



TEA Time: “Grow Your Own” Program Overview – September 2018

Narrator: Welcome to TEA Time, a podcast about all things public education from the Texas Education Agency.

Host: Welcome back to another episode of TEA Time. I’m joined today by Sheel Jagani. She’s a program specialist in our Educator Recruitment and Development division here at the Agency, and Sheel, we’re here today to talk about a very special project called Grow Your Own.

TEA Program Specialist Sheel Jagani: Yes, thank you so much for inviting me.

Host: So talk to me about what Grow Your Own means and what the program does.

Jagani: So Grow Your Own right now is actually a national buzzword, and it really captures the idea that our future teachers are really in our high school seats. So it’s a series of initiatives nationally, and also this one here in Texas, to help districts train current high school students with the intention that they will be the future educators in their community.

Host: So what does this look like in the state of Texas right now? I know this is, as you said, a very new initiative that we’re working on. Across the state of Texas, what does this look like?

Jagani: So this looks like a collection of programs in high schools that are currently called Education and Training programs, Education and Training courses – very similar to other Career and Technical Education courses except these are our quality teachers, our highly-motivated teachers that are training high school students on what it means to be a teacher. What this looks like at TEA is a new grant program in which we’re awarding funds specifically to districts to help with this initiative.

Host: Walk me through this grant program – what does it look like?

Jagani: So this year, we’re in Cycle 2 of our grant. It is a little bit complex because we envision a pipeline to the classroom as a classroom teacher. We’ve identified three key entry points in which someone can become a classroom teacher. So the first one is focusing on those courses that I’ve mentioned, the Education and Training courses in high schools. We are awarding grant funds to schools that can increase the enrollment, increase the quality, found some career and technical student organizations, so these are like clubs. That’s my favorite part. It’s a lot like a speech and debate club, but it’s like competitive teaching events. So that’s the ethos behind the first pathway. We’re focusing on our high school students. The second pathway is actually helping transition our paraprofessionals, instructional aides, long-term substitute teachers that already have their roots in the community in which they serve, and a lot of times they’re from that community in which they serve. And we are supporting them in getting their bachelor’s degrees and their teaching credentials, so they can transition into full-time teaching. And then the third is supporting quality clinical teaching assignments that are year-long for students who are in university and their getting their ed degrees. A lot of times university students don’t have the time or the bandwidth or really the financial support to do a year-long clinical teaching assignment. It feels like an unpaid internship. So we are providing stipends for those students so that it reduces their costs; it also reduces the cost for the district, they get a quality student

teacher and the student teacher gets an authentic experience. And also, we've now opened it up this year to programs that offer something that we call an intensive pre-service. So that is exactly what it sounds like, it's a five-or-more week intensive experience in which educator preparation program candidates are teaching. They have teaching experience. It is clinical teaching, but it's accelerated and intensive. And then they're actually ready to serve as teachers as soon as that summer experience is over, but they continue to get the support from their prep program.

Host: We've got three very individual opportunities for these three pathways. Talk to me about the grant application. What do individuals in each of these pathways need to do to apply for this grant?

Jagani: That's a great question. The grant application is going to post on our grants opportunity page September 14th. And our eligible applicants for pathway 1, which is focusing on the recruitment of future educators in high school, those are local education agencies – so those are school districts that are eligible. It's the same for pathway 2, pathway 2 being the transitioning paraprofessionals into teaching roles. Local districts, local education agencies and school districts are also eligible. The difference in pathway 3 is, because it is funding to support clinical teaching experiences, our eligible applicants for that pathway are educator preparation programs. That could either be a school of education or an alternative certification program.

Host: Why is this an important initiative for our school districts, for individuals who are in an educator preparation program? What does participating in this program provide to them?

Jagani: So if you're referring to pathway 3, it really focuses on developing really well-qualified teacher candidates, but more importantly, those teacher candidates that get an authentic experience embedded in a school and in a community in which they intend to serve in the future. So another layer in this grant is if a student teacher spends a year in their clinical experience getting this authentic experience, they're invested in the success of those students in that community, they're invested in the success of other programs in that high school, and they are committing to actually teach as soon as they're certified in the school they had their student teaching experience, which is not always the case in educator prep programs. I also think it's wonderful because a lot of times, small districts and rural districts, it's cost-prohibitive for them to support a student teacher. They just don't have the funds to provide that stipend. And so they don't get, perhaps, the most diverse or perhaps the most motivated students because some people simply cannot give 28 weeks of their last year of college to essentially an unpaid internship.

Host: You've also talked about high school students very specifically in this grant, and I know that kind of the mantra of Grow Your Own at the district level is "your future teachers are in your high school seats." Why is that such an important aspect of any local community?

Jagani: That's a great question. I think that teaching is an incredibly rigorous and incredibly rewarding profession. As a former high school teacher myself, I can attest to that. And I think that the exposure and kind of the feeling around teaching, the excitement, the motivation, we have a huge opportunity here where our students are in high school and they're considering their careers for the future. They're often asked what they want to major in or where they intend to go to college. We have so many wonderful career and technical education programs in the state of Texas, and we should be, as the Education Agency, as probably the body that elevates the profession the most, encouraging our students just as much to enter the teaching profession as we are encouraging them to enter college, career, military, health and science, all kinds of other professions, we should give them the same exposure to teaching.

Host: Sheel, thanks so much for joining us today. Again, that Grow Your Own grant opens on September 14th. It will remain open until November 13th. We will have information on the Grow Your Own page on

tea.texas.gov. You can also find all the information about Grow Your Own by searching Grow Your Own on the TEA homepage. Sheel, thanks again for joining us.

Jagani: Thank you.

Narrator: For more on this and other education issues, visit our website at tea.texas.gov. For more TEA Time episodes, visit tea.texas.gov/podcast or look for us where you download your other podcasts. Join us again soon for another episode of TEA Time, a podcast from the Texas Education Agency.