problems of teacher turnover in hard-to-staff schools and teacher vacancies in hard-to-fill positions. School districts that have to spend their limited resources recruiting and inducting new teachers every year, only to lose them in a year or two, have much to gain from Grow Your Own. Schools that are required by NCLB to send “not highly qualified” notices to parents because they cannot find teachers in certain fields also stand to gain.

The roles of the targeted schools and school districts are critical to the entire program. Teacher candidates in the Grow Your Own program are expected to have direct experience in and with the targeted schools throughout the program, and they are expected to be hired to work in those schools once they complete their preparation. It is beneficial to all if the candidates get jobs or are active in the targeted schools during their preparation. For example, if the school district can develop a program that offers qualified Grow Your Own candidates employment opportunities as paraprofessionals,, that can be helpful. When it comes time for GYO candidates to do their student teaching, they can be paid, under a special amendment to the GYO legislation, and the school district can use a variety of sources of public funds to pay them.

Roles of Teacher Unions and School Employee Unions

School employee unions and teacher unions have a huge stake in Grow Your Own, because it provides a career ladder for their paraprofessional members to become teachers provides a non-alternative track to full certification and fosters good working relationships with other powerful institutions and organizations.

Unions can also be very helpful to consortia. They often have the expertise to understand many of the problems that paraprofessionals face in attempting to go to school while working full time and raising a family. Furthermore, they may already have classes that assist their members in passing the basic skills test or the test for paraprofessionals, and

they may already have contract provisions that reward their members who move up a career ladder. They are among the most powerful players in the state capital when it comes time to win legislation or appropriations. They are also critical allies on local issues that arise in Grow Your Own, such as getting the graduates of the program hired at the schools that need them, identifying obstacles to successful implementation and making changes that overcome the obstacles. Although unions are optional consortium members in the law, it is good practice to include them in every consortium.

B. Recruiting and Identifying Candidates

The teacher candidates are at the center of Grow Your Own. Developing parents, community members, and paraprofessionals as teachers and creating a pipeline of teachers of color is the goal of the initiative.

Which Candidates Qualify?

Since the GYO initiative is based in the community, the program targets three non-traditional sources of potential candidates. As the law provides, these groups are eligible to be candidates:

- Para-educators, such as teacher assistants, special education assistants, school clerks, cafeteria employees, security guards;
- Parents or community residents who are active in the schools;
- Members and leaders of the community organization who are active on education issues.

According to the law and regulations, these candidates will most likely have a “non-traditional background,” i.e., they have never attended college because they could not afford it; they began a baccalaureate program at a point in time other than immediately following graduation from high school; they began a baccalaureate program after high school and did not complete it; or, they hold a GED certificate as opposed to a high school diploma.

The program will be evaluated on a number of counts. Important data will be gathered by each program, such as:

- Home zip codes of the candidates
- Racial/ethnic makeup of the candidates
- Percent who stay year to year
- Percent who complete the program
- Percent still teaching in hard-to-staff schools after five and seven years.

Thus, it is in each consortium’s interest to target candidates from the communities where hard-to-staff schools are located and insure that the candidates are, to the extent possible, from a racial or ethnic group that reflects that of the student population. They will seek candidates with the commitment to stay in the program, go into teaching and stay in hard-to-staff schools even beyond the five years required in order for loans to be forgiven.

GYO is not a program that encourages people to become certified as teachers, teach for five years, and then move elsewhere to teach. Therefore, it is in our interest to create a program whose culture attracts the candidates who are, in fact, where they want to be long term and who have no intention of going anywhere else.

Which Schools Qualify?

Because GYO targets candidates from the low-income communities where hard-to-staff schools or hard-to-fill positions are located, it is hard to identify the candidates without first identifying the schools.

There is a definition of hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-fill positions in the legislation. According to the law, a hard- to-staff school is an Illinois public school that “ranks in the upper third” among public schools of its type (elementary, middle, secondary) “on a combined index” of teachers not fully certified and rate of attrition among teachers.

A hard-to-fill teaching position is defined as any position in a school serving a substantial percentage of low income students (K-8 schools where 35 percent are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch, or 9-12 schools where 25 percent are so eligible) where data compiled by the state board of education indicates a multi-year pattern of substantial teacher shortage or that is identified as hard to staff by the responsible official of the school district.

In order to identify schools that qualify, ACORN and the Cross City Campaign have done extensive research on schools statewide, with the help of the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE). As a result, Grow Your Own Illinois can now provide information on percentage of low income students, teacher turnover and racial discrepancy between students and teachers. Consortia have used this information to identify the communities of need and thus the communities from which to recruit candidates.

Sources of Potential Candidates

The community organization has strong relationships in the community that enables them to recruit potential teacher candidates for the Grow Your Own program. They can tap a number of sources including participants of school parent involvement programs, paraprofessionals and teachers’ aides and community leaders. Because the idea of the program is to “grow” teachers who will stay in their communities, choosing parent, community, and paraprofessional “seeds” that live in and are already involved in the community is one way to guarantee that happens.

Community organizations have been successful in recruiting candidates through existing community education programs. Many community organizations have strong ties to their local schools and their members participate in a number of programs in the local schools which involve adults and parents. These programs serve as a way to organize the community, and in turn provide a source for potential Grow Your Own candidates. One

reason that community organizations play such an important role in the GYO consortia is because of this access to active community members already invested in education.

For example, almost a decade ago, the Logan Square Neighborhood Association on Chicago's northwest side began a program called "Parent Mentors". Parents, primarily low-income immigrant Latina mothers, were trained and then assigned to a classroom in their own children's schools, where they assisted the classroom teacher and worked with students. Working as a mentor allowed parents access to the schools and classrooms, places where many of them had not felt welcome before. As parents found their places in the classrooms, some of them began to identify with the teachers and to say to themselves, "I could do that." LSNA believed that some of the parent mentors could, indeed, become teachers and sought a local university with which to collaborate. This was the birth of Nueva Generación, the model for the GYO program.

School parent involvement programs such as Parent Mentors are an excellent source from which to recruit teacher candidates because they include people who are already involved in the education system and have some knowledge of how it works. However, there are many other sources from which potential Grow Your Own Teacher candidates can surface. One group of potential candidates is school paraprofessionals or teachers' aides.

According to the No Child Left Behind Act, a paraprofessional must now have 60 college credit hours or pass an examination in order to be able to work in a school. This has changed the nature of the position, and many people have had to leave their jobs because they lack sufficient education credits. The Grow Your Own Teachers initiative is a resource for these unemployed paraprofessionals to achieve their 60 hours and beyond, as well as those that finished their 60 hours but could not continue because of the financial burden. Both ACORN and TARGET Area Development Corporation have formed cohorts that include paraprofessionals and teachers' aides. They are excellent potential candidates because of their classroom experience, dedication to their local schools and their understanding of what being a teacher entails.

A third group from which potential Grow Your Own Teacher candidates can be recruited is community leaders--members of the community that are active in education in a variety of ways. In Chicago, they might be members of local school councils. They might be leaders in local business or civic associations engaged with the schools or they might be active members of the community organization, with a special interest in the education work of the organization. This ensures a dedication to and an interest in the field of education, as well as an investment in the community.

Recruiting Candidates

Once the community organization and other consortium members decide which groups and individuals will be targeted, they recruit candidates using effective means of communication, such as creating a buzz at the schools by using multiple means of getting the word out. Personal contacts are very effective. In addition to preparing flyers and sending them home with students at the local schools, recruiters can make

announcements at LSC and PTA meetings and they should then make follow-up phone calls. Recruiters will want to meet with the school principals and ask them to inform their paraprofessionals and other school staff who may be interested. Recruiters can make announcements at church or other community gathering places, contact the teachers union and ask them to inform their members, put GYO on the agenda of the community organization and ask that each member contact three or four people who may be interested.

Informational Meetings

Community organizers who are recruiting will want to schedule one or more community informational meetings at times that accommodate different schedules so that anyone interested can receive information about the GYO program at a location that is convenient and inviting. The community organization and their higher education partner should run the meetings, in order to be able to answer the likely large number of questions posed by the attendees.

At each meeting, the organizer will want to make a sign-up sheet available for those potential candidates who are ready to proceed or who want to continue to explore this opportunity. At each meeting, attendees should sign in with their name, phone number, address and email address if applicable. The organizer should be sure to follow up with those who have expressed interest because potential candidates are almost sure to have additional questions and may need to be encouraged to pursue their interest in participating in the program. It is also important to use informational meetings to inform the meeting participants of the specific requirements for entry into the program (i.e., university application, transcripts, placement tests, photocopy of a photo identification, and so on.)

Identification and Assessment of Candidates

Once recruitment and dissemination of information is completed, the organizer and their higher education partners will begin assessing candidates and forming a cohort. Experience has shown that to get a cohort of 50 candidates, it is important to recruit up to 200, since some will have second thoughts and drop out, some will be unable to assemble all of their needed paperwork (especially difficult if their transcripts are from overseas), some will not pass the initial placement tests or will find the academic work too difficult, and a few will face family emergencies and be unable to continue. Because of the challenges of getting the transcripts and taking the placement tests, consortia are learning that they should assume that of the interested people who attend their information sessions, approximately one in four will do what is necessary to enroll.

Assembling the Needed Documents

In order to choose potential teacher candidates and form a cohort of students, the higher education and community partners will assess candidates by looking at their applications, transcripts from all other colleges and universities attended, and other documents

required for community college and/or university admission. Potential candidates may need copies of their high school diploma or their GED certificate. The potential candidates should begin gathering these documents right away. Obtaining all transcripts takes time and support from a program coordinator is critical at this juncture.

For candidates who cannot access their transcripts because of unpaid bills, some schools may accept a payment agreement if they understand that the transcript will provide access to an educational program that will result in higher income and faster payment of the tuition bill.

It is important to take into consideration the difficulties potential candidates may have in obtaining transcripts when making a timeline from recruitment to the first day of class. For many people, finding their way through the bureaucracy can be the first barrier to their academic success. The community organization and the university need to assist at this first stage in the process. Students will learn to overcome bureaucratic hurdles as they become more experienced in dealing with educational systems, but they should not be dissuaded from applying simply because they are not good at managing bureaucracies up front.

Evaluating International Documents

Any student with high school or college credits from a foreign country must obtain their transcripts and have the degree evaluated for a U.S. equivalency. Prior to this evaluation, the transcript may need to be translated into English and notarized. The Illinois State Board of Education maintains an approved list of organizations qualified to evaluate foreign transcripts, and these organizations charge for the service.

Selection of Candidates

There is not yet data to suggest how best to screen candidates for Grow Your Own positions. Ultimately, candidates must be capable of doing the rigorous academic work that will be required. However, past academic performance may not be the best predictor of potential academic ability for a group of motivated adults. Each consortium will define their own alternative selection criteria such as demonstrated accomplishment in the classroom or in an education-related position, commitment to the students who need them the most, such as special education and behaviorally-challenged students, rather than the traditional academic screening.

Maria Teresa Garreton, Bilingual Education Program Coordinator, Chicago State University and an experienced higher education partner who developed the Nueva Generación program with LSNA, said “We are dealing with a very non-traditional population and we have not found any instruments or measures that have helped us determine who would be a good teacher before getting started. For these cohorts, we have been granted waivers from requirements such as ACT minimum scores, GPA’s, etc. because we found that very often taking the ACT test itself was a barrier that could not be overcome until the participants have developed stronger basic skills as well as test taking

skills. ...Part of what makes this program unique is that everyone has the opportunity to participate, and most of them, if life circumstances do not stop them, are able to take advantage of it.”

As GYO is implemented around the state, consortia will learn more from each other about screening and final selection.

Academic Predictors

One way of addressing academic potential is to place possible candidates for the program in an early developmental class or two (most likely reading, math, or composition) during the planning process, provide plenty of support in the form of attention from an organizer or coordinator and a tutor to assist them, hold meetings of the students to assist in the development of solidarity and cohort relationships, and see who succeeds. Getting classes started early (with no commitments to the students that they are guaranteed a slot in the GYO program) forces them to get their transcripts in and their placement tests completed, and provides them with a realistic opportunity to assess the wear and tear on their family and work lives. If they find that they cannot handle the academics or the time investment, despite a great deal of support, it may save the consortium an early dropout and the potential candidate can try out the program without a financial commitment. The cost of these contracted developmental classes can be included in the planning or implementation grant.

For those potential students who speak English as a second language, their English language skills must be assessed to ensure that they will be able to read, write and comprehend at the college level. This can be determined through placement tests, interviews, or other types of language assessment. Immigrant students may need additional courses to attain the necessary level of English.

Selection Criteria

There is no rubric to follow when assessing a potential Grow Your Own Teacher candidate but there are some things to consider:

- **Candidates of color** Because GYO was founded to increase the number of teachers of color, an effort should be made to include as many minority candidates as possible. It is an important goal for GYO to provide as many minority candidates as possible with an opportunity to receive a college education which has previously not been available to them for economic or other reasons.
- **Candidates from the community** Another goal of GYO is to decrease the teacher turnover rates in low-income schools in the state. Research indicates that teachers “go home to teach,” and because of this GYO intends to recruit candidates from a specific geographic area. This will help to maintain a close-knit cohort, make it possible to hold classes that are accessible to everyone and ensure that once the students graduate as teachers they will stay to teach in the

community where they live. This is another reason why GYO targets community leaders and parents who have already shown a commitment to their local schools.

Because of the length and unique structure of the program, there is no guaranteed formula for “growing” a successful teacher of color who will stay home to teach and remain committed to their community. Learning from programs like Nueva Generación and from the ten new collaborations between universities and community organizations will allow the successful achievement of the goal of 1000 new teachers by the year 2016.

Placement Testing

Upon completion of university and/or community college application materials, all potential cohort members take the required placement exams for their specific institution. This is a university or community college requirement and the results help determine which courses will be initially offered to the students. It is critical that placement tests be administered prior to planning developmental courses so that students do not take unnecessary courses. The community-based coordinator needs to work with the university personnel in order to schedule the exams. It is recommended that the potential candidates all go on the same date or dates for testing. Depending upon the population and the location of the university, transportation may also need to be arranged for the group, or the university or community college may be able to hold a placement test in the community. The results of the placement tests are sent to the university coordinator who uses the results to plan the developmental course work for the cohort.

Evaluating Transcripts

As part of most university admissions processes, students with at least 24 hours of college credit do not need to submit high school transcripts. If they have fewer than 24 hours, they must do so. Potential candidates must comply with the partnering university’s requirements. (As noted above, foreign transcripts, both high school and college, need to be evaluated by an outside organization approved by the Illinois State Board of Education in order to determine the U.S. equivalency of the foreign degree and/or credits, for which a fee is charged.) Transcripts from all other colleges and universities attended will be evaluated by the university.

Protecting Transferability of Credits

It is important to have transfer credits evaluated by the certification office in the college of education at the four year institution, even if the candidates will be starting classes at a community college. The program coordinator should play an advocacy role in helping to ensure that students transfer the maximum number of credits. One of the roles of the coordinator is to help potential candidates understand which credits may transfer, to answer potential candidates’ questions and to insure that no time is wasted taking courses that are non-transferable

Developmental Courses

University faculty members evaluate transcripts in part to identify whether potential candidates need some basic coursework before they enter the regular college program. The cohort coordinator uses the evaluation of transcripts combined with the results of the placement exams to assess an individual student's placement in courses as well as to plan which courses to offer. In some cases students need to complete one or more developmental courses, such as basic reading, math, and composition. Developmental courses are not included in the general education curriculum but are necessary in order to ensure success for students once they are in general education courses. As such, the developmental courses do not count toward the final number of credits but are prerequisites for general education courses. In addition to being a university requirement, developmental courses are important in the evolution of the cohort and the formation of the group. Many of the students have not been in school for some years. The courses serve as "refreshers" and serve to re-acclimate the students to the school environment and to prepare them for academic success once in the general education courses.

C. Preparing Grow Your Own Teachers

Cohorts in Theory

Many university and community college professors say that the data is clear on the benefits of a cohort approach to adult education. An educational cohort is a group of students who work together toward their degree. The solidarity developed by a group of students provides built-in support that makes it possible for adult learners to overcome obstacles, knowing that they are not alone. The sense of community, tangible supports, and solid new friendships provide an incentive to come to class and stay in the program.

In many cases, a cohort of students begins and ends the program of study together. The cohort model is especially effective for busy, working adults who have many demands on their time because the courses are planned based on their schedules and implemented to ensure maximum use of time. Additionally, the students in a cohort are in similar life situations and support each other academically and emotionally.

Inherent in the cohort model is an atmosphere of cooperation and collaboration among the students as well as the program faculty with whom they work. Initially a cohort is created by the design of a program. For example, 25 new students who are starting a program of study together and taking the same two courses form a cohort. However, in order for a group of students to evolve into a true cohort—a group of people who know each other and each other's family circumstances, support each other, and go the extra mile for each other—the coordinator intentionally creates opportunities for cohort members to get to know each other and to become friends through courses, the curriculum and social interaction. Eventually, the cohort will create its own internal support network if a positive group dynamic has been fostered throughout planning and implementation.

Cohorts in Practice

The program may originate as a cohort but evolves based on the needs of individual students. As often as possible, all students are enrolled in the same course and progress through the program together. This is particularly important during the first two years of the program. Working as a cohort allows students to get to know one another and form smaller peer groups, which provide academic, social and emotional support.

Although the cohort model is a significant factor for success, individual students are not “held back” in order to keep pace with the cohort. In Grow Your Own programs, students often begin at different points in their education. For instance, one consortium has a two-tiered approach: students who enter the program with a significant number of college credits, and students who are taking developmental courses before they are ready to begin their college credit courses. Another consortium reports a three tiered approach. One consortium is paying upper tier candidates to tutor those from the lower tier. If individual students are able, they take classes outside the cohort. This flexibility is important for students who want to take more classes per semester as well as for those who enter the program with transfer credits.

Meetings and social events bring all members of the cohort together. It is critical that these are built into and billed as part of the regular program for which attendance is required, rather than being viewed as an “add on.” One important way to develop a cohort mentality, a sense of togetherness, across tiers and academic variances is to be intentional about making leadership development and community organizing for school change an essential part of the curriculum. This enables the teacher candidates to see themselves and each other in a different light, to recognize the leadership potential that they and their colleagues share, and to work together on a common issue in the community. Other important methods of building a cohort are to encourage them to work together on study skills or other courses, and to attend seminars or retreats as part of their required coursework. Building relationships and solidarity for the entire cohort is critical to academic success.

The Coordinator’s Role

Grow Your Own programs need at least one full-time coordinator to provide many kinds of support to the cohort as a group and to individual students who are members of the cohort. Some consortia will want two coordinators, one coordinator from the college or university who has the credentials and the inside knowledge to function effectively in the higher education institution and one from the community organization, who can help build the cohort and members’ strengths as community leaders.

The Grow Your Own cohorts are non-traditional college students. Most are from low-income families, have children and other family responsibilities, and have a full-time job in addition to now going to college to become teachers. They need support. They can

provide a great deal of support to each other, but they also need someone who is their advocate, supporter, and negotiator. Cohort members will need someone to give them advice and counsel on courses and coursework, to negotiate higher education bureaucracies on their behalf, to provide a tutor or other academic help when they need it, to be aware of their family situation and to offer support and help in an emergency, and to create the opportunities where friendships and relationships can be built and victories celebrated.

The coordinator(s) will do the dozens of different tasks that ensure each member of the cohort is successful in becoming a highly qualified teacher. They will arrange classes in the community, help organize transportation if needed, ensure child care is available, keep track of each member's individual education plan and make sure that person is on track. And they will help to organize the celebrations and social events that are so important to creating friendships and including family members in celebrating many points of success along the way.

The university coordinator may:

- help students navigate the bureaucracy of the institution
- review transcripts and plan a course design/timeline for each student
- assist with admission and financial aid
- plan courses on site
- identify good professors to teach the courses
- prepare the instructors for the kind of teaching that is expected
- assemble an articulation contract between the community college and four year institution.

The community organization coordinator may:

- help foster a cohesive and supportive cohort
- hold meetings, leadership and organizing training sessions, social events and celebrations
- meet one on one with cohort members to make sure all is well
- attend classes often and communicate with the instructors to make sure progress is on schedule,
- make sure that the tutor is on duty, accessible and being used early in the term, not just after students are in trouble
- build a relationship with the professors to foster good communication
- maintain a constant connection to the targeted schools, through site visits, suggested class projects, etc.
- identify candidates who need assistance with child care, transportation, additional coursework and help them access it.

Organizing classes

Each student should have a personal program for the entire project based on his or her own needs, as identified by transcript review and placement tests. The student and the coordinator will both have a copy of this individual plan--copies of the courses required

for the student, the proposed timeline for taking those courses, any tests that will be required and where they fit into the timeline. Students should be alerted that, in a state-funded program, there is no guarantee that funding will be allocated every year until they complete their course of study. They may have to organize with other students across the sites to participate in a campaign to keep the funding flowing.

The coordinator schedules the classes based on 1) the needs of the students and 2) the availability of quality instructors. The results of the university placement tests determine which students need which developmental courses. The coordinator schedules courses so that the maximum number of students can participate. Students' preferences for course time and day are also taken into consideration. Instructors who travel to the community-based site are selected based on their qualifications and also on their experience and skill in working with non-traditional college students. Instructors do not alter course content or expectations from the course they teach on campus but they do need to have an understanding of the program and the student population with whom they will be working. Higher education institutions may need to screen the instructors to insure that they want to teach adult learners and are prepared with strategies for teaching such a group.

Each semester, new courses are scheduled for the community site. The goal for scheduling the courses is to attempt to offer two courses each semester in the community for the students. The actual number of courses each student takes depends upon their wishes as well as which specific courses individuals need. Some students may travel to campus, where feasible, in addition to taking the courses offered in the community.

Supporting Academic Success

Students who struggle academically are supported and counseled on an individual basis. During the semester the coordinator communicates frequently with students and talks to them about courses and workload. Students often contact the coordinator if they are having difficulties and university professors are also encouraged to contact the coordinator if problems arise during the semester. In response to conversations with students, the coordinator may set up tutoring for the student, help set up study groups with other students, help with time management or help the student address the problem in a creative and helpful manner. In almost all cases, the coordinator encourages the students to stay in courses and to communicate directly with professors regarding questions and concerns about a specific class.

When the coordinator and the program faculty deem that a student is making insufficient academic progress, the student meets with the coordinator to form a plan for assistance and to set standards that must be met in order to remain in the program. If the student does not meet the standard, he or she is encouraged to continue in school but is dropped from the roster of program participants, and tuition and fees are no longer paid beyond what the student qualifies for outside of GYO. In the Grow Your Own program, if a student has received a forgivable loan and then is counseled out of the program, a

determination regarding loan repayment, if any, will be made on a case by case basis, according to the regulations for the program.

Tutors

Tutors can be included in the cost of the courses being contracted for in the planning grant, or they can be hired separately by the college or the community organization, but GYO candidates will always need them, at least a half time tutor for each class with 20-25 students. However, it is important that the coordinator monitor the tutor and insure that students are taking advantage of the resource and benefiting from it.

Teacher Preparation, GYO style: Progressive Practices in Colleges of Education

The GYO initiative will allow an opportunity to invent, learn together, and to share lessons over the coming years about how best to create a highly effective and innovative GYO teacher preparation program that taps community assets and leadership development as part of the curriculum. What kind of teachers are highly effective? Most parents and educators call for teachers who are:

- Strong knowledge of academic content
- Problem solvers
- Lifelong learners
- Technologically savvy practitioners
- Collaborators
- Relationship-builders
- Powerful leaders
- Good listeners
- Caring and loving people
- Rigorous academics with high expectations for student performance
- Respectful of all: students, parents, other teachers, staff, administrators
- Respected by all

In order to educate GYO candidates and teach them to be teachers with the qualities listed above, the colleges of education should have professors and instructors who also have those qualities and skills.

Teaching strategies that incorporate active learning, team building, collaborative projects, community-based exercises, group study, role playing, technology, critical analysis of case study examples from the schools and communities—these are the approaches that will change the culture in schools, one thousand teachers at a time.

Grow Your Own programs will be challenged to find effective ways to develop a cohort of candidates into a community, with a strong sense of solidarity among them, since many of the candidates start at different places and will progress at different rates. The cohort will need meetings and seminars that unite the disparate group into one. A community organizing group has great strengths in developing powerful leaders and building collaborative and trusting relationships. As noted above, this is one strong

reason for including leadership and community organizing training seminars as a community-building strategy.

A second reason is that many of the qualities of great teachers are qualities of great organizers and leaders as well. Teachers should learn effective strategies for organizing and building a relational culture within the school and with families in the community. Sustaining the respect for the community and its people that led to Grow Your Own in the first place is critical. In the course of developing professional teachers, we must never create an “us” vs. “them” mentality in people naturally inclined to see themselves on the same side of the struggle as the students and their families. That is the strength of the Grow Your Own recruitment and it is very important that it becomes a strength of the GYO classes, all the way through.

Community Location of Classes

All of the developmental classes, ideally to be completed during the first two years of the program, should be offered at a site in the community easily accessible to the students. Generally, it is important to consistently offer as many courses as possible on site in the community, to foster a sense of community on the part of the candidates and to ease the difficulties of simultaneously working full time, raising a family and attending school.

Child Care

Some communities may already have quality child care available in the community. In others, it may need to be an integral offering of the Grow Your Own program. It may be provided on a case by case basis. Child care can be paid for directly by the consortium, budget permitting. It is also allowable under the law to make it part of the forgivable loan for those students who need it.

Basic Skills Test

The Illinois Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) is a critical milestone for the students. In order to be admitted into the college of education, students must have passed this exam and have fewer than 12 credit hours of general education courses remaining. Thus, the timing of the exam is important and the cohort coordinator needs to advise students when to register for the exam and how to do so. For many non-traditional students, test-anxiety is great and they are hesitant to register for the exam. Students who speak a native language other than English may qualify for a time extension on the day of the exam to allow them additional time to complete the exam. The coordinator helps students obtain a letter from the certification officer at the university requesting such an extension.

In addition to assistance in the registration process, students also need to prepare for the exam. The coordinator organizes Basic Skills workshops and study sessions. A tutor, hired by the project specifically for assistance with the Basic Skills test, helps the students create individual study plans. Once students have passed the ITBS, they

complete the application to the college of education. Once admitted, they then may register for the required professional education courses.

Learning from Mistakes

When one organization started their planning process, they quickly set up developmental courses for prospective students, to see if they could handle the academics. On the last day to drop the courses, almost every student dropped out. What happened?

After the students got their transcripts in and their placement tests taken, they received very little support or contact; there was no coordinator, no tutor, and no support services of any kind. Out of 24 students, all but three dropped out or did very poorly in the class.

The next time around, the same organization with some of the same students in the same community had learned its lesson. A coordinator attended every class with the students, as did the tutor. In between classes, the coordinator and the tutor made home visits, scheduling extra study sessions, identifying problems. If a student needed help with transportation, child care or counseling, the coordinator was there. Any student that missed even one class was called and visited. For this group of thirty students, all but three stayed in and passed the course. And the coordinator agreed that those three did not belong in the program.

Data consistently shows that community people with a history in the classroom are the most persistent and motivated teacher candidates and teachers. By following best practice for adult learners and for Grow Your Own programs, by sharing lessons learned as we go forward, we can develop a model for transforming our schools and communities.

When ACORN convened the coalition that created the Grow Your Own program, it was with the intention of transforming the quality of teaching and learning in low income school classrooms. For all of the partners in this important program, we will be satisfied with nothing less.

Resources and Contacts

For assistance in developing your consortium, researching your hard-to-staff schools, recruiting your candidates, applying for planning or implementation funding, finding a Grow Your Own program near you, or to ask any question, brainstorm with us or share what you are learning for future editions of this booklet, contact one of the following:

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