



Illinois Grow Your Own Teacher Education Initiative

2014 Policy and Program Recommendations

Prepared for the Illinois Board of Higher Education by

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Executive Summary

The Illinois Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher Education Act was established by state statute in 2005 as Public Act 93-802. The focus of GYO Illinois is to prepare highly skilled, committed teachers who will teach in hard-to-staff schools or in hard-to-staff teaching positions and who will remain in these schools for substantial periods of time. According to the GYO statute, “the Initiative shall increase the diversity of teachers, including diversity based on race and ethnicity.” As such, the GYO Initiative was conceptualized as a diverse pipeline for culturally competent teachers.

In August 2010, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) selected the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University to serve as the statewide evaluator for the Illinois GYO Initiative. The purpose of the evaluation is to review the individual grant projects and the program as a whole, to identify areas of effective practice and areas needing improvement, and to provide technical assistance to project grantees and to IBHE. As a result, policy and program recommendations are developed at both the project and state program levels.

This year’s work – which occurred over a period extending from August 2014 through December 2014– has probed deeper into case-specific research questions designed to help IBHE, GYO Illinois, and each consortium make decisions that will strengthen the GYO program overall. Based on the data presented in the formative evaluation report, several program and policy recommendations are made, which have been designed to help GYO projects and the GYO initiative statewide to meet its challenges with matriculating candidates and assuring teacher placement and effectiveness. To the Illinois Board of Higher Education, we recommend deeper investigation into the larger systemic issues challenging GYO.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Supports for Non-Traditional Teacher Candidates

Recommendation 2: Strengthen Regional Approaches

Recommendation 3: Flexible Funding Models

Programmatic Recommendations from Consortium Members (per site visits)

- Create a common candidate application process
- Create a common admissions process
- Conduct Monthly statewide calls to foster networking and a more unified approach statewide
- Use data to cultivate external support for the GYO program
- Expand the GYO Illinois Director’s practice of meeting monthly with Chicago GYO project coordinators to all GYO sites.

Illinois Grow Your Own Teacher Education Initiative 2013-14 Policy and Program Recommendations

Background

The Illinois Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher Education Act was established by state statute in 2005 as Public Act 93-802. The focus of GYO Illinois is to prepare highly skilled, committed teachers who will teach in hard-to-staff schools or in hard-to-staff teaching positions and who will remain in these schools for substantial periods of time. According to the GYO statute, “the Initiative shall increase the diversity of teachers, including diversity based on race and ethnicity.” As such, the GYO Initiative was conceptualized as a diverse pipeline for culturally competent teachers.

Why is a diverse teacher pipeline important? Four main reasons are found in recent educational research:

1. ***Students learn better from teachers like themselves.*** Teachers from cultural backgrounds similar to that of their students are more likely to use teaching strategies and materials that connect well with their students, establish school-to-home relationships, and create environments that foster student engagement with learning.¹ When teachers teach students of color from their own ethnic groups, they have higher academic, personal and social performance.²
2. ***The student population is becoming more ethnically diverse over time,*** while the racial/ethnic makeup of the teaching remains largely Caucasian. While the U.S. Census Bureau projected steady and accelerated growth of students of color in the K-12 student population through 2050, the K-12 teaching workforce has not diversified at the same pace. Nationally, 40 percent of the public school population is students of color (23 percent Latino, 18 percent African American) compared to just 17 percent of the teaching force. For Illinois, the disparity is even greater, with 46 percent students of color compared to 11 percent of teachers (6 percent African American and 5 percent Latino). The mismatch between the student and teacher racial and ethnic backgrounds in Illinois is particularly problematic. Illinois ranks 48th out of 50 states in bridging the gap between the racial make-up of teachers versus students.³ In 2012, nearly half (49 percent) of the state’s two million public school students were racially and ethnically diverse while 16.7 percent of Illinois teachers similarly were diverse (Illinois State Board of Education, 2012).
3. ***Numbers of English Learners and students in poverty are rising.*** Nearly 1 in 4 students in Illinois (22 percent) reported speaking a language other than English in the home (U.S. Census Bureau, 2006-2008) and nearly one out of every 10 Illinois’ students was designated at one point as an English Learner (EL). Over the last fifteen years, the population of English Learners in Illinois schools has grown by 83 percent (Illinois Advisory Council on Bilingual Education Report, 2011). Low-income students are now a majority (51percent) of the schoolchildren

attending the nation's public schools, according to the latest data collected from the states by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES).⁴

4. ***Nationwide, enrollment is dropping in teacher preparation programs.*** Various causes are proposed: economic uncertainty, changes in teacher evaluations, new and more rigorous academic standards, and the perception that teachers are to blame for school problems.⁵

Policies and programs to address the mismatch between teachers' backgrounds and those of their students include statewide initiatives to fund teacher preparation programs aimed at low-income and minority teachers and federal financial aid programs for low-income students entering the teaching field. These programs include the Illinois GYO Initiative, the Golden Apple Scholars Program, and the Associated Colleges of Illinois (ACI) Center for Success in High-Needs Schools. University programs include: University of St. Francis Multi-Cultural Education Recruitment in Teaching (MERIT), Governor's State University, Milliken University, and Northeastern Illinois University (NEIU) (See descriptions in Appendix A).

All too often, graduates who obtain a teaching certificate take their first job only to leave after one or two years. In Illinois, policy analysts have been investigating teacher turnover in response to a belief that half of all new teachers "flee the profession within five years." A report by DeAngelis and Presley (2007) states "Although we do not see large differences in new teacher attrition across school types, we do find that teachers with strong academic backgrounds are more likely to leave disadvantaged schools within five years."⁶

How is the Illinois GYO Initiative addressing these challenges?

The Illinois GYO Initiative is a collaboration of regional partnerships or consortia among K-12 districts and schools, 2-year and 4-year colleges, and community-based organizations working together to recruit and develop a pipeline of diverse teachers who come from the communities in which they will one day teach. Programs offer tuition support, other types of financial assistance, test preparation support, cohort structures, and other customized means of assistance based on the needs of the candidates.

The concept of GYO began with Chicago's Logan Square Neighborhood Association (LSNA) and Chicago State University through a U.S Department of Education grant. From there, the statewide initiative evolved through legislation passed in 2005 into the current statewide initiative. According to Illinois Board of Higher Education 2014 data, eleven GYO consortia currently serve 184 candidates. GYO consortia have successfully prepared 102 graduates through the fall of 2014. Motivated by the motto, "Speaking with One Voice" and under the leadership of the Illinois Board of Higher Education and GYO Illinois, the Illinois GYO Initiative participants have reflected on the past ten years and have made changes to continuously improve program outcomes. These changes do not affect the charge of the program but rather, reflect a deeper analysis into what works well; what has not worked; current educational policy; and research around the teacher preparation, recruitment and placement.

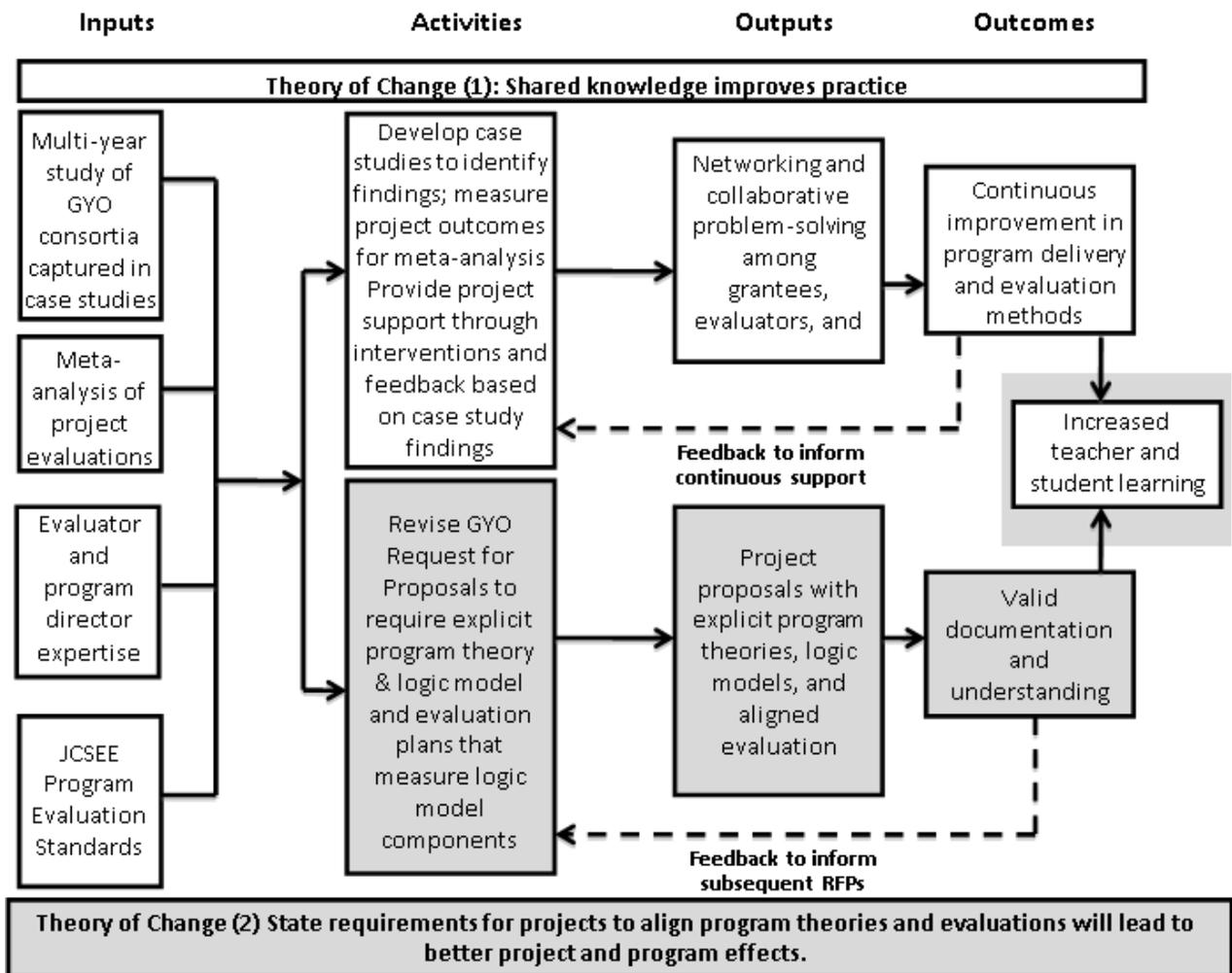
As illustrated by survey results and student narratives, GYO teachers not only enroll in the program with the understanding that they will teach in disadvantaged schools, but enter into it knowing they want to do so. For the average GYO candidate in the program, this is the community where they live, and many have served in some capacity as active members of their school (e.g., as an employee, parent mentor, volunteer, or working in their local community-based organization).

Evaluation Role and Methodology

In August 2010, the Illinois Board of Higher Education (IBHE) selected the Center for the Study of Education Policy (CSEP) at Illinois State University to serve as the statewide evaluator for the Illinois GYO Initiative. The purpose of the evaluation is to review the individual grant projects and the program as a whole, to identify areas of effective practice and areas needing improvement, and to provide technical assistance to project grantees and to IBHE. As a result, policy and program recommendations are developed at both the project and state program levels.

The CSEP evaluation work follows a logic model built around two theories of change: (1) shared knowledge improves practice and (2) state requirements for projects to align program theories and evaluations will lead to better project and program effects (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Illinois GYO Initiative Logic Model



The CSEP evaluation team has worked with IBHE since 2003 as statewide evaluators for the Illinois Improving Teacher Quality (ITQ) State Grant Program supported by federal ESEA Title II funds. The meta-evaluation methodology and designs used for (ITQ) evaluation-received recognition by the U.S. Department of Education as an exemplary practice model for capacity building among grant-funded projects. The CSEP evaluation team has employed the same research designs for the evaluation of the Illinois GYO initiative that have been utilized since 2003 with the ITQ partnership sites. The methodology used by CSEP for GYO and ITQ initiatives employs evaluation capacity building strategies through a formative evaluation process designed to not only monitor program effectiveness of the GYO initiative statewide but also to provide individual assistance to each GYO consortium to help strengthen its outcome attainment.

For the 2013-2014 evaluation, CSEP conducted consortium site visits; interviewed GYO directors, staff, partners, graduates and candidates; and analyzed data from IBHE, along with survey data from GYO graduates and candidates. In an effort to understand the effectiveness of GYO in meeting state needs for teacher preparation, certification, and placement of new teachers, CSEP used data across cases to analyze implementation successes and challenges of the program.

Over the course of five months, CSEP researchers visited the eleven consortia across the state and met with directors of each project, community-based partners, and district and school partners, including higher education institutions affiliated with each project. In total, CSEP met with over 50 GYO members face-to-face and interviewed via phone, in person, or through email another 20 graduates and candidates. (Interview protocol is provided in Appendix B). CSEP conducted and updated annual survey of GYO candidates and graduates, in which 26 of 102 graduates responded (26%) and 97 of 184 candidates responded (53% of candidates). These multiple sources of data were analyzed together to investigate implementation successes and challenges in achieving the goals of the GYO program. (Survey questions are provided in Appendix C).

2014 GYO consortia include:

Chicago State University
East St. Louis School District
Governor's State University
Rockford
Southern Illinois University Carbondale
Springfield School District
Youth Connection Charter School

Northeastern Illinois University (4)

- Action Now Institute/Kenwood Oakland Community Organization
- Logan Square Neighborhood Association
- ONE Northside
- Southwest Organizing Project/ENLACE

Evaluation Findings

Candidate Progress and Completion

Over ten years, GYO has produced 105 graduates. As of March 2015, 288 candidates with a forgivable loan amount of over \$1,000 have exited the program, which is 51% of GYO candidates who have ever received GYO funding. Tables 1-5 provide current data on GYO candidates and graduates. [The Illinois Board of Higher Education (3.3.2015) provided all data.]

Table 1: Historical GYO Graduates 2006-2015

Prior to 2009	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	Total 06-15	Total 11-15
10	9	10	25	23	21	6	105	76

Table 2: GYO Projected Graduates 2015-2019

2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Total
18	28	61	38	7	152

Note: Includes Active Enrolled, and Active Not Enrolled Candidates

Table 3: GYO Attrition Rate Excluding Individuals Exited with less than \$1,000 In Loans

Status	# Of Students	Percentage
Total Exited Candidates since inception	401	
# Exited with less than \$1,000 in loans	107	
# Exited with MORE than \$1,000 in loans	288	
# Current – Active Candidates	129	
# Candidates completing degree requirements	47	
# Of Graduates	105	
• Total less with \$1,000 in loans	589	
• Total with everyone	676	
Attrition Rate		51%

Table 4: Exit Reasons

Exit Reason	# Of Students	Percentage
Counseled Out	192	47.88%
Family	36	8.98%
Financial	4	1.00%
Health	13	3.24%
Military Leave	1	0.25%
Other	90	22.44%
Program/Courses/Tests Too Difficult	33	8.23%
Work	13	3.24%
No Response	19	4.74%

Table 5: Candidate Certification Programs

Licensure Program	# Of Students	Percentage
Bilingual Education	26	14.13%
Early Childhood Education	19	10.33%
Elementary Education	74	42.05%
Secondary Business Education	5	2.84%
Secondary Career/Tech Ed	1	0.57%
Secondary Language Arts	9	5.11%
Secondary Math	8	4.55%
Secondary Science	6	3.41%
Secondary Social Science	8	4.55%
Special Education	16	9.09%
Unknown	1	1.09%
No Response	3	0.57%

In the Fall of 2014, the Illinois GYO program had 184 candidates (140 enrolled for fall 2014 term and 44 not enrolled). Of these, 88% are African-American or Latino, and 84% are employed full or part-time. More than one-fourth (27%) have been admitted to a College of Education in their consortia. A typical GYO candidate is a first-generation college student, who works 20 or more hours per week, has a family, and has been away from higher education for many years or is new to higher education. Eighty percent of the 184 candidates reported being aged 31 or older, and the rest aged 20-30. More than two-thirds (68%) of candidates have dependents. Research has shown that these background characteristics (e.g. working, having dependents, having a greater number of years between high school and college enrollment) are associated with prolonged time-to-degree.⁷

According to the Pell Institute (2008), based upon data from the National Center for Education Statistics, “low-income, first-generation students were nearly four times more likely to leave higher education after the first year than students who had neither of these risk factors,” (p. 2). Furthermore, “six years later, nearly half (43 percent) of low-income, first-generation students

had left college without earning their degrees. Among those who left, nearly two-thirds (60 percent) did so after the first year. After six years, only 11 percent of low-income, first-generation students had earned bachelor's degrees compared to 55 percent of their more advantaged peers," (p. 2).⁸ Data from the National Student Clearinghouse has shown that older students tend to take a longer time to graduate with bachelor's degrees, if they graduate at all.⁹ *GYO candidates fit this profile for non-traditional students, and over the course of the initiative, over 15% have graduated with baccalaureate teaching degrees. If on-track graduation predictions hold, an additional 158 graduates will boost that percentage higher in coming years.*

Most current GYO candidates have not yet passed the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) that is required to gain acceptance in Illinois' Colleges of Education and become certified as a teacher in the state. According to the 2014 GYO survey results, 53 GYO candidates reported that they passed the Test of Academic Proficiency or Illinois Test of Basic Skills. In 2010, ISBE restructured and raised the cut scores for the required entrance exam for education colleges, and also imposed a limit on the number of times students could take the test. The limit was set to 5, this was changed in 2014 (March 2014). *Overall, less than a third of students who now take the TAP pass it*, a vast difference from previous past rate of more than 80 percent. Much of the dialogue about the sharp drop in pass rates on the TAP has focused on black and Hispanic students, whose scores are significantly lower than white students. However, only 34 percent of White students passed the exam in the final quarter of 2013. Alternatively, students can take the ACT test with the writing component.

Survey Findings

Twenty-six graduates completed the 2014 Grow Your Own survey, which is about one-fourth of the total number of GYO graduates (102 graduates as of 11/11/2014). Most of the responding graduates (23 of 26) teach in a GYO partner school district and the other three graduate survey respondents teach in private schools serving a predominantly minority student population or other educational non-profit organization. Twenty of the 26 graduate respondents also obtained additional endorsements such as Special Education, Bilingual Education, or middle school Math/Science.

Graduates rated tuition assistance and reimbursement for course books as most valuable to their degree completion (25 of 26 graduates rated these as the top supports). Three other supports were rated as highly valuable: evening classes, mentoring/personal relationships with college or GYO staff, and the ability to borrow a laptop. Many graduates spoke of the combination of financial support and personal encouragement as the strongest factors in their success. As one graduate said, "Though I originally found that I could not have started the program (or finished) without the great financial support, it was the support I received from GYO advisors, mentors, and cohort members that allowed me to complete my endeavor so successfully."

GYO graduates and candidates expressed the value of participating in community engagement activities, such as attending a GYO rally in Springfield, participating in a local rally on education issues or non-education issues, distributing literature on GYO, and assisting community-based organizations with GYO or non-GYO programming. Nearly three-fourths (72%) reported participating in some community engagement activities of this type, and nearly two-thirds (64%) of responding graduates and candidates who participated in these activities found them to be “very beneficial” to preparing to teach in a high-needs school. In addition, two-thirds of GYO graduates and candidates who responded to the 2014 survey already worked or volunteered in a school served by their GYO community, and more than half (56%) live in the neighborhood served by their GYO community.

GYO candidates value GYO consortia’s efforts. Top-rated supports from 97 survey respondents were tuition assistance (100%), academic advising (72%), academic support (77%), moral/emotional support (92%), and participation in a network of support with fellow GYO participants (76%). While not all GYO candidates reported receiving every support, the majority of survey respondents indicated that the supports that they received were “most instrumental.” Table 6 below summarizes the supports received by 97 GYO candidates and their general ratings of these supports.

Table 6: Survey Results

Type of Support	Number and percent of candidates who reported receiving various types of support	Number and percent who rated as “most instrumental” (of those who received)
Tuition assistance	89 of 97 (92%)	89 of 89 (100%)
Academic advising	82 of 97 (85%)	59 of 82 (72%)
Academic support (e.g. tutoring)	71 of 97 (73%)	55 of 71 (77%)
Moral/emotional support	71 of 97 (73%)	65 of 71 (92%)
Participation in network of support with fellow GYO participants	71 of 97 (73%)	54 of 71 (76%)
Academic workshops (e.g. study skills, workshops on effective teaching styles)	69 of 97 (71%)	48 of 69 (70%)
Financial aid assistance (e.g. support for applying for loans, grants, or scholarships)	69 of 97 (71%)	65 of 69 (94%)
Emergency fund assistance (e.g. short term loan, books, laptop)	58 of 97 (60%)	57 of 58 (98%)
Participation in network of support with other GYO consortia	53 of 97 (55%)	34 of 53 (64%)
Connections to staff in partnership schools to support certification and employment as a teacher	53 of 97 (55%)	42 of 53 (79%)
Logistical support (e.g. transportation, child care)	46 of 97 (47%)	37 of 46 (80%)
Technical support (e.g. with computer programs or other technological support)	43 of 97 (44%)	39 of 43 (91%)

As one GYO candidate said, “Financial, tutoring, and emotional support have been vital in the past. If it were not for GYO, I will not be able to afford college, without tutoring I will struggle academically, and the emotional support reminds me I am not alone in this journey.”

Furthermore, when GYO consortia have operated effectively and successfully supported their candidates to attain their teaching certification and obtain teaching jobs in the partner districts, the GYO candidates and graduates are generally satisfied with their preparation.

Three-fourths (77%) of GYO graduates who responded to the 2014 survey (n=26) and two-thirds of GYO candidates responding to the survey (65 of 97) reported being “highly satisfied” with their experience in GYO Illinois. Most (69%) of the 26 graduates and half of the GYO candidates responding to the survey also reported being “highly satisfied” with the training they received from their teacher certification program. Though fewer GYO graduates reported being “highly satisfied” with how well their training and GYO Illinois prepared them for the demands of teaching in a hard-to-staff school, more than half of the 26 GYO graduates responding to the survey (54%) reported being “highly satisfied.” More than half of GYO candidates who responded to the survey (53%) similarly reported that their teacher training through GYO prepared them well for the demands of teaching in a hard-to-staff school. Most GYO teacher graduates (16 of 26, or 62%) and 59% of GYO candidates who responded to the survey also reported that they “feel connected to their GYO program participants and cohort.” Amidst the successes of the GYO Illinois program, considerable room for improvement exists.

In their survey responses, GYO candidates reported upon challenges that deter progress toward degree completion. The top challenges cited were:

1. Financial hardships overall (transportation, child care, books, other supports)
2. Family responsibilities and concerns (e.g. death in the family; caring for children; personal health concerns)
3. Lack of financial support to cover lost income during student teaching and clinical experience
4. Not enough time to study with other responsibilities
5. Course scheduling issues that delay progress

Both GYO graduates and candidates who have passed the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) or the Illinois Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) have said that the most beneficial supports were: individual study (53% of candidates and 22 of 26 graduates); tutoring through the GYO program (33% of candidates); preparation in college courses (32% of candidates and 14 of 26 graduates); and mentoring from faculty, staff, or fellow GYO participants (11 of 26 graduates). While GYO graduates successfully completed all the teaching certification milestones, 16 of the 26 graduates who responded to the survey noted that passing the TAP exam (or ITBS exam) was “somewhat difficult.” Fifteen of the 26 graduates in the 2014 survey said that passing the Illinois content area tests and other certification exams were “somewhat difficult.” From the perspective of GYO graduates, the least difficult milestones in obtaining teacher certification were: 1) admission

acceptance into student teaching and clinical experience, 2) admission acceptance into the College of Education, 3) passing general education credits with a minimum GPA, 4) passing student teaching and clinical experience according to rubric standards, and 5) passing professional education credits with a minimum GPA.

Site Visit Findings

Site visits to each consortium, supplemented data collected by IBHE and through surveys and interviews. Project coordinators were provided with questions in advance of the visit (See Appendix C). Several categories of findings helped to round out evaluators' understanding of GYO consortia's strengths and challenges in the areas of partnerships, candidate supports and regional approaches.

Partnerships

GYO consortia have continued to strengthen their partnerships with universities, school districts, and community agencies to improve support for teacher candidates at various stages of the teacher certification pipeline.

The Rockford GYO consortium has a strong collaborative working relationship. They meet monthly to track candidate progress through the program, making collaborative decisions about how to improve the program to support student's needs. The relationship with the district has significantly impacted placement of GYO graduates. Through paraprofessional union negotiations with Rockford School District #205, GYO candidates on leave for student teaching are allowed to keep their insurance. Under this contract agreement, paraprofessionals retain their benefits, alleviating some of the financial burdens that come with taking a leave of absence. The Rockford GYO consortium has also expanded and altered its program to include concentrations in other teaching certificate areas. This decision was made with district partners at annual meetings where it was determined that the needs of the district had shifted, and teachers holding a special education certificate would be needed. In 2015, a cohort of GYO candidates will begin their education toward special education certification. With the Human Resource staff from the district deeply involved in the consortium's work, GYO graduate placement and supports once placed is a model for other GYO consortia.

The Southernmost GYO based at Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) is continuously working with the school districts they serve. The Southernmost GYO is unique in that it serves a vast geographic area across multiple counties. These southern counties have a high proportion of low-income families, consisting primarily of small towns and rural areas. Shawnee Community College has a long-standing cooperative relationship with SIUC and offers SIUC coursework on its campus, including EDU 999, a mini-workshop designed to support candidates preparing to take the Test of Academic Proficiency. Instructors from SIUC and SCC, along with tutors, meet with students individually to provide encouragement and support for their success. Southernmost GYO, along with partners FoCUS of Southern Illinois and the Small and

Rural Schools Association, has a history of collaboration with counties' school districts through grants to offer after-school programs, a "Virtual Community Learning Center" that connects districts to share programs and innovations, and a mentoring program for students. Based on past district needs analysis, there has been a strong emphasis on special education certification to staff special education positions in high-need schools. Based on more recent needs assessments (2012/13) Southernmost GYO received approval from IBHE for the addition of mathematics and science as areas of concentration for candidates.

In contrast, some consortia are struggling to find a strong partnership with their community-based organizations. Chicago State University - Teachers with a Cause (TWAC) has struggled to connect with a community-based organization for an extended period of time. This however, is changing with a new partnership formed in 2014. The Chicago State University GYO has been challenged to connect the needs of the district and partner schools. Many of the partner schools show no vacancies or only one, which is a concern when it comes to the chances of placing graduates. In light of this, the project personnel have refocused their priorities, initiated new efforts toward district collaboration with a focus on clarifying roles and responsibilities to successfully prepare, graduate, and place students in a timely manner. At the university level, the program appears to be sustainable, particularly with the university support services available to students. More questionable is sustainability at the community-based organizational level, and in administration and tracking of students. In the fall of 2014, the Chicago State University GYO implemented a new evaluation plan, which will allow the program staff to measure the effectiveness of current program supports and program elements. This is done with the intention of eliminating some of the program elements that no longer add value to the program.

The Chicago-based consortia all described strong partnerships with the neighborhood districts they serve; however, ongoing change in the Chicago Public Schools (CPS) puts added stress on GYO partnerships simply because there are so many unknowns. Action Now Institute Oakland Community Organization is on track to prepare their teacher candidates for endorsements in elementary education, special education, middle school science and math, and early childhood education. They have extensive supports and counseling procedures in place along with the benefit of being part of a network help NEIU ANI-KOCO successfully prepare diverse teaching candidates to meet the needs of CPS. The network partnership provides NEIU ANI-KOCO with the needs of partner schools, keeping the consortium fully informed, and working with NEIU to prepare teachers to meet the racial composition and language diversity present in the student population they serve. Partner schools have demonstrated support through collaborating with community-based organizations and NEIU to help identify teacher vacancies and mentor new teachers in the district. A challenge facing the Chicago-based GYO consortia is continued volatility with school neighborhood closure, and how this affects the GYO graduate. A principal interviewed for this report said, "We simply do not know if we will even open our doors next year." (This principal asked to remain anonymous). Chicago Public Schools (CPS) school closure and hiring/laying off policies have made supply and demand projections difficult, creating

a larger systemic issue for the GYO consortia. Even with deliberate approaches to connecting with partner schools, NEIU SWOP/ENLACE faces similar challenges including teacher vacancies, hiring/laying off policies of CPS, and aligning teaching certificates to the needs of the district. The NEIU ONE Northside GYO (along with all the NEIU sites) says university faculty immersion into the community is the key to candidates' continued perseverance in their academic endeavor.

Candidate Supports

Every GYO consortium takes a great deal of initiative to ensure every opportunity possible for candidate success. Their deep investment in the GYO project is evident in the amount of time and resources each has collectively committed to the candidates and the program. At the majority of site visits, a wide representation of partners was present including faculty and staff from partnering higher education institutions, GYO coordinators, school and district representatives, community-based organization members, and sometimes candidates themselves. Common supports beyond covering tuition include tutoring, advisement, test preparation courses, reimbursement for books and materials, transportation and childcare reimbursement, and offering loaner computers.

The Southernmost GYO has demonstrated great resourcefulness in identifying and securing funding to support GYO candidates. When delays in state funding occur, college partners have carried student tuition costs themselves, and candidates have paid out-of-pocket for childcare and transportation while awaiting state payments for stipends. In accordance with changing state education policies, GYO candidates are receiving strong preparation in aligning to and writing lessons for the Illinois Learning Standards through their SIUC coursework and field experience. They are also being familiarized with the Danielson Framework for Excellence in Teaching, so they are well prepared to know what is expected of an excellent teacher once hired in a district. A challenge for the Southernmost GYO is its broad service area. Field placements may be separated by 100 miles to due to the rural context of this consortium. Holding classes and providing tutoring and advisement at Shawnee Community College is one way to save many candidates community time and money.

Although budget reductions have limited the scope of supportive services the East St. Louis GYO can offer its candidates, its strong partnership helped to ameliorate some of these losses. Program coordinators have integrated several funding streams to support GYO candidates. District 189 is also the recipient of the federal Transition to Teach (TTT) grant, which supports paraprofessionals as they pursue their teacher certifications. TTT funds have supported eligible GYO candidates through the allocation of laptops, technology training, and workshops. Higher education partners, SWIC and SIUE have also been supportive of GYO candidates by connecting them to needed services (like TAP preparation) through campus services.

Some suggestions from GYO candidates and graduates for easing the challenges and burdens faced by non-traditional teaching candidates include: providing more online course availability and electronic books; employers offering flexibility to attend classes; more courses offered in late afternoon, evenings, or weekends; offering tutoring; study groups for TAP preparation and for final classes needed to become a teacher; and providing stipends for student teaching. Once GYO candidate's progress successfully through their teacher certification milestones, they recommended additional support for obtaining a job in education and provide a network of schools for observations, clinical experience, student teaching, and job placement. Other important supports that were recommended included: mentoring from a teacher in the program to guide through necessary paperwork, tests, and classes; and frequent meetings/gatherings with their cohort to build consistency and stamina for degree completion.

Among successful GYO candidates and graduates who passed the TAP exam or its equivalent, they recommend: encouraging teacher education candidates to do online practice testing, boost participation and offering of test preparation "boot camps" offering and incentivizing one-on-one tutoring and study groups, offering and incentivizing late afternoon or evening workshops (as the majority work full or part time), providing support for intense studying and practice for a few days before the test, and consistent support structures for candidates to create and keep a study and test preparation schedule.

GYO graduates have reported on the 2014 survey that the top supports in securing employment are: 1) professional referrals from the College of Education to the school/district, 2) regular follow-up calls from the GYO program to encourage and check-in, and 3) coaching from college staff or graduates on obtaining and registering their certification. Once in their teaching jobs, GYO graduates reported that the most beneficial support is "mentoring from a fellow teacher." (Half of survey respondents who were GYO graduates cited this as "highly beneficial.") Many GYO consortia offer these supports.

Regional Approaches

In the context of changing policies and funding uncertainties, it is difficult to assure GYO candidates of job placement upon graduation. Some GYO consortia are expanding their outlook to the broader regions beyond the original consortium partner districts.

The East St. Louis GYO staff members are housed in the Human Resources department and are knowledgeable about district hiring requirements and professional expectations. In the context of a state takeover of school district 189, the GYO program's strong relationship with school district has been crucial for its continuation and support. Candidate recruitment is ongoing, with support from the local NAACP chapter. However, given the context of the East St. Louis governance and financial issues, it is difficult to assure that recruits will have employment upon completion of their degrees. Therefore, the district is broadening its outlook to a regional approach, in collaboration with other high-need districts. For example, the Cahokia school

district is a partner in Illinois along with the Confluence Academies in Missouri. Others are expected to collaborate in the future, thus increasing the likelihood that GYO graduates will obtain employment.

Emerging Themes from Data Analysis

Analysis of site visits, interviews and survey data as well as information gathered at the annual GYO Symposium has revealed emerging themes that illustrate both successful practices and recurring challenges. These themes are pertinent to recommendations for improvement at both the project and program levels.

Successful practice themes include:

- *Dreams Deferred:* Candidates had, in the past, deferred their dreams of becoming teachers due to their personal circumstances.
- *Common Ground:* Candidates desire to teach students who share their personal, cultural and ethnic backgrounds.
- *Helping Hands:* GYO Project coordinator and cohort supports matter greatly.

Recurring challenge themes include:

- Funding and finance uncertainty.
- Candidate progress and retention.
- Graduate placement in teaching positions.

These themes are discussed in more detail below.

Dreams Deferred

Of the ten GYO graduates interviewed by CSEP staff, and the seven graduates interviewed at the GYO Statewide Learning Conference, the consistent theme of “dream deferred” emerged. For all of the GYO graduates interviewed, becoming a teacher was a dream they had believed was not possible given their circumstances. One GYO graduate of Northeastern Illinois University said, “I was raised in Chicago, and was one of five siblings born to Mexican immigrant working parents. I attended four different CPS elementary schools, and given the bad timing of my parents’ divorce, I graduated with a very low GPA. My parents reinforced the importance of taking advantage of opportunities available to me in the United States, and I tried. However, at age 19, seven months from receiving an associate degree, I became pregnant. My priorities shifted, and I did not have the financial resources to be both a parent and student. It wasn’t until I was 31 and a volunteer at my son’s school that I heard of GYO. I enrolled at Northeastern Illinois University to pursue a bachelor’s degree. After three and a half years I graduated with honors from Northeastern Illinois University.”

Similar testimonials were heard from the other GYO graduates, most of whom were mothers working full and/or part-time jobs, and trying to attend classes in pursuit of a teaching degree.

Males make up approximately one-fifth of active GYO candidates. Two men interviewed shared their own illustrative stories of reaching their dream of being a teacher. They graduated from two different GYO consortia and today serve as full-time teachers in hard-to-staff schools.

One of these GYO graduates grew up on Chicago's South Side. "I know what it is like to live in a small apartment with 10 people. My goal was to push through and not use these 'hardships' as an excuse. I didn't realize my dream of becoming a teacher until later in my life." He was a security guard before enrolling in GYO. He says, "Getting my degree was not easy, but now I'm living my dream."

A second male GYO graduate is from the southern part of the state. When asked about his ethnicity he said, "I'm a hybrid." His mother who worked multiple minimum wage paying jobs to support him and his three siblings raised him. "I'm the only one of my three siblings who was not born with the genetic disability that left my other siblings with multiple physical impairments. I saw firsthand the struggles they faced as students with a disability." He felt he was not on a path to succeed in school; however, "a few great teachers took an interest in me and managed to fan a spark into a flame." After spending time in the Navy and on the reservation, this person became the co-chair of an AIDS Project in Missouri. This position led him to work at a center for at-risk youth. "Within a week I knew what I was supposed to do." With the support of a former regional superintendent, he became the first Safe School employee where he spent 20 years as a teaching assistant. After multiple efforts to secure the funding to go back to school to become a certified teacher, "The funds simply kept drying up." Then he heard about GYO. "I felt like I was being given the chance of a lifetime." He "jumped on board" and graduated with honors from Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC). He is in his second year of teaching at a Special Education Youth Service Agency. "My career matches my experience, and because of it I can effectively do my job." GYO offered him the opportunity to go to school with "some of the most impressive individuals I will ever meet; mothers, fathers, working and going to school, struggling to make ends meet so they could live out their dream."

A female GYO graduate from SIUC is a "hometown girl," growing up and attending the same school where she was later a teaching assistant for 15 years. Her plans to go on to college were changed when, as she puts it, "life happened." Her mother was diagnosed with breast cancer. "School wasn't a priority, living was." After her mother passed away, she wanted to do more and this where GYO entered her picture. After five years attending SIUC, She graduated with honors in May of 2013. In October of 2013 a vacancy opened at a school for students with behavioral disorders and this GYO graduate was hired to fill that position. She is still there today teaching English Language Arts to sixth through twelfth grade students.

Common Ground

Another theme heard during the interviews and conference was the hope to be a teacher who shared the same ethnicity and experience of their students. “I went to Peck Elementary School, almost all of my teachers were white, but my classmates were a mix of 2nd and 3rd generation Latinos. None of my teachers spoke English,” said one GYO graduate. “My goal as a teacher is to establish a dialogue with my students, which is based on our shared experience and background. I also want them to use critical thinking to apply, analyze, and evaluate information in order to succeed.” He goes on to say, “I teach history from the perspective of different ethnic groups that are sometimes overlooked in books, and teaching philosophies that do not mirror the background of my students.” This theme is echoed in each discussion the evaluators had, and also in the tone of the teacher panel at the Statewide Learning Conference. Another GYO graduate said, “During the 12 years that I attended CPS, I encountered very few minority teachers and no teachers with Mexican background like me. Now, I can be that teacher who has a positive influence on the children I teach. Our common background provides me with the tools and references that I use when making when making connections with my students. My classroom is better because of it and my students are motivated as well.”

One woman is a SWOP/GYO graduate currently teaching math at a high school in Chicago. She reiterated the comments of the other GYO graduates with regards to cohort support, economic opportunity and “dream deferred;” however, she also talked at length about her role as a mentor and teacher to students who are not from this country and do not speak the language. “I teach three classes assigned to English Language Learner (ELL) students. They come to this country with no understanding of the culture or the language, it can be terrifying. My job is to help ease the transition and serve as support system to them as they make their way into our educational system, and their new community. I create a trusting and safe environment; through this type of environment I see greater academic outcomes.”

Helping Hands

The GYO Program offers multiple supports to their candidates including, but not limited forgivable loans, tutoring, mentoring and coaching. However, beyond these supports, which can be tracked on spreadsheets, you will find the shared and real-life experiences the candidates bring to their cohorts. This was another theme that resonated throughout the conference and interviews.

“I was sometimes the oldest person sitting in my classes at the colleges, even sometimes older than the professor. This can be deflating; however, all of my GYO friends were just like me. They were going through the same emotions and challenges both inside and outside of the classroom. We managed all of our problems together. This was the greatest level of support I received.”

-GYO Graduate

This theme resonated throughout every conversation with a GYO graduate. A graduate with SWOP-Enlace/GYO said, “I was a mom, and the majority of my GYO friends were as well. When we were studying or taking classes together, I never felt alone. I always felt that there was someone like me sitting in class. This wasn’t the same feeling I had pre-GYO when I was trying to take classes at Chicago City Colleges. This made a huge difference toward my attitude about going to class.”

It wasn’t however, just the shared life experiences that GYO graduates commented on. Each and every one interviewed talked about their consortium coordinator. The bureaucratic red tape of going to school can be incredibly difficult to navigate, especially when you are twenty-plus years removed. However, for the GYO graduates, their experience differed from their early attempts at degree attainment. For many it had a lot to do with their consortium coordinator. A Springfield GYO graduate said, “I called my coordinator during late hours many nights, and she always answered. I was usually at my end, and ready to quit. After a sometimes lengthy conversation where I did most of the talking and she did the listening, she would end with, okay see you in class tomorrow, and I would be in class the next day.” A similar story was told over and over again by each graduate, praising the work of his or her coordinator and cohort members.

Others talked about their building principal. One graduate said, “It was my building principal who led me to GYO. I was serving as a teaching assistant, and he knew I wanted to be a teacher. One day he told me about GYO.” She is the mother of two children who was born and raised in the Little Village neighborhood on the south side of Chicago. Her parents still live in this neighborhood. She had been working full-time as a teaching assistant and part-time on the weekends while raising her two children. Her efforts to take classes and pay for them always ended quickly. “My children came first.” Thanks to her principal and his connection with the community-based organization SWOP/Enlace, she is now in her third year of teaching English Language Arts at a Chicago middle school.

Funding and Finance Uncertainty

The very nature of year-to-year funding for the Illinois GYO Initiative creates a variety of challenges for IBHE, project coordinators and for candidates themselves. For many consortia, it is difficult to recruit candidates to start a teacher education program when they do not know if funding will be available from year to year for them to continue through graduation. Funding shortfalls have made it necessary for some university partners to cover tuition costs while waiting state funding. In addition, the reimbursement model requires candidates to foot many costs out-of-pocket, such as those for transportation and childcare, and await repayment at a later date. As one graduate put it, this is a very “middle-class” mindset; it presumes that the candidate has spare cash to outlay and the financial wherewithal to wait for reimbursement. This is most definitely not the case for most, if not all, GYO candidates.

Even when GYO candidates do graduate, they are seeking employment in disadvantaged school districts. Here, the broader issue of public school funding in Illinois comes into play. Evaluators were told that district vacancies that would normally be filled have gone unfilled in recent years due to serious state funding shortfalls. These shortfalls disproportionately affect districts that are more dependent on state funds; i.e. those with lower local wealth. These are the very districts for which many GYO candidates are being prepared to serve as teachers.

Candidate Recruitment

While funding uncertainty can negatively affect GYO recruitment, recent policy changes have opened new doors. In early 2014, IBHE and GYO Illinois worked together on a bill that amended the original GYO statute in an effort to widen the eligible candidate pool for GYO and to refine the description of the ideal candidate. Low graduation rates in the GYO program with non-traditional, older students were a key impetus for these changes. The new statute: 1) allows candidates that have a college or associates degree into the program; 2) refines the definition of an “ideal” GYO candidate, and 3) removes the original goal of 1,000 graduates by 2016. On June 28, 2014, the bill was sent to former Governor Quinn, and on August 28, 2014, he approved it. Effective January 1, 2015. The changes were not in place when CSEP researchers conducted their site visits; however, consortia discussed hope for how the changes could help with recruitment and graduation rates.

During site visits in the fall, CSEP researchers asked consortium members about the statute changes. Jeff Barlow (NEIU SWOP/Enlace GYO) Renee Zydch (GSU/GYO) and Shartia Jones (CSU/GYO) all remarked that it was too early to know what impact the changes will have. Jeff Barlow said, “I think it is a step in the right direction. Renee Zydch further said, “Although I think it is a good idea, we will need to really take a look at how this impacts our ability to open GYO up to these new candidates considering they would be enrolling as graduate students and paying a higher tuition rate. They are also not eligible for MAP and PELL money.” Dr. Andrea Evans, Dean College of Education at Governors State University said, “We are currently working internally to prepare for candidates who hold a baccalaureate degree.” At a recent meeting held at GSU with district representatives, audience members were excited to hear about this change, noting they were aware of individuals who possess a baccalaureate degree and are interested in teaching but do not have a teaching certificate.

To address challenges in the past, a list of proposed programmatic changes was developed by IBHE and GYO members. This list included: strengthening and the GYO recruiting program; strengthening GYO’s current recruiting system; exploring ways to connect with and recruit veterans; piloting new recruitment strategies aimed at college students and career changers; increasing consortia coordination across the state; holding quarterly meetings with all cohorts; producing quarterly newsletters; and exploring the idea of reviving the GYO Partner Council.

Candidate Progress and Retention

The key milestones to attaining Illinois teacher certification and job placement are:

1. Upon acceptance to a participating bachelor's degree granting institution, passing the general education minimum number of credits and a minimum GPA
2. Passing the Test of Academic Proficiency (TAP) or its equivalent (Illinois Test of Basic Skills, ITBS) or comparable ACT score
3. Applying and being accepted into the College of Education
4. Passing education/professional credits with a minimum GPA
5. Passing the Illinois content area test and other certification exams
6. Getting admitted and passing standards for student teaching and clinical experience
7. Passing the Assessment of Professional Teaching (APT)

To date, passing the TAP examination has been a particularly difficult milestone, not only for GYO candidates, but also for many traditional candidates in Illinois teacher preparation programs. Until candidates pass this test, they are unable to enter their respective colleges of education and continue down the path to graduation and licensure. Many consortia are intensifying services for candidates with a special emphasis on test preparation, creating individualized test preparation plans for each student, and piloting an intensive and mandatory summer test preparation class.

Graduate Placement in Teaching Positions

In addition to the funding issues affecting placement as described above, it is generally very difficult to project teaching vacancies with any accuracy, especially four to six years ahead. This is the amount of time it takes candidates to complete their training, and can take even longer for non-traditional candidates. This makes it difficult, if not impossible, to train GYO candidates for specific teaching positions in the future. Regional approaches to placement (beyond the GYO partnership districts) can be one way to make employment more likely for graduates.

In some cases, district partners have gone out of their way to ensure GYO graduate employment. For example, in the East St. Louis district, despite widespread changes over the past few years, the continuity in GYO program administration has ensured its relevance to the changing needs and demands of the school district. As a district-led initiative, the GYO program is able to continuously monitor and tailor its activities—from recruitment through placement—to the real-time changes within the district. For the past two consecutive school years, first- and second-year teachers were laid off as part of an ongoing effort to reduce the teacher workforce in School District 189 and restore its financial stability. The strong relationship between the GYO program and the district has been quite beneficial to GYO teachers in this context of instability. As

Human Resources staff, GYO coordinators have been strong and effective advocates for their teachers. When GYO teachers were laid off as part of the workforce reduction efforts, program coordinators were able to hire them into other district positions through a 21st Century after-school program grant to support them until they could be placed in classrooms. Their advocacy on behalf of the GYO teachers ensured that all four of those teachers have now been restored to classroom positions.

Recommendations

This year's work – which occurred over a period extending from August 2014 through December 2014– has probed deeper into case-specific research questions designed to help IBHE, GYO Illinois, and each consortium make decisions that will strengthen the GYO program overall. Based on the data presented in the formative evaluation report, several program and policy recommendations are made, which have been designed to help GYO projects and the GYO initiative statewide meet their challenges with matriculating candidates and assuring teacher placement and effectiveness. To the Illinois Board of Higher Education, we recommend deeper investigation into the larger systemic issues challenging GYO. The following represent our suggestions after thoughtful consideration of the data available to us through our conversations with consortia members, graduates, candidates, and GYO leaders.

Recommendation 1: Strengthen Supports for Non-Traditional Teacher Candidates

Minority and low-income student populations face multiple obstacles and take longer to graduate. Policies, institutional supports, and changes in the way institutions engage with diverse student populations are recommended here to bolster non-traditional candidate success rates.

In regard to strengthening GYO projects, GYO graduates' top recommended program support (based on 2014 survey responses) would be to offer *stipend support for student teaching*. For many candidates, student teaching represents unpaid leave from their regular employment.

Even though many participating school districts have support systems for new teachers to be hired and mentored in their first year of teaching, GYO graduates found that additional supports would be helpful in obtaining a teaching job. The top recommendations were to provide, encourage, and incentivize:

1. Professional referrals from the College of Education to School/District (Cited by 11 graduates)
2. Referrals from fellow GYO participants or graduates (Cited by 11 graduates)
3. Mentoring from a fellow teacher through the GYO program (Cited by 10 graduates)
4. Job bulletin board or email list of vacancies in my community (Cited by 9 graduates)

Once in teaching positions, GYO graduates recommended that school districts and Colleges of Education provide coaching on obtaining and registering certification from college staff or graduates (Seven said this would have been beneficial if available), and regular follow-up calls from the GYO program to encourage and check-in (Six said this would have been beneficial if available).

In regard to Colleges of Education in general, considering the large disparity between minority candidates' rates of passing the TAP test and non-minority, traditional age candidates' pass rates, Colleges of Education may benefit from instituting reforms successfully implemented by

predominantly-minority K-12 schools to close academic achievement gaps. Successful disadvantaged schools shared characteristics of: 1) high expectations; 2) a nurturing, supportive climate; 3) a high degree of academic press; 4) a focus on assessment data and using it to tailor interventions to increase students' achievement in weak areas, 5) a collaborative decision-making culture, 6) a strong faculty work ethic and morale to regularly analyze data to plan and evaluate interventions and engage with parents and community members, and 7) careful and intentional attention in the recruitment, hiring, and assignment process.¹⁰ Instituting these principles could assist all teacher candidates, including non-traditional students.

Recommendation 2: Strengthen Regional Approaches

In light of the previously cited statistics that show a need to diversify the teaching workforce and the overall trend toward declining interest in teaching as a career, it is especially important that GYO consortia help as many students graduate and be placed in teaching positions as possible. To do so will require that many of these programs adopt a regional approach to recruitment and placement. It is often difficult to accurately forecast teaching vacancies. According to information gathered through site visits, this is true for several reasons:

- Many “hard-to-staff” schools serve high-poverty student populations or are found in small or rural districts. Teacher pay is often lower than average in these schools and the teacher turnover rate is relatively high. When more attractive positions become available, their teachers leave, often with little advance notice.
- Districts with high poverty rates are more dependent on state funding than those with higher local wealth. For the past four years, the state has not paid its statutorily required school funding levels, and is currently prorating payments at 89% of the amount due. Those districts highly dependent on state funds suffer larger funding cuts under this payment method, and consequently have been unable to fill some vacancies, even if they had planned to do so.
- Recruiting and training teachers takes time – at least four years for a full-time student, and longer for part-time students. Districts do well if they can forecast vacancies a year or two in advance, but few if any can forecast four to six years into the future.

For the reasons described above, developing regional recruitment and placement strategies has the potential to improve the outlook for finding and training suitable candidates and hiring them in teaching positions. Regional recruitment can expand the candidate pool, allowing programs to find those students most likely to enroll, progress in a timely manner and graduate. Upon graduation, a regional system can offer more options for teacher placement than a single district or single neighborhood partnership.

In addition, regional systems can offer candidates more varied and robust supports, such as test preparation, tutoring and mentoring, and personal supports such as child care and transportation options. Consortia could develop multiple partnerships with a wide range of community and civic organizations across their regions, thus building resource “banks” responsive to candidates' needs.

Recommendation 3: Flexible Funding Models

Three funding issues greatly affect GYO programs' ability to recruit, retain and graduate diverse teachers: the year-to-year uncertainty of state funds, the inability of candidates to afford unpaid leave during student teaching, and the candidate reimbursement model used within each program. All three are based on state regulations that should be reviewed and potentially modified.

State funds for GYO, as for other state grant programs, are reauthorized by the General Assembly annually. As such, these funds are considered "soft" money; that is, uncertain from year to year. GYO candidates are quite often non-traditional students who are being asked to make a multi-year commitment to a teacher preparation program. However, the state is making only a year-by-year commitment. Some consideration should be made to allow funding for candidates to be "front-loaded," allowing programs to set aside funds for individuals that will last throughout their training. This may require special exemptions to allow state funds to carry over through multiple fiscal years.

Student teaching requires that candidates spend full days in schools for several months. This model was developed many years ago, when most college students were "traditional." They attended classes full-time throughout their course of study, so student teaching was simply another assigned class and did not disrupt their lives. Many of today's students, including GYO candidates, are non-traditional. They attend college part-time because they are adult heads of households, have one or more jobs, and often have to care for children of their own. Although the GYO Education Act [110 ILCS 48] allows payments to be provided to candidates during student teaching, the amount of funds available is insufficient to adequately cover this expense for all candidates. Remedies could include different models for student teaching experiences, with more flexibility in scheduling and credit acquisition.

As with most state funds, GYO candidate expenses are paid back using a reimbursement model. Candidates must pay out-of-pocket for such costs as books, transportation and childcare. The program then reimburses them. As one candidate clearly explained, this is a "middle-class" model that only works for people who have disposable income to spend and then are able to wait for repayment. Many, if not most, GYO candidates do not have reserves of cash to cover these costs, and thus are unable to continue in the program. As another candidate stated, if the choice is between books for class or food for their kids, their kids will eat. A more flexible model that allows up-front payments to cover known costs would greatly benefit many GYO students and allow them to remain in their teacher education programs.

Programmatic Recommendations from Consortium Members (per site visits)

- Create a common candidate application process
- Create a common admissions process

- Conduct Monthly statewide calls to foster networking and a more unified approach statewide
- Use data to cultivate external support for the GYO program
- Expand the GYO Illinois Director's practice of meeting monthly with Chicago GYO project coordinators to all GYO sites.

Conclusion

This evaluation has presented findings from IBHE data a survey, interviews and project site visits. The GYO has identified the following shared goals: to “produce” teachers who are willing to teach in hard-to-staff schools, including schools with high rates of attrition; to provide forgivable loans to candidates; to assist in removing barriers to degree completion; recruitment of non-traditional students with strong ties to the community; and finally to place and retain candidates in high need schools. The data reveal progress being made towards these outcomes.

The data also reveal existing challenges, for the candidates themselves, for individual GYO consortia, and for the program as a whole. Some of these challenges are not unique to the GYO program, but rather are systemic issues that are brought to light quite sharply through the lens of the GYO program. These include issues of funding, supports for non-traditional students, and ways to mobilize regional resources in support of educational goals. Recommendations are made in this report to attempt to address these challenges in the spirit of continuous improvement.

Diversifying the teacher pipeline is a challenge of ever-growing importance, and the GYO program is making strides in addressing that challenge. The over 100 program graduates are making an important contribution to staffing disadvantaged schools. To continue to create an effective and efficient diverse teacher pipeline for the State of Illinois it is recommended that GYO address the challenges identified in this report and continue to make necessary improvements to fulfill its legislative mandate and successfully graduate candidates while working in a collaborative effort with community based partners, districts, and universities.

ENDNOTES

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