

# Increasing Enrollment and Diversity in Special Education Preparation Through Grow Your Own Programs

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## ABSTRACT

Although the teacher education shortage is at an all-time high across the United States, particularly in the field of Special Education, an innovative, multi-tiered approach can help colleges and universities address this scarcity. Teacher preparation programs can bolster their recruitment, training, and delivery of high-quality special educators while also focusing on diversifying the special education teacher workforce. This paper will present a step-by-step approach to address the special education teacher shortage through a Grow Your Own Model. Using this approach as a blueprint for success, systems of higher education can help address the current special education teacher shortage crisis.

## KEYWORDS

**Special education, teacher shortage, diversity, Grow Your Own**

**A**s colleagues at a mid-size university in the Special Education Department gather for their end of year department meeting, looming on the agenda is a challenging and persistent issue. Dr. Pickens, the Department Head, shares updated statistics surrounding the incoming pre-service teacher candidate in educational programs for the upcoming semester. The numbers show enrollment is down by 30 percent, and the number of diverse candidates applying for educational programs are dismal. The department had much anticipation for the upcoming year, and they leave concerned and a bit defeated. Dr. Pickens wonders, “How did this happen and what can we do to increase enrollment numbers?” Dr. Pickens suggests that faculty from Early Childhood Special Education (ECSE) and Special Education (SPED) programs form a summer task force to investigate avenues for increasing enrollment. After all, the community housing the university is facing considerable special education teacher shortages. This particular university is situated in a city with a population comprised of immigrants from over 73 different countries. The task at hand is to devise a plan for pre-service teacher recruitment in SPED and ECSE (both in overall numbers and to represent the diversity within the city of the university). Dr. Pickens suggested colleagues look at a Grow Your Own model. Professors from those disciplines decide to meet weekly, over the summer, to address this concern.

## The Special Education Teacher Shortage Crisis

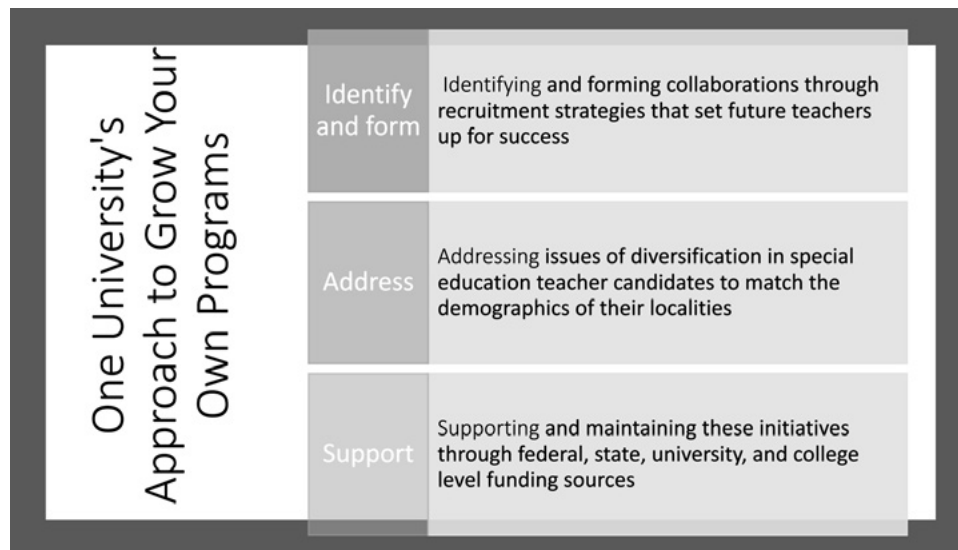
Department meetings like this vignette are not uncommon. The special education teacher shortage threatens the federally mandated education students with disabilities must receive. In the United States, 49 states report shortages of special educators (National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services, n.d.), and enrollment in teacher preparation is lower than at any point since the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2016) began collecting these data. PL 94-142 (Individuals with Disabilities Education Act [IDEA]) first passed in the United States 1975, and special education teacher shortages have existed

since this time. Although educational opportunities were available to some students with disabilities before 1975, this law mandated, for the first time, that public schools educate all students, thus contributing to a dramatic increase in demand for special educators (Dewey et al., 2017). The need for special educators has only increased as time has passed, and the demand for special educators consistently exceeded the supply (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). An additional concern is special educator attrition, as it worsens the issue, resulting in the hiring of unqualified individuals working in classrooms (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008).

Nearly half (44 percent) of our US public schools report full- or part-time teaching vacancies, according to data released by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES, 2022), within the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences (IES). High poverty schools bear the brunt of substantial turnover which reduces the likelihood that highly qualified special educators will teach students with disabilities who live in poverty (Levin et al., 2015). Of public schools with at least one reported vacancy, 61 percent specifically identified the COVID-19 pandemic as a cause of increased teaching and non-teaching staff vacancies (NCES, 2022). Of those schools, special education was the position with the most vacancies. COVID-19 exacerbated this shortage as well as the public and political scrutiny educators face.

A closer look at the teacher shortage shows a dearth of representation in the teacher workforce. Students with disabilities in the United States are increasingly diverse, and more than half are now students of color including Black, Hispanic/Latinx, Asian, Native Hawaiian/Other Pacific Islander, Native American/Alaska Native, and multiracial students (NCES, 2016). Yet,

**FIGURE 1: A Three-Pronged Approach to GYO**



teachers, including special education teachers, have been historically White (Ingersoll & May, 2011), with teachers of color (TOC) representing only 18% of the teacher workforce. This lack of representation historically meant White special education professionals primarily taught students of color with disabilities. (Boveda & McCray, 2021; Kozleski et al., 2014). Data suggest there is a wide gap between the underrepresentation of special education teachers of color (SETOC) in local schools (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020) and the overrepresentation of students of color in special education (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). That is, students of color with disabilities can complete an entire public-school career without seeing an SETOC (Scott et al., 2022). One can see after looking at the variables contributing to special education teacher shortages that institutes of higher education (IHEs) need to broaden their teacher candidate recruitment and attainment strategies. One potential way to do this is to create a Grow your own (GYO) program.

### **Grow Your Own Programs in Special Education**

GYO programs are different from

other pipelines, particularly in their recruitment efforts and community partnerships. The focused recruitment efforts of faculty via GYO programs concentrate around the recruitment of high school students, career changers, paraprofessionals, non-teaching-school faculty, and community members (Espinoza et al., 2018). Through these partnerships, stakeholders develop solution-oriented approaches to reduce obstacles that have historically kept potential teacher candidates from entering the profession. According to Amaya Garcia, deputy director of pre-K-12 education in the education policy program at New America, who studies GYO programs, nearly every state has at least one GYO program apart from North Dakota, Vermont, and Wyoming (Wood, 2022). Yet only around 15 states provide direct funding for GYO program development, implementation, and sustainability (Wood, 2022). Despite this, GYO programs have been successful in nearly 45 states. With this in mind, most colleges and universities can establish innovative, multi-tiered approaches to creating GYO programs. Teacher preparation programs can bolster recruitment, train highly qualified candidates, and assist participating

**FIGURE 2:** Identified Grow Your Own Pathways

localities through these initiatives.

The purpose of this article is to outline one university's approach to developing a GYO program, so that other similarly sized universities might engage in comparable recruitment efforts. A university's GYO initiatives should include: (a) identifying and forming collaborations, (b) addressing issues of diversification in special education teacher candidates to match the demographics of their localities, and (c) developing and maintaining these initiatives through federal, state, university, and college level funding sources.

## IDENTIFYING AND FORMING COLLABORATIONS

According to a national study by New America, there is no universal model for developing GYO Programs (Garcia, 2022). This means IHEs can leverage resources at their institution, and in their locale, to cultivate an approach that works best for them. Although there are many potential partnerships via GYO initiatives (e.g., state

level, school level, community level), including IHEs as a necessary partner for such initiatives is imperative. Espinoza and colleagues (2018) mention several areas to target candidates, including the recruitment of current high school students and paraprofessionals. To do this IHEs must (a) identify specific needs relevant to the university and community (e.g., SPED, ECSE) (b) establish and nurture collaborative partnerships, (c) recruit participants/future educators, and (d) provide scaffolds and supports to foster successful program outcomes.

## Identifying Specific Needs Relevant to the IHE

Faculty members tasked with creating a GYO program must first identify the needs of the local school district. IHEs often recognize issues and potential solutions, but without tapping into the wealth of knowledge and lived experiences of community partners, faculty of IHEs risk souring any potential relationships before they form. Consid-

ering this risk, it is paramount that IHEs work with their community partners to identify their needs (Garcia, 2022). Meaning IHEs can personalize their strategies to meet municipal needs.

*After researching the importance of forming local collaborations and identifying local school needs, Drs. Watt and Heyward, two faculty members of the SPED department, decide to hold an administrators breakfast to discuss potential GYO partnerships and critical areas of need those schools face in relation to SPED. During this breakfast, relevant faculty members, department heads, deans, administrators, and other relevant parties discuss current challenges they face regarding special education. Each table is assigned a faculty member whose responsibility is to facilitate a question-and-answer period with attendees using a script which includes targeted questions intended to encourage community partnerships. In addition to holding an administrators breakfast, Drs. Watt and Heyward hold an information session with current*

*cooperating teachers and university supervisors to get a first-person account of what is happening and is needed in schools. During both meetings the department head Dr. Pickens will act as the master of ceremonies, where they describe the initiatives set forth by the department and highlight the positive outcomes that can come from GYO program initiatives.*

Based off the information gathering stage presented above, the task force determined there are two plausible GYO pathways that warrant further exploration. The first pathway centers on teaching fellow programs for high school students in local school districts who plan to attend the sponsoring institution in the future. According to Valenzuela (2017), research indicates students decide to become a teacher well before graduating high school, so IHEs should make efforts to create pathways for teacher preparation as early as possible. Based on these data, IHEs should collaborate with local school districts to discuss the benefits of partnering with the resident IHE. One exemplar comes out of The University of Colorado who adopted a *Pathways2Teaching* model focused on preparing students from low-income high schools to enter an IHE in the field of education (Barber, 2018). Using a variety of strategies within the public school, this university aimed to provide coursework for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders to earn college credits before entering The University of Colorado Programs like this allow IHEs to recruit local high school students and develop clear systems for them to attend their university.

A second method to consider is a paraprofessional pathway for those currently employed at local school divisions. Paraprofessionals, like anyone else, can train to become high-quality special educators with the agreement they will then teach in their participat-

ing school district upon completion of the program. These programs can form at the local IHE or for two years at a partnering community college with the understanding of subsequent transfer to the GYO program home (i.e., the coordinating IHE) for the completion of a Bachelor's degree in Special Education. Due to the number of paraprofessionals who want to become teachers but otherwise would likely not have the opportunity (Osterling & Buchanon, 2003), this pathway is a tenable option for increasing enrollment numbers. IHEs can also ensure the program allows paraprofessionals to take coursework while still working during the day making it more suitable and affordable. With these needs in mind, the next step is to form meaningful partnerships.

### **Forming Partnerships**

The IHE needs to identify needs, establish pathways, and cultivate strategic partnerships in their local communities to feed the newly created GYO. To do this, faculty members can approach multiple parties (e.g., schools, community colleges) to foster critical partnerships, without which GYO programs would have little success. Like any productive relationship, the partnership must share a common vision and clearly identified roles to achieve their long-term goals of recruitment, training.

In many cases, IHEs can pair with school districts to recruit current high school students and paraprofessionals who have shown or may have interest in becoming a SPED teacher via pathways identified above. This partnership allows local districts to share data on their student demographics and teacher prospects. Once coursework begins, the IHE provides the academic content for the teacher candidates, while the local school districts provide the necessary clinical experiences for teacher licensure. For high school students, local

districts can work with their schedule and the local IHE to make room for courses in their senior year that will count as college credit in teacher preparation programs. For paraprofessionals, their school districts will allow them to remain employees of the school while taking night classes at the IHE. To foster positive partnerships, and to ensure all parties are moving toward the same terminal goal, IHEs should remain active partners by updating the schools and districts on their paraprofessionals progress in the program.

An additional consideration when developing a GYO program is seeking out potential partnerships with local and state community colleges. One exemplar is in the state of Virginia. Virginia Beach City Public Schools helped coordinate a partnership with a local community college for high school students wanting to make teaching their profession, in a GYO program titled Virginia Teachers for Tomorrow (VTfT). The school district provides students educational experiences in the following ways: 1) students get to work under highly qualified teacher leaders in the district; 2) students learn from a select group of teachers that facilitate the VTfT courses; 3) districts provide well-supported, hands-on teaching experiences; 4) students earn early college credit with Tidewater Community College; 5) localities provide a chance at a Future Teacher Award, which guarantees winners a teaching job within the district; and 6) districts commit to hiring participants within the local school district (Brown, 2018). These partnerships strengthened enrollment in community colleges and lead to licensure when transferred to IHEs, benefiting both partners and the students.

IHEs can adopt a similar model for forming partnerships by providing the educational experiences mentioned previously. By ensuring students earn

credits and work with highly qualified teachers while simultaneously participating in hands-on experiences in the local districts, these future educators are set up for success upon graduation. Additionally, providing awards, funding, and a commitment to an impending position in the schools allows students the comfort of knowing their college experience will lead to employment (Brown, 2018). IHEs can capitalize on these partnerships efforts but must then ensure they have the pre-service candidates for enrollment through intentional and purposeful recruitment strategies.

### Recruiting Strategies

IHEs need to make recruitment a priority after programmatic needs are identified and partnerships established. Recruitment efforts must be strategic to ensure IHEs contact potential teacher candidates. As with any initiative, it is critical to define each parties' roles in the recruitment efforts. Potential roles include sending out newsletters about their programs, success stories from previous students, advertising in local papers, college websites, social media, and email updates to local school districts. Another role IHEs should consider is employing and assigning a GYO liaison with recruitment efforts (e.g., visiting local schools and community colleges) as a part of their job responsibilities. Successful programs use liaisons to facilitate discussions and answer questions related to joining a GYO program. According to the Texas Comprehensive Center (2018), IHEs have been successful with recruiting efforts by engaging local schools through personal speaking engagements and making connections with prospective students.

Local school districts should also have a role in recruitment efforts. Administrators can identify paraprofessionals and students who show interest

This article opens the conversation on the potential benefits of expanding the MTSS framework into higher education, specifically teacher preparation, as an innovative approach for attracting, retaining, and preparing high-quality special educators.

in becoming licensed teachers. Administrators can develop interest surveys, provide university visits, discuss pertinent data about their personnel with IHEs, and craft individualized and personalized letters to prospective teacher candidates. To illustrate this type of effort, the *California Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program* uses their Title VII office to administer surveys to bilingual and special education paraprofessionals (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015) to gauge interest in furthering their education to become a teacher. According to the North America Cost of Living Index (2018), special education paraprofessionals make around \$1,577/month. Using this salary, 158.9% of their monthly income would pay for rent or mortgage expenses (NUMBEO, 2018). This fact alone affords school districts the opportunity to recruit and target this population for advancement in both their career and annual salaries.

Overall, it is imperative that recruitment efforts are intentional and target specific needs. As mentioned, the gap between SETOC and students of color in special education is overwhelming (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020; National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). By employing the efforts above, including targeting local paraprofessionals or students of color via email or personalized school visits from a university

liaison, IHEs can address this issue head on. IHEs and local school districts must work together to identify potential candidates for GYO programs and each partner should have clearly established and manageable roles. After these recruitment efforts are complete, IHEs should provide a variety of supports to guarantee that candidates are successful.

### Providing Supports to Ensure Success

Maintaining collaborative partnerships and recruiting qualified candidates is not

sustainable without wraparound supports during their time in the program. Often, students in GYO Programs agree to work in their home school divisions ensuring job security upon program completion. This is perhaps the largest attractor to the program, but students are non-traditional, meaning they are not usually full-time students and are often career changers or caretakers (Muniz, 2020), which *can* create barriers to successful completion of this type of educational initiative. According to Muniz (2020), non-traditional candidates bring with them a variety of value-added experiences to their local school and district including but not limited to: a) cultural competencies, b) language skills, c) instructional experience, and d) commitments to their local community. These benefits



make non-traditional students highly sought-after for local needs, but students often need additional support.

Multifaceted academic support systems are key to ensuring success. Successful programs at IHEs should assign an academic advisor in addition to mentors or other faculty put in place, purposefully, to support students in understanding and accessing resources required to be successful in such a program. There is evidence to show that this type of mentoring from start to finish in a GYO program is beneficial for all parties involved (Carver-Thomas, 2018). A great example of an academic support put in place is the *California Paraprofessional Teacher Training Program* which offers test-preparation sessions students can use when preparing for state licensure exams (California Commission on Teacher Credentialing, 2015). The *Pathways2Teaching* model provides another example of academic supports which offers college readiness support to high school students via the coordinating IHE (Barber, 2018). In these instances, university faculty and staff work with high school students entering a GYO program to focus on writing skills, test preparation, and time management.

In conjunction with academic supports, effective GYO programs should provide social supports to their students. IHEs can create a cohort model so students enrolled in the program progress through their coursework together. This allows students to collaborate with one another, discuss experiences, and learn what it is like to cooperate with teachers in the field, with the goal of creating a sense of community during and after program completion (Pemberton & Akkary, 2010). Social backings can also mentally support students during their time in the program to ensure success not only academic but socially and emotionally.

Further, non-traditional students often represent a minority group (Pham, 2019). According to Leonardo and Porter (2010) people representing a minority group have different positioning and familiarity and this means that spaces must “exist where people of color can collectively access support.” Supporting minority groups benefits localities when demographics match the local population which is an important premise that signifies the need for understanding and intentionally using GYO programs to diversify the teacher workforce.

*After identifying needs and partnerships needed to develop a GYO program, the task force recognized another area in which they should be focusing their recruitment efforts and that is diversifying the teacher workforce. To this point they had not addressed the issue of training teachers to work in the field that matched the local student demographics as far as diversity. They decided to focus their next two GYO meetings to discuss this aspect of the GYO initiative and gather evidence to show Dr. Pickens and the college Dean the importance of recruiting diverse teacher candidates.*

## **DIVERSIFYING THE TEACHER WORKFORCE THROUGH GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS**

GYO programs are a promising approach to not only decrease the special education teacher shortage but to also increase the diversity of the workforce in local communities. IHEs can grow pre-service teacher enrollment and expand candidate demographics by working with their surrounding community school districts. IHEs must understand two key points to successfully recruit, train, and retain diverse applicants: (1) the benefits of removing barriers for diversified candidates, and

(2) the intentional positive implications of a successful and diversified future special education workforce through these programs.

### **Benefits of Diversifying Teacher Candidates within GYO Programs**

As mentioned, students with disabilities are extremely diverse (NCES, 2016) but special educators of color only make up less than one-fifth of the teacher workforce (Ingersoll & May, 2011). IHEs can develop GYO programs to ensure more future teachers of color (TOC), and those from other diverse backgrounds, represent the demographics of their community. Additionally, one of the key elements of GYO programs is to match the needs of the locality (Gross, 2022). To do this, IHEs must understand the paybacks for local recruitment and the barriers to enrolling in teacher preparation programs for minorities. They must then tailor a GYO program to address these needs. Generally, to help diversify the special education workforce through GYO programs, IHEs must (a) recognize the benefits of tapping into local school districts to match demographic needs, and (b) remove existing barriers to entering teacher preparation programs for TOC.

**Benefits of tapping into local school districts.** According to Muniz (2020), TOC are more likely to participate in an alternative pathway to a teaching career, including GYO programs. A major benefit of GYO programs is that it is one of the only alternate pathways to recruit future educators from local entities. As mentioned, GYO programs can promise job placement upon graduation for high-school students and paraprofessionals. By recruiting students and paraprofessionals in a specified area, it is more likely they will represent and match the demographics of their schools. They have lived in the area (as a student or employee) and often have

family and friends. Additionally, they are familiar with the school system and more likely to want to stay in the area which is a chief benefit for the school district partners.

IHEs can use similar recruitment strategies mentioned above but should be intentional to recruit candidates that represent local diversity. To recruit for the high school teaching fellow program, IHEs can tap into local middle and high schools which offer the largest pool of potential future teachers of color (Johnson, 2018). For the paraprofessional program, IHEs should recognize that paraprofessionals more closely reflect student demographics than current special educators (Brown & Stanton-Chapman, 2014). This means they are more likely to represent the linguistics, cultures, and racial demographics of students than the teachers who are currently serving them. After enrollment, IHEs must recognize they have a legal responsibility to use culturally relevant pedagogy from student culture, backgrounds, and personal experiences (Skinner et al., 2011). This means that graduates of GYO programs who go back to teach in their home districts will not only match student demographics but will also be highly trained to understand students' individual needs. For this reason, IHEs can build academic and cultural supports into their GYO programs to address dealing with the unfamiliar for these groups.

**Barriers to entering teacher education preparation for TOC.** According to Tasha Levy, a GYO program in Illinois is comprised of nearly 66 percent future TOC (Wood, 2022). Although this is a promising statistic, minority students face many barriers to higher education and are especially in need of supports. Dyce et al. (2013) reported that families have less than a six percent chance of sending a child to college if their income was less than

\$25,000. It is also true that “median Black household earned just 61 cents for every dollar of income the median white household earned” (Wilson, 2020). This means there is a large discrepancy in the ability to afford a college education across racial lines. GYO programs who want to diversify their students should recognize this, and a subsequent section discusses strategies for funding opportunities for these students.

In addition to financial barriers, future TOC in GYO programs may need added wraparound supports as does any university student. More specifically, paraprofessionals in GYO programs are often diverse, but may be reluctant to enroll at an IHE. A study by Gardner et al., (2019) found that successful GYO programs were able to recruit and retain diverse paraprofessionals by providing three things: childcare, alignment with degrees, and pathways to transfer from a community college to an IHE in the state. This is promising for mid-size universities to remove existing concerns and structure GYO programs that are attractive and attainable for these professionals. IHEs must work with local school districts to ensure paraprofessionals have night or online coursework when considering candidates with children. Facilitators of GYO programs should monitor the pathway from community college to the IHE to ensure transparency and prevent any interference with the paraprofessional's job. IHEs can also offer diversity awareness and sensitivity programs to high school students so they know what to expect and engage in when they enroll in a GYO program.

Overall, IHEs who intentionally diversify their students benefit two main parties. First, universities can address local community needs when IHEs work to educate paraprofessionals or other members of the community that

match demographic needs. Secondly, diversifying a GYO program can help solve the issue of fewer TOC in the special education workforce (Ingersoll & May, 2011). Both purposeful diversity strategies may contribute to lessening the teacher shortage for SETOC and lead to future implications for the children they serve.

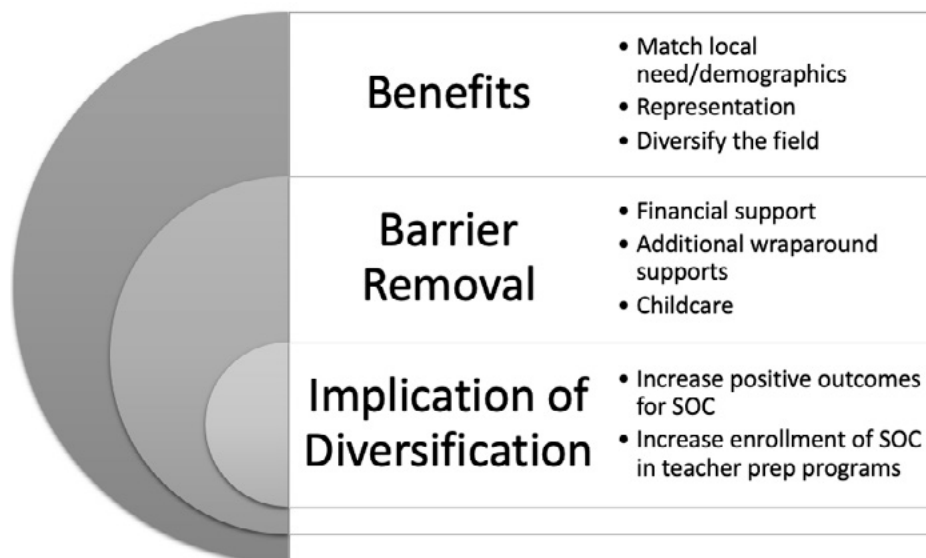
### **Future Positive Implications of Diversifying the SPED Workforce**

There is clear data to illustrate that students of color are overrepresented in special education (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020) and teachers of color are underrepresented (Kozleski & Proffitt, 2020). This is problematic but IHEs can address this through their GYO programs to benefit children in the classroom. Future implications and long-term benefits from enrolling diverse candidates in a GYO include: (a) an increase in academic, behavioral, and social outcomes for diverse children and (b) the aptitude to inspire more students of color or minorities to become teachers.

**Increase positive outcomes for diverse children.** Children of color are disproportionately represented in special education and more often referred for behavioral and social support (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2020). Holt and Gershenson (2015) point out that when students of color have teachers that represent who they are can result in fewer disciplinary appointments and reduce the magnitude of those referrals. This means children are less likely to be referred to the principal or expelled from school when their racial demographics match that of their teachers. Additionally, children adjust more socially due to their comfort level, and they report lower instances of absences in school (Holt & Gershenson, 2015). Because student absences correlate with academic achievement, this, in turn, means children perform

**FIGURE 3:** Diversifying the Teacher Workforce Through Grown Your Own Programs

## Diversifying the Teacher Workforce via Grow Your Own Programs



Note. SOC = Students of color

higher academically when teachers who match their racial demographics teach them (Aucejo & Romano, 2016). Further, research on academic achievement shows that when a teacher resembles their students demographically, it results in statistically higher reading and math attainment (Egalite., 2015).

By recruiting and retaining future TOC in GYO programs, colleges and universities can insert coursework that speaks to these statistics. They can work with pre-service teachers, either high school students or paraprofessionals, to discuss the constructive impact they can have on their future students' success in academics, behavior, and social adjustment. Additionally, IHEs can introduce culturally responsive pedagogy in GYO coursework to further the likelihood of success.

**Inspire students to become teachers.** Diversifying the teacher workforce can also support students of color who may never experience having a TOC

which could impact the future enrollment in special education training programs. More specifically, children of color are more likely to enroll in IHEs, and become teachers, if a person of color is the educator (Gershenson et al., 2017). For these reasons, IHEs who successfully graduate SETOC may have a large impact on inspiring more minority students to be teachers. If children often base their futures on what they see in their environment, namely their classrooms, providing highly trained special educators of the same race or ethnicity may serve as role models and encourage students to become educators. According to a study reported by Sarah Marsh (2105) on why people become teachers, 37% reported they were inspired by former teachers themselves. This shows IHEs can benefit from educating and producing more TOC to keep the succession going and produce future teachers through the inspiration of GYO grad-

uates. With this in mind, while all the foundational work surrounding partnership development, needs assessments, and recruitment effort are critically important, it is all for naught unless funding is available to start-up and maintain a GYO program.

*After presenting the data on the importance of recruiting diverse candidates to meet demographic needs, Dr. Pickens and the Dean were impressed. They felt the taskforce had identified a solid plan for implementation and one that would prove beneficial to all parties including the university and local school systems. As is the case at most universities, the big question then came down to funding. Although these were worthy ideas, the administration wanted to know how it could possibly be affordable. How would high-school students or paraprofessionals pay for this training and what would be the long-term benefits to all stakeholders?*

## DEVELOPING AND MAINTAINING GROW YOUR OWN PROGRAMS

Applicants to GYO programs come from a variety of backgrounds which includes those from low socio-economic status who might require financial supports to enroll at IHEs (Connally et al., 2017). Obtaining GYO funding helps provide more attainable access into the field of education for many who will then teach in their same communities. Universities must consider programmatic costs when starting a GYO model and identify potential funding and supports. Several types of funding are achievable for these programs including (a) external federal, (b) external state, and (c) internal University and College of Education monies.

### External Federal Funding

There are numerous opportunities for GYO programs to tap into federal



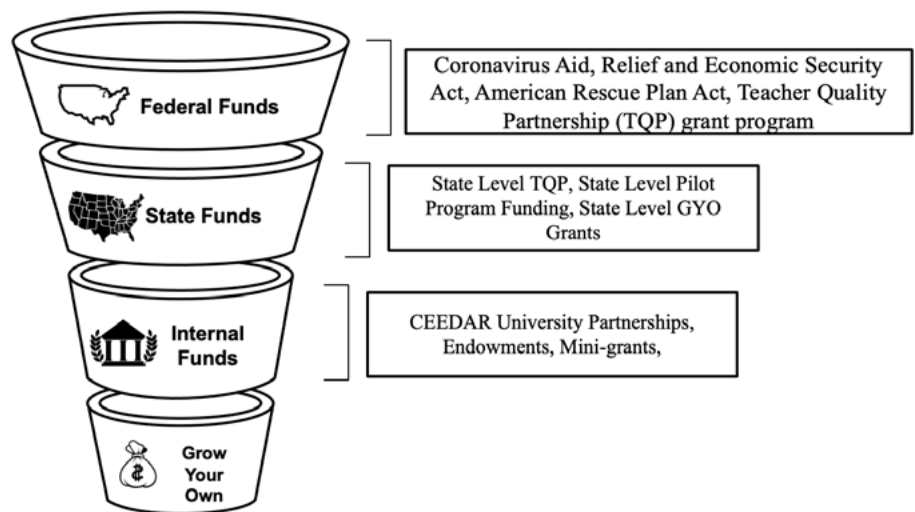
funds. Following COVID-19, the federal government introduced the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security Act (Acosta & Holdheide, 2021). One major goal of this act was to afford states and schools with money for programs endorsed by the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) (Acosta & Holdheide, 2021). Part of these funds could go directly to an IHE to start a GYO program. Further, in March of 2021, Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, suggested using American Rescue Plan Act (ARP) funds to address teacher shortages (U.S. Senate and House of Representatives, 2021). This act is particularly important for the field of special education as the major shortage area for teacher employment (National Coalition on Personnel Shortages in Special Education and Related Services, 2016). Additionally, in September of 2022, the U.S. Department of Education awarded almost \$25 million dollars to recruit and train diverse teachers for employment through the Teacher Quality Partnership (TQP) grant program. (U.S. Department of Education, 2022). The TQP grant program is an essential award for GYO programs who want to tap into local diversity. Overall, several IHEs and state school districts have capitalized on these acts to strengthen GYO programs.

### External State Funding

In addition to federal funds, external state funding is variable but available in most states.

Depending on the state government, legislatures award funding differently, however, colleges and universities can request funding to collaborate with state school districts to help qualified high-school students become licensed teachers in their local area (Sutton, 2022). As mentioned, this has several

**FIGURE 4:** Examples of GYO Development Funding



benefits as students in these areas know the local population and are more likely to stay. Additionally, many universities apply for state money to pilot GYO Programs. Pilot money in several states is available through Teacher Quality Partnership grants under Title II of the Higher Education Act (Muniz, 2020). These grants offer IHEs the opportunity to start programs and provide funding for teacher candidate training throughout the program (Muniz, 2020).

In addition to state funds for IHEs, numerous states have established grants for local school districts. These funds support the recruitment of diverse candidates to meet local district needs. For example, GYO Pilot Program funding is available to local schools through grants for individuals who meet certain conditions (Virginia General Assembly, 2020). Such conditions often consider pre-service teacher candidates who will match local school demographics and who have graduated from a public high school in the division, were qualified for free lunch during their time in high school, and who agree to teach in a participating district for at least four years, starting within one year of graduating from an IHE (Virginia General Assembly, 2020). IHEs often assist local

districts in applying for these funds. **Internal University and College of Education Funding**

More localized, IHEs can capitalize on insular grant funding and internal grants from within the University, college, or specific education department. Several IHEs offer exclusive grants for teacher candidate recruitment. Funding opportunities often appear through grants in the forms of endowments, Faculty Senate monies, or specialized local educational organizations.

In 2019, the American Institutes for Research's Center on Great Teachers and Leaders collaborated with the University of Florida's Collaboration for Effective Educator Development, Accountability, and Reform (CEEDAR) Center to establish a Toolkit for funding opportunities for the teacher education shortage (American Institutes for Research, 2019). Since this time, the University of Florida assists many IHEs in addressing specific programmatic needs. Finally, many IHEs can begin to work with their college to identify funding using resources in this document.

*At the opening department meeting to start the Fall semester, Dr. Pickens asked the GYO task force to share their*

strategies and findings. They identified what they set out to accomplish by creating an actionable plan for pre-service teacher recruitment in SPED and ECSE. They also brought in administrators from the local school district to discuss logistics and the importance of training these future educators to work within the community. Additionally, the task force shared their information on applying for federal, state, and local funding. After a departmental vote, the majority agreed the GYO Program would prove beneficial to address the special teacher education shortage.

## CONCLUSION

The demand for special educators is at an all-time high and colleges and universities are constantly looking for ways to address this need (McLeskey & Billingsley, 2008). GYO Programs require successful partnerships to ensure training programs are accessible, affordable, and culturally relevant. Yet, it takes a lot of effort to create and sustain a successful GYO Program. Universities can take actionable steps to identify school district needs, secure school partnerships, recruit future teacher candidates, provide engaging and comprehensive pre-service special education training, and act as a conduit that can supply local communities with highly qualified teachers. IHEs would benefit their initiatives by using three main steps: form collaborations, focus on diversifying teacher candidate, and tap into funding sources from multiple levels to develop and maintain GYO initiatives. With these steps in mind, IHEs across the country may adopt a similar model that meets their unique needs, and the community needs in which they are situated in to ease the burden placed on schools due to the teacher shortage.

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