

**Grow Your Own Beginning Teachers
First Year Results**

Prepared for Grow Your Own Illinois
and
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Table of Contents

	Page
Executive Summary	
Introduction.....	1
Description of Study and Methods.....	1
A. Development of Instruments.....	4
B. Analysis of Data.....	4
1. Preparation of GYO Teachers.....	5
2. GYO Teachers: Content Knowledge and Effective Teaching.....	7
3. GYO Teachers and Community Leadership.....	14
4. Relationships with Other Teachers.....	15
5. Relationships with Parents.....	17
6. Teaching Impact of GYO Strengths.....	19
Race/Ethnicity/Culture	
Maturity	
Experience with Children	
7. GYO Teachers, Other Beginning Teachers.....	20
8. GYO Teachers, Student Results.....	22
9. GYO Beginning Teachers: Jobs in their Communities.....	25
10. Additional Comments.....	26
11. Conclusion.....	28

APPENDIX

Grow Your Own Beginning Teachers: First Year Results Executive Summary

The goals of the Grow Your Own Teachers Initiative (GYO) are: 1) Create a pipeline of highly qualified teachers of color; 2) Improve teacher retention in low-income schools; and 3) Prepare culturally competent, community-connected teachers for hard-to-staff schools and hard-to-fill positions.

OER Associates LLC (OER), an external evaluator, was contracted by GYO to provide data collection pilot services for the purpose of describing the status of a sample of GYO beginning teachers currently working in classrooms. Four GYO partnerships throughout the state agreed to participate in the initial pilot. The evaluators conducted site visits to four school districts. Site visits included classroom observations, teacher interviews, and principal interviews; in selected sites, mentors and superintendents were also interviewed. A total of 2 superintendents, 5 principals, 6 teachers, and 3 mentors participated in the pilot. Key findings are presented below.

Preparation of GYO Teachers

- All GYO beginning teachers describe valuable aspects of their preparation program and GYO involvement that prepared them to teach. Most valuable was the student teaching experience, and having a helpful mentor or GYO Coordinator. However, they wanted more preparation in classroom management.
- Principals and mentors believe the GYO beginning teachers were well-prepared to teach in their districts. Many attribute the GYO beginning teachers' prior experiences in the school/district as being an important factor.
- Superintendents and principals agree that their GYO beginning teachers meet their hiring expectations that include strong teaching skills, intelligence, expertise in engaging children in learning, enjoyment regarding working with children, knowledge of curriculum and classroom management, understanding of community and family, and love of teaching. They seek teachers who have a desire and willingness to learn, and have high expectations for all students--including at risk students.
- Many of the principals knew the GYO beginning teacher before she was hired, and agree that prior knowledge of the teacher positively affected the decision to hire her.
- Principals and mentors agree that the GYO beginning teachers are performing as well as--and in some cases better than--other beginning teachers.

GYO Teachers: Content Knowledge and Effective Teaching

- GYO beginning teachers far exceeded expectations on Curriculum and Instruction, and on Assessment. GYO beginning teachers are particularly strong in knowledge of content area, and lessons having a discernable purpose. Mentors confirm that GYO beginning teachers engage in effective lesson planning.

- While still positive, GYO beginning teachers' skills could be strengthened in the areas of: variety of instructional purposes used, stimulating students' creativity, and differential pacing of lessons.
- GYO beginning teachers far exceeded expectations related to knowledge of content. During classroom observations, all GYO beginning teachers received the highest possible ratings on demonstrating strong command of content. In addition, graduates received high ratings regarding the broad scope of content taught, and its applicability beyond the specific facts or skills presented. All mentors agree that the GYO beginning teachers have a strong grasp of content.
- GYO beginning teachers far exceeded expectations on Classroom Management. GYO beginning teachers are particularly strong in the following areas: acting confidently and competently with students, stating consequences for undesirable behavior without critical tone, refraining from negative verbalizations, materials organized and prepared ahead of time, maintaining standards of professional conduct, and dressing appropriately.
- While still positive, GYO beginning teachers' skills could be strengthened in promoting purposeful student-student interaction for learning purposes.
- Many GYO beginning teachers believe they are particularly strong in classroom management, and others believe they are organized, prepared, and successfully plan ahead. These opinions were validated during the external evaluator classroom observations.
- A few teachers report that paperwork and organization continues to be a challenge.

GYO Teachers and Community Leadership

- Superintendents and principals agree that high quality teachers are interested in their community. All GYO beginning teachers are involved in their community to some extent, including tutoring at the school, doing outreach, coaching a sports team, volunteering, serving on education-related committees or boards, volunteering at church or community functions, using the local library, and volunteering at a church fine arts camp. Two GYO beginning teachers are not teaching in their community, but they are learning more about their school community so they can be more effective teachers. GYO beginning teachers continue to be connected to their GYO network. Many GYO Coordinators and mentors continue to provide support, even after graduation from the program.

Relationships with Other Teachers

- Mentors and GYO beginning teachers agree that GYO beginning teachers are successfully collaborating with other teachers in the school. GYO beginning teachers perceive their general learning community environment as being very positive and collaborative. Principals believe that it takes most beginning teachers time to become true collaborative

partners. However, based on the data gathered, it appears that GYO beginning teachers develop relationships and engage in productive collaboration quicker than most beginning teachers.

Relationships with Parents

- GYO beginning teachers successfully communicate and interact with parents. They are comfortable communicating "in person", as well as via e-mails and newsletters.

Teaching Impact of GYO Strengths

- GYO beginning teachers agree that having a shared race/ethnicity/culture with students facilitates their understanding of, respect for, and empathy with students and parents. GYO beginning teachers appear to have a deep understanding of diverse backgrounds.
- GYO beginning teachers' prior work and life experiences give them a level of maturity that helps them be more effective teachers. Principals, mentors, and GYO beginning teachers agree that entering the teaching profession as a second career or several years after high school positively impacts teaching effectiveness.
- GYO beginning teachers' experiences as parents tend to make them more empathetic and understanding of student and family needs. They also see the value of involving parents in their children's education.

GYO Teachers, Student Results

- GYO beginning teachers far exceeded expectations on Teacher/Student Interaction. GYO beginning teachers are particularly strong in: directions are given in clear, understandable terms; exhibits appropriate and enthusiastic teaching disposition; students are treated with respect; communicates positively with students; students are allowed to speak to the teacher without interruption; and teacher effectively responds to student feedback.
- Principals and mentors agree that the GYO beginning teachers relate well to their students. All six GYO beginning teachers believe they have good relationships with their students. Many agree that either through GYO, or because they have lived in the community for a long time, they knew many of the students and have established good rapport.

Support for Grow Your Own

- Superintendents praise GYO for putting the time and energy into preparing new teachers.
- Principals express support for the GYO program and hope it will continue to find funding. Many principals are pleased with their GYO beginning teachers' expertise and are glad their school/district was involved with GYO.

Additional Findings

- All six GYO beginning teachers included in the study are currently working as classroom teachers. Due to financial constraints in the school districts and state, it is uncertain how many will be retained next year. Because the GYO beginning teachers are first or second year teachers, they have low priority when cutbacks are made. The current funding status of education in Illinois has resulted in several GYO beginning teachers being RIF'ed, or in having to accept positions outside of their immediate community. The lack of job security is a disappointment. All intend to continue working in the profession.
- All GYO beginning teachers have inspiring stories of the positive effects GYO has had on themselves, their children, their families, or others.

Conclusions

The pilot study successfully gathered a range of data from various sources and stakeholders in order to describe the status of a sample of GYO beginning teachers currently working in classrooms. Results must be viewed with caution due to the small sample size; however, trends do emerge from this limited set of data. The external evaluator concludes the following:

- Grow Your Own Illinois (GYO) has successfully created a pipeline of highly qualified teachers of color. GYO beginning teachers enter their classrooms "ready to teach", and exhibit positive and effective behaviors that are likely to result in increased student achievement.
- GYO provides the supports teacher candidates need to successfully obtain employment in their communities, or similar communities. However, financial constraints in school districts and the state could affect retention rates. Several highly rated GYO beginning teachers have been RIF'ed for the coming year. The external evaluator wonders whether, given the considerable state and personal resources devoted to preparing GYO teachers--and the high quality of their teaching performance--they somehow can be given higher priority in their districts so they are not the first ones released.
- Many factors positively affect GYO beginning teachers' success as beginning teachers, including shared race/ethnicity/culture, entering the teaching profession as a second career or several years after graduating from high school, being a parent themselves, and being involved in the community.
- GYO beginning teachers communicate and interact successfully with their students' parents, and collaborate well with other teachers in the school. The external evaluator projects that the GYO beginning teachers will become leaders in their school more quickly than other beginning teachers.
- GYO beginning teachers far exceeded expectations on curriculum and instruction, knowledge of content area, assessment, classroom management, and teacher/student interaction. The external evaluator concludes that the combination of high quality education at the university/college level and the dedicated support of GYO Coordinators successfully prepare highly competent teachers.

- GYO beginning teachers continue to be connected to the GYO network, showing an ongoing commitment to continuous improvement and striving for excellence.

A GYO beginning teacher dramatically describes what the experience has meant to her: "My GYO Coordinator was wonderful. I faced challenges at the university, and family illnesses. The steady, strong support of GYO staff encouraged me, told me I could make it. Anytime I needed anything, they would help. I would encourage anyone with a problem or need to email my GYO Coordinator. It took me many years from when I first enrolled in a community college to become a certified teacher. Without GYO, my family, friends, and the school staff, I don't know how I would have done it. I'm glad that I had the opportunity to teach at this school. That's what GYO is about; to become a teacher at your school. The principal encouraged me to become certified. It was good advice.

