

Grow Your Own Programs for Bilingual Educators

Essential Policies and Practices

In response to the growing population of English learner students, districts and states must invest in the development of bilingual educators. A promising strategy, Grow Your Own (GYO) programs are partnerships between educator preparation programs, school districts, and community organizations that recruit and prepare local community members to enter the teaching profession and teach in their communities.

Statewide policies and practices that support high-quality GYO programs include:

Policies

- Allocated funding to develop and sustain GYO programs
- Data systems to track program recruitment and completion, job placement, and retention
- Program evaluation to gauge impact on local workforce needs
- Teacher certification and licensure systems that offer multiple approaches to measuring educator skills and competencies
- Program accessibility for candidates with and without bachelor's degrees through different program models

Practices

- Strong collaboration and coordination across school districts, educator preparation providers, and community organizations
- Recruitment of linguistically and culturally diverse candidates who are both reflective of and responsive to the needs of the local community
- Wraparound supports for candidates through the recruitment, preparation, and induction years (e.g., cohort structure, scholarships, licensure test preparation, assistance navigating college admissions process, etc.)
- Paid work-based experience under the guidance of a mentor teacher that aligns with educator preparation coursework
- Structured pathways for candidates to advance toward required teaching credentials and certification at various stages of their careers

Why Grow Your Own Bilingual Educators?

English learners are a rapidly growing segment of the U.S. student population, now making up nearly 10 percent of K–12 enrollment and almost one-third of the early childhood population. An emerging body of research suggests that these students are best served in bilingual programs that provide them with the opportunity to maintain their home language and develop English language proficiency. However, the dearth of bilingual educators has hobbled state and district efforts to expand and create high-quality bilingual programs (e.g., dual language immersion, two-way immersion) to serve English learners. Currently, many localities hire teachers from abroad to work in bilingual programs, but this only expends resources on teachers who will leave the system. Others offer waivers and exceptions to hire certified teachers without bilingual credentials to fill these hard-to-staff positions.

Grow Your Own programs are an opportunity for states and districts to invest in the development and preparation of bilingual educators who are from the local community and invested in staying in the community. These programs are usually designed in response to a local need and include wraparound supports that are tailored to the needs of those participating. These supports help remove the financial, academic, familial, and linguistic barriers bilingual candidates may face at each step of the process in becoming a teacher.

This resource is designed to provide state and local leaders with a foundational set of practices and policies to consider when designing and implementing GYO programs for bilingual educators. For more, see newamerica.org/gyo-pathways

We are grateful to the members of New America’s Grow Your Own Advisory Group for their expertise and guidance in the development of this resource. Our work is generously supported by the Heising-Simons, McKnight, and W. K. Kellogg foundations.

To learn more about the English Learners initiative at New America, please visit newamerica.org/education-policy/english-learners