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TO: Educator Advancement Council members and staff

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RE: Grow Your Own Teacher grants

Greetings,

It is with enthusiasm that I am submitting this correspondence with input provided from individuals on the frontline of current Grow Your Own teacher projects in Oregon. GYO grant funds have been used in many locations to hire Teacher Pathway Navigators, directly working with aspiring teachers, helping them “navigate” the best pathway towards teacher licensure. These individuals are essential to the goal of not only reaching/recruiting potential teachers but providing the ongoing support/coaching necessary for individuals, many of whom are first generation in college candidates.

Often the Navigator is the sole person in an organization carrying out these important tasks. In 2022, the [Willamette Education Service District](#) launched an online Professional Learning Community supporting Teacher Pathway Navigators working in different parts of the state. Now Navigators can share ideas, resources, and solutions to challenges faced by aspiring educators they seek to serve. Close to 30 individuals have been participating in the Oregon Network for Teacher Pathway Navigators sponsored by the Willamette ESD. The Network offers:

- Monthly virtual forums focused on topics identified by and featuring Teacher Navigator network members
- A Grow Your Own Toolkit, resource documents, and equity-focused lessons to use with future teachers,
- A members-only discussion board to support collaborative problem solving,
- Updates and opportunities to provide input on key state legislation, and
- Access to : [Shape Oregon's Future: Become a Teacher](#), a website focused on information and support for aspiring teacher candidates.

What Network Navigators are learning in their day-to-day work can help inform EAC priorities, legislative policies and future strategic investments to help Oregon meet its goals for a skilled, sustainable, and diverse workforce of educators. Here are nine recommendations resulting from the Network members’ regular discussions:

**1. Oregon's GYO projects need to be able to count on continued funding to adequately and positively impact the future workforce.**

Recruitment to the profession starts long before someone is eligible to apply for a teaching position. Oregon teacher licensure requires a bachelor's degree and candidates may need 6 years or more to complete Oregon licensure requirements, particularly if they are simultaneously working and going to school. And they will need mentoring as beginning teachers. Thus, GYO funding must be sustained long enough to realize the intended impact.

Gap funding from other sources, e.g. non-profit foundations perhaps could be very useful to retain staff hired with grant funding during any lapse of funding between biennium investments. We are hopeful that the proposed retention activities in SB 283 will not decrease funding or detract from the EAC's continued funding for GYO projects.

**2. Grant funding must be sufficient enough to substantially cover candidates' costs for completing their educational requirements AND also cover the salary and benefits for a dedicated GYO staff member, e.g. a Navigator or Connector who can serve as a recruiter and coach.**

Many of the GYO projects are distributing funds to aspiring teacher candidates to help support the costs of becoming a teacher as well as paying for personnel who work directly with the candidates guiding them on appropriate pathways.

Being a successful Teacher Pathway Navigator is complex work requiring the ability to connect authentically with first generation college students, BIPOC individuals and those for whom English is not their first language. They draw upon an extensive knowledge base related to teacher licensure routes, financial supports, course transfer, and even college application and admissions policies. Navigators also help disburse scholarship and tuition remission funds to candidates and partner with district staff, community organizations and higher educational institutions to dismantle barriers and improve access for educators of color to supports including mentoring, professional development and affinity groups.

**3. Future teachers need encouragement and inspiration to consider the teaching profession.**

Any PR campaign needs to take into consideration what Teacher Pathway Navigators and GYO projects are learning about the information needs of potential teachers including teacher pathways and available resources and help dispel rumors like you have to earn a Master's to teach in Oregon, etc. Perhaps the creation of an advisory group for the ODE public relations campaign would help identify user needs from current teacher candidates, particularly BIPOC individuals, Navigators or staff of GYO projects currently working with teacher pathways.

Administrators and educators at every level must be much more proactive in promoting the teaching profession. They need to personally “tap” talented students, classified staff, and community members who demonstrate soft skills valued in the teaching profession, e.g. organization, empathy, communication, teamwork, multi-tasking, patience, and leadership. Any PR campaign must include a “Call to Action” along with tools that can be used to elevate the profession in the eyes of the next generation.

**4. Districts and unions can work together to support policies and practices that prevent a total loss of employment and benefits for classified employees during student teaching.**

To successfully recruit future teachers from the ranks of local staff, school districts have to develop flexible work schedules allowing them to maintain employment and benefits while pursuing a teacher license, particularly during student teaching, e.g. Tigard-Tualatin SD. Several of the projects represented in the Network are doing this; yet surprisingly many districts still believe they can’t work with their unions to implement these policies.

**5. Regardless of where candidates live in Oregon, they deserve equal access to educator preparation programs and a way to easily determine the financial .**

Colleges and universities play a key role in the success of GYO programs when they offer accessible teacher licensure coursework through flexible scheduling and online course offerings. We can no longer expect all working professionals are able to leave their employment, families, and communities to attend a university in person. Given the geographic spread of Oregon, there is a great need for online coursework that results in teacher licensure, particularly for areas of secondary education.

We applaud the increase in tuition remissions offered through many GYO projects and other sources. However, Navigators have specifically identified the need for an interactive tool using a few questions of candidates to help them easily locate financial resources for which they qualify and helping them estimate potential amounts.

**6. Every school district has access to future generations of teachers enrolled in their high schools that can be leveraged to address workforce shortages.**

Offering dual credit coursework transferable to an educator preparation program, can help high school students start a teacher pathway earlier, saving time and money. Certificates that help qualify HS students for paraprofessional positions upon graduation can provide future teachers with relevant paid employment (and benefits) while they pursue college courses leading to teacher licensure. As GYO programs help more instructional assistants become licensed teachers, new vacancies in the staff can be partially filled by these future teachers.

**7. Emergency licensure may help districts hire for hard to fill teaching positions but without strong mentoring and support, we run the risk of individuals leaving the profession within the first couple of years.**

There are already many factors influencing new teachers' decision to leave the profession such as salary levels, community distrust in teachers as professionals, and other teaching conditions. GYO programs need to employ culturally responsive hiring practices, first year teaching experiences, and mentoring to retain all new educators and especially BIPOC educators. Unfortunately, too many new teachers are still being placed in the most challenging positions, increasing a likelihood of early burnout and even departure from the profession. This would never happen in the medical profession.

**8. The educator shortage has many contributing factors for which recruitment efforts alone don't address.** With the growing availability of higher paying jobs, many of which can be done working remotely from one's community, we must address teacher wages for beginning educators. And without district investment in restorative justice practices and authentic equity work, we run the risk of recruiting and then losing BIPOC educators who leave the profession because of unsafe and often hostile working conditions.

**8. We all benefit from learning from each other and working collaboratively across the various GYO projects.** Supporting a Network of Teacher Pathway Navigators has resulted in the sharing of great ideas and the creation of a "community of practice" for Navigators who are critical in the success of GYO efforts in Oregon. We appreciate access to resources such as the Oregon Educator Equity Report, the Shape Oregon's Future: Become a Teacher website, the proposed statewide K-12 workforce data system, and data resulting from the workforce satisfaction survey.

We are exploring a virtual Summit in May 2023 so our Navigators can share emerging practices with other interested individuals. **We would love to partner with the EAC to elevate the voices of practitioners and GYO leaders at this event and welcome your ideas and involvement.**

Thank you again, EAC members and staff, for all of your ongoing efforts to help Oregon stay focused on the original intent of SB 182 and support our state's educators at every stage of their careers in meaningful ways.