

Creativity From Necessity: A Practical Toolkit for Leaders to Address Teacher Shortages

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Case Study

How Two Districts Are Using Grow Your Own Programs

Context

This case study highlights the efforts of two large school districts to develop Grow Your Own programs. Chicago Public Schools (CPS) in Illinois and Harmony Public Schools in Texas have faced teacher shortages over the past two years, particularly in hard-to-staff roles in special education, bilingual classrooms, and STEAM content areas. While these districts operate in different contexts, both have looked to Grow Your Own programs as one tool in their toolkit to attract and retain teachers.

Advice From Chicago Public Schools and Harmony Public Schools

If you are interested in designing a Grow Your Own program, keep this advice in mind:

Carve Out Planning Time

Strategically plan for the implementation of a program. Take 6-12 months to plan what this program can look like, identify mentor teachers, create a new-to-teaching development scope and sequence, create a rigorous and supportive recruitment and selection process, build partnerships with institutions, create success criteria, and secure funding, among other things. There must be a clear end-to-end plan before implementation begins.

Plan for a Sustainable Funding Source

Harmony Public Schools and CPS advise raising philanthropic funds, as these funds are more flexible. If philanthropic funding is not available, consider closing

an aide position or another instructional support position, and convert to a more robust role, like an apprentice teacher.

Support Residents Financially

To honor and respect teachers, and to ensure they are focused on student learning, pay residents a competitive salary while they are in the Grow Your Own program.

Invest Participants in Giving Back to Their Community

When designing your program's mission and vision, consider investing in and inspiring local stakeholders and alumni to apply. "Coming back to teach is kind of like a duty for our students, like serving in the army. They don't do it for the money, they do it to pay back what they have been given," one leader says.

Chicago Public Schools

When CPS designed its Grow Your Own program, leaders in the district envisioned a program that would not only help address staff shortages but also benefit the district in other ways. In addition to filling teacher positions, CPS saw an opportunity to use Grow Your Own pipelines to increase the diversity of its teaching workforce and ensure new teachers were receiving professional development aligned with its mission, vision, and philosophy.

Leaders at CPS noted that starting a Grow Your Own program was a "no-brainer," especially for a district that hires approximately 1,400 teachers each year.

Building an in-district program would allow CPS to intentionally hire teachers with backgrounds similar to those of their students, and would enable the district to target individuals who may not have direct access to a teaching career but are otherwise committed to students and the city. With this vision in mind, the district launched [Teach Chicago](#), an initiative “to attract and retain highly qualified, diverse teachers for every classroom in the city,” particularly in the “hardest-to-staff schools and high-need subject areas.”

With a clear vision in mind, senior leaders at CPS worked to build buy-in with the local school board and secure a commitment to help fund the program. Even with buy-in at the board level, CPS depends on philanthropic funds to sustain its Grow Your Own program. “For us, philanthropy is huge,” explains a district leader. “A lot of time philanthropy is reluctant to invest in school districts because of the perception that districts have all this money, but those philanthropic dollars help subsidize our work.”

Reflecting on the early progress of its GYO initiative, CPS has observed four major trends: 1) Residents in its program are staying in the district beyond their initial three-year commitment; 2) there has been an increase in the diversity of its workforce, with 80% of residents identifying as Black or Latino; 3) there has been a steady uptick in the number of residents in its program, currently at 170 residents; and 4) more individuals from the community, CPS graduates, parents, and former employees are enrolling in the program, with two-thirds of current enrollees being CPS employees, such as paraprofessionals.

For more information, visit the [Teach Chicago](#) website.

Harmony Public Schools

In support of its mission and vision, Harmony Public Schools established the Grow Your Own Teacher (GYOT) Educational Assistance Program. Harmony’s alumni team manages the program, which predominantly targets its former students. Specifically, the program “identifies and supports students and graduates of Harmony Public Schools, assisting them in attaining an undergraduate degree and obtaining

a Texas teaching certificate, and then returning to [Harmony] in an instructional capacity ...”

Harmony’s GYOT candidates are initially hired as interns and work 10-19 hours per week. Interns are exposed to the teaching environment through co-teaching opportunities, tutoring, and other classroom responsibilities. Additionally, they receive “professional development from central office and district experts, one-on-one coaching from a highly qualified teacher mentor, and networking opportunities with student colleagues from across Texas.”

Currently, Harmony uses public funding to sustain its GYOT program, with roughly 90% of the program costs covered by state funds and the other 10% coming from federal sources. Interns work at an hourly rate, and Harmony caps their total work time at 19 hours per week to manage costs and promote work-life balance among its interns, most of whom are college students. Harmony also offers reimbursable financial assistance as an employee benefit to those GYOT residents, up to \$20,000 over six years for tuition, books, and supplies. To access this funding, interns commit to teach for two years in Harmony schools.

In terms of results, Harmony has seen two major qualitative trends: First, there has been a steady increase in GYOT residents who stay employed within the district beyond their two-year commitment, with 145 former interns currently serving in full-time roles as teachers, assistant principals, and in central administrative positions. “We have seen a return on our investment,” one Harmony leader explains, “and we expect that to grow over time.” Additionally, the GYOT program has reinforced Harmony Public Schools’ vision to lead “students from the classroom into the world as productive and responsible citizens.” “Many of our students are first-generation college students,” says one Harmony leader. “This program helps motivate our alumni, keeps them connected to mentors from high school, and enables them to come back and be mentors and role models to other students like them.”

You can find additional information and resources on [Harmony Public Schools’](#) website.

Resources for the Field

Resident Recruitment and Selection Materials

[Prospective Candidate Information Deck](#)

[LBS1 One-Pager](#)

[STEM One-Pager](#)

[Bilingual One-Pager](#)

[ECE-SPED One-Pager](#)

[FAQs](#)

[Residency Flyer](#)

[AA to BA One-Pager](#)

[Recruiting Event Checklist](#)

[Candidate Interview Guide](#)

[Interview Training Deck](#)

[Social Media Recruitment Ad](#)

Training Site/Mentor Recruitment and Selection Materials

[Prospective Site Informational Slide Deck](#)

[Program Commitment Overview](#)

[Mentor Interview Protocol](#)

[Mentor Role Description](#)

Other Materials and References

[2019-20 Program Handbook](#)