

Best Practices for Educator Recruitment and Retention

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Executive Summary

Like other states, Oregon’s educator workforce faces well-documented pressures—entry barriers in preparation pathways, uneven access to high-quality training, and elevated early-career attrition across roles—that erode school stability and student experience. This white paper highlights practical, scalable solutions already underway. Regional Educator Networks (RENs) align professional learning to classroom needs through job-embedded coaching, mentoring, professional learning communities, and improvement cycles that reduce isolation for novices and elevate practice for experienced educators. Grow Your Own (GYO) partnerships expand accessible, affordable, community-based pathways that diversify candidate pools and create on-ramps for high school students, paraprofessionals, and rural residents. Together, these initiatives demonstrate promising practices that can improve recruitment, increase retention, and stabilize Oregon’s K–12 workforce while advancing better outcomes for students.

Regional Educator Networks

The ten **Regional Educator Networks (RENs)** are designed to ensure that every educator in Oregon has access to high-quality professional learning opportunities (ORS 342.940). Since 2019, the RENs have strengthened systems to support educator growth by providing and improving professional learning programs at district and regional levels, ultimately leading to better outcomes for students. Data collected from the 2024-25 school year identified the following promising practices:

- 1. On-going, job-embedded supports for novice educators.**

Over the 2024-25 school year, 50% of REN participants were novice educators in their first three years of their career. RENs focus on sustained, relational, and instructional supports—moving beyond one-off workshops to cohort-based learning, mentoring, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Communities of Practice (CoPs), and individual coaching. These types of opportunities align with the standards and practices of high-quality professional learning and are more likely to result in improved teaching practices, which in turn supports improved outcomes for students (Learning Forward, 2026).

- 2. High-quality, standards-aligned mentoring.**

Mentoring is a core workforce retention strategy. Research finds that mentoring is vital for educator growth, fostering trust-based relationships, leadership development, and collaboration through professional learning communities (Ryerson, 2025). During the 2024–25 school year, a one-time \$8 million investment allowed school districts and

RENs to launch or expand mentoring for beginning teachers and administrators, prioritizing educators in high-need settings such as special education, rural communities, diverse backgrounds, and emergency licensure pathways.

3. Professional learning opportunities tailored to the needs of experienced educators.

REN investments support experienced educators to participate in coaching cycles, content-specific institutes, and leadership development rather than introductory skill-building. Monthly cycles of inquiry—using structured protocols to analyze student work, test instructional strategies, and assess impact—position experienced educators as active learners focused on results and instructional coherence. These types of opportunities align with standards and practices of high-quality professional learning and are likely to result in improved teaching practices, which in turn supports improved outcomes for students.

Grow Your Own Partnerships

Since 2020, Oregon’s investments in **Grow Your Own (GYO) partnerships** have demonstrated promising practices to address educator recruitment and retention by supporting critical pathways for individuals to become highly skilled educators, expanding student learning opportunities, and promoting equity across districts. GYO programs serve a broad range of educators—including K-12 educators, early learning educators, classified employees, CTE instructors, emergency/substitute teachers, and administrators. Data collected during 2023-2025 identified the following promising practices:

1. Reduced barriers to educator careers for underserved candidates.

GYO programs helped reduce institutional and financial barriers by providing accessible, affordable, and community-aligned preparation pathways for educator candidates, particularly for rural, bilingual or multilingual, racially and ethnically diverse educator candidates. From 2023 to 2025, GYO programs supported 2,172 adults and 644 high school students pursuing credentials through enrollment in a postsecondary program. During that time, GYO programs helped address accessibility issues for students and pre-service candidates who often experience barriers when pursuing educator careers in Oregon with accessible, affordable entry points into career pathways.

2. Supported local and/or regional career pathways to meet current and future workforce needs.

Through partnership and cross-sector collaboration, GYO programs coordinated support with Pre-K programs, school districts, Education Service Districts, postsecondary institutions, Tribes, and community organizations to address local and regional

workforce needs—including Special Education (SPED), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Career and Technical Education (CTE).

3. Strengthen retention strategies by expanding career advancement opportunities.

GYO programs use career advancement as a retention strategy. GYO programs supported employees—such as classified staff, early learning educators, K-12 educators, and educators on emergency or restricted licenses—advance into licensed or leadership roles. These efforts strengthen workforce stability by promoting employee development and reducing turnover.

Introduction

For more than thirty years, Oregon has worked to expand equitable, high-quality learning opportunities for K–12 students by strengthening the recruitment and retention of educators through key legislative actions. These efforts have been guided by statutes related to the recruitment and retention of K–12 educators—particularly culturally and linguistically diverse educators (e.g., ORS 342.437, ORS 342.940, ORS 342.447). For nearly a decade, the Oregon Educator Equity Report has been jointly produced by the Oregon Department of Education (ODE), the Higher Education Coordinating Commission (HECC), the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission (TSPC), and the Educator Advancement Council (EAC). This biannual report provides an update on the state’s progress to meet these goals and includes data on educator preparation and workforce diversity. It also highlights evidence-based practices for recruiting, preparing, supporting, and advancing culturally and linguistically diverse educators, drawing on cross-agency data to examine the conditions that influence educator recruitment, retention, and career advancement.

In addition to reporting on the state’s progress, the Legislature established the EAC in 2017 to coordinate statewide efforts to improve the conditions that affect educator recruitment and retention. As described in the 2024 Quality Education Commission Report, the EAC functions as a statewide intergovernmental coalition with council directors representing Oregon’s state education agencies, local education agencies, pre-K–12 educators, Tribes, postsecondary institutions, and community partners. The role of the Council underscores the need to coordinate strategies and work collaboratively to address educator workforce needs and to mitigate persistent challenges related to low recruitment and high turnover across the state.

Data presented in this paper draw from state and local agency reports and collections, as well as a longitudinal workforce study conducted in 2024 by a research team from the University of California, Irvine (UCI) at the request of the EAC. The UCI report¹ examines turnover patterns among diverse educator groups over a fifteen-year period, including changes across different economic contexts, and analyzes labor market outcomes for teachers who exit Oregon public schools. In the UCI study, “educator” includes licensed, non-licensed, and early learning educators, as well as educator candidates (as defined in Senate Bill 1552 from 2024 and ORS 342.940). This definition—shared in the 2024 Oregon Educator Equity Report² and supported by research—recognizes the critical role adults in a variety of school positions play in supporting students’ academic, health, and social-emotional well-being.

¹ For more details, see [Building a Diverse Workforce \(2024\)](#).

² For more details, see the [2024 Oregon Educator Equity Report](#).

This paper includes examples of promising practices to recruit and retain Oregon's K–12 educators across the educator career continuum (Zugelder & L'Esperence, 2022). The continuum offers a practical framework to describe the interrelated phases of an educator's career, suggesting that educators may experience the continuum stages at various points in their career (Eros, 2011). Overall, the career continuum emphasizes the importance of retaining educators in each of the following stages:

- **Educator Pathways and Preparation** include access to educator pathways (e.g., proximity to an Oregon postsecondary institution), enrollment, credential, and recruitment of pre-service educators, as well as training and advancement opportunities for current school employees.
- **Support for Novice Educators** includes recruitment, selection, and hiring practices; access to professional supports; and high-quality mentoring and induction programs that provide structured, intentional guidance to newly hired educators as they transition into their roles, learn their organizational context, and develop the skills necessary for long-term success and retention.
- **Professional Growth and Development** refer to opportunities for ongoing, job-embedded learning and skill development for licensed and non-licensed educators, including coaching, mentoring, role-specific training, collaborative learning structures, and continuous professional learning aligned with individual, school, and system needs.
- **Career Advancement** includes access to leadership opportunities, specialized roles, credentialing or degree programs, and other career pathways supported by postsecondary partners that expand opportunities for relevant coursework, credentials, and evidence-based professional learning.

Together, these dynamic and interconnected phases illustrate key points in an educator's career that significantly influence retention and overall workforce stability. This paper begins with a summary of national educator workforce concerns to highlight systemic issues related to turnover and school instability, as these challenges continue to shape recruitment and retention efforts (Burns et al., 2023). It then reviews the current research on turnover, mobility, and retention across teachers, administrators, and support staff, underscoring how changes in the school workforce affect long-term stability. Finally, the paper revisits the educator continuum to describe regional and local recruitment and retention challenges in Oregon and summarizes several promising practices and recent progress to address them.

Background and Relevant Research

National Concerns about Educator Shortages

Since the early 1970s, concerns about national and state teacher shortages have raised alarms among state and local education policy leaders (Nguyen, Lam, & Bruno, 2022). These concerns have been driven in part by an aging workforce and rising numbers of retiring teachers that outpace the supply of new educators, particularly in hard-to-staff specialized roles (McVey & Trinidad, 2019). For decades, research on workforce shortages—including understanding and identifying patterns of attrition and turnover—as a “leaky pipeline” with educators entering and leaving the profession at multiple stages. Although this metaphor is useful, it underrepresents the complexities of educator mobility across different career stages. It also tends to focus primarily on teachers. While extensive research documents the impact teachers have on student outcomes (Chetty et al., 2011), compelling evidence also highlights the important contributions of administrators (Perry et al., 2024) and school staff (Holme et al., 2018) to overall school climate and culture. A comprehensive understanding of educator workforce stability must therefore consider the recruitment and retention of all adults who support student academic success and well-being in various school roles (Penner et al., 2024).

Workforce Stability and Why it Matters

In the context of recruitment and retention, school stability refers to the conditions that support the consistent presence of a school’s instructional workforce over multiple years. Stable schools benefit from shared institutional knowledge, strong professional relationships, and coherent instructional practices aligned to student goals, as well as sustainable and consistent funding. Conversely, stability is weakened by chronic or cumulative turnover that disrupts organizational functioning and impedes school improvement efforts (Holme et al., 2018). When instability persists, schools can resemble a “revolving door,” with educators cycling in and out before relationships, routines, and shared practices can take root (Penner et al., 2023). Frequent turnover and long-term unfilled vacancies undermine both recruitment and retention efforts by signaling challenging working conditions, limited support, and weak organizational coherence—reducing applicant interest and making hard-to-fill positions even more difficult to staff. Such instability contributes to shortages that are often “innumerable and hyper-local,” producing inequitable impacts across districts and regions (McVey & Trinidad, 2019).

Turnover presents a particular challenge for individual schools and small districts striving to maintain a stable workforce under both short-term and long-term conditions (Holme et al., 2018). Examining turnover, including mobility, offers meaningful indicators of retention, workforce stability, and student outcomes (Eros, 2011; Goldhaber & Cowan, 2014; Holme et al.,

2018; Ingersoll, 2001; Kraft et al., 2016; Penner et al., 2024). Staff mobility data capture whether employees remain in the same school, move to another school or district, or leave the profession altogether (Penner et al., 2024). Understanding these movement patterns can help to design and implement targeted strategies to increase stability, as turnover churn can undermine or impede local recruitment and retention efforts (Holme et al., 2018; Penner et al., 2024; Taie & Lewis, 2023).

Staff Continuity and Student Belonging

Teachers, principals, and staff collectively form the institutional foundation of K–12 schools and create school culture through their interactions with students and families. Research shows that students’ sense of belonging is strongly associated with regular attendance, engagement, and academic persistence, and that belonging is fostered through relationships with caring adults across multiple school roles—not only classroom teachers (Best et al., 2018; Hemelt et al., 2021; Mulhern, 2020). Long-term vacancies and frequent turnover disrupt student–adult relationships and erode the conditions that support belonging and engagement. Student survey data indicate that feeling “welcomed,” “seen,” and supported by adults at school is a strong protective factor against chronic absenteeism and disengagement—underscoring the importance of staff continuity across roles (Jacoby, 2023).

Recruitment and Retention as Interdependent Systems

Finally, effective recruitment and retention practices must work in tandem to support overall school stability. Educator shortages are linked to recruitment and retention challenges and often force schools to adopt measures that compromise instructional quality (e.g., larger class sizes, reduced course offerings, or reliance on under-qualified staff), harming student outcomes. Systemic efforts to improve educator recruitment and retention are essential to ensuring that students and families have access to stable school environments with highly qualified, well-supported staff.

The next section provides a brief discussion of systemic challenges that impede Oregon’s recruitment and retention efforts, including barriers to accessing high-quality preparation and training, insufficient supports for novice educators, and limited opportunities for professional growth and career advancement—each of which affects both recruitment and retention for current and prospective school staff.

Challenges Impacting a High-Quality Educator Workforce

Like many states, Oregon faces many challenges that affect the recruitment and retention of a high-quality educator workforce. Despite recent state investments designed to reduce barriers to entering the profession (e.g., scholarships, reduced licensing costs), monitoring and evaluating local and regional workforce stability remains difficult. The impact of the pandemic on educator burnout has heightened statewide urgency around improving the recruitment, preparation, employment, and retention of educators, as burnout has reached crisis levels in several areas (Oregon Educator Equity Report, 2024). Addressing these recruitment and retention challenges therefore begins by identifying system-level workforce conditions that are essential to K–12 students having access to high-quality educators.³

Access and Equity Challenges Across Oregon’s Educator Preparation Pathways

Oregon’s teacher workforce faces persistent access and equity challenges rooted in preparation pathways, geography, economic conditions, and racial and ethnic disparities (Oregon’s Teacher Workforce Report, 2025). Teachers who are prepared by Oregon educator preparation programs (EPPs) are retained at significantly higher rates than those prepared out of state, yet the state increasingly relies on educators trained in non-Oregon programs, especially in regions without nearby EPPs, creating uneven access to stable educators across counties.

Geographic patterns further amplify these inequities. For example, teachers tend to live, train, and work close to where they grew up, meaning rural and remote regions—particularly in Eastern, Southern, and coastal areas of the state—struggle to attract and retain teachers who lack local ties and therefore experience lower retention rates (Oregon’s Teacher Workforce Report, 2025). Economic disparities intensify these challenges, as nearly a quarter of counties require new teachers to spend more than the commonly accepted affordability threshold on rent, and these same counties also exhibit higher student-to-teacher ratios, reducing access to appropriately staffed schools for students in high-cost areas (ibid). Racial and ethnic inequities also emerge. While Oregon-prepared teachers of color have higher retention than their white peers, teachers of color trained by out-of-state education programs experience lower retention rates than white teachers, suggesting possible differences in preparation, support, and

³ For the purposes of this paper, the definition of “educator” includes licensed, non-licensed, and early learning educators, as well as educator candidates (ORS 342.940).

workplace experiences that disproportionately affect educators of color (ibid). Together, these interconnected factors limit equitable access to a stable and diverse educator workforce.

State Disinvestment Impacts Recruitment to Oregon Postsecondary Programs

Recruitment challenges are often attributed to a lack of interest in the profession, but this narrative overlooks structural and equity-related barriers that restrict entry for early-career educators. Oregon has experienced significant disinvestment in postsecondary education since the Great Recession, leading to increased costs for students (e.g., rising tuition) and reduced affordability (State Higher Education Finance, 2024). Decades of underfunding have strained public and private postsecondary systems, likely contributing to declining enrollment and completion rates and limiting program options available to prospective educators.⁴

Statewide enrollment of Oregon residents in education majors and programs has begun to rebound at both community colleges and universities since the COVID-19 pandemic, with community colleges driving the largest gains (Higher Education Coordinating Commission, *Fall Enrollment Report*, 2025). Enrollment in Oregon EPPs has increased from 2018–19 to 2024–25. However, during this same period, the number of pre-service candidates completing an EPP declined. While enrollment and completion have improved since the COVID-19 pandemic, the number of educators entering Oregon’s workforce from out-of-state, online, and for-profit programs has also steadily increased (Oregon Educator Equity Report, 2024; Oregon’s Teacher Workforce Report, 2025).

These examples illustrate the challenges of maintaining a high-quality, stable workforce—particularly during the earliest stages of the educator career pathway. Postsecondary institutions play a vital role not only in recruiting but also in retaining educators. Workforce stability, particularly for rural school communities, can be supported through expanded partnerships between school districts (employers) and postsecondary institutions (preparation). Partnerships strengthen pathways for teachers and substitutes with emergency or restricted licenses to complete training for preliminary licensure. Postsecondary access to high-quality preparation is critical not only for pre-service candidates but also for ensuring that all K–12 students are supported by well-trained and well-supported adults.

⁴ Since 2021, at least two private in-state EPPs have closed (Educator Equity Report, 2022).

Insufficient Support for Early-Career Educators Undermines Retention Across Oregon’s Workforce

Novice educators—including teachers, paraprofessionals, and other school staff—benefit from structured early-career supports such as high-quality induction, mentoring, and coaching, all of which improve retention and reduce early attrition. These supports are especially critical during the first years of service, when turnover risk is highest and professional identity, skill development, and workplace relationships are still emerging. This section draws from a longitudinal study⁵ examining novice educator turnover and mobility in Oregon from 2006–07 to 2021–22 (Penner et al., 2024). Data spanning contexts such as the Great Recession and the COVID-19 pandemic show significant churn across educators of all types, including teachers, administrators, paraprofessionals, and staff.

Educator Turnover Contributes to Workforce Instability

Administrators. New administrators experience elevated turnover and mobility, highlighting the fragility of early-career leadership positions. Overall, administrators exhibit higher turnover than teachers, and early-career administrators are especially likely to move between schools or districts rather than remain in their initial placements. This suggests that leadership retention challenges are driven more by movement within the system than exit from public education. Administrator turnover increased sharply after the COVID-19 pandemic, exacerbating pressures associated with demanding working conditions, organizational stress, and school climate challenges. Leadership turnover is only weakly correlated with teacher turnover, indicating that administrative instability can occur even when teaching staff remain relatively stable.

Teachers. Similar patterns emerge among new teachers. Although many new teachers enter Oregon’s workforce each year, turnover among novices remains consistently higher than among more experienced educators. New teachers are also more racially and linguistically diverse than veteran educators, making early-career retention critical to sustaining workforce diversification. Novice teachers are disproportionately placed in less stable, higher-need school environments where they often collaborate with other novices and experience leadership turnover—conditions associated with reduced retention.

Paraprofessionals and staff. Turnover is even more pronounced among novice paraprofessionals and support staff, whose early attrition represents a major point of workforce vulnerability. Paraprofessionals and staff exhibit the highest turnover rates of all

⁵ In 2022, the EAC contracted with a research team from the University of California, Irvine to conduct a longitudinal study on Oregon’s educator workforce from 2006-07 to 2021-22.

educator groups, with newer employees more likely to exit public education entirely rather than transfer within the system. Contributing factors include compensation challenges, job precarity, limited advancement opportunities, and demanding working conditions.

Post-pandemic turnover rose sharply, compounding these challenges. Because paraprofessional and staff turnover is also only weakly correlated with teacher turnover, schools may lose newly hired support staff even when teaching assignments appear stable—impacting supports such as special education services and student well-being.

Mentoring Alone Is Insufficient to Ensure Stable Staffing in High-Needs Schools

Findings from the UCI report highlight the need for targeted early-career supports—including mentoring, improved working conditions, and leadership stability—to promote retention. Oregon’s past investments in induction and mentoring demonstrate the impact such supports can have. From 2010 to 2019, Oregon funded a state mentoring program⁶ that supported thousands of beginning teachers and administrators and served more than 10,000 educators over a decade. The program improved novice educator confidence, instructional skills, and professional networks. A complementary research study found that the program significantly improved state-level retention, reducing the likelihood that novice teachers would leave Oregon public schools within a year, with especially strong effects for teachers of color and educators in more diverse districts (Liu & Penner, 2024). However, the study also found that mentoring did not improve school-level retention and may have contributed to mobility across districts, producing mixed effects on local workforce stability.

Mentoring is an important support for early-career educators, but on its own it is insufficient to ensure stable staffing in high-need schools. Persistent turnover across educator roles underscores the need for more comprehensive and equitable early-career supports. While mentoring strengthens instructional practice and state-level retention, additional strategies—such as improved working conditions, stronger school leadership, and clearer career advancement pathways—are necessary to stabilize staffing and build a resilient and equitable educator workforce.

These system-level challenges underscore the need for strategies that operate along the entire educator career continuum—linking preparation access to induction, ongoing professional

⁶ In 2007, the Oregon Legislature passed HB 2574 authorizing the Department of Education (ODE) to establish a beginning teacher and administrator mentoring program. The Oregon Mentoring Program provided support to beginning teachers, principals, and superintendents. The program sunset in 2019.

learning, and career advancement—so that recruitment and retention reinforce one another rather than compete.

Promising Practices for K-12 Educators in Oregon

Oregon’s educator workforce continues to experience well-documented pressures that limit recruitment, weaken preparation pathways, and contribute to early-career attrition. The initiatives highlighted in this white paper demonstrate that the state has already begun to build the infrastructure necessary to address these challenges through coordinated, evidence-informed strategies.

Within this coordinated system, the Regional Educator Networks (RENs) and Grow Your Own (GYO) partnerships translate evidence into practice by strengthening job-embedded supports and expanding local pathways, respectively. The RENs strengthen professional learning systems by providing sustained, job-embedded supports that enhance instructional quality, reduces novice isolation, and build regional capacity through mentoring, coaching, and improvement cycles. Targeted investments in high-quality, standards-aligned mentoring—such as the SB 283 Mentor Grant—further underscore the importance of consistent, relationship-centered support for teachers and administrators at critical points in their careers. At the same time, GYO partnerships support local and regional workforce efforts by recruiting people from the community – such as paraprofessionals, school staff, high school students or other local residents – to become licensed or advance their careers in education.

Regional Educator Networks: Strengthening Professional Learning to Stabilize the K–12 Workforce

Oregon’s Regional Educator Networks (RENs) demonstrate that high-quality, job-embedded professional learning is a critical driver of educator retention and workforce stability.⁷ By prioritizing novice educators and providing sustained mentoring, coaching, PLCs, and Communities of Practice, RENs reduce isolation, build instructional confidence, and connect induction to long-term professional growth. Targeted investments—such as the SB 283 Mentor

⁷ In 2019, the EAC created ten Regional Educator Networks to ensure that every educator in Oregon has access to high-quality professional learning opportunities (ORS 342.940).

Grant—show that structured, standards-aligned mentoring significantly improves novice teacher and administrator effectiveness while strengthening resilience and commitment to the profession. For experienced educators, RENs shift professional learning from one-off training to improvement-focused practice, positioning educators as leaders in inquiry cycles, coaching, and curriculum-aligned implementation. Through these coordinated strategies, RENs strengthen local capacity, elevate instructional practice, and reinforce a coherent professional learning system that supports educator growth across the career continuum. Together, these efforts contribute to a more stable, well-supported K–12 workforce and improved outcomes for Oregon’s students.

Data collected from REN sponsoring organizations during the 2024-25 school year suggests RENs are a promising strategy for Oregon to address many system challenges impacting educator recruitment and retention. Examples of REN promising practices include:

1. On-going and job-embedded supports for novice educators.

Over the 2024-25 school year, 50% of REN participants were novice educators in their first three years of their career. RENs focus on sustained, relational, and instructional supports—moving beyond one-off workshops to cohort-based learning, mentoring, Professional Learning Communities (PLCs), Communities of Practice (CoPs), and individual coaching. These types of opportunities align with the standards and practices of high-quality professional learning and are more likely to result in improved teaching practices, which in turn supports improved outcomes for students (Learning Forward, 2026). The most effective networks emphasize the following formats for on-going and job-embedded supports:

- **Creating sustained learning formats.** Research shows effective early educator support includes on-going coaching and professional learning during a teacher’s first three years to help ease the transition from preparation program to the classroom (Kwok & Macfarlane, 2025). RENs supported early career educators through sustained learning formats with multi-day learning series, PLCs, CoPs, and job-embedded coaching to develop skills, confidence, and peer connections. Effective networks focused on instructional practices through structured PLCs—with facilitation, protocols, and collaborative inquiry routines. This is a promising practice for novice educators to develop habits of collaborative inquiry and data-informed decision-making early in their careers. This approach aligns induction support with long term professional growth rather than treating it as a separate system.
- **Developing strong, regional mentoring networks.** Mentor or coach selection, training and pairing matter when supporting novice educators (Kwok & Macfarlane, 2025). Across the RENs, new educators were paired with trained mentors across

districts, to reduce isolation and increase access to high quality support, particularly in rural contexts. These networks met monthly or bimonthly and included a combination of facilitated learning sessions, mentor-mentee collaboration time, and problem solving around shared challenges such as classroom management, curriculum implementation, and culturally responsive practice. Effective networks emphasized relational support paired with instructional focus, rather than isolated professional development sessions.

Example from Douglas Regional Educator Network.

Douglas Regional Educator Network (Douglas REN) serves primarily rural and remote districts and is coordinated by Douglas ESD. Douglas REN emphasizes relationship-based engagement, frequent touchpoints, and structured improvement routines to reduce isolation and support limited local capacity.

How it works.

- **Regional coordination.** Coordination body meets up to eight times per year for extended sessions on priority setting, data review, and aligned technical assistance.
- **Monthly improvement meetings.** Network teams meet for two hours monthly, using root-cause analysis and Plan–Do–Study–Act cycles; receive targeted coaching from ESD instructional staff.
- **Design team structure.** Phase-specific templates, facilitation protocols, and onboarding ensure shared language and routines. Novices develop collaborative inquiry skills; experienced educators often serve as facilitators, mentors, or team leads—building leadership pathways while refining practice.

Why it works. Consistent improvement routines plus frequent, relationship-based touchpoints create coherence and mitigate isolation—key conditions for retention and instructional improvement in rural systems.

2. **High-quality, standards-aligned mentoring.** Mentoring is a core workforce retention strategy. Research finds that mentoring is vital for educator growth, fostering trust-based relationships, leadership development, and collaboration through professional learning communities (Ryerson, 2025). During the 2024–25 school year, a one-time \$8 million investment allowed school districts and RENs to launch or expand mentoring for beginning teachers and administrators, prioritizing educators in high-need settings such

as special education, rural communities, diverse backgrounds, and emergency licensure pathways.⁸

- **Transformative program design.** Seven key transformative mentor program characteristics were developed and defined by analyzing the Oregon Mentoring Standards, New Teacher Center’s High-Quality Mentoring and Coaching Practices, and National Institute for Excellence in Teaching resources. These transformative practices were then reviewed and compared to the characteristics of mentor programs across Oregon. These characteristics included supported support cycles, clearly defined mentor selection process and training, data-informed decision-making, collaborative learning communities, inclusive practices, leadership development pathways and tiered mentee support beyond year two.
- **Positive impact on novice teachers and administrators.** Evidence from the evaluation findings shows that mentoring greatly impacted educators. Mentoring increased teacher confidence, improved instructional quality among beginning teachers, developed strong leadership skills in new administrators, and encouraged mentees to remain in their positions. These outcomes supported the professional growth and improvement of educator retention statewide. Mentees repeatedly reported feeling more supported, less isolated, and better equipped to navigate the challenges of their early years in the profession.

3. Professional learning opportunities tailored to the needs of experienced educators.

REN investments support experienced educators to participate in coaching cycles, content-specific institutes, and leadership development rather than introductory skill-building. Monthly cycles of inquiry—using structured protocols to analyze student work, test instructional strategies, and assess impact—position experienced educators as active learners focused on results and instructional coherence. These types of opportunities align with standards and practices of high-quality professional learning and are likely to result in improved teaching practices, which in turn supports improved outcomes for students.

- **Educator leadership is a retention strategy.** Positioning experienced educators as contributors (not mere recipients) strengthens professional culture, builds local leadership, and sustains engagement across the career continuum. Experienced educators serve as mentors, PLC facilitators, model-lesson hosts, and improvement leads while continuing to receive coaching and feedback—reinforcing that leadership and learning are interconnected.

⁸ For more details, see [SB 283 Mentorship Evaluation Report](#).

- **Developing instructional coherence.** Embedding leadership in improvement cycles helps align professional learning to curriculum, assessment, and student outcomes. Monthly cycles of inquiry—using structured protocols to analyze student work, test instructional strategies, and assess impact—position experienced educators as active learners focused on results and instructional coherence.

Example from Western Regional Educator Network.

Western Regional Educator Network (WREN) serves urban, suburban, and rural districts (Lane, Linn, Benton, Lincoln), coordinated by Lane ESD and Linn Benton Lincoln ESD. Western REN uses a multi-tiered improvement structure to support implementation and continuous learning.

How it works.

- **Design teams.** District and school teams develop Professional Learning Plans aligned to regional priorities; meet monthly/quarterly; receive targeted technical assistance on improvement science tools, data use, and professional learning strategy refinement.
- **Facilitator PLCs (virtual).** Design team leads meet regularly to deepen facility with improvement routines (theories of action, Plan–Do–Study–Act cycles, evidence protocols), troubleshoot challenges, and share strategies.
- **Networked sessions (in person).** Two to three sessions per year convene teams to share PDSA findings, reflect on what works, and translate lessons to classroom practice.

Why it works. The cadence—design team meetings, facilitator PLCs, and network convenings—balances collaboration with protected time for testing, learning, and refinement, tightening the link between professional learning and instructional improvement.

Grow Your Own Partnerships: Expanding Pathways into Education Careers

Recruitment and retention efforts require multiple strategies to demonstrate effectiveness and sustainability. Grow Your Own (GYO) programs contribute to these strategies by expanding access to postsecondary pathways, high-quality preparation and training programs, and career advancement opportunities for school employees. By intentionally serving rural communities, underrepresented groups, and working adults, GYO programs reduce barriers, address regional shortages, and enhance stability across the educator workforce. As a community-anchored approach, GYO programs recruit local residents such as paraprofessionals, school employees,

high school students, and Tribal community members. By providing mentoring, tuition assistance, program navigation, and flexible training pathways, GYO programs help districts fill vacancies, strengthen local retention, and diversify Oregon’s educator workforce. These are promising practices that collectively support stronger recruitment pathways, increase retention, and a more diverse and well-prepared educator workforce for Oregon’s schools.

In the 2023–25 biennium, 29 GYO programs received state funding to support local and regional recruitment and retention efforts through partnerships with 65 school districts, 16 Education Service Districts, Tribal governments, Regional Educator Networks (RENs), community colleges, universities, and community-based organizations.⁹ Data reported by GYO grantees highlights three promising impacts:

1. Reduced barriers to educator careers for underserved candidates.

GYO programs helped reduce institutional and financial barriers by providing accessible, affordable, and community-aligned preparation pathways for educator candidates, particularly for rural, bilingual or multilingual, racially and ethnically diverse educator candidates. From 2023 to 2025, GYO programs supported 2,172 adults and 644 high school students pursuing credentials through enrollment in a postsecondary program. During that time, GYO programs helped address accessibility issues for students and pre-service candidates who often experience barriers when pursuing educator careers in Oregon with accessible, affordable entry points into career pathways. Some examples included:

- **GYO programs served rural participants.**

From 2023 to 2025, 63% of adult and 69% of high school GYO participants resided in rural counties. Over half of high school students who completed a GYO program live in rural areas—an important outcome in communities where postsecondary opportunities are limited.

- **GYO programs supported underrepresented groups.**

From 2023 to 2025, more than one-third of all participants identified as Hispanic/Latino/a/x, and over 40% of adult participants were bilingual or multilingual. Nearly 5% of adult participants and close to 4% of high school students identify as citizens of federally recognized Tribes.

2. Supported local and/or regional career pathways to meet current and future workforce needs.

⁹ The nine federally recognized Tribes also received funding for GYO programs during the 2023-25 biennium. Due to different reporting requirements data was not included in this report.

Through partnership and cross-sector collaboration, GYO programs connect and coordinate with Pre-K programs, school districts, Education Service Districts, postsecondary institutions, Tribes, and community organizations to support local and regional workforce needs—including Special Education (SPED), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), and Career and Technical Education (CTE).

- **GYO programs help districts develop qualified educators for high need specializations.**

From 2023 to 2025, 20% of adult participants pursued degrees in areas in which school districts often struggle to find qualified candidates, including Special Education (SPED) and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL).

- **GYO programs support the completion of educator credentials.**

From 2023 to 2025, nearly 600 GYO adult participants earned a license, degree, certificate, or endorsement. About half earned preliminary teaching licenses, and more than 10% completed Early Learning and Care certifications. These credentials improve candidates' ability to be hired into educator careers.

- **GYO programs strengthen high school career pathways.**

Research finds that CTE coursework increases engagement and improves high school completion, especially for underserved groups (Hemelt, et al., 2019).

From 2023 – 2025, 58% of high school GYO participants engaged in work-based learning through CTE programs. In addition, about 50% of high school students earned dual credit and 58% participated in a CTE program.

3. Strengthen retention strategies by expanding career advancement opportunities.

GYO programs use career advancement as a retention strategy. GYO programs supported employees—such as classified staff, early learning educators, K-12 educators, and educators on emergency or restricted licenses—advance into licensed or leadership roles. These efforts strengthen workforce stability by promoting employee development and reducing turnover.

- **GYO programs provided school district employees career advancement opportunities.**

From 2023 to 2025, 70% of all adult GYO participants were school employees including classified employees, restricted-license teachers, emergency-license teachers, and substitutes and enrolled in a postsecondary program. Additionally, 21% of licensed educators advanced into leadership roles by earning principal or administrator licenses.

Conclusion

Collectively, the Regional Educator Networks and Grow Your Own Partnerships are strategies that strengthen Oregon’s educator continuum. By aligning preparation, induction, professional learning, and leadership development, they offer scalable pathways to improve recruitment, increase retention, and stabilize the K–12 workforce. Continued investment in these interconnected systems will help ensure that every Oregon student is supported by well-prepared, well-supported educators—and that the state’s education workforce is positioned for long-term stability and success.

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