



Ensuring Equity in Grow-Your-Own Programs

Created by partnerships of educator preparation programs, school districts, and community-based organizations, grow-your-own programs recruit, prepare, and place community members as teachers.¹ They typically recruit and prepare high school students, school classified staff

(e.g., paraeducators, afterschool workers, bus drivers), career changers, and leaders and activists from local schools and geographic communities.

An overwhelming majority of teacher candidates do not know and do not hail from the communities in which they will

State-level criteria for programs' design can yield better outcomes in preparing and retaining diverse teachers.

Conra D. Gist

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teach, nor do their teacher educators know those communities. Increased interest in grow-your-own programs reflects a belief in local school and community members' capacity to create better learning environments more attuned to community strengths. Community teachers matter because they may be more likely to remain in the profession and establish relationships with students that effectively support learning.²

Education leaders also hope these programs will attract and retain more teachers and, in particular, more whose race and ethnicity reflect those of the student bodies whom they will serve. Although a majority of students in U.S. schools are Students of Color and Indigenous Students, Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT) represent a little less than 20 percent of the educator workforce.³ To ensure that grow-your-own programs can succeed as a strategy for diversifying the educator workforce, education leaders should adopt state-level equity criteria that embrace supporting TOCIT at each stage of teacher development.

While having TOCIT benefits all students, it is important for state leaders to understand what research reveals about these teachers' impact on Students of Color and Indigenous Students. For example, Black teachers improve Black kindergarteners' reading and mathematics scores.⁴ The culturally relevant teaching practices of TOCIT are associated with positive socioemotional, academic, and behavioral student outcomes.⁵ Also, shared racial affinity between teachers and students is associated with reductions in exclusionary discipline practices and the likelihood to enroll in college.⁶

Yet TOCIT are more likely than others to enroll in alternative certification programs and bypass traditional routes to the classroom. They thus often have limited clinical teaching experiences and mentorship support. They are also more likely to be placed in schools with challenging working conditions and experience racial microaggressions that can constrain their teaching effectiveness.⁷

To address the shortage, preparation, and retention challenges facing the profession, it is critical to ensure equity across the teacher development continuum.⁸ Adopting state-level equity criteria for grow-your-own programs is one policy lever toward this end. The criteria

should address four equity areas: structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal.⁹ These areas provide lenses for exploring how state education policymakers can understand, confront, and overcome barriers community TOCIT may experience when attempting to enter the educator workforce.

Structural

Structural power refers to how power relations shape the organization and structure of institutions or systems. As a set of structures and practices that provide access to resources and opportunities, education has a particular power to transform individual and community outcomes. By promoting education careers for those who otherwise might not have the opportunity to pursue them, grow-your-own programs can create opportunities for economic mobility through developing and investing in the talent and cultural wealth of the community. They can combat race, gender, class, and language inequities by creating a career development system with livable salaries and opportunities for community members to move from semiprofessional to professional autonomy. But there must be structures in place before these good outcomes can materialize.

Collective bargaining and district partnership agreements can be high-leverage approaches for advancing this work. For example, a long-standing career ladder program for paraprofessionals was originally established as a partnership with the New York City's teacher's union and its department of education. Another example is the California Mini-Corps program, in which the state education agency partners with districts to provide pathways to the education profession for children of migrant farmworkers. Structural barriers can be further reduced through loan forgiveness, tuition reimbursement, or scholarships that limit the cost of educator preparation. The Los Angeles Unified School District's tuition reimbursement program for paraeducators is an example of pairing program structures with financial incentives.

Disciplinary

Disciplinary power can be understood as the differential impacts of policies and regulations

that create inequities for certain groups. Barriers to entering the profession can signal areas where policymakers may need to rethink and revise practices, policies, and regulations.

Certification exams and rigid coursework and learning opportunities are places where disciplinary power is evident. Standardized exams have historically excluded TOCIT from equitable access to educational opportunities.¹⁰ Yet Dan Goldhaber and Michael Hansen found that Black teachers in North Carolina with low certification exam scores had higher impacts on Black student achievement than White teachers with high certification exam scores.

Recognizing the racialized and problematic nature of the program entrance exams, the Illinois State Board of Education removed the basic skills exam as a prerequisite for entering educator preparation programs. This shift arose in part from grassroots advocacy efforts on the part of the grow-your-own Illinois program to eliminate testing barriers for TOCIT.¹²

Flexibility in program policies and regulations—offering evening classes or Saturday sessions, for example—is another way to advance equity for aspiring teachers with full-time jobs. Some programs have partnered with school districts to arrange a certain number of Friday release days each month so paraprofessionals can complete coursework.¹³ Another approach to expanding learning opportunities is to offer summer institutes and bridge programs. These approaches often involve organizing teachers in small cohorts, which allows the program to guarantee course availability and ensure teacher candidates' access to courses needed for program completion.

Cultural

Cultural power derives from dominant, taken-for-granted narratives, assumptions, and ways of viewing, and being in, the world that are normalized as appropriate and acceptable. TOCIT bring to teacher education programs knowledge, dispositions, and skills steeped in distinct ways of being that challenge dominant narratives in teacher education. Initiatives committed to valuing the knowledge systems of TOCIT view schools and teacher education locales as sacred spaces in which educators can

engage in self-reflexive, dialogic, reciprocal, and antiracist practices. Grow-your-own program initiative Abriendo Caminos in Nevada and the Indigenous Teacher Education program at the University of Arizona demonstrate what this work may look like in practice.¹⁴

The cultural power of community can also be valued by expanding the place in which teacher education classes and learning experiences are situated. To do this, learning is not solely based in university settings or led by university professors, but also taken up by local school and community educational experts in neighborhoods, community-based organizations, and spaces that are important cultural markers for the community. Indeed, local schools, grassroots organizations, and historical sites are often organized or led by community members with deep knowledge and expertise that can support the development of effective community teachers.

Interpersonal

The nature and type of interpersonal relationships influence the barriers or opportunities that teacher candidates experience. By placing communities at the center of teacher education, grow-your-own programs can foster reciprocal relationships between community members and teacher education programs, identify and nurture community-based educators, and invest in equity-focused schools.

Grow-your-own programs can cultivate relational power by involving the local community in key decision-making processes, attract subawards and grants for community and school collaboration, examine data and address inequities, and foreground commitments to equity across the teacher development continuum. As an example, the Community Teacher Equity Development program, a partnership between the University of Houston and Greater Houston school districts, created community-centered research-practice partnerships dedicated to generating teacher development designs for local school and community members.¹⁵ The ecology of support for TOCIT is not held exclusively by educator preparation programs but interwoven with authentic, reciprocal community and educational stakeholder

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partners, whose voices and expertise inform and shape teaching and learning experiences in the grow-your-own program.

Role for State Boards

Many state boards of education have authority to require educator preparation programs to present evidence of their commitments to advance equity in their applications for initial accreditation and ongoing state approval. At a minimum, this process for grow-your-own programs should involve the following:

- examining equity provisions and outcomes in educator preparation programs related to teaching and learning development of community TOCIT;
- reviewing equity commitments in program evaluation protocols for community TOCIT;
- piloting equity-embedded program evaluation protocols; and
- ongoing assessment of evaluation processes and their progress toward advancing equity for teachers, students, and schools.

I offer the following questions that state boards and accreditation officers can use to explore how structural, disciplinary, cultural, and interpersonal equity considerations are being advanced in their state's grow-your-own educator preparation programs.¹⁶

- To what extent is the educator preparation program intentionally recruiting from Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) community members (e.g., community organizers, church leaders)? If it is not, how might the program center their voices, experiences, and needs? If it is, what evidence demonstrates the program's recruitment practices are effective?
- Is the program recruiting BIPOC in semiprofessional roles in schools (e.g., teacher assistants and school personnel) and preparing them in their professional roles as teachers? If not, how might the program do better? If it is, what evidence shows its effectiveness?
- Does the program provide financial, academic and/or socioemotional support structures to ensure the retention of TOCIT community

members? If not, how might it do so? If it does, what is its evidence of effectiveness?

- Are university educator preparation program entry policies and regulations designed to eliminate inequitable disparities for community TOCIT? What is the evidence these policies and practices are effective? If they are not evident, how might the program advocate for or create them?
- To what extent do certification and licensure exam policies and regulations disadvantage community TOCIT? If these policies and regulations evidence inequities, what needs to be done differently? If inequities are not evident, what more can be done to ensure equitable certification and licensure exam practices continue for community TOCIT?
- What stipulations at the state and district levels are in place to ensure that BIPOC community members have equitable access to grow-your-own programs? What policy, practice, and regulatory changes are needed to expand access to coursework and learning opportunities for BIPOC communities?
- What are the narratives about teacher quality that permeate the educator preparation program? How are BIPOC community members characterized and positioned in these narratives? What aspects need to be challenged and reimagined to center, honor, and value community TOCIT?
- In what ways does the program's curriculum and design value local funds of knowledge and community cultural wealth? What aspects need to be challenged and reimagined?
- In what ways is the educator preparation program providing teacher education classes and meaningful learning experiences in schools and communities? What aspects need to be revised and reimagined?
- To what extent does the program leverage reciprocal, authentic, and meaningful partnerships with community-based organizations and TOCIT in the local community? Is it evident these partnerships are effective? What may need to be done differently?
- To what extent does the program recruit, nurture and support community-based teacher

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educators? Are these approaches effective based on evidence provided by the program? What may need to be done differently?

- To what extent are the voices of TOCIT and BIPOC community members reflected in the design and implementation of the educator preparation program? What roles do community schools play in this process? Is there evidence that community voices and schools are effectively embedded in the educator preparation program? What may need to be done differently? ■

¹Conra D. Gist, “‘Grow Your Own’ Programs: Examining Potential and Pitfalls for a New Generation of Black, Indigenous, and People of Color Community Teachers” (Boulder, CO: National Education Policy Center, 2022).

²Conra D. Gist, Margarita Bianco, and Marvin Lynn, “Examining Grow Your Own Programs across the Teacher Development Continuum: Mining Research on Teachers of Color and Nontraditional Educator Pipelines,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 70, no. 1 (2019): 13–25.

³Richard Ingersoll and Lisa Merrill, “A Quarter Century of Changes in the Elementary and Secondary Teaching Force: From 1987 to 2012” (Washington, DC: National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers (TOCIT) share sociopolitical histories of marginalization by K-20 schools and higher education institutions, structures, policies, and practices as well as transformative epistemological, pedagogical, and community-based practices. Positioning TOCIT from a group standpoint when theorizing and conducting research affords more comprehensive, complex understandings of their experiences. The term Teachers of Color and Indigenous Teachers—along with Black, Indigenous and People of Color and Students of Color and Indigenous Students—is capitalized throughout the article to acknowledge this collective history and give credence to more contemporary efforts to view group standpoints from a perspective of solidarity as a type of intellectual activism intended to advance the production of knowledge for equitable education systems in K-12 schools and higher education institutions.

⁴Thomas S. Dee, “The Race Connection: Are Teachers More Effective with Students Who Share Their Ethnicity?” *Education Next* 4, no. 2 (2004): 52–60.

⁵David Blazar, “Teachers of Color, Culturally Responsive Teaching, and Student Outcomes: Experimental Evidence from the Random Assignment of Teachers to Classes,” EdWorkingPaper 21-501 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2021).

⁶Matthew Shirrell, Travis J. Bristol, and Tolani A. Britton, “The Effects of Student-Teacher Ethnoracial Matching on Exclusionary Discipline for Asian American, Black, and Latinx Students: Evidence from New York City,” EdWorking Paper 21-475 (Annenberg Institute at Brown University, 2021); Seth Gershenson et al., “The Long-Run Impacts of Same-Race Teachers,” Working Paper 25254 (Cambridge, MA: NBER, 2018).

⁷Nicole S. Simon and Susan Johnson, “Teacher Turnover in High-Poverty Schools: What We Know and Can Do,”

Teachers College Record 117, no. 3 (2015): 1–36; Rita Kohli, “Lessons for Teacher Education: The Role of Critical Professional Development in Teacher of Color Retention,” *Journal of Teacher Education* 70, no. 1 (2019): 39–50.

⁸Conra D. Gist and Travis J. Bristol, eds., “Building a More Ethnoracially Diverse Teaching Force: New Directions in Research, Policy and Practice,” *Kappan* (2021): 1–79.

⁹Patricia Hill Collins and Sirma Bilge, *Intersectionality* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2016). In it, the authors describe how different types of power intersect to shape the way people experience the world.

¹⁰Emery Petchauer, *Navigating Teacher Licensure Exams: Success and Self-Discovery on the High-Stakes Path to the Classroom* (New York: Routledge, 2019).

¹¹Dan Goldhaber and Michael Hansen, “Race, Gender, and Teacher Testing: How Informative a Tool Is Teacher Licensure Testing?” *American Educational Research Journal* 47, no. 1 (2010): 218–51.

¹²Conra D. Gist, ed., *Portraits of Anti-Racist Alternative Routes to Teaching in the U.S.: Framing Teacher Development for Community, Justice, and Visionaries* (Peter Lang, 2017).

¹³Kam Fui Lau, Evelyn B. Dandy, and Lorrie Hoffman, “The Pathways Program: A Model for Increasing the Number of Teachers of Color,” *Teacher Education Quarterly* 34, no. 3 (2007): 27–40.

¹⁴Norma Angelica Marrun and Christine Clark, “The Rise of the GYO-TOCs as Pop-Ups: Lessons in Racial Resistance from the Abriendo Caminos/Opening Pathways for Students of Color into the Teaching Profession: Giving Back to Community through Teaching Project,” *Taboo: The Journal of Culture and Education* 19, no. 4 (2020): 65–93; University of Arizona, “Values: The ITEP Framework,” web page, <https://itep.coe.arizona.edu/content/values>.

¹⁵J. L. Hickman, “Aldine Creates Pathway for Community to Advance Its Equity Goals to Benefit Students,” (Aldine Independent School District, July 26, 2022), <https://www.aldineisd.org/2022/07/26/aldines-mission-is-to-create-a-pathway-for-the-community-to-advance-its-equity-goals-for-the-students/>.

¹⁶The four areas of equity and reflection questions draw from Conra D. Gist, “The Community Teacher: How Can We Radically Reimagine Power Relations in Teacher Development?” *Equity and Excellence in Education* (forthcoming).

Dr. Conra D. Gist is an associate professor of teaching and teacher education in the College of Education, University of Houston.