Supporting Grow Your Own educator initiatives in local Colorado communities

Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Central, Colorado Department of Education (CDE), and Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE)

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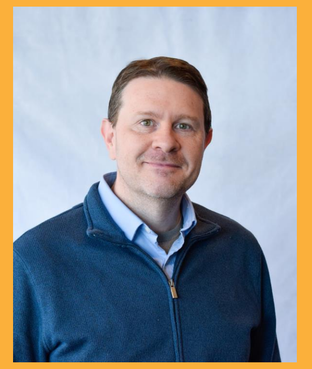
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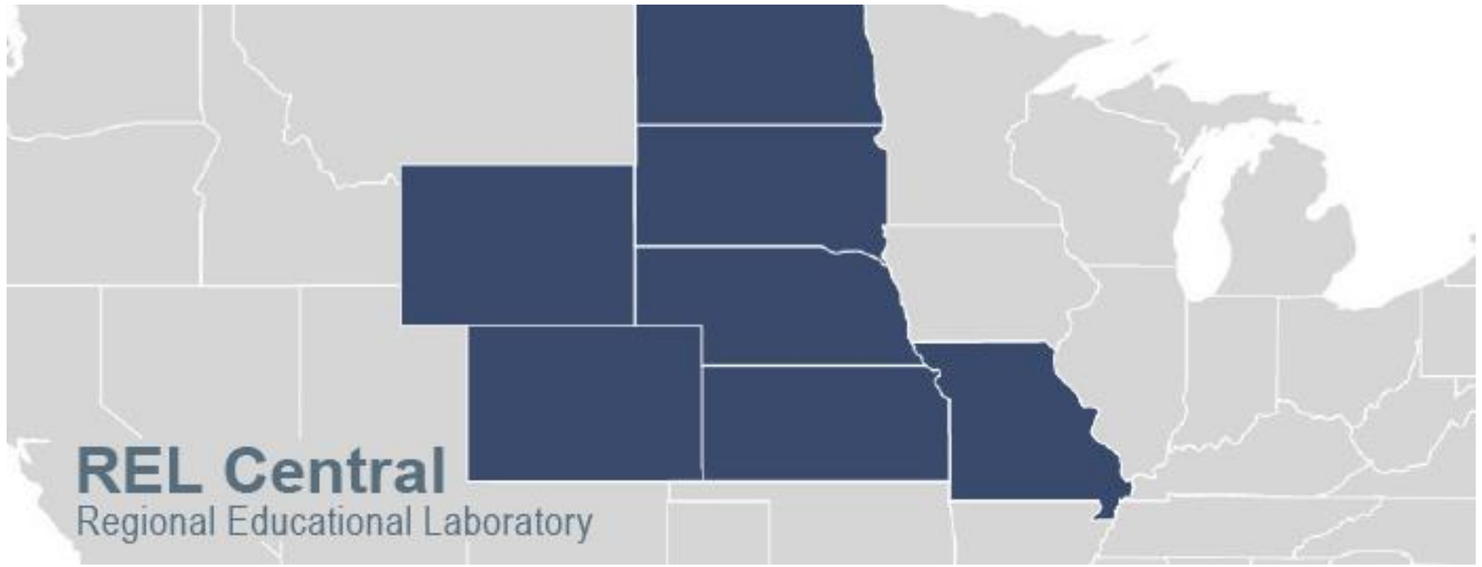
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About REL Central



Regional Educational Laboratory (REL) Central is one of 10 laboratories funded by the U.S. Department of Education's Institute of Education Sciences to partner with policymakers, education systems, and communities to improve outcomes for learners in its region.

REL Central and its partners collaborate to…



Address high-leverage needs



Work toward shared objectives



Improve student and educator outcomes

High-leverage need

To improve the recruitment and retention of high-quality teachers through the definition and development of a research-informed and actionable framework for Grow Your Own educator initiatives in Colorado.



Supporting Colorado's strategic planning priorities through GYO

- GYO educator initiatives can:
  - Address teacher shortages
    - 27% of open positions are filled with shortage mechanisms, 4% of those were unfilled in 2026/27
    - Shortages are related to pipeline challenges and teacher attrition
  - Build community-rooted talent
  - Expand the pool of teacher applicants

What research tells us about GYO educator initiatives

REL Central conducted a scan of 22 research studies across states focused on GYO educator initiatives and found:

- Varied definitions, purpose, participants, program offerings, and resources
- Participants that are representative of their local community are viewed as more likely to stay and teach in the same community, helping to address long-term teacher shortages in underserved areas.
- No studies provided causal evidence



Grow Your Own educator initiatives in Colorado

Grow Your Own (GYO) educator initiatives include specific programs designed to recruit and credential individuals to serve in a local classroom.

They are **community-driven**, focus on recruiting individuals who are **representative** of the community, and involve a **partnership** between a local education agency and an educator preparation program, institution of higher education, or other organization.

GYO educator initiatives lead toward a PK–12 teaching credential or an early childhood credential and support the success and retention of educators in local schools.



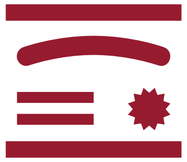
Key components of GYO initiatives



Clear, strategically aligned goals



Partnerships



Lead towards PK–12 teaching credential



Local community



Social, financial, and academic assistance



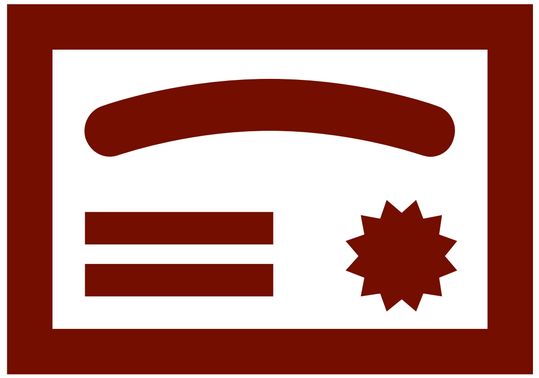
Encouraged to teach locally

Key components: Clear, strategically aligned goals



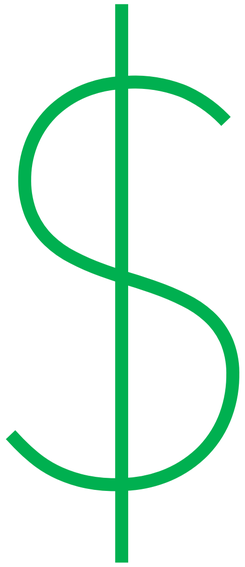
- Becomes the anchor for every design decision that follows
- Creates coherence across partners
- Communicates the purpose of the program
- Enables a strategic and coherent workforce solution

Key components: Lead towards PK-12 teaching credential



- Clear routes to a credential
- Participants see what they are working toward
- Pathways are predictable
- Transforms interest into impact

Key components: Social, financial, and academic assistance



- Each removes a different set of barriers
  - Financial supports make the pathway possible
  - Academic supports make the pathway doable
  - Social supports make the pathway sustainable
- Creates support that addresses problems early

Key components: Partnerships



- No single organization can do it alone
- Coordinated ecosystem supports alignment and collaboration across partners
- Partner perspectives make pathways more responsive

Key components: Local community



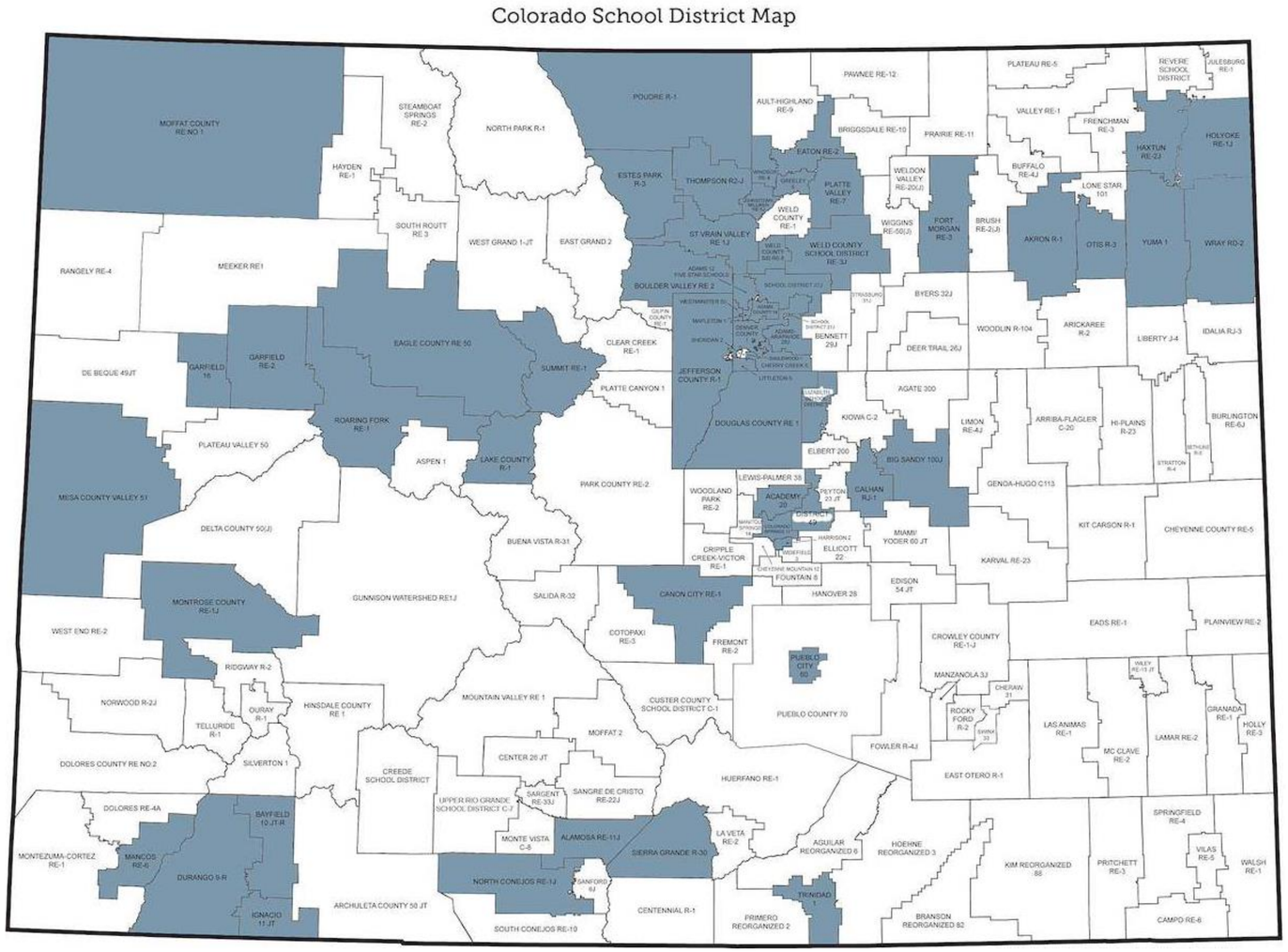
- Deep understanding of students and families
- Commitment to place
- Relationship building, trust building

Key components: Encouraged to teach locally



- Where the investment pays off
- Clear, accessible hiring routes
- Demonstrates commitment

Current landscape of GYO educator initiatives in CO



[Tell Us About Your GYO Educator Initiative!]

Shaded districts provide a rough estimate of where GYO educator initiatives are in the state



Variation based on local context

- Goals
- Role(s) cultivated
- Recruitment pool
- Recruitment strategies
- Partnerships
- Credential
- Barriers
- Supports
- Dedicated internal staff
- Monitoring activity
- Complexity
- Formality
- Closure/Consolidation

GYO in Colorado: Teacher Cadet

Teacher Cadet is a high school Grow Your Own pathway that gives students early, hands-on exposure to teaching through coursework, classroom experience, and college credit so they can explore and prepare for future careers in education.

GYO in Colorado: CTE and concurrent enrollment

Concurrent enrollment allows high school students to take college-level courses for credit, giving them an early start on postsecondary pathways while still meeting high school graduation requirements.

Career and Technical Education (CTE) pathways are structured, hands-on programs that help high school students explore and prepare for future careers by building real-world skills, earning industry-recognized credentials, and connecting learning directly to workforce opportunities.

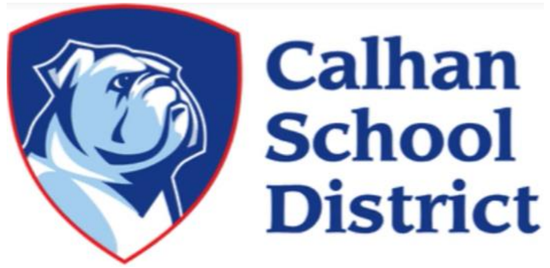
POUDRE SCHOOL DISTRICT

Walsh School District RE 1
SOAR with the Eagles

GYO in Colorado: Registered Apprenticeship

Registered apprenticeship is an earn-and-learn pathway where participants receive paid, on-the-job training, related coursework, and progressive wage increases under an approved, high-quality training model.

- Teacher Degree Apprenticeship Information
- Teacher Degree Apprenticeship Programs
- Early Childhood Apprenticeship





GYO in Colorado: Alternative licensure and residency models

Alternative Licensure

- Candidate has a Bachelor's Degree and demonstration of content competency
- An earn-while-you-learn pathway
- Begin teaching immediately while completing the training required to earn a teaching license.

Residency

- Gain a full year of hands-on experience alongside an experienced mentor teacher
- Earn while you learn, building practical skills in a real classroom setting
- Enter a full-time teaching role prepared, confident, and connected to the school community

GYO in Colorado: Pathways in team-based staffing models

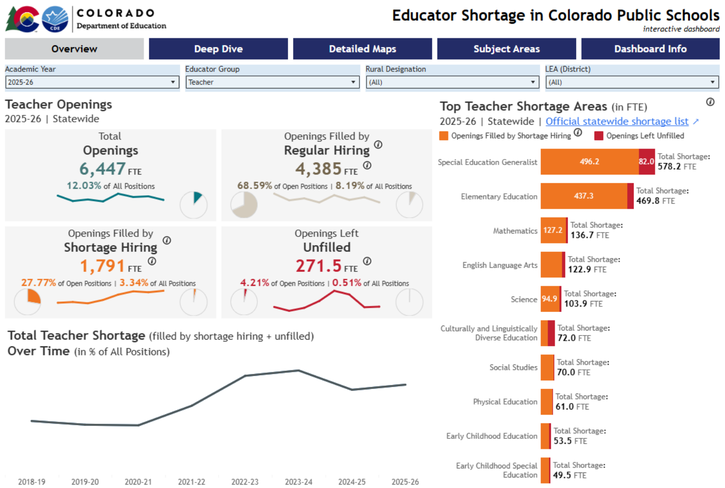
- Pairing aspiring teachers with collaborative school teams in participating schools
- Giving them structured roles, coaching and hands-on experience
- Builds skills, confidence and belonging

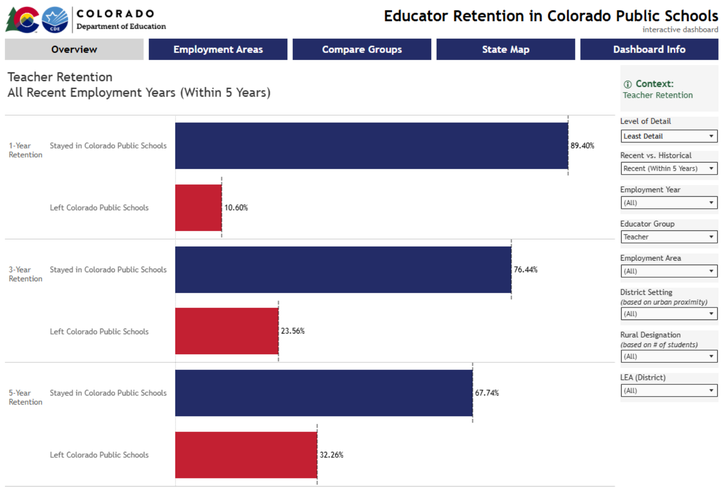
CANON CITY SCHOOLS
FREMONT RE-1

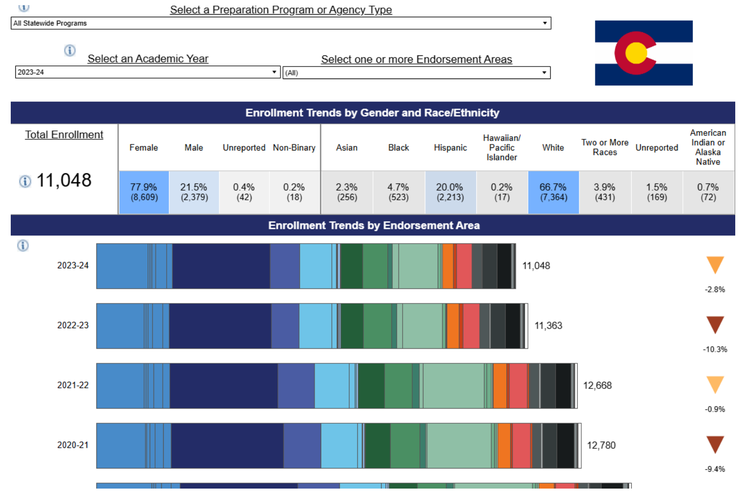
Montrose County
School District RE-1J

Resources

Relevant Data Dashboards







Educator Shortage Dashboard

Where is there need?

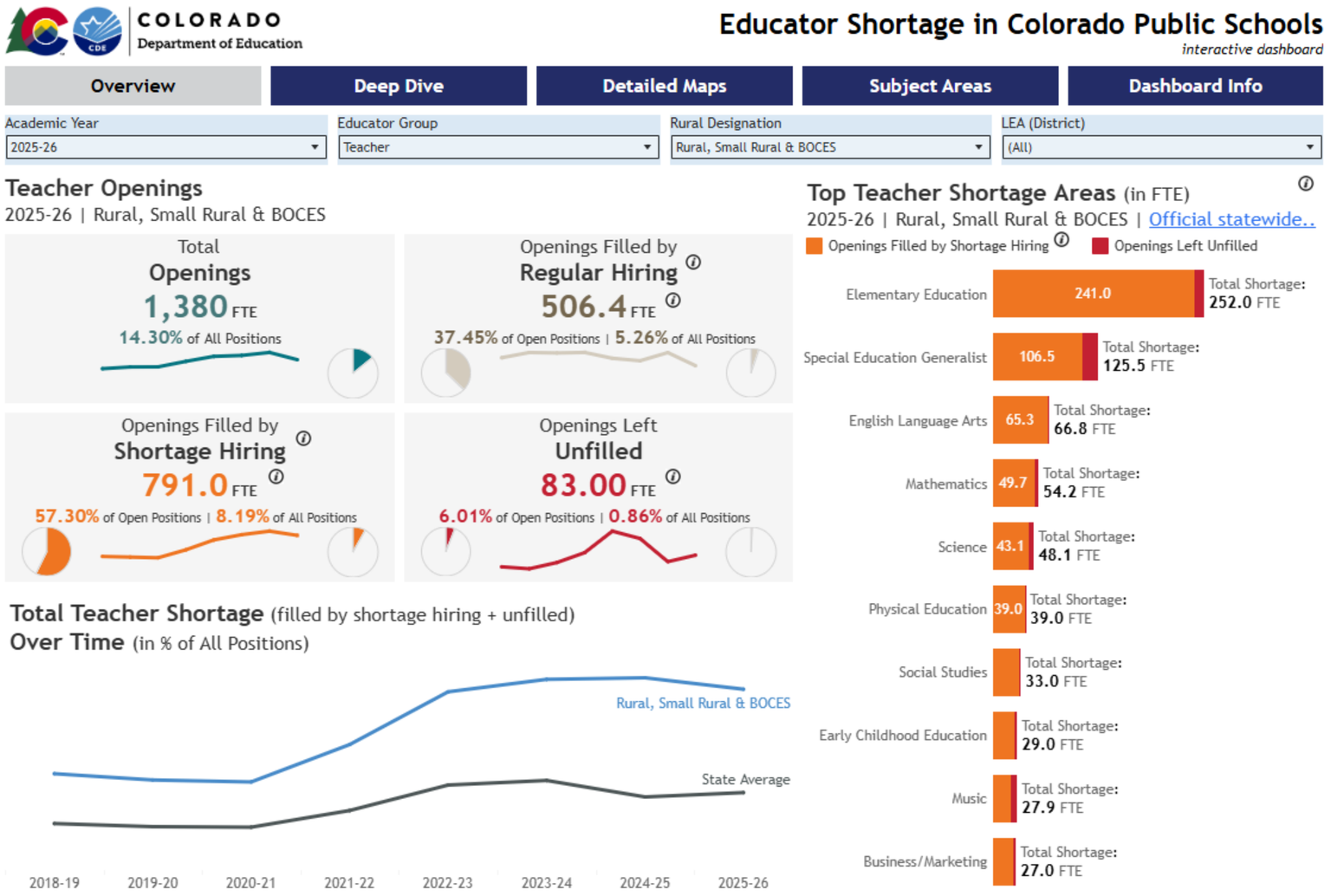
Educator Retention Dashboard

Who stays and who leaves?

Educator Preparation Program Dashboard

Whom can we partner with?

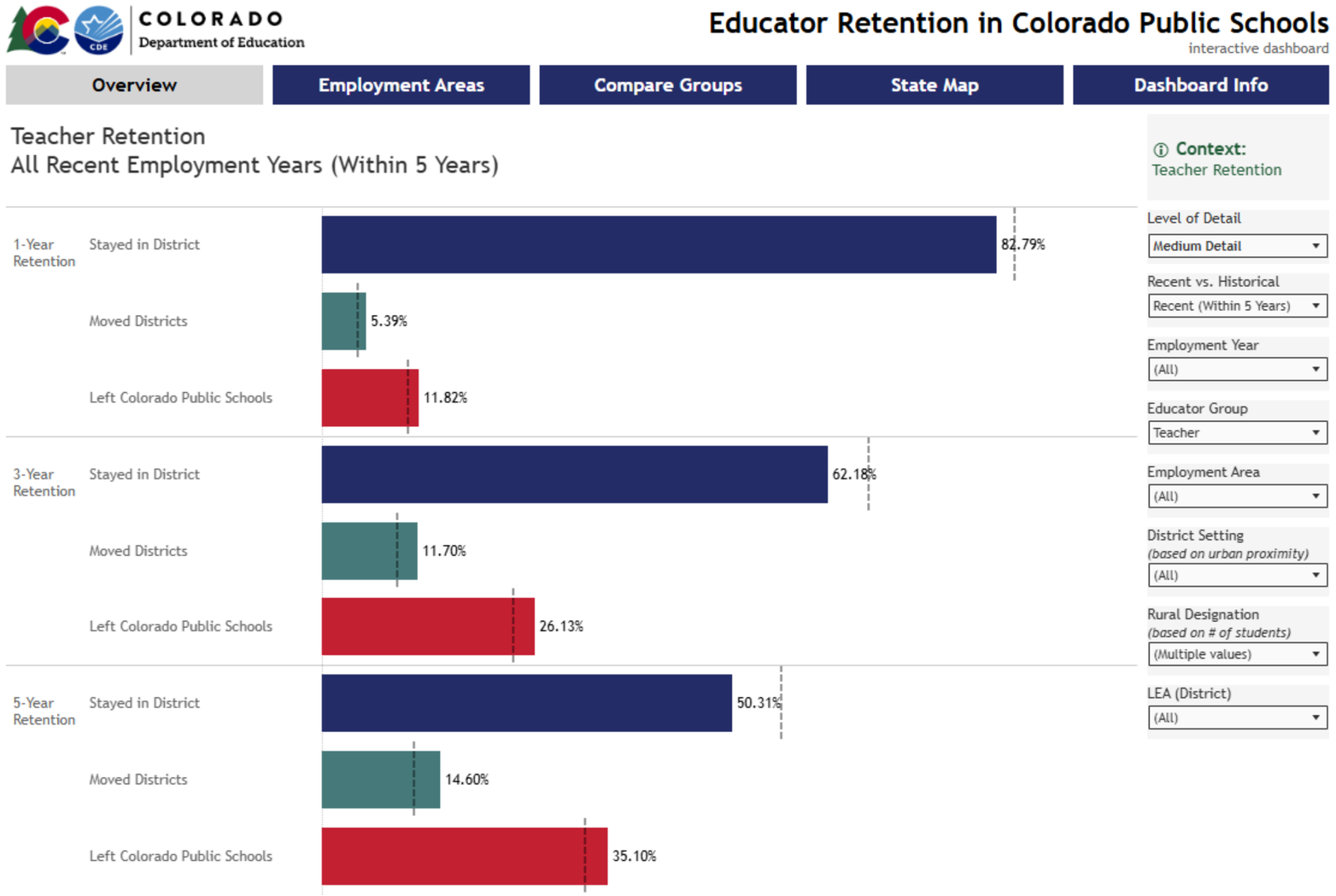
Educator Shortage Dashboard



- **Key question**: *where is there need?*

- Tips:
  - Filter by rural designation or LEA
  - Check out the "Deep Dive" tab to view
    - Shortage mechanisms utilized
    - Trends over time

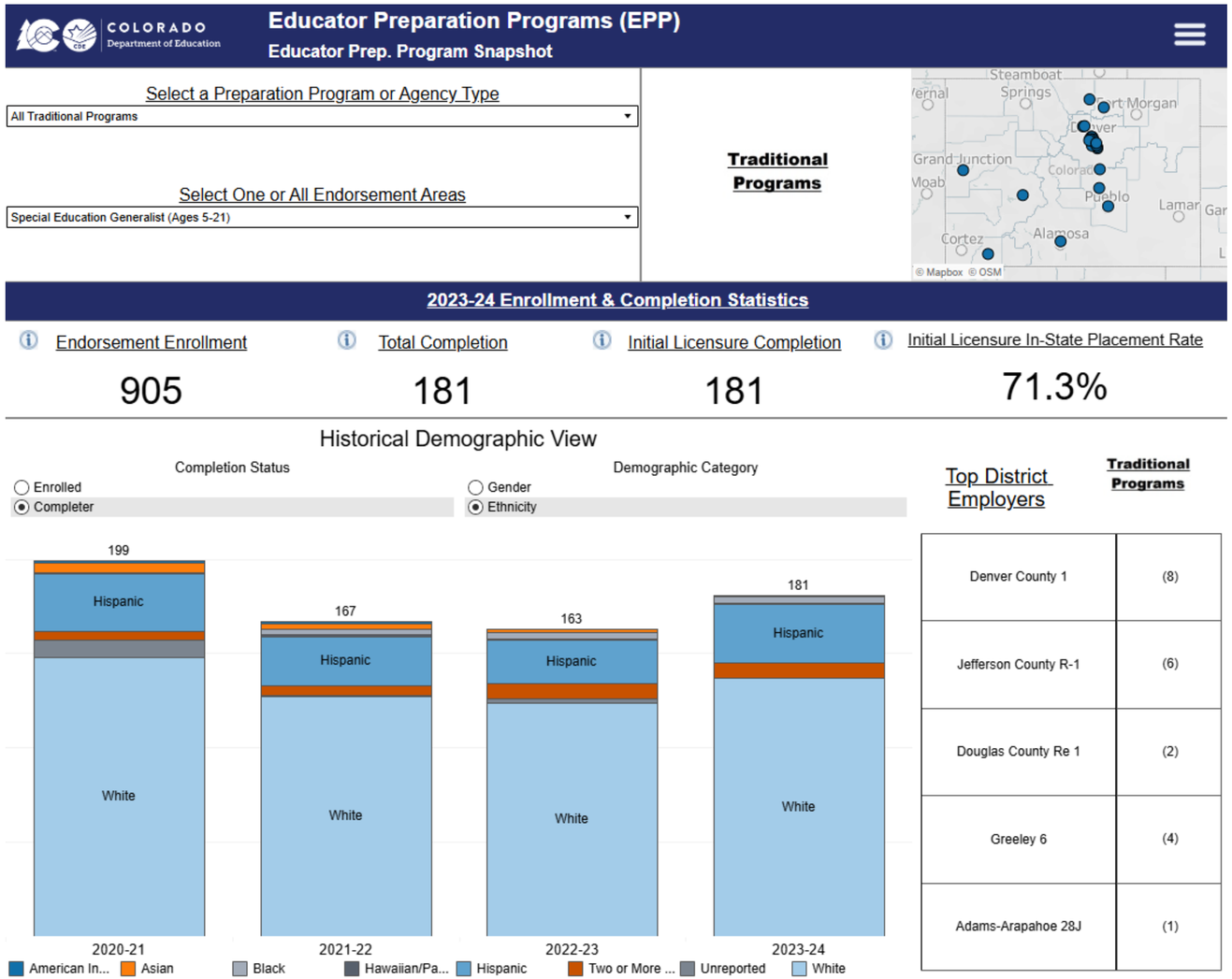
Educator Retention Dashboard



- **Key question**: *who stays and who leaves?*

- Tips:
  - Change the "Level of Detail" for more granular data
  - Check out the "State Map" tab to view retention trends and mobility trends by district

Educator Preparation Program Dashboard



- **Key question**: *whom can we partner with?*

- Tips:
  - Navigate to "Prep Program Snapshot" *(upper right hamburger menu)*
  - Filter by preparation program and endorsement area to view outcome statistics

Learning about GYO educator initiatives in Colorado

- CDE, CDHE, and REL Central conducted interviews with seven GYO educator initiatives in Colorado representing various
  - Initiative designs (e.g., Teacher Degree Apprenticeship models, residencies, and other alternative pathways)
  - Participants (e.g., current school staff, high school students, and postsecondary students)
  - Locales (e.g., rural, urban, and suburban districts)
- Interviews focused on
  - Implementation of components
  - Continuous improvement and monitoring approaches
  - Strengths and challenges to implementing GYO educator initiatives



Institute of Education Sciences

Grow Your Own: Initiatives to Reduce Teacher Shortages in Colorado

Definition and Overview of Resources

Regional Educational Laboratory Central

August 2026

As with much of the nation, Colorado faces a challenge with teacher shortages. During the 2025/26 academic year, 27 percent of open positions were filled using shortage mechanisms such as long-term substitutes and emergency certification, and 4 percent of open positions remained unfilled (Colorado Department of Education [CDE], 2026). Challenges with the teacher pipeline and teacher attrition are two main factors contributing to teacher shortages (Learning Policy Institute, 2025). States are responding by exploring strategies that expand entry into the profession and improve retention.

Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher initiatives have emerged as a promising approach for addressing these challenges by recruiting and preparing new educators from within local communities (Garcia, 2024). GYO teacher initiatives often focus on developing paraprofessionals or other noncertified staff into certified teachers, creating early teaching pathways for high school students who may be interested in teaching, or establishing teacher apprenticeship programs that reduce barriers to entry.

Efforts are underway to expand and support GYO teacher initiatives in Colorado. CDE set a goal in its 2025-2028 Strategic Plan (CDE, 2025) to increase the number of GYO teacher initiatives to help reduce teacher shortages. Similarly, the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE) has prioritized expanding pathways that enable learners to access careers with strong returns on investment (CDHE, 2023). GYO teacher initiatives support this priority by offering accessible community-rooted educator pathways into the teaching profession that align individual opportunity with statewide workforce needs.

About this work

The Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education partnered with Regional Educational Laboratory Central to build and apply evidence to address teacher shortages through Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher initiatives across the state.

This brief includes the following:

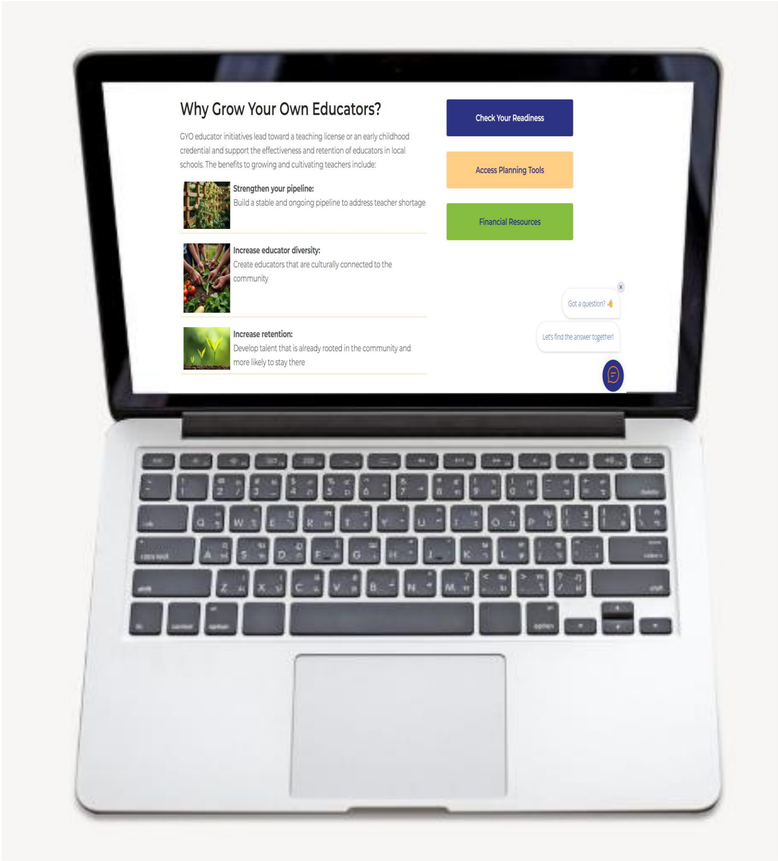
- **A definition and evidence-based key components** for GYO teacher initiatives.
- **Links to four briefs** that staff from local education agencies and educator preparation programs can use to help establish or refine GYO teacher initiatives.
- **Seven example GYO teacher initiatives** that represent a variety of approaches and contexts across Colorado.

Adapted from the Colorado Department of Education

Learn more in our series of briefs!

- Overview
- Readiness
- Partnerships
- Recruitment
- Monitoring

CDE GYO Website



- What GYO initiatives are
- Why they are beneficial
- Tools to plan and launch or strengthen a GYO initiative

CDE GYO Starter Kit



Starting a GYO: A Step by Step Guide

This guide is intended to help district and building leaders navigate the design and implementation of a GYO program. Feel free to skip steps you don't need and utilize the resources in a way that is helpful to you. Have questions or need a thought partner along the way? Contact the Educator Career Navigation Team!

Step 1: Establish the Purpose & Vision

Goal: Align around why you are launching a GYO program.

Activities:

- Identify the staffing challenges GYO will address (e.g., special education shortages, diversity gaps).
- Define the long-term vision (e.g., "Build a sustainable, diverse educator pipeline from our community").
- Clarify success criteria (retention, diversity, vacancy reduction, completion rates).
- Understand readiness

Helpful Work Products:

- Vision statement
- High-level goals
- Board/superintendent alignment

Resources:

- Establish the Purpose, Vision, Roles
- Analyze Workforce Data
- Clarify Roles and Responsibilities
- Select Your Target Populations
- Choose Your Pathway Models
- Build Higher Education Partnerships
- Design the Program Structure
- Determine Funding and Sustainability
- Build Candidate Supports
- Launch Recruitment & Communications
- Select and Onboard Participants
- Implement & Monitor Progress
- Evaluate, Improve & Scale

Interested in learning more?

Free professional development workshop

Oct 26th 12-4 pm in Genoa-Hugo (in-person)

Learn about resources, discuss strategies for implementation, and network

Q & A

- What financial supports (such as grants, philanthropic support, etc.) are available for GYO initiatives? How can these make GYO initiatives sustainable?
- How do GYO initiatives adapt to school closures and consolidations?
- How can GYO initiatives be replicated with other areas of need in school systems, such as with school counselors?
- What certificates or industry credentials are recommended for GYO initiatives?



Q & A

Thank you!



References

Colorado Department of Education. (2026). Educator shortage survey results. https://ed.cde.state.co.us/educatortalent/researchandimpact/educator-shortage survey-results

Learning Policy Institute. (2025). An overview of teacher shortages: 2025 [Fact sheet]. https://learningpolicyinstitute.org/product/overview-teacher-shortages-2025 factsheet

Colorado Department of Education. (2025). Strategic plan: Start strong, stay engaged, leave ready. https://ed.cde. state.co.us/cdecomm/strategic-plan

Colorado Department of Higher Education. (2023). Colorado's strategic plan for higher education: Building skills for an evolving economy. https://cdhe.colorado. gov/strategic-plan

Disclaimer

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