



**Grow Your Own Illinois  
STATEWIDE LEARNING NETWORK**

***Implementation Insights:  
Lessons Learned & Best Practices  
November 2007***

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## **Statewide Learning Network November 2007**

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# Introduction

Grow Your Own Illinois convened the annual Statewide Learning Network in Chicago on November 29 and 30, 2007. Representatives from fifteen of the sixteen statewide consortia--including teacher candidates, community organization and higher education partners--gathered to share their implementation insights and experiences. The goals of the meeting were as follows:

1. Support consortia to learn from each other and outside experts;
2. Build relationships among and across consortia;
3. Strengthen implementation practices; and
4. Explore innovative issues to support next generation of GYO IL work.

The meeting was divided into a series of panel presentations, breakout discussions and networking opportunities. Topics ranged from effective academic performance tracking to developing teacher leadership skills. Each session was recorded, and the resulting information was compiled and synthesized into the summaries that follow.

The practices of individual consortia are included as examples. Readers are encouraged to seek out peers across the state and continue these conversations throughout the year, to build on the creativity, innovation and collaboration that are the hallmarks of GYO Illinois.

# Tracking & Supporting Academic Progress

*This rich collection of lessons learned is a compilation of three breakout group discussions. It reflects the experiences of consortia across the state, all of whom are seeking effective strategies for tracking and supporting academic progress. After one lively and revealing breakout session, one of the consortia members asked: Is anybody talking to the students to be clear about what works? Certainly, the vast majority of approaches outlined below have proven to be useful. But the process of refining and improving the GYO IL experience continues, and this collection of practices is part of that process.*

## **STRATEGIES USED TO TRACK CANDIDATES' ACADEMIC PROGRESS**

From peer counseling groups to newsletters, consortia regularly provide information and support to their cohorts. But some have struggled to create effective processes for *collecting* indicators of academic progress. A few reported relying on students to self-report, a strategy that did not always prove accurate or timely. In most cases, schools won't ordinarily release grades and other academic information to a third party. The following solutions and examples were suggested.

### ***Written Progress Forms***

Some consortia have instituted a written tracking form. As a third party, GYO IL consortia partners can access grades, but only if students sign waiver forms to release the information. Some have been able to make these arrangements with their community college partners, but not always at the university level. In most cases, the schools will provide a waiver form. This is the same form students sign so that parents can access academic information. The consortium's agreement of understanding with a candidate should include a requirement to sign the waiver. The university-based coordinator or academic advisor usually serves as the point-person to access and track grades and attendance.

### ***Cohort Coordinator***

One Quad Cities candidate outlined another approach: her cohort coordinator provided a form for the professor to complete at different times throughout the semester, to include information on progress, grades and attendance. The tracking was not perceived as punitive—quite the opposite. The coordinator would initiate additional supports based on the information from the professor, which the candidate welcomed. It also provided a degree of accountability, knowing that someone else would know if she were succeeding or struggling.

### ***Attendance***

All agreed: candidates must attend class in order to succeed. In one breakout session, attendance was ranked first as an indicator of progress. Some consortia have hard and fast rules regarding attendance, such as a lower letter grade after two missed classes. Others follow the lead of the classroom or college policies, including the possibility of an automatic drop after three missed classes.

### ***Peer group & regular meetings***

Family concerns and childcare were frequently cited as reasons for absences, incomplete school work and lack of study time. One cohort has managed to implement a childcare sharing system

for emergency situations, caring for each others' children as schedules allow. But this kind of mutual support grows out of strong relationships, which are usually dependent on a strong cohort structure that encourages (or even mandates) regular meetings and activities.

### ***Faculty Liaison***

A faculty liaison can serve as a connector between the higher education partner and the cohort, providing personalized support to candidates. The Northeastern Illinois University faculty liaison spoke of his efforts to build rapport with students; he wanted them to feel comfortable talking about academic challenges. Ideally, these candidates would come forward and speak to him when they weren't doing well, an essential step in accessing help. The faculty liaison also serves to personalize the academic institution, providing a sense of support and accessibility. If necessary, the faculty liaison can also assess if it is in the student's best interest to drop a class.

### **SUPPORTS PROVIDED TO HELP CANDIDATES MAINTAIN THEIR GPA**

Consortia recommended multiple strategies to help candidates maintain their GPAs, from formal "safety net" structures in the form of tutors and workshops to informal, ongoing support systems. Several contributing factors were cited, including the timing of interventions, accessibility of support services, information sharing, and the importance of relationships within cohorts and among consortia partners.

Some consortia tackle the issue right off the bat: in East St. Louis, the consortium hosts two introductory workshops covering the topics of non-traditional students returning to school, professional development and knowing how to test. All candidates must take these two courses before beginning academic courses. Peoria believes in teaching students to advocate for themselves, by talking directly to teachers and learning how to negotiate through the system. The program acknowledges that candidates are non-traditional learners and helps them understand how to negotiate college.

### ***Tutors***

Across Illinois, GYO IL consortia have engaged tutoring as an essential component of academic support. In some cases the tutors are provided by the higher education partner; in others, the consortia recruit a cadre of experienced professionals or enlist the aid of candidates further along in the program. Most consortia have a team of tutors, either on call or with regular office hours. Accessibility is a key factor: the tutors must be available and flexible enough for the students to reach, both in terms of time of day and location. Ultimately, though, it is the responsibility of the candidate to initiate contact with a tutor and make use of the tutoring services. Some sites encourage group tutoring, to continue to build the relationships within the peer group. Tutors can also be useful in assessing a candidate's ability to succeed in a particular class.

Some of Logan Square Neighborhood Association's *Nueva Generacion* (first cohort) candidates voluntarily choose to work as tutors for the *Maestros sin Fronteras* (second) cohort. They are paid for their work through the GYO IL grant at a rate of \$25 an hour. The tutors attend classes with the candidates, take notes and serve as teachers' aides – all of which provide them with teaching practice. Many have expressed a desire to continue to be tutors once they become teachers.

East St. Louis does not use peer tutors, but the community partner, NAACP, has assembled a pool of eighteen retired teachers, counselors and librarians who are paid by the consortium to provide tutoring services. If a candidate is struggling, s/he will automatically be assigned a tutor for one-to-one support. The consortia has instituted a rule stipulating that the only way to drop a class is to meet with the tutor first.

The Rockford consortium is recruiting tutors who are certified teachers. Tutoring will take place at the community organization partner's office, Hands that Help, as well as Rock Valley College. Candidates and tutors agree on the hours that they will meet, and sign an agreement. Candidates are then expected to follow through.

### *Mentors*

Mentors provide support, insight to the profession of teaching and guidance to candidates. In some cases, they are new teachers themselves, having finished their first or second year of teaching. East St. Louis NAACP has found retired teachers to be mentors. North Lawndale has recruited teachers from their neighborhood schools to mentor teacher candidates. Experienced mentors can encourage self-reflection, inform the vision of a candidate's career, and even inspire transformation. On a practical level, mentors can offer job-readiness advice, including issues such as professional personal presentation. Finally, mentors can remind candidates "why they're here" and how important it is for them to achieve academically.

### *Caring professors*

Ideally, the consortia relationships include a dedicated and supportive higher education partner. In many cases, the higher education partner identifies instructors most likely to provide both a quality educational experience and a supportive environment to GYO IL candidates. Some professors provide additional time for GYO IL candidates at the end of the class, for example. This is often dependent on significant buy-in from the heads of the universities; where it happens, these are academicians who understand and support non-traditional candidates.

Cohort coordinators need to get to know the professors, to ensure that as many candidates as possible are with instructors who are responsive. The Kenwood-Oakland/Little Village consortium makes an effort to get to know the faculty at Malcolm X College, and the coordinators try to match learning styles with candidates and professors. Peoria shares tips with students on which professors work best with GYO IL candidates. Consortia need to know which teachers are most helpful, which classes candidates will be most successful in, and who is teaching those classes. Ask around in the university and get recommendations about professors. Springfield encourages more experienced students to talk to novices and have frank conversations regarding their experience of professors and classes.

This is a two-way street: cohorts should also take the time to acclimate themselves to the culture and norms of the university. Provide an orientation at the university, and invite professors to attend. This summer, SIUE will host a session a campus on "what SIUE is about," even though the candidates may not spend a lot of time on campus.

### ***Social supports***

Consortia reported that candidate self confidence, positive self esteem and a positive circle of family or friends had a significant impact on academic success. Several made specific efforts to nurture and develop those attributes. Quad Cities provides a workshop on positive self esteem. Others talked about the need for a Life Skills component, to include setting goals, dealing with change and personal presentation. For some, this approach was woven into the academic program, matching a candidate's personal ability with academic challenges: the North Lawndale coordinator prepares individual plans for each student, figuring out a course trajectory based on what the candidate is ready to take on.

### ***Taking classes together***

While it is ideal for candidates to take the same classes as a full cohort, for some this isn't feasible. Either the candidates are on their own, taking what they need at the community college and then coalescing at the university level, or working their way through the community college as a cohort only to seemingly scatter at the four-year institution. Peoria encourages a group approach as much as possible, even if only through small groups of candidates and not the entire cohort. Chicago State University keeps all candidates together, offering four classes per semester with everyone taking at least two. Note that these are mostly night classes, scheduled to be most convenient to candidates continuing to work during the day. Eventually, the North Lawndale cohort will end up together at NEIU, but at Daley College they take whatever they need. SIUE will take the classes to the cohort as a whole once the candidates finish community college.

The benefits of maintaining a group approach are many: mutual support, group or peer tutoring and accountability for attendance. Quad Cities has twenty students in the program, all taking the same classes on Wednesdays and Saturdays. They email each other for help, study together, and generally "lean on" one another.

### ***Build a cohort support group***

Whether or not candidates are together for classes, a cohort support group can provide an important resource. This is not always the same as regular cohort meetings—though that can be a component of a cohort support group. Rockford formed a Peer Support Council, which is developing activities to build relationships among the cohort and full consortium. Peoria coordinates monthly candidate meetings with guest speakers and also provides individual support and counseling.

Sometimes it can be difficult to get candidates to talk on a personal level, especially if candidates feel intimidated—either by the relative experience of others in the room or by the newness of the process. One way around intimidation is for coordinators and candidates to know each other as people, to share their own stories and honestly address concerns. Cohort solidarity can also be challenging to build, especially if there is diversity. The Kenwood/Little Village consortium, the only consortium that combines an African American neighborhood and a Latino neighborhood, has had the cohort do awareness exercises around issues such as stereotypes.

Sometimes the “support group” is spontaneous, based on location and convenience. In Springfield, a few of the teacher candidates worked at the Urban League, so they met there too. The amount of contact and communication was phenomenal, they reported. They were able to check in regularly, and the web of relationships resulted in significant support and partnership.

### ***Recognition & Awards***

Consortia encouraged the celebration of successful candidates and their accomplishments. Some do this through trips and events, others through awards and public recognition. East St. Louis hosts an awards ceremony with a press release to local paper. Springfield planned a trip in collaboration with the Urban League, their community organization partner. Candidates went to a celebratory performance (a step show and battle of bands) as an award for those doing well. It also served as a good bonding activity for cohort. Expenses were covered by the grant – building relationships and celebrating success is an important component of GYO IL. Consortia noted other activities as rewards, including tickets to special events or group theater outings.

Some were concerned that such celebrations and activities might feel like punishment for struggling students who feel excluded. One recommendation was to let everyone know in advance that there will be awards and what the award will be. By announcing early on, everyone knows what to expect, and it creates an added incentive to strive for success. Another suggested including awards for “most improved” and other categories that acknowledge and reward effort.

### **RETENTION, PROBATION & COUNSELING STUDENTS OUT**

Sometimes no matter how much support is provided, a candidate may be failing academically. Consortia are wrestling with the questions: At what point do we draw the line? Where is the line? There is a sense of responsibility, of being accountable to the state and other consortia for appropriate and constructive allocation of tuition funds. Each consortium should have mechanisms for identifying candidates at risk of failure, assessing each situation with the individual involved, creating a personalized plan of action that includes accountability and expectations for future performance and, if all else fails, a probationary period policy and a process for counseling students out. Interventions can come too late; there is a point after which a low GPA becomes practically insurmountable.

One approach is to be clear about expectations for staying *in* the program. Chicago State University has the following requirements: the candidates must be in contact with the coordinator, they must finish all financial aid paperwork and they must complete at least some of the classes they take in any given semester. If these criteria aren’t met, they are likely to be counseled out—and they know this up-front.

Usually the university-based cohort coordinator or tutor will be the first to see a potential problem, and that person can alert the cohort coordinator and any other necessary personnel. Immediate counseling should be utilized to assess the problem and identify appropriate short-term solutions, such as note-taking or study skills improvement, dropping the class or, if necessary, taking time off to deal with personal or family concerns. Close tracking of individual candidates can reveal stumbling blocks early on, and allow time for assessment and intervention.

Some consortia see this as part of the developmental process for the non-traditional student, and catching issues while they are still manageable preserves opportunities for future success.

That said, consortia are definitely facing the issue of dropping students. And many are setting contracts for a probationary period. Specific levels of performance, such as perfect attendance or a particular grade, are required in these contracts for a candidate to be allowed to continue. North Lawndale is concerned about the number of administrative withdrawals, since GYO IL still has to pay for the class. If a candidate has an administrative withdrawal (teacher withdrew them for lack of attendance), they are automatically on probation. But only the North Lawndale Steering Committee, comprised of all partners, can make a final determination about whether a candidate on probation should remain in the program.

Some identified a tension between the selection process, which prioritizes candidates with leadership skills and community connections, and the process of constructively managing a failure situation. These are non-traditional candidates, chosen based in large part on their potential and enthusiasm, and experience has shown that significant support and nurturing can result in a positive outcome. One consortium member voiced her frustration this way: ‘How much do we support, support, support? We’re wrestling with expectations, we want to be helpful. But when do the candidates become accountable?’ Others echoed this challenge, wondering if the consortium should continue paying for classes if a candidate isn’t maintaining a GPA of a certain level. At what point does the consortium step in and tell the candidate what they need to do, versus supporting them in what they want to do?

One higher education partner cautioned against mimicking or repeating the system many of these non-traditional candidates have already experienced. In many cases, the candidates themselves would be the first to counsel themselves out, because they never believed they could do it anyway. Consortia need to look at each candidate on an individual basis and provide options. This is not a program for zero tolerance; struggling does not mean they can’t succeed. In addition to academic learning, the GYO IL experience is teaching candidates to learn how to be resilient, and to learn how to navigate the world of higher education.

On a practical level, many consortia have instituted guidelines regarding failing or dropped classes. At Governors State University, the college-based coordinator can put a hold on a student, so that a candidate can’t drop a course until they see their advisor. At the Rockford consortium, if a candidate drops a class and has to take it over, the candidate has to pay for it. East St. Louis follows the general guidelines set in place by SIUE, but sits down with the candidate to review the university’s plan of action and decide which classes that student would need in order to get back on track. Retention is aided by grouping the candidates together, and the consortium partners participate in deciding which classes will be presented each semester.

### **STRATEGIES TO HELP CANDIDATES PREPARE FOR THE BASIC SKILLS TEST**

All students of education are required to take a number of tests in the process of becoming a teacher. Various content tests are required prior to student teaching, an assessment of professional teaching is one of the last tests before certification, and bilingual and special

education certifications require additional testing. But the Basic Skills Test must be taken—and passed—before a candidate can enter a College of Education.

Most consortia offer some kind of tutoring, study groups, workshops or other supports to candidates in preparation for the Basic Skills test. This has proven to be a necessity; in one cohort only three out of fourteen candidates passed the test without preparation. There is a tutorial site that some consortia use for individual, candidate-driven assessment and preparation ([www.basicskillsprep.org](http://www.basicskillsprep.org)) while others stress a cohort-based approach. Workshops can last anywhere from six to nine weeks long, meeting once or twice a week. While these show promise, attendance is always an issue. Students are now required to attend in one consortium, as ‘strongly suggested’ resulted in missed sessions. Attendance at workshops, they found, correlates to passing the test.

Several test preparation workshops use the *ICTS Basic Skills 096: Teacher Certification Exam (Illinois)* guidebook by Sharon Wynne. The guide includes 18 competencies/skills found on the ICTS Basic Skills test and 136 sample-test questions. It is also aligned specifically to standards prescribed by the Illinois Department of Education, and covers the sub-areas of Reading Comprehension, Language Arts and Mathematics. [Available through Barnes & Noble, \$33.95 online.] Apparently there is also a guidebook offered by the state, which one site found to be more confusing than useful.

The Rockford consortium looked to their community college for assistance, but they didn’t have anything to help prepare candidates. So the consortium asked a professor who is an ACT test-prep coach to put together a course. The professor worked with the cohort, running practice tests and going through the math and English sections. He highlighted trick questions and provided insights on *how* to take the test. The morning of the actual test, the consortium rented a van for the cohort and they all traveled together. A candidate reported that the process made an otherwise nerve-wracking experience much more manageable.

Other consortia agreed that practice tests should be conducted just like the real tests, to put the cohort in the same situation. And the candidates do need test-taking skills as well, not just content. Suggestions include reminding the candidates that they cannot take a cell phone or an ipod into any test. And dispel persistent myths; for example, ISBE does not keep a list of how many times a student takes the test, nor will that information be made available to principals.

Finally, several consortia pointed out that ESL candidates or those who have specific learning disabilities can qualify for additional test-taking time. There is a process for this, and an official letter from the certification office or university dean is required. Northeastern Illinois University and Illinois State University have letter templates available. Both highly recommended taking this extra step, as the time extension has made a difference for several of their candidates.

# Building Cohort Relationships & Resources

*Cohort coordinators play a key role in fostering cohort cohesiveness. Candidates may be eager to meet and learn from one another, but the tone and expectations for meetings are shaped by the coordinators. In addition to cohorts taking classes together whenever possible and forming peer study groups, candidates benefit from participatory cohort meetings and other supportive services.*

## COHORT MEETINGS

### *Attendance & Participation*

While few dispute the value of cohort meetings, there was some difference of opinion on how to ensure attendance. Some consortia simply made it mandatory, one even going so far as to include attendance in a contract. Others agreed that regular absences were an issue, but weren't ready to make it mandatory. One cohort used "warning letters" and threatened probation after repeat absences. But a community organization partner suggested that perhaps the issue wasn't how to *make* candidates attend meetings, but how to make the meeting so candidates *want* to attend. She suggested that a pattern of absences might be a symptom of a larger problem, either irrelevant or uninteresting meetings or significant personal distractions. Either way, the proposed solution was a series of one-to-one meetings with candidates to ascertain the true reasons for the absences, and a willingness to make adjustments based on the feedback.

One administrator, in an effort to be efficient, chose to run the meetings and disseminate information—but a candidate in her cohort was beginning to understand that the purpose of the meetings was for the students to get to know and support one another. The candidate stated that more cohort members would come to the meetings if they were more social and interactive. Other participants supported the candidate, suggesting that cohort meetings were an ideal place for candidates to voice their opinions in a safe and welcoming environment. Ideally, attendance at cohort meetings should lead to deeper relationships and mutual support.

### *Topics & Activities*

While many consortia continue to experiment with formats and agendas, many have found a combination of presentations and discussion to be useful. GYO IL business can be included, but shouldn't be the focus of every meeting. Candidates suggested that they should have more ownership of the cohort and meetings, as means of building student leadership. On the other hand, an administrator thought it should be organized so that everyone had a turn at leadership. A participatory approach is recommended.

### *Specific suggestions included:*

- ✓ Start with an ice breaker to help people learn about each other
- ✓ Monthly meetings with guest speakers
- ✓ Sponsor a group outing
- ✓ Ask students about their progress
- ✓ Build mentorships and tutoring programs with input of candidates
- ✓ Host a family fun night
- ✓ Have students teach their peers what they learned in the last four weeks
- ✓ Elect a peer council
- ✓ Organize a student support group around particular topics or subjects

- ✓ Get members to take ownership of the meetings, design topics
- ✓ Design activities that require team work

For example, Peoria invited the superintendent of schools and human resource director to talk to cohort, and reported that it was welcoming in tone and the candidates found it very motivational. The Rockford cohort planned to do a family reading night or family math night with door prizes. Alton is thinking about incorporating social justice into cohort meetings; the district has been working for two years on social justice and wants to involve the cohorts.

### ***Communication & Relationships***

Many recommended using the cohort meetings as a means for building relationships and facilitating open communication. Create an open, supportive environment conducive to candidates' sharing experiences, ideas and challenges. Hold small group sessions, or do a round of one-to-one conversations. Incorporate social activities so candidates get to know one other as individuals, with families and personal struggles. Share common experiences and common concerns, as well as strategies and solutions for managing those concerns.

Additional suggestions included:

- ✓ Incorporate personal learning examples
- ✓ Include team building activities: encourage the cohort to be a team
- ✓ Talking about ideas and experiences, giving progress reports and updates
- ✓ Host "meet your professor" meetings so professors can get to know candidates
- ✓ Discuss successful strategies (studying, research, time management)
- ✓ Small group discussions on specific topics
- ✓ Have the coordinator do home visits
- ✓ Acknowledge your cohort's accomplishments with certificates or other prizes

### ***Contact between Meetings***

Consortia also shared ideas for maintaining and building the cohort connection between meetings. Some have created newsletters, written by students. Others use email with a combination of quick catch-up updates and tips for success. One created a blog and another a listserv; both are open and available to candidates as a means of staying connected and seeking/providing support.

## **ADDITIONAL RESOURCES**

### ***Providing supportive services***

Consortia partners contribute resources and support services well beyond the GYO IL state funding. Community organizations provide mentoring and social supports, while serving as liaisons between the university and students. Partners have created workshops and courses to prepare candidates for the Basic Skills test. In Chicago, the school district is holding resume writing workshops for candidates. The Alton consortium organizes Monday Meetings where candidates can meet with support personnel, a guidance counselor, a representative from the community college or Greenville College. The Alton school district partner provides two retired teachers as personal mentors for the candidates. The Chicago Lawn consortium featured the first

candidate to pass the Basic Skills test as a guest speaker, and NEIU, the higher education partner, regularly provides helpful information on education topics.

Laptops were cited as a useful resource that only some of the consortia have been able to provide. In Peoria, the Urban League and Early Childhood education center provide a technology lab and tech support. Greenville College (Alton) was able to secure laptops for their candidates. Chicago received a grant from the City for computers, but the funds have not yet come through.

Other resources that consortia are trying to provide include expanded childcare, more tutors and additional meetings and support activities. Some expressed regret at not being able to provide all of the resources candidates need; even sites that promised childcare are struggling to accommodate the needs of parents with infants or very young children. Quad Cities reported that even though they pay for childcare, not all candidates realize that childcare is available or take advantage of the program.

#### **ADDENDUM: Consortium Meetings**

More than once, consortia partners suggested a parallel dynamic between productive cohort meetings and productive consortium meetings. The consortium should also prioritize communication and relationships through monthly (or more frequent) meetings and regular phone/email contacts. They suggested strategies such as:

- Prepare and distribute a roster of all partners and their contact information,
- Get to know one another by name and understand each other's role and function,
- Foster the equality of each consortium partner; each consortium member can support the activities of the other partners,
- Have a process for joint decision-making and joint problem solving,
- Discuss the topics that candidates put forward,
- Make sure consortium partners meet the candidates and take the time to learn each other stories in an informal setting, and
- Organize meetings with both cohort members and consortium partners.

# Financial Issues & Forgivable Loans

*Linda Jamali and Debra Stephens (Illinois State Board of Education) joined Steve Andrews (GYO IL) to discuss financial issues, including forgivable loans, candidate financial tracking, budgeting and more.*

The Illinois State Board of Education provides funding for GYO IL from a state appropriation. As a division of state government, ISBE is ruled by state statute and consortia are responsible for following those statutes. The ISBE website [www.isbe.net](http://www.isbe.net) and Debra Stephens [dstephen@isbe.net](mailto:dstephen@isbe.net) are both available with information regarding grant rules. Steve Andrews, GYO IL Resource Coordinator, also provides support and facilitates the sharing of financial tracking tools. Linda, Debra, and Steve emphasized that while the rules are many and the details can be complicated, ISBE and GYO IL are collaborative partners. The rules are not intended to be punitive, and assistance is available upon request.

The following topics have proven to be the most challenging. While the information below summarizes the discussion that took place, many of these issues will be further addressed and clarified by ISBE and/or GYO IL in future documents and conversations.

## **Financial Tracking & Forgivable Loans**

At this point, ISBE does not have a standardized tracking or data collection template. Each consortium must develop a process for recording transactions. While many appreciate this flexibility, it gave rise to many questions and concerns. Higher education partners are generally not responsible for tracking GYO IL dollars, and while some bursars are highly responsive and cooperate regularly with consortia partners, each consortium must maintain detailed records for each student's financial aid and forgivable loans. In general, it is the fiscal agent for the consortium that is responsible for this data.

GYO IL recommends that the consortium fiscal agent maintain the fullest detail possible of every transaction that has anything to do with the forgivable loan, including components of the bursar's bill and the book voucher. Note that when there are two or more higher education institutions, the fiscal agent must consolidate this information. Once ISBE announces a standardized process for receiving loan information, consortia can make sure that the data they are keeping is compatible. Until then, they should keep comprehensive and clear records of every transaction.

Some consortia have created contracts that candidates are obligated to sign. The contracts specify how the GYO IL forgivable loans (which cover tuition, fees and books) work, how Pell or other grants funds will be applied and the expectation that all students will apply for financial aid. Contracts may also include a waiver allowing the consortia to directly access student information such as grades and financial aid directly from the higher education partner. Most consortia maintain individual files for each candidate, tracking all financial transactions.

For example, the South Suburban consortium developed a spreadsheet tracking process. It provides a level of transparency and accountability: students know what they are receiving and

what is expected of them. The spreadsheets track each student, itemizing what was paid from forgivable loans, travel and childcare. Students review and sign their own spreadsheet annually; the consortium maintains a file folder for each student. The Springfield consortium requires each candidate to sign a loan agreement. ISBE does not require signatures—this is strictly for the bookkeeping purposes of the individual consortium. But ISBE does recommend having an attorney look over any binding or contractual forms requiring a student signature.

### **Pell Grants**

All grant aid, such as a Pell Grant, must be applied toward the tuition bill *before* the forgivable loan is calculated. Candidates are not to receive Pell Grant “refunds” after GYO IL funds are applied toward tuition. Unfortunately, because of timing, this has become a confusing issue for some consortia. If Pell or other grants are processed after tuition is charged, there must be a mechanism in place for those funds to be credited to GYO IL. This can be tricky, since the grant is in the candidate’s name, and unless detailed tracking information is made available by the financial aid office of the higher education partner, consortia may not even be aware of the award.

At this time, ISBE does not have a specific rule requiring projects to ensure that the forgivable loan fund is the “first creditor” when grant dollars are received for a specific academic term. Some fiscal agents have developed effective methods for making this happen, including a close, ongoing relationship with higher education partner’s comptroller, finance and/or bursar’s office as well as with each candidate. Those needing assistance on this issue can contact Steve Andrews, Resource Coordinator for GYO IL, [atmsteve@rcn.com](mailto:atmsteve@rcn.com).

Note: there are no rules regarding other loans that candidates are entitled to apply for as students. If a candidate qualifies for and takes out a loan in his/her own name, to cover living or other expenses, then those loans are the sole responsibility of the student. Only *grant* funds must be applied toward tuition, fees and books.

### **Developmental Classes**

A developmental class is a course which is encouraged as a prerequisite to required courses, but does not provide credit toward graduation. The cost of developmental classes is covered directly under the GYO IL grant. These costs are not included in forgivable loans, and the candidates do not have any financial responsibility.

### **Calendar and Year-end Transitions**

GYO IL dollars are allocated annually in the state budget. Any delays or last-minute changes can impact both the amount and timing of the actual payout, even though there are guidelines for fiscal years and annual budgeting. Debra Stephens encouraged consortia fiscal agents to have accounts settled by end of grant year, as they will not receive the next year’s money until they return unspent funds from the previous year. She explained that ISBE vouchers out money as fast as possible, but those vouchers are regularly delayed in the comptroller’s office (currently 77 days).

ISBE and GYO IL will be providing detailed year-end guidelines directly to consortia fiscal agents, clarifying deadlines for spending annual grants and using FY08 funds for fall tuition.

Funds for transportation and childcare are currently delayed, and community organizations are encouraged to “float” the funds if they are able. ISBE will amend budgets to ensure retroactive coverage.

### **Other budgeting issues**

- **Line-item changes:** Consortia can transfer line item dollars within function numbers if the budget total remains the same, but only if the item is less than 20% of the total or \$1000, whichever is greater. If a consortium needs to move dollars from one function to another, or the amount is greater than \$1000, they should send Debra Stephens (ISBE) a budget amendment.
- **Laptop computers:** Purchases are considered equipment only if they cost \$500 or more. If an item is equal to or less than \$499, it is considered supplies. Consortia were advised, however, to be careful when purchasing very low cost laptops, as the savings may come at the expense of heavier laptops.
- **Growing the cohort:** Candidates can be added only if additional funds are secured. Consortia are encouraged to develop financial plans for 5 – 7 – 10 years into the future, anticipating growth. ISBE is committed to working with GYOI to increase the amount of funding available.

### **Student Withdrawal and Dropout Requirements**

Consortia must notify ISBE when a student has been out for two semesters. If a student is out for two semesters or more, the forgivable loan repayment process begins. However, if a student is counseled out because of a low GPA, then they do not have to repay their loan. The rules change if a student violates any law or has an infraction with the university.

### **Background Checks**

GYO IL and ISBE do not have rules regarding background checks for candidates. Student teaching placements, practicum programs, school districts and financial aid may have regulations regarding background checks. Conducting independent background checks is at the discretion of the consortium.

### **Book Vouchers**

Books expenses are a component of the forgivable loan and at this time there is no standardized protocol for recording or disbursing these funds. Fiscal agents are working primarily with authorized bookstores, a process that presents a problem when a professor instructs students to purchase books from Amazon or other sources. Consortia are encouraged to problem-solve in these situations, and may themselves order books directly from Amazon or other sources.

### **Equity**

Childcare is an important provision of GYO IL, but some students need those resources more than others. One participant asked if there were any guidelines to provide “equal resources” to the students who do not have children. There are not. Indeed, these funds should go to those in need, based on that need – it is not about each student receiving exactly the same dollar amount.

# Teacher Candidates: A View from the Cohort

*Two sessions featured current GYO IL teacher candidates, sharing their first-hand experiences of the program. One focused on a single cohort (Maestros Sin Fronteras); the other included candid reflections from four candidates across the state at different stages in the process.*

*Maestros sin Fronteras* is the second cohort of the Logan Square Neighborhood Association/Chicago State University consortium. The candidates emphasized that partnership as key to their experience; coordinators from both institutions provide personal contact and significant support. The candidates appreciated the fact that Chicago State University professors came to their neighborhood school to offer classes. As parents and community members, these candidates began their interactions with local schools through LSNA, serving as Parent Mentors, Tutors, and Literacy Ambassadors. Access and flexibility were noted as important ingredients to their positive experience and success in the GYO IL program.



The cohort itself is a highly cherished component of the program. Through the process of taking classes and studying together, the candidates have developed a peer support network and deep appreciation for one another. Outside of classes, they have elected a Student Committee, called on their advisors regularly and met frequently at a local coffee shop.

Academic support comes in several forms: peer tutors (from *Nueva Generaciòn*, the first GYO cohort) in the classroom who take notes; attendance tracking, with notes that are made available for missed classes; caring teachers who go out of their way to bring the classroom to the students and make themselves available outside of class; and English Language support. There is always somewhere to turn for help, reported one candidate.

Candidates valued the opportunities for leadership development, primarily through their involvement with the education organizer at LSNA. They attended local events and Illinois State Board of Education meetings in downtown Chicago. In addition, many candidates are also leaders in other LSNA issue areas, from health care to immigration. Both LSNA and CSU provided exposure to the “wide world of education” through conferences and seminars.



When LSNA lost funding for summer activities, the cohort developed an educational summer camp program for neighborhood children. Adventure Camp featured a thematic unit on

community, with math, science, art and field trip components. It provided teaching practice for the candidates, and the young participants loved it. It's likely they'll do it again next year.



*Maestros sin Fronteras* candidates also spoke to the challenges faced by both the cohort and the consortium. Due to limited funding, over a dozen potential candidates are on a waiting list. The candidates do not have laptops and have to rent computers for Power Point assignments. They are trying to secure computer access at the local schools, but so far the principals have not been receptive. The current cohort faces an uncertain course load, as they are not sure if summer classes will be available this

year. At times it can be difficult to find the right professors. Candidates occasionally struggle with probationary periods. Personal issues threaten their time and attention. In addition, Logan Square neighborhood schools face declining enrollment due to gentrification, which brings the looming threat of school closures.

The Logan Square/CSU consortium recognized that the challenges faced by teacher candidates--especially personal hurdles such as divorce, family illness or death, or the loss of job--threatened the candidates' ability to succeed. So the consortium sought out and contracted the services of a professional social worker to provide appropriate supports. The addition of these services has had a profoundly positive impact on the candidates, allowing them to successfully stay in the program and create solutions in other areas of their lives.

### **IN THEIR OWN WORDS**

*As adult learners with families of their own, rich life experiences and a commitment to their communities, GYO candidates from across Illinois see this program as much more than a career opportunity. They report that it has had a profound impact on their perceptions of themselves, their relationships with others and their capacity to participate in improving their communities.*

**Rockford: Allynthia Benton-White**

**West Central Illinois: Juanita Cervantes**

**North Lawndale: Anita Sanders**

**Logan Square: Danny Silva**

**Facilitator: Imelda Salazar, Southwest Organizing Project**

#### **> *What challenges have you encountered in this program?***

I have two daughters and four grandchildren who live with me. It's a challenge to find time to do homework, and spend time with grandchildren. It's been hard. But I can reach out to other people—other cohort members guided me, helped me get a schedule going. Talk to somebody. There's always someone there to help! ~Juanita

I'll be honest and say: life. Family, husbands, wives, children, divorces. In the middle of my seven years of study, I went through a divorce. It was hard, especially difficult with children. I had four classes, a 4.0 GPA, and I quit. But then I got myself together and said this isn't my life. I need a future so I can take care of myself and my children. The challenges were incredible, but I made the decision to come back. Best decision I've ever made in my life. On the weekends I can't be with my kids because I need to do my homework. If this is what you really want, this is something you have to do. Thank God for my cohort and their support—they call me all the time, offering words of encouragement. ~ Daniel

It's life, it's a balancing act: life, school, and work. It depends on where priorities are in life, where your focus is. If you want it bad enough, you'll do it! ~Allynthia

I'm the type of person who's always taking care of everyone else. The challenge for me was learning to say no. I need to put myself first. School takes a lot of time. I took a full load of classes. I didn't have time to spend with my kids because I had papers due. Thanksgiving weekend, I had four papers due, so I took only one hour to have Thanksgiving dinner. Family, friends didn't understand. Even my kids said, 'we're sick of hearing about school.' ~Anita

➤ ***What would be an advantage of being an adult student?***

We're older, it's harder to remember, and the brain is a little different. I had to get back in the habit of writing papers, studying for tests, juggling, planning time. The advantage is to see where I'm going to be in next few years. My daughter, 11 years old, is struggling in reading and I was able to tutor her. She said, 'if you're on honor roll, I know that can do this.' I was at Motorola, I made good money, school wasn't important to me then--but now that I'm older, more mature, I can take the time to work on this. Grades matter to me now. ~Anita

I wonder sometimes, are we doing it the "right" way? I was an overachiever in high school. Life happens. I had kids, got married. I thought, I don't know if I can go back right now and do this. I don't have that much time. But my kids are watching me. They say: think about me mom when you go to take a test. I've got to do this for my kids. ~Allynthia

I am an adult, and I take things more seriously. As an adult, I took my education a lot more seriously than I ever thought I would. The challenges of returning, writing a paper! First class: write a ten-page paper. What?! It took me hours to figure out how to write two or three sentences. The disadvantage is that I have a lot of responsibility in my life: school, kids, life, divorce, death, funeral, you name it. We all have things to worry about, and it could hold you back. But in the end we have to put our priorities straight. ~Daniel

Because you are older, you realize that you've been given another chance, and you have to take it now. I was given an opportunity to do this. If I want to go someplace, my daughters will ask, Mom, did you get your homework done? It's hitting me now: I did something right, I raised them right. They've been a great support—so has my husband. ~Juanita

➤ ***How have you changed?***

I've been a teacher's aide for 10 years, I've seen teachers that teach, and they're good. But I want to give those children the chance that they need. It's hard to be a teacher and I see that, but I think I can do better sometimes. I think I can do it. ~Juanita

I'm the kind of person who thought, I can do this on my own, I don't need to get with a study group. But being a part of a cohort, you are going through the same things, have the same challenges. Now I will call upperclassman and ask life questions: how are you managing your time on the weekends, balancing work, studying, classes, etc. Family and school responsibilities are overwhelming. For me, it was changing as far as asking for help because that was a big, big issue. ~Allynthia

I've worked at Chicago Public Schools in different capacities. Started working as a janitor, even washed dishes in the kitchen. I served as a school assistant, in special education, bi-lingual classes. To see myself in the position I am--where I'm going to have my own classroom--definitely has been a life-changing experience. My kids have seen me grow. They see me come home tired. They see me motivated. They ask me if I've done my homework. Before I was not motivated, now I'm motivated and I'm motivating my kids. ~Daniel

This program made me focus on what I wanted to do. I saw that I had abilities like teachers. I had to observe a classroom and I just saw myself in the teacher's shoes. The classroom was full of twenty-two African American students, all from poverty. I just have a concern for these students. Actually getting into the program has put me on the right path, where I always wanted to be. ~Anita

➤ ***Should cohort meetings be mandatory? What is their value?***

I enjoyed the meetings. I'd have more meetings around midterms and finals. That's when students want to drop class--have more meetings for support, encouragement. Other students can call my cell phone at home; I get phone calls all the time, always at mid-term and finals. ~Anita

Set a minimum that you can only miss two to three times per year. Make phone calls to remind students. Have meetings once a month, a newsletter, phone calls, to remind students. They all show up, we have special guest speakers. ~Allynthia

Guest speakers are great, they talk to us, give us encouragement. But sometimes meetings are too long. ~Juanita

Meetings help to provide support and build relationships. We now call each other all the time. The support is always there. Our cohort helps us to go on, be successful. It's really a family-type situation. Just like a family, we get into fights. And we come back together, sit, and talk it out. It's a big part of the success. ~Daniel

The advisor from the university comes to our meetings and has been very useful, helpful. I ask students on one-on-one basis if the meetings are working for them, and attendance has been

great. We meet on Fridays, 6-8 p.m., which works best for cohort. ~Imelda Salazar, SWOP Cohort Coordinator

➤ *If you were to do a 5-minute presentation to potential candidates, what would you say?*

You would have to be real, tell what is expected of them, the challenges they may face. Make sure to tell it like it is. Express personal experiences. This is what you can expect. How you might deal with wanting to give up. At one time we've all been in the classroom, we've experienced the need, and we know our community better than anybody else. Let's give our kids what they deserve and need. ~Daniel

# Characteristics of Well-Functioning Consortia

*Four Chicago-based consortia partners share their experiences and recommendations on creating a well-functioning consortium.*

**How do we build consortium relationships?**

**How do we practice what we preach?**

**If we engaged successfully in this project, what would it look like?**

**What would a well-functioning consortia look like?**

When I was a teacher, I wouldn't ask a student to do something I hadn't already done. Our immediate project is fostering teacher leaders. The larger project is changing the system for high-need schools, so that all kids can receive a high quality education.

We can't be talking around, over or under each other. Go back to your consortia and ask yourselves: are we really working on this?

I also was the teacher that other teachers didn't like that much because I was doing house visits, going to *quinceaneras*. **You can't teach kids you don't know, can't reach parents you don't understand.** Home-school community connections help us work together to achieve our goals. Next item on the list is **communication**. I need to be able to talk with other consortia members. **How do we speak, listen, read, write about each other?** We use verbal and nonverbal **communication** as we work with each other and with our candidates. What attracted me most about GYO IL was the ability to work with community based organizations, and to work with school districts.

*Maureen Gillette, Dean, College of Education, Northeastern Illinois University*

Our first goal is quality teachers in the schools with great skills and competencies-- leadership skills in terms of relationship building so teachers can be shapers of change. **We recognize the best way for us to embody what we're trying to develop in the students is to model it ourselves.**

We heard from Charles Payne last year when we talked about effective teaching in high-need schools. His points correlated to effective work in organizing. In both cases collaboration, connection is at the root.

1. We need a strong supportive environment for students; in organizing we call it **trust**;
2. High level of expectation and demand; for organizers, that's **accountability**
3. Teachers need excellent diagnostic skills; organizers call it power analysis, or **understanding power dynamics**.

We may use different words--and come at this from different perspectives--but ultimately our disciplines are aligned, and we are working toward the same objectives.

*Jeff Bartow, Executive Director, Southwest Organizing Project*

Part of what's exciting about Grow Your Own is that **we can challenge each other**. I'm the cohort member that people don't like because I need to make sure we're asking the questions to get us where we need to go. I've been on sabbatical this semester. I've had a lot of time to think about collaboration, how we develop respect among students. I've been thinking about

**trust** on two levels: **organizational and personal**. Years ago we only knew each other as organizations--we didn't know each other personally.

When we each thought about what schools should look like, had a **shared vision**, we agreed on what schools needed. The community based organization had clear vision of what they wanted for their community. How do we work **together** is the challenge. How do we recognize each other's expertise? We worked with the Logan Square Neighborhood Association and they looked for us to create an academic path, they never questioned our expertise, we never questioned theirs.

LSNA wanted monthly meetings. For us, for teachers, we said it was too late to wait two or three weeks, we needed to address a problem when it occurred. We didn't agree, but we **sat down and talked to each other with respect**. We built a system where we had to have an academic coordinator and a cohort coordinator who worked together very closely. If either saw that something wasn't quite right, academic or personal, they would call the other to sit down and work on it. We worked with students to develop their own **system of support**. If a student was having a problem, we needed to know the best way to reach them. We were all looking at candidates, but from different perspectives. And in the process, we **built the relationship** between CSU and LSNA.

We have to have everyone working toward the same goal. As we're looking ahead, I would like to challenge us to think and examine what these components mean.

**What does it mean to have a shared vision?**

**Can we respect each other's expertise?**

Every time we talk about the LSNA cohort, I say it's the LSNA/CSU cohort, because if I always said the CSU cohort, you wouldn't like it either. **We need to challenge each other, learn from conflict**--can we sit at the table and learn from each other? And finally, how do we **model this collaboration to our participants?**

*Maria Teresa Garretton, Bilingual Ed Coordinator, Chicago State University*

In order to restructure urban/high-need schools, we need transparency. We cannot hold back, we must share. **Share our experiences**, learn from one another, and seek help when we need it.

- **Documentation** of everything we do: if we're trying to model this experiment, this risk that involves many committed people, we must document it so we can model it. Document as well as possible the expectations of candidates, the experiences good and bad—it's the only way to develop a good model. **We must have honest conversations**, but also with common sense.
- **Commitment** entails **respect and utmost professionalism** across all partners; commitment may require **accepting differences** in cultures or departments. Some people work in rough neighborhoods. Some people work in rough departments. We have to be sensitive to those things. *Rough politics*.
- **Fairness and equity** also fall under commitment: being true to the concepts of fairness and equity. This includes the distribution of resources: money, technical assistance, time, attitude.
- **Embracing partnership** and all of its components. Requires recognition that we can succeed only if we **embrace all partners**. If we perceive one to be a handicap, that only gets in the way. Need to take time to appreciate what everyone brings to the table. There is

a risk, this is an experiment, a lot of reputations are on the line – we must give it all we’ve got so we can succeed.

Maureen talked about CBO’s ducking, skirting, even avoiding the challenge of public education. I was going in that direction, only six or seven years ago. Our neighborhood had been promised a high school, and we were trying to figure out how to turn up heat to get the high school built. We were being given the runaround, and we had to engage in a dramatic fight. Ultimately, we had a nineteen day hunger strike. We were forced to come to terms with the question: why had we resorted to such a drastic measure? It forced us to consider: what do we want? Is victory a building that we’ll turn over to CPS to hire teachers and principals, while we go to foundations to ask for more money to do more stuff in neighborhood? That journey brought home a lot of issues.

**Are we really fighting for greater guarantees that our children will be successful for the rest of their lives?**

**Don’t we really want to do something that says poor communities are capable of excellence?**

That was a tremendous learning process that has lasted several years, and Grow Your Own is part of this story. We can’t duck education issues. We must provide opportunities for children and their families. We can’t reduce violence unless we deal with education. We can’t reduce the drop-out rate, which in my community is around 50%, that’s catastrophic. Unless we deal with education, we won’t get through these other issues. Education will be our lead issue moving forward. **Creating successful schools and helping to create excellent teachers is critical.** Keeping schools open after schools hours is critical. Tutoring, recreation, fine arts—all critical.

Part of what we’ve learned is that our organization can’t do it alone. **The only the chance we have is through partnerships with other nonprofits, churches, everyone who cares about community.** This requires putting the ego on the shelf and really listening. Knowing what kind of baggage we bring to table. If we don’t fully embrace and respect all of the partners here, we won’t be successful. We’ve got to **respect universities, colleges, everyone involved** in this. This is a bold experiment that we can’t afford to fail. **We can’t do it alone.**

*Jesus Garcia, Executive Director, Little Village Community Development Corp*

# Exploring the Disciplines of Organizing & Teaching: Teachers as Leaders

*Most GYO IL candidates are already involved in leadership positions in the community, from serving as Sunday school teachers to involvement with local community organizations. They are life long learners, always growing and developing. They are mature and bring life experiences that can be further developed as leadership skills. GYO IL teachers can also be leaders in their own classrooms, with their peers, and with parents and community members.*

Grow Your Own is rooted in community organizing, where the people most affected by an issue create strategies to address that issue. They research the issue and reach out to their community and key partners outside the community to create viable solutions. The kinds of teachers GYO IL wants to develop are teachers who will be good leaders. And the process to develop good teachers also develops good leaders. One breakout session began by listing the attributes of good teachers and good leaders:

What makes a good teacher?	What is a good leader?
<p><b>Characteristics:</b> Good motivators, highly organized, engaging, fair, good communication skills, accomplished, knowledgeable of best practices, active learner themselves. Must be passionate about teaching. Focused on student learning. Content specialist.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Motivator:</b> utilize strategies that motivate students, get them to want to learn.</li> <li>➤ <b>Organized:</b> a lot going on at once, need to stay on top of things, make sure students are learning</li> <li>➤ <b>Engaging:</b> pull students into educational process, involved in their learning.</li> <li>➤ <b>Fair:</b> how you relate to students, fair in what you do and what you say</li> <li>➤ <b>Good communication skills:</b> can relay information, translate what you know</li> <li>➤ <b>Accomplished:</b> master in their field, someone students can learn from</li> <li>➤ <b>Knowledgeable about best practices:</b> goes along with being an active learner, participating in on-going educational endeavors so that skills are honed everyday</li> <li>➤ <b>Passionate:</b> no matter what area, in order to be successful, will be passionate; learn everything possible can about a particular subject</li> <li>➤ <b>Content Specialist:</b> knowing the content they are teaching, knowing how to teach it</li> <li>➤ <b>Good leader:</b> Meet people where they're at, to get them where they need to go</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➤ <b>Visionary:</b> someone who has a vision, sees the big picture, pro-active</li> <li>➤ <b>Respectful:</b> Work with different cultures, communication styles, learning styles</li> <li>➤ <b>Persistent:</b> won't take no for an answer</li> <li>➤ <b>Clear goals:</b> identify what you want</li> <li>➤ <b>Excellent planning skills:</b> objective to plan to, have to know how to plan, execute that plan</li> <li>➤ <b>Self interest:</b> know where you are coming from, where others are coming from</li> <li>➤ <b>Promote autonomy:</b> recognize that you can't do it all, recognize strengths of participants, leadership development process helps people who are already strong people develop skills to participate in public arena, link to an organization, focused on bigger goal, empowering others to act</li> <li>➤ <b>Understanding power dynamics:</b> who are the power players that can make change?</li> <li>➤ <b>Know how to do a power analysis,</b> identify potential allies, different strategies, plan out actions based on that analysis</li> <li>➤ <b>Knowing history:</b> go back a few years, who's connected, what's worked in the past</li> <li>➤ <b>Research root causes:</b> also about history</li> <li>➤ <b>Builds leaders:</b> people become knowledgeable, residents take leadership roles</li> <li>➤ <b>Motivator:</b> able to move other people</li> <li>➤ <b>Consensus builder:</b> can't go in with pre-conceived notion, need to work with others</li> </ul>

The characteristics are complementary, if not interchangeable. When asked ‘**what makes a good Teacher Leader**’ the following attributes were cited:

- **Motivator:** the ability to move people (to action, to learn, to inspire, to move students to action)
- **Respect:** valuing the worth of another person, ability to enter into a relationship with someone in a community not as an expert but by valuing another person. A good teacher would value the student, and his/her ability to learn in way that is respectful.
- **Relationship Builder:** with students, parents, other people in the community
- **Data-driven decisions** to inform teaching (same way organizers look at effects of teacher turnover in key schools); won’t use same methods year after year
- **Clear goals:** being clear about what you want to accomplish
- **Communication:** Not about just talking, but about listening and receiving what is coming from other people
- **Knowledgeable about community,** investment to teach and remain, have a strong positive influence over time.

But do teachers need to be leaders? Both teachers and leaders have to be creative and flexible. They have to get others to buy into their vision. They lead in their classrooms. Good teachers have to get students to follow them, in both subject area content and classroom rules or discipline. All schools have “politics” and power dynamics. A good teacher must learn to navigate the power structure, and a teacher leader would be aware of the politics surrounding public education--especially in low-income neighborhoods. GYO IL seeks teachers who understand content and can teach, but who also understand community and are willing to be leaders inside schools they’re teaching in as well as outside, in their communities.

### **Leadership Skills**

A seasoned organizer from a community based partner was quick to add that it’s not the tactics of community organizing but the underlying values which provide examples for teachers to emulate. Organizing is a matter of structured disciplines, one of which is deliberate, reflective relationship building.

Amanda Rivera was a teacher and principal in the period when the Logan Square Neighborhood Association was developing its education organizing. She reported that the experience she had with LSNA enabled her to build relationships at all levels: in the classroom, with teaching peers, school-wide, in the community, and in her work at the district. Maxine Wortham of Peoria talked about building their current program on existing relationships, and then about her own path as a teacher in the Peoria school district, a teacher educator, and now as a community-based manager of Head Start programs. Her ability to negotiate all these worlds has been one of the key strengths of the program. Fanny Diego-Alvarez noted that the KOCO-LVCDC consortium study groups weren’t functioning well until they started to deal with the relationships. Amanda brought the conversation full circle: the first leadership challenge for teachers is classroom management. If teachers don’t know or respect the culture, they don’t build up the relationships that create a good place for learning.

Critical thinking is another important aspect of leadership. A member of the Rockford consortium reported that they talk about decision making models, including the process of

identifying problems and evaluating alternatives. These are all skills that can be taught. The question is how, and where, these skills should be taught in the GYO IL model. Colleges of Education are focused on training teachers, spending the vast majority of their time on content and subject matter. But teachers also need to know how to work with parents, for example, and that takes leadership skills. Several GYO IL-affiliated higher education partners incorporate leadership development into their classes; one even includes leadership development in its theoretical framework. A member of the Alton consortium suggested that the retired teachers who serve as mentors can address leadership, as they are themselves leaders. But they are not currently receiving any training in teachers as leaders, nor is this an intentional component of the program.

### ***Approaches for building teacher leadership***

- Develop expectations of leadership and mutual respect in the cohort
- Utilize GYO IL as an opportunity for developing the candidates as responsible students who will be leaders in the classroom—not just as a “service program” or a means for recruiting new teachers. Nurture candidates’ ability take responsibility for themselves.
- Provide individualized support rather than treating everyone the same
- Part of leadership is ability to work collaboratively: encourage collaboration both within the cohort and the consortium
- Develop a partnership statement that is agreed to by candidates and consortium partners. In organizing, developing the terms of the partnership is the first step toward becoming leaders. Ask the most difficult candidate to set the terms; they will likely step up and set stronger terms than one would expect.
- View the GYO IL experience as a kind of boot camp for leadership. Provide a process where students can test their own abilities, face their fears and succeed.
- Find out what candidates dreams are. A good organizer helps to take them where *they* want to go, not where we want them to go.
- Leadership development is not a process where you say “you are wonderful” all the time. It’s about providing challenges where individuals can experience their own abilities. Always give people things they can be successful at. Leadership development is a combination of supporting and agitating and challenging in a way that the candidate always knows you are on their side.

The North Lawndale consortium suggested an activity for the cohort: give candidates a New Trier school budget (suburban Chicago) and a North Lawndale school budget (west side of Chicago) to analyze. Let them see the funding difference that allows 10 students per teacher on the north shore versus 35 students per teacher in a low-income Chicago neighborhood. That makes them angry—a rational “cold” anger. This is how community organizations engage residents around an issue, by showing the inequity and inviting leaders to help craft a strategy that moves toward change.

### **Teacher Leadership and the GYO Illinois Model**

Several discussion participants asked about the availability of a curriculum for leadership development. Jay Travis, a partner in the Kenwood-Oakland/Little Village consortium, said that a single curriculum does not exist; rather, these discussions were a part of the process to develop a GYO IL vision for teacher leadership. Generally speaking, the concept is already in the GYO

IL standards, and is included in the best practices guidebook. GYO IL is in the process of figuring out teacher leadership, and some areas are more developed than others. The challenge is in assessing where the consortia are in implementing this approach, and encouraging one another to continue on this path. If GYO IL is to be replicated on a national level someday, the consortia in Illinois will provide the template.

A member of the Alton consortium welcomed this news, and requested input on a ‘teacher leadership curriculum’ from other consortia. He shared a vision of what teacher leadership might look like, and it included getting out of the classroom. Candidates could go to the state capital, become active in the neighborhood, write letters to congressmen, and learn more about the needs in the neighborhood. All of these activities could then be translated to their classrooms when they are teachers. They need to know the local community activists. As a dean, he understood why educators are tied up in compliance and teaching to the test, but this work is important too. In a broad sense, he said, this is our vision for our future, for the children who will replace us.

A Rockford partner chimed in: If community leadership is a priority for GYO IL, and we know that in the institutions of higher learning it is not always being integrated into curriculum, perhaps we should we incorporate it into legislation, the GYO IL guidelines. If we’re not exposing our teacher candidates to those critical areas of research about leadership, and we’re hoping for various institutions of higher education to do that for us, it’s probably not going to happen.

Others argued that legislation isn’t the answer. It’s better to have these priorities developed at the community level, not to just tell people this is how you should do it, but have guiding themes or principles. A lot of this activity is being done, though it may not be fully developed or focused on. Perhaps a clearer foundational statement about teacher leadership in GYO IL would be useful, but leave the implementation open-ended for grassroots input in different areas.

The GYO IL model grew out of Logan Square Neighborhood Association’s commitment to teacher leaders who implement best practices but also create change. Their candidates were community leaders before they became teachers; they sought to be models for community leadership. A social justice perspective was a given. Now consortia have candidates who may not have as much experience in social justice work, and it is up to the local partners to provide support and learning opportunities in this area.

### **Encourage life-long learning**

Another means of supporting teacher leadership is to encourage life-long learning. Participants suggested the following strategies:

- School districts can provide opportunities for professional development and applying what the candidates have learned
- Helping teachers know how to access learning opportunities.
- Cohort needs to have a good relationship with the district so that learning continues after they are teachers.
- Build relationships that will pay off later
- Take advantage of strategic opportunities

- Become active in a community organization and participate in a campaign. Will learn how to listen, maybe even knock on doors to ask residents what they are thinking.
- Learn about power and politics
- Organizers learn how to do a power analysis and to understand the complexities of a situation; this skill will help candidates learn how to diagnose learning in the classroom.

One of the session facilitators, Madeline Talbott, concluded with questions for each consortium: What kind of teachers do we want? What characteristics do we want to see in our graduates? The answers to those questions will inform the kind of educational *and* leadership opportunities consortia need to provide for their cohorts.

**NOTE:** Linda Jamali, Division Administrator, Illinois State Board of Education, cautioned against using the term ‘teacher leadership’ in the context outlined above. At the state level, there is now a Teacher Leader endorsement, to be used in higher education programs designed to prepare teachers to become administrators. She noted that the two concepts could easily be confused at ISBE.