Grow-Your-Own Teacher Program Spotlight: Creative Initiatives in Teacher Education
A collaboration initiative to increase the credentialed elementary school teachers

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Summary

Creating a diverse pool of high quality, certified teachers continues to be a top priority for district and state leaders across the United States. In this policy brief, we introduce the Creative Initiatives in Teacher Education (CITE) program to highlight one innovative way that the Montgomery County Public Schools (MCPS), the University of Maryland, College Park (UMCP), and the Maryland State Department of Education (MSDE) collaborated to develop and implement a program geared towards developing high quality certified teachers. Preparing teacher candidates who are currently working in the district in non-teaching roles, CITE offers an example of a Grow-Your-Own (GYO) program that serves to increase the pipeline of certified elementary school teachers. By reviewing the goals, program design/implementation, and outcomes, this policy brief offers insight into the ways that public school districts, colleges of education, and state education departments can work together to create teacher education and credentialing pathways that increase the number of certified elementary school teachers available to districts.

The Issue

Recruiting certified teachers continues to be a challenge for many school districts across the United States. The need for certified teachers is especially acute in certification levels that support diverse learning needs such as special education and English Language Learners. In Maryland, teacher shortages have increased in recent years thus leading more conditionally certified teachers to fill classroom positions (https://foxbaltimore.com/news/project-baltimore/number-of-uncertified-teachers-in-city-schools-increases). In addition to decreases in the number of teacher candidates enrolling in traditional teacher education programs, many districts have also experienced higher attrition rates as teachers leave the classroom for other career opportunities (Ingersoll & May, 2012).

The reasons for teacher shortages vary based on the location of a specific district. In addition to geographic, racial, and economic factors related to the place of a specific district, leaders have also struggled to identify, attract and retain teachers certified to teach Special Education (SPED) and English as a Second Language (ESOL). Both SPED and ESOL certified teachers contribute to the success of students by bringing specialized training in strategies related to the needs of students.

Access to credentialed teachers and high quality educational experiences is a component of equitable education. Research on student achievement indicates that access to certified teachers is correlated with higher achievement levels for students (Darling-Hammond, Holtzman, Gatlin, & Heilig, 2005). As schools in Maryland navigate issues of teacher turnover and difficulty recruiting certified teachers, students of color and students from lower

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socio-economic status backgrounds are more likely than their whiter and wealthier peers to attend schools that lack certified teachers. These and other conditions inspired the Maryland State Legislature to convene the Maryland Commission on Innovation and Excellence in Education to research the state of Maryland's public schools and to make recommendations. The Commission's findings determined that improving education in the state requires that all students in Maryland have access to a high quality education. The resulting recommendation, known as the Blueprint for Maryland's Future, calls upon state and local districts to find creative ways of ensuring this outcome.Thus attracting and retaining certified teachers is a necessary area of focus for all school districts in Maryland. Grow Your Own (GYO) programs offer district administrators "viable pathways" (Gist, Bianco, & Lynn, 2019, p. 13) for increasing the pool of potential teachers. Unique to the GYO programs are the connections those programs have with the school communities they are designed to serve. In cases such as the CITE program, program participants are part of the district community before training to take on classroom positions.

CITE is a pathway geared towards increasing the pool of certified elementary school teachers. This program, which precedes the Kirwan Commission, operates by working with current, permanent employees of the district to support them in completing a masters degree program and additional, required experiences for obtaining a teaching certificate in the state of Maryland.

Addressing the Issues

Like many districts in Maryland, MCPS has experienced changes in their student population demographics. Given preliminary data collected from the most recent census, the changes in student demographics in Montgomery County may serve as an example for other districts in Maryland and across the United States. In the following section, we show how CITE successfully increases the number of certified teachers in their school district thus offering students in the district a more equitable distribution of certified teachers who also bring to their school specific training to support diverse learners.

CITE Program

The hallmark of the Creative Initiatives in Teacher Education (CITE) program is providing permanent employees with a bachelor's degree a pathway for obtaining a Masters' of Education (M.Ed.) and eligibility for a Maryland elementary teaching certificate in two years. In addition to completing the courses required for a traditional M.Ed. members of the CITE program also complete an internship, which usually occurs at their school of employment. Beginning in the first year of the CITE program, pre-service teachers complete site-based internships in MCPS elementary schools. In the second year of the program the daily length of the internship increases. As a result, alums of the CITE program have extensive in-class experiences in addition to the masters level coursework. Furthermore, CITE program alums have the opportunity to receive high-quality coaching and development while moving through their graduate coursework and field experiences required for certification. Since redesigning the programmatic components of CITE, over 40 MCPS permanent employees have successfully transitioned into certified elementary school teacher positions. If you are interested in the course sequence of the CITE program please see Appendix A.

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Innovations to Increase Completion

Over the last three 3 cohorts, the CITE program team have worked to innovate components of the program with the intention of increasing the number of permanent employees who obtain a masters in elementary education and complete the requirements to obtain teacher licensure. The section below highlights some of the innovations CITE program designers have implemented to increase successful completion and improve participants' experience: costs, customization, and a cohort model.

Costs

Participants in the CITE program are MCPS employees and have obtained a bachelor's degree before applying to the program. As a result, the additional cost of the graduate/certification and the change in salary have been barriers to success for some participants. The CITE program staff have developed relationships with principals and area public colleges and universities and use these relationships to help participants chart a course of study and internship that offers participants the lowest costs and explaining options for reimbursement from the district. By offering support to manage costs, the program attempts to make the training and certification process financially sustainable for permanent employees interested in becoming certified elementary teachers.

Customization

CITE program staff have also sought ways to customize entry requirements to support the number of permanent employees matriculating into the program. One low cost and anecdotally effective strategy has been to use counseling meetings to review the order and most effective plan for completing prerequisite courses before fully entering the CITE program. CITE program staff members often meet with prospective CITE participants to review their coursework from their undergraduate program of study and match those courses against the MSDE's requirements for completing courses before an individual is eligible for certification in elementary education. After identifying the missing courses, CITE program members then work with prospective CITE program participants to lay out a plan for completing courses across a number of institutions of higher education to ensure the plan takes into account the time and financial constraints of prospective participants. Interns can be conditionally admitted to UMCP and complete prerequisite courses in tandem with the start of the CITE program. Generally, interns have the first two semesters to complete any prerequisite work. The CITE program staff has also worked with MSDE to identify courses that can be completed during the masters program to avoid duplicating costs or courses and thus creating a sustainable and customized program that does its best to support each prospective participant to join the program without overwhelming or overleveraging the person.

Cohort Model

Another strategy for increasing completion is that the CITE program is structured as a cohort model. By structuring the program as a cohort, Cite interns have the opportunity to build community with those balancing similar demands during the CITE program. Secondarily, upon completion members of the CITE program also enter the classroom with personal relationships

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with others who are experiencing similar challenges and transitions. These relationships offer CITE program participants a form of community that is conducive to building collaborative practices with the intention of developing high quality teaching and reflection practices. Cobb, McClain, Lamberg, and Dean (2003) note that all groups of teachers working in close proximity does not automatically indicate a community of practice. Instead they offer three criteria to determine the existence of a community of practice: (1) "a joint enterprise, (2) "mutual relationships", and (3) "a well-honed repertoire of ways of reasoning with tools and artifacts" (Cobb et. al., 2003, p. 15). Given the programmatic design of the CITE program, it is likely that this experience will impact how they work in their school while further developing relationships across the district. Such relationships may benefit CITE programs participants' teaching and reflection practices as they develop as teacher leaders.

Progress and Insights from the Maryland PDS 2025 Project

Grow-Your-Own programs such as CITE offer one illustration of the power and possibility related to collaborative relationships between school districts and institutions of higher education. One of the strengths of the CITE program has been its ability to grow and develop as a program to meet the needs of MCPS students and staff. As the state of Maryland and other school districts attempt to think about policy solutions to increase the number of high quality teacher leaders, the CITE program serves as an example of how institutions of higher education and districts can collaborate to move permanent employees of a district into certified teacher positions and eventually into higher levels on the teacher career ladder.

Appendix A
Course and Internship Plan for CITE Program Participants
(For more information, see Program Handbook)

Semester	Graduate Courses at UMD Special Education Track	Graduate Courses at UMD TESOL Track	Internship Experience
Spring	Materials for Creating Skilled and Motivated Readers Part I (3 credits) Materials for Creating Skilled and Motivated Readers Part II (3 credits) Professional Seminar in Education (1 credit)	Materials for Creating Skilled and Motivated Readers Part I (3 credits) Materials for Creating Skilled and Motivated Readers Part II (3 credits) Professional Seminar in Education (1 credit)	**Internship 1** ● 2 hours a day, 5 days a week in a classroom setting ● 2 consecutive day takeover period at the end of the semester
Summer	Process and Acquisition of Reading (3 credits) Introduction to Special Education (3 credits) Inclusive Practice in Schools (3 credits)	Process and Acquisition of Reading (3 credits) Introduction to Special Education (3 credits) Second Language Acquisition (3 credits)	
Fall	Teaching and Learning Mathematics in the Elementary School Part 1 (3 credits) Diagnostic Reading Assessment and Instruction (3 credits) Foundations of Research in Education/Seminar (1 credit)	Teaching and Learning Mathematics in the Elementary School Part 1 (3 credits) Diagnostic Reading Assessment and Instruction (3 credits) Foundations of Research in Education/Seminar (1credit)	**Internship 1** ● 2 hours a day, 5 days a week in a classroom setting ● 5-7 consecutive day takeover at the end of the semester
Spring	Teaching and Learning Mathematics in the Elementary School Pt. II (3 credits) Foundations of Research in Education/Seminar	Teaching and Learning Mathematics in the Elementary School Pt. II (3 credits) Foundations of Research in Education/Seminar	**Internship 2** ● 2 hours a day, 5 days a week in a classroom setting ● 2-week takeover at the end of the semester

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	(cont'd) (1 credits) Curriculum and Instruction: Elementary Special Education (3 credits)	(cont'd) (1 credits) Methods of Teaching TESOL (3 credits)	
Summer	Teaching Science in the Elementary School (3 credits) Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School (3 credits) Behavior and Classroom Management in Special Education (3 credits)	Teaching Science in the Elementary School (3 credits) Teaching Social Studies in the Elementary School (3 credits) Foundations of Literacy and Biliteracy Development (3 credits)	
Fall	Digital Learning Tools and Communities (1 credits) Internship in Education (3 credits)	Digital Learning Tools and Communities (1 credits) Internship in Education (3 credits)	**Internship 2** ● 4-6 week Full day intensive takeover

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