



GROW YOUR OWN TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP INITIATIVE

2025 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY: GYO TEACHER APPRENTICESHIP EVALUATION REPORT

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Introduction

The Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher Apprenticeship Initiative is a regional effort supported by Houston Endowment Inc. (HEI) to strengthen the educator workforce pipeline in the Houston area.

Through a grant to the National Center for Grow Your Own (NCGYO), HEI is funding the design and implementation of apprenticeship-based teacher preparation programs across multiple school districts. In Year 1, three districts (Aldine, Spring, and Tomball ISDs) began planning or implementing their GYO programs in collaboration with educator preparation program (EPP) providers and technical assistance partners.

The evaluation is being conducted by Steuck & Associates, LLC using a developmental evaluation approach, which emphasizes real-time feedback, continuous learning, and adaptation in complex and evolving initiatives. The evaluation aims to support program refinement, elevate participant and partner perspectives, and strengthen alignment across institutions.

While the contract year for the evaluation runs from October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025, the evaluation team defined the **technical year** as August 1, 2024, through July 31, 2025, to better align with school district calendars. This executive summary presents key findings, insights, and recommendations based on data collected during this technical year through interviews, focus groups, surveys, and ongoing partner engagement.



System Context

The HEI GYO Teacher Apprenticeship Initiative operates within a complex educational and workforce ecosystem shaped by local, state, and federal influences. The program brings together a diverse network of school districts, educator preparation programs (EPPs), and technical assistance providers to collaboratively design sustainable, equity-driven pathways into the teaching profession.

Each school district involved maintains its own hiring timelines, human resources policies, and staffing priorities. Simultaneously, EPP providers uphold independent admissions requirements and academic standards. Nonprofit technical assistance partners, particularly the National Center for Grow Your Own (NCGYO), provide coaching, facilitate Communities of Practice, and support the development of U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)-recognized Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs), introducing a layer of federal compliance to the work.

In Year 1, Aldine and Tomball ISDs began implementation efforts by recruiting paraprofessionals and supporting them through coursework toward certification in high-need areas such as bilingual education, special education, and secondary content fields. Spring ISD focused on planning and infrastructure development, with program launch expected in Year 2. EPP providers, the University of Houston-Downtown (UHD) and Texas Woman’s University (TWU), partnered closely with districts to support candidates through pre-service coursework and preparation aligned with the apprenticeship model.

Houston Endowment’s role includes funding, coordination, and alignment across the initiative’s many moving parts. HEI facilitates partner collaboration and engages in biweekly meetings with the evaluation team to monitor progress and support accountability.

This multi-institutional system requires proactive cross-sector communication, shared language, and continuous relationship-building to navigate the varying institutional policies, expectations, and timelines involved in building a region-wide GYO teacher apprenticeship pipeline.

School Districts



Educator Preparation Program Providers



Technical Assistance Provider



Evaluation Partner



Funder





Key Findings

The Year 1 evaluation identified several core themes based on data from interviews, focus groups, surveys, and regular communication with GYO program participants and partners. These findings reflect early implementation experiences and reveal both strengths and persistent challenges across the initiative.



Participant Motivations and Experiences

Participants were primarily drawn to the GYO program by the opportunity to become certified teachers while continuing to work, particularly in the districts they already serve. Many cited longstanding aspirations to teach, a desire to give back to their communities, and the appeal of financial support and job security. Participants valued the flexibility of course offerings, especially asynchronous and online formats, and the supportive environments cultivated by their EPP providers and peers.

However, participants also reported significant barriers, including balancing coursework with full-time work and family responsibilities, limited financial support for prerequisite courses, and logistical difficulties (e.g., travel to in-person classes or understanding course sequences). Pre-candidates (those still completing core coursework) faced particularly acute challenges related to cost, eligibility, and course availability.

District and EPP Collaboration

Cross-institutional collaboration was a defining feature of Year 1. Districts and EPP providers communicated regularly and designated point persons to manage relationships and support participants. The NCGYO-facilitated Community of Practice was widely seen as a valuable venue for shared learning.

Still, partners faced ongoing misalignment in definitions (e.g., who is considered “in the program”), tracking participant progress, and clarifying program timelines. These inconsistencies complicated data sharing and coordination across institutions and highlighted the need for common language and expectations.



Implementation Challenges and Adjustments

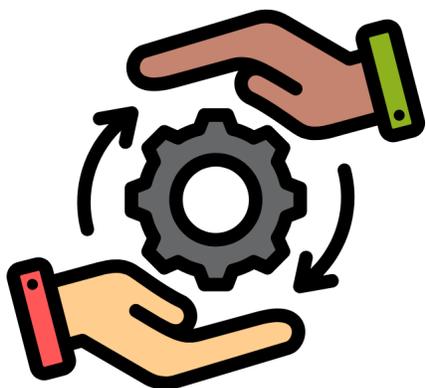
Several implementation issues emerged early and were addressed over the course of the year. These included unclear program timelines, compressed advising windows, and inconsistent recruitment messaging. Delays in USDOL approval of Registered Apprenticeship Programs also caused uncertainty, though two districts received RAP approval by the end of Year 1.



Districts and EPPs made notable mid-year adjustments to better support participants and streamline implementation: clarifying documentation, revising course schedules, offering additional advising, and adjusting program expectations.

Remaining Barriers and System-Level Issues

Persistent challenges include limited administrative awareness at school campuses, unclear program duration, and delays caused by district-level data access restrictions. Variability in candidate readiness (e.g., academic standing, transcript complexity, prior degree status) continues to make standardized onboarding difficult.



Despite these barriers, all partners expressed strong commitment to the program and willingness to adapt based on feedback. Evaluation team reflections emphasized the need for consistent campus-level support, shared understanding of pacing and credit requirements, and continued investment in communication infrastructure.



Impacts

The Year 1 evaluation revealed early but significant impacts of the GYO Teacher Apprenticeship Initiative across four key dimensions: participants, partner institutions, cross-sector collaboration, and equity in teacher pathways. These impacts illustrate how the initiative is already shaping systems, structures, and individual trajectories, laying the groundwork for long-term transformation.

Impact on Participants

For many participants, the GYO program offered a long-awaited pathway to a career in teaching that felt possible and affirming. Participants described renewed motivation, stronger commitment to educational goals, and a deepened sense of purpose rooted in serving their communities. Pursuing teacher certification while remaining employed was cited as a critical factor in making this path viable. Some participants were returning to higher education after years away, while others were building on past academic work to pursue a calling they had postponed due to financial or logistical barriers.

Participants reported growth in professional skills such as time management, perseverance, and communication as they balanced work, coursework, and family responsibilities. Despite challenges, many expressed confidence in their ability to succeed, crediting the program with providing necessary structure, encouragement, and opportunity.

Impact on Partner Institutions & Networks

Districts and EPPs began investing in new infrastructure to support the GYO model. One district created a new position to manage its GYO efforts, signaling institutional commitment to long-term implementation. EPPs refined their advising and support practices to better meet the needs of working adults and nontraditional students. Although institutional processes varied, all partners demonstrated responsiveness to candidate needs and a shared goal of preparing high-quality teachers for local schools.

Momentum also grew among paraprofessionals and other district staff, increasing interest in future program cohorts and prompting some districts to explore additional entry points, including dual-credit or associate's degree pipelines for high school students.



Impact on Cross-Sector Collaboration

The initiative significantly strengthened coordination among school districts, EPPs, and technical assistance providers. Partners engaged in regular communication, participated in Communities of Practice, and made decisions about timelines, recruitment, and course alignment. These efforts fostered trust, mutual accountability, and problem-solving across institutions that had not previously worked together at this scale.

This collaboration has laid a foundation for a more unified regional teacher preparation ecosystem that centers local context, candidate lived experiences, and the shared goal of building a sustainable teacher workforce.

Impact on Equity in Teacher Pathways

By centering paraprofessionals and other community-based candidates, many of whom are people of color, bilingual, or first-generation college students, the GYO model is already making progress toward a more representative and accessible teacher pipeline. The program's structure, which allows candidates to continue working and offers financial and academic support, directly addresses barriers that have historically excluded these individuals from teacher preparation pathways.

At the same time, the evaluation surfaced equity gaps that require ongoing attention, particularly during the pre-candidate phase, where financial burdens remain high and eligibility criteria can be difficult to navigate. These challenges underscore the need for sustained investment, flexible design, and system-wide alignment to ensure equitable access, retention, and success.



Lessons Learned & Recommendations

The first year of the HEI GYO Teacher Apprenticeship Initiative provided essential insights into what it takes to implement an equity-centered, multi-institutional teacher preparation model. These lessons reflect both the successes and the growing edges of the work, offering practical guidance for ongoing refinement.

Lessons Learned

Intentional, Ongoing Collaboration Drives Progress

Districts, EPPs, and technical assistance providers made the most progress when they invested in early relationship-building, met regularly, and made collaborative decisions. These partnerships were essential in navigating real-time challenges and supporting candidate persistence.

Clarity and Common Language Are Essential

Misalignment in terminology, program milestones, and expectations created confusion across institutions. Establishing shared language and consistent messaging is foundational for coherent program delivery, data tracking, and participant support.

Flexibility Enables Equity

Participants entered the program at different stages, some with prior degrees, others with partial coursework. Institutions providing flexible pacing, rolling admissions, and tailored advising were better equipped to meet participants where they were and support diverse pathways to completion.

Infrastructure Needs Real-Time Development

Year 1 highlighted gaps in transcript review, data sharing, registration processes, and program documentation. While many partners responded adaptively, sustained investment is needed to build robust systems that can scale and serve future cohorts effectively.

Support Systems Matter

Participants succeeded not only because of academic supports, but because of encouragement, peer networks, and responsive faculty and staff. Emotional, financial, and logistical supports were equally vital in helping candidates balance work, school, and family life.

Recommendations

Sustain and Deepen Cross-Sector Collaboration

Maintain the Community of Practice and regular inter-institutional meetings as structured spaces for shared learning and coordination. Include new districts and EPPs as they join in Year 2.

Develop Shared Definitions and Data Protocols

Create a joint glossary and standardized data templates to support consistent reporting and communication across partners. Clarify what it means to be “in the program” at each stage.

Improve Participant Communication and Onboarding

Design clear, accessible materials that explain timelines, requirements, financial supports, and who to contact for help. Increase principal- and campus-level awareness to better support participants on the ground.

Address Financial Barriers for Pre-Candidates

Explore new funding streams and scholarship opportunities to support candidates completing prerequisite coursework. Ensure cost expectations and available supports are transparent from the start.

Design for Flexibility and Multiple Entry Points

Offer nontraditional start dates and scheduling options that accommodate working adults. Recognize that not all candidates will follow the same path or timeline to certification.

Strengthen Cohort-Based Support and Mentorship

Facilitate regular cohort check-ins, peer mentoring, or affinity-based gatherings to reduce isolation and promote persistence, especially for candidates balancing full-time work and family obligations.

Invest in Long-Term Systems Building

Build internal capacity within districts and EPPs for GYO coordination, advising, and evaluation. Develop onboarding protocols, course sequencing plans, and staffing models that are sustainable beyond pilot cohorts.



Promising Practices

Throughout Year 1 of the GYO Teacher Apprenticeship Initiative, several promising practices emerged across districts and EPPs. These practices demonstrate how localized innovation, flexibility, and responsiveness can strengthen teacher preparation pathways, especially for nontraditional candidates balancing work, school, and family responsibilities. While contexts varied, common features of effective practice included proactive collaboration, adaptive program design, and a strong equity orientation.



Flexible Course Scheduling and Delivery

One EPP revised its course schedule and delivery format to accommodate working adults. This flexibility enabled candidates to balance full-time employment and family responsibilities while progressing toward certification and reduced attrition caused by scheduling conflicts.



Targeted Academic Support Structures

EPPs offered customized supports such as “Scholar Saturdays,” which provided additional time for test preparation, academic advising, and navigating university systems. These targeted efforts helped participants, many of whom were returning to school after extended breaks, feel more prepared and confident.



Early and Coordinated Recruitment Processes

Districts that began recruitment earlier and collaborated with EPPs on transcript review and candidate advising reduced onboarding delays and confusion. These sites also implemented clearer communications around eligibility, deadlines, and next steps, improving candidate experience and preparedness.



Dedicated GYO Staffing and Role Clarity

Some districts created staff roles specifically to manage GYO implementation, which helped streamline internal coordination and improve responsiveness to participant needs. EPPs that designated liaisons for district communication and candidate support also reported stronger alignment.



Structured Inter-Institutional Communication

Districts and EPPs that held regular joint meetings or established shared documentation protocols were able to resolve definitional differences, align expectations, and track candidate progress more accurately. This level of coordination strengthened system-level infrastructure.



Cohort Building and Peer Support

Efforts to build community among participants (in-person gatherings, discussion groups, peer mentoring) contributed to stronger engagement and persistence. Candidates consistently expressed appreciation for the sense of solidarity and encouragement these spaces provided.



Clear and Participant-Centered Program Materials

Partners who invested in user-friendly program guides, FAQ documents, and checklists helped participants better understand program expectations and requirements. These resources helped reduce confusion, especially among pre-candidates navigating complex systems for the first time.

These practices offer early examples of how GYO programs can be adapted to better serve adult learners, align cross-institutional systems, and create conditions for long-term sustainability. As the initiative expands in Year 2, these insights provide a foundation for replication and scaling across new districts and partners.





The Houston Endowment Inc. (HEI) Mutually Beneficial Partnership to Advance Teacher Preparation (MBP) program aims to enhance the teaching pipeline in Houston-area school districts through a Grow Your Own Teacher Apprenticeship model. HEI has contracted Steuck & Associates, LLC. (S&A) through an Independent Contractor Agreement (Reference Number 33232) for evaluation of the MBP program.

The contract year for the evaluation of the GYO Initiate is October 1, 2024, through September 30, 2025. However, to align with the school district calendars, the evaluation team defined the technical year is August 1, 2024–July 31, 2025. The data summarized in this report were collected during the entire technical year.

Any opinions, findings, or recommendations expressed in this report are those of the evaluation team and do not necessarily represent the official views, opinions, or policy of the Houston Endowment, Inc, National Center for Grow Your Own, or any of the participating independent school districts, universities, and their personnel.

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