



# Developing a Sustainable Teacher Preparation Program Aligned with Educators Rising Standards and Principles in Connecticut:

## A Blueprint for Success

New Resource from PDK International



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## Introduction

States across the country are continuing to seek adequate solutions to district- and community-level teacher shortages<sup>1</sup>. Connecticut, for example, has taken significant steps over the last five years to address the state's teacher shortage by investing in Educators Rising chapters and curriculum. Through this continued partnership with Educators Rising, Connecticut is investing in a sustainable solution aimed at the root of the state's teacher shortage crisis. Educator Rising's unique solution, a Grow Your Own teacher preparation program that offers a curriculum and coordinated school-specific chapters for middle and high schools, is now reaching nearly three-hundred students in Connecticut. It offers an encouraging model for other states seeking to support the sustainability and growth of the education profession in their own contexts.

The continued partnership between Educators Rising and Connecticut represents an encouraging solution to the seemingly perennial teacher shortage problem many states face. As a matter of study, this particular partnership provides a blueprint for other states interested in taking steps to address teacher shortages in their own communities.

The continued proliferation of Educators Rising chapters across Connecticut stems from a recognition of the transformative potential inherent in empowering rising educators at the onset of their academic journey.

## Background

Educators Rising is a nationally recognized organization dedicated to cultivating and supporting future educators through curriculum and community. Predicated on the understanding that most teachers work within twenty miles of where they attended high school, Educators Rising embodies a strategic investment in solving local teacher shortages by fostering a vibrant culture of teaching excellence that comes from within

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<sup>1</sup> Person, E. (2024, April 19). Pennsylvania Addresses Teacher Shortage with New Program, but Is It Enough? *CBS 21 WHP*. Retrieved from <https://local21news.com/news/local/pennsylvania-addresses-teacher-shortage-with-new-program-but-is-it-enough>

and is representative of the local community. Presently, 53 percent of students who participate in Educators Rising programming are students of color<sup>2</sup>.

Educators Rising formally began its fruitful partnership with schools in Connecticut in 2019. In 2020, the governor’s office and the Connecticut State Department of Education increased investment in existing Educators Rising programming. Expanding existing partnerships in ten school districts across Connecticut provided students with access to critical support and programming from Educators Rising, including state competitions and other chapter specific supports<sup>3</sup>. The state undertook this expansion to provide supplemental support, financial incentives, and targeted exposure to the profession for prospective teachers as early as high school. The expansion allowed school districts to invest in current students while also cultivating future educators.

The following year, in 2021, the state again expanded its partnership by implementing the program’s unique curriculum in partner school districts across the state<sup>4</sup>. This expansion increased classroom participation opportunities for students and grew the breadth and duration of Connecticut-specific Educators Rising events, designed for participating students to further develop community and skills with peer future educators from across the state. For the past five years, Educators Rising events have continued to provide increasing opportunities for students to learn, compete, and collaborate, as they focus together on issues facing the educator workforce today and in the future, such as educator diversity, student leadership, and higher education. Student participation in conferences has developed rapidly since 2020; the first in-person conference in 2024 hosted dozens of students (with over a hundred school and district staff), and in the last year the number of entries to compete at the state conference has doubled. In 2024, the Connecticut chapters sent dozens of students representing their communities to attend the Educators Rising National Conference where they completed with peers across the country to further develop their skills in such categories as lesson planning and delivery, job interview, and researching learning challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> See PDK whitepaper: [https://pdkintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PDK\\_whitepaper\\_jan24.pdf](https://pdkintl.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/PDK_whitepaper_jan24.pdf)

<sup>3</sup> CDSE (2020, October 6). Governor Lamont Announces Expansion of Program Encouraging High School Students to Become Teachers [Press release]. Retrieved from <https://portal.ct.gov/sde/press-room/press-releases/2020/governor-lamont-announces-expansion-of-edrising-program>

<sup>4</sup> PDK International (2020, October 6). Governor Lamont Announces Connecticut Expansion of ‘Educators Rising Academy’ for High School Students Aspiring to Become Teachers. [Press release]. Retrieved from [https://educatorsrising.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PR-CT-CSDE\\_EdRising\\_Academy\\_Curriculum\\_Expansion\\_Press\\_Release\\_10.6.20.pdf](https://educatorsrising.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/PR-CT-CSDE_EdRising_Academy_Curriculum_Expansion_Press_Release_10.6.20.pdf)

The state offered mini-grants to districts in 2023. These grants were designed to support a new site at a school or support expansion of an existing program, covering a teacher’s stipend, curriculum, and student activities, including Educators Rising competitions. The state ear-marked \$500,000 to support the mini-grant program. The same year, the state implemented the Aspiring Educators Diversity (AED) grant which provided scholarships to students of color who graduated from Connecticut priority school districts. The AED scholarship amount was \$10,000 per year and can be applied for both undergraduate and graduate study.

In 2024, nineteen districts in the state<sup>5</sup> are implementing the full suite of Educators Rising supports, including curriculum, participation in state and national competitions, training and professional development for educators and chapter leaders, and creation of a continuous community of students seeking to learn and develop their own skills in the profession. There are now nineteen chapters at the high school level and four in the middle school level in the state, representing nearly three hundred students.

Additionally, Connecticut has taken several other steps to address the state's teacher shortage and to support educators across the state. Connecticut has implemented alternative routes to teacher certification to attract individuals from diverse backgrounds and career fields into teaching. The state also offers loan forgiveness programs to incentivize educators to work in high-need schools or shortage subject areas, such as special education, mathematics, science, and bilingual education. These programs provide financial assistance to educators by forgiving a portion of their student loans in exchange for a commitment to teach in specified schools or subject areas.

Connecticut has supported additional high school *Grow Your Own* initiatives—which aim to recruit and prepare local community members, including paraprofessionals, substitute teachers, and community members—to become certified teachers. These programs often target individuals who have a vested interest in teaching within their own communities. The state has invested in teacher residency programs that provide rising teachers with a year-long, immersive experience

The continued partnership between Educators Rising and Connecticut represents encouraging solutions to this seemingly perennial problem many states face.

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<sup>5</sup> As of April 2024, an additional four districts are in the planning stages with using the Educators Rising Curriculum.

working alongside experienced educators in high-need schools. These programs offer intensive mentoring and support to help new teachers transition into the profession successfully.<sup>6</sup>

Connecticut provides professional development opportunities and resources to support educators in their ongoing growth and development. These opportunities include workshops, conferences, mentorship programs, and collaboration with colleagues to enhance teaching practices and student learning outcomes. The state has engaged in targeted recruitment efforts to attract qualified educators, particularly in high-demand subject areas. These efforts include recruitment campaigns, job fairs, and partnerships with colleges and universities to identify and recruit potential candidates. Connecticut has also implemented strategies to improve teacher retention rates, such as providing mentoring and induction programs for new teachers, offering competitive salaries and benefits, and creating supportive working environments that prioritize educator well-being and professional growth.

The continued proliferation of Educators Rising chapters across Connecticut stems from a recognition of the transformative potential inherent in attracting and empowering rising educators at the onset of their academic journey. By instilling a sense of purpose and belonging among those entering the teaching profession, Educators Rising programming and chapters not only cultivate a pipeline of skilled educators but also imbue schools that are lifting them up with a spirit of innovation and collaboration.

The partnership between Educators Rising and the state of Connecticut can be represented by *Educators Rising Future Teacher Cycle*, a strategic framework poised to elevate the teaching profession and redefine the trajectory of student success across the state (Figure 1). This step-by-step guide helps educators, district officials, students, parents, and legislators chart a course for improving the state's pipeline of prepared, qualified future educators.

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<sup>6</sup> See Sims, V. J., Lord, K., Megos, M., and Mitchell, U. (2023, May 1). Teacher residency: Growing and diversifying the profession. *Kappan* 104(8), pp. 6-11.

## Educators Rising Future Teacher Cycle

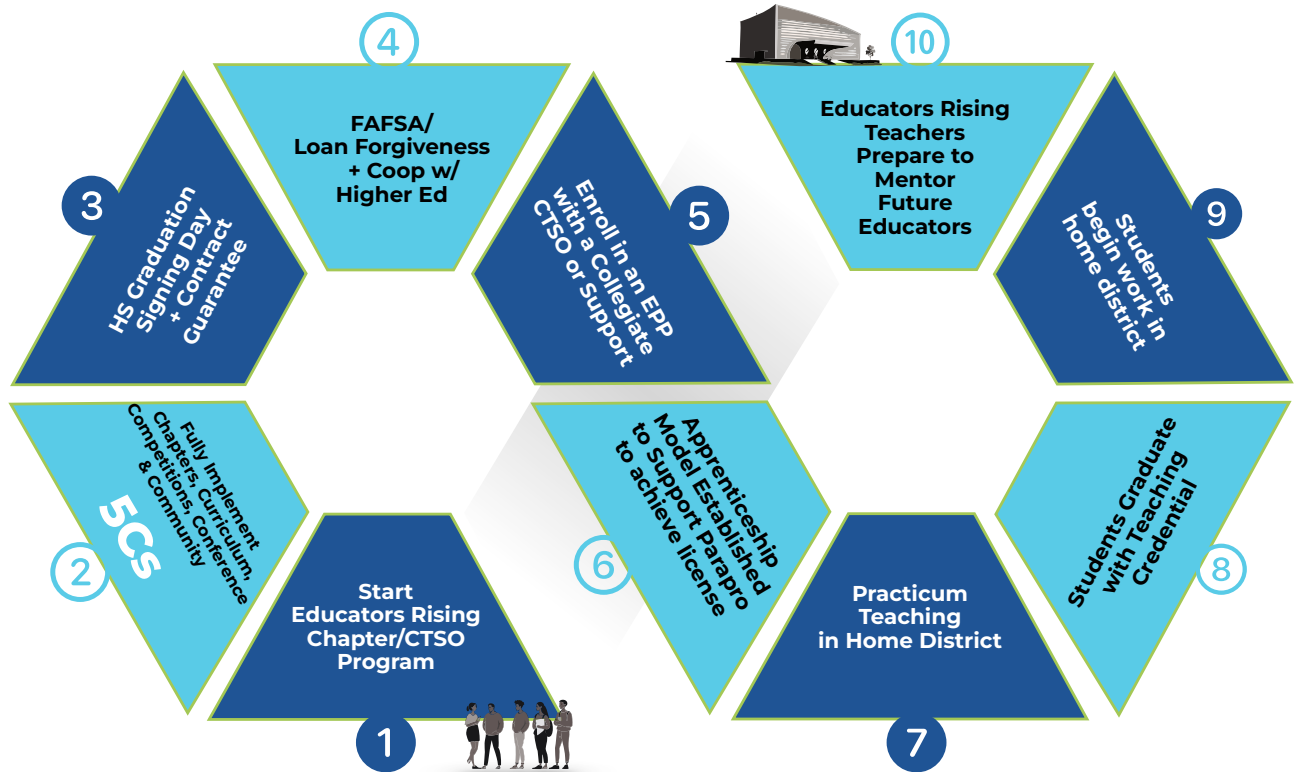


Figure 1. *Educators Rising Future Teacher Cycle Framework*

- 1. Start Educators Rising Chapter/CTSO Program:** Establish or expand current Educators Rising chapters.
  - **Research and Planning:** Reaching out to Educators Rising for guidance and support in starting a chapter at your school. Form a team of dedicated students, teachers, administrators, and community members who share your enthusiasm for education and mentorship. Collaborate with them to develop a clear vision, mission statement, and goals for your Educators Rising chapter.
    - Meet with school administrators to discuss your plans and seek their approval and support. Explain the benefits of having an Educators Rising program at your school and how it aligns with the school's educational objectives.

- Spread the word about your Educators Rising program and recruit students who are interested in pursuing careers in education. Utilize various platforms such as school announcements, classroom presentations, social media, and flyers to attract potential members.
  - **Partnerships and Collaboration:** Collaborate with local schools, colleges, universities, and educational organizations to expand your program's reach and access to additional resources, such as mentorship programs, internships, and scholarships.
- 2. Fully Implement the 5 C's:** Utilize Educators Rising's signature 5 C's to support future educators in the classroom.
- **Curriculum:** Educators Rising provides a comprehensive curriculum designed to prepare rising educators for careers in teaching. This curriculum covers a wide range of topics, including educational theory, instructional strategies, classroom management, diversity and inclusion, and leadership development. It includes: lesson plans, instructional materials, assessments, and resources to support student learning and growth in the field of education. The curriculum serves as a foundation for Educators Rising chapters to structure their programs and activities.
  - **Chapters:** Educators Rising chapters are local student-led organizations affiliated with the national Educators Rising network. Chapters provide a platform for students interested in teaching and education-related careers to come together, collaborate, and engage in activities that enhance their knowledge, skills, and experiences. Chapters organize meetings, events, workshops, and service projects to support the professional development and personal growth of their members. They also serve as hubs for networking, mentorship, and community engagement within schools and communities.
  - **Conferences:** Educators Rising organizes conferences at the local, state, and national levels to bring together students, educators, administrators, and education stakeholders. These conferences provide opportunities for attendees to participate in workshops, seminars, panel discussions, and networking sessions focused on various aspects of education and teaching. Conferences offer valuable learning experiences, professional development opportunities, and inspiration for students interested in

pursuing careers in education. They also promote collaboration, innovation, and advocacy in the field of education.

- **Competitions:** Educators Rising hosts a variety of competitive events and challenges designed to showcase the talents, skills, and creativity of rising educators. These competitions cover a wide range of topics and formats, including lesson planning, curriculum development, public speaking, educational technology, and teaching demonstrations.
    - Competitions provide students with opportunities to demonstrate their proficiency, receive feedback from judges and peers, and gain recognition for their achievements.
    - Educators Rising competitions also foster a spirit of friendly competition, collaboration, and excellence among participants, inspiring them to strive for continuous improvement and innovation in their future careers as educators.
  - **Community:** Educators Rising creates a supportive and inclusive community for students interested in pursuing careers in education. This community consists of students, teachers, mentors, administrators, and education professionals who share a passion for teaching and learning.
    - Through chapters, conferences, competitions, and online platforms, Educators Rising provides opportunities for members to connect, collaborate, and learn from one another. The community offers mentorship, guidance, and resources to help students navigate their educational journeys, overcome challenges, and achieve their goals in the field of education.
    - These Educators Rising opportunities also promote a culture of inclusion, empowering students to become advocates and change makers in their schools and communities.
- 3. High School Graduation Signing Day + Contract Guarantee:** A college signing day and a deferred enrollment program can significantly support future educators by providing them with the necessary resources, encouragement, and flexibility to pursue their educational and professional goals effectively.
- **College Signing Day:** Hosting a college signing day for future educators celebrates their commitment to pursuing careers in education and



acknowledges their achievements. This event serves as a public recognition of their dedication and passion for teaching, inspiring other students to consider careers in education as well. By creating a sense of pride and belonging within the educational community, college signing day fosters a supportive environment that encourages future educators to continue their academic and professional journey with confidence and enthusiasm.

- **Deferred Enrollment Program:** A deferred enrollment program offers future educators the opportunity to defer their enrollment in college for a certain period, allowing them to explore alternative pathways, gain real-world experience, or address personal and financial obligations before pursuing higher education. This flexibility accommodates students who may need time to work, volunteer, travel, or participate in service-learning programs before committing to a formal academic program. Deferred enrollment programs empower future educators to make informed decisions about their educational and career aspirations, providing them with the time and space to clarify their goals, interests, and priorities before embarking on their academic journey.

4. **FAFSA/Loan Forgiveness + Collaboration with Higher Education:** Student loan forgiveness programs serve as powerful incentives for individuals considering careers in education. By offering the prospect of partial or full forgiveness of student loans, these programs help alleviate the financial burden associated with obtaining a degree in education, making the profession more accessible and attractive to rising educators.
  - **Retention and Professional Commitment:** Student loan forgiveness programs can enhance teacher retention and professional commitment by recognizing and rewarding educators for their dedication to the profession.
    - By offering loan forgiveness incentives based on years of service or participation in specific teaching programs, these programs help retain experienced educators and encourage ongoing professional development, ultimately benefiting students and schools alike.
  - **Promoting Diversity and Inclusion:** Student loan forgiveness programs can help promote diversity and inclusion within the teaching profession by reducing financial barriers for individuals from underrepresented backgrounds.
    - By offering loan forgiveness incentives targeted toward minority, low-income, and first-generation college students pursuing careers in education, these programs contribute to building a more diverse teacher workforce that better reflects the demographics of the student population. This diversity enhances cultural competence, fosters inclusive learning environments, and provides students with role models and mentors who share their backgrounds and experiences.
5. **Enroll in an Educator Preparation Program with a Collegiate CTSO or Support**
  - **Collegiate chapters of a teacher preparation program** serve as invaluable support systems for future educators by offering multifaceted opportunities for professional growth and community engagement. These chapters provide platforms for members to participate in diverse professional development activities, including workshops, seminars, and conferences, which enrich their understanding of educational theory, instructional methods, and classroom management techniques.

- Collegiate chapters foster networking and collaboration among future educators, current educators, and education professionals, facilitating the exchange of ideas, resources, and best practices. Through leadership opportunities within chapters, members develop crucial skills in teamwork, communication, and organizational management, empowering them to become advocates for educational equity and agents of positive change within their communities.
- Collegiate chapters engage in advocacy and outreach initiatives that raise awareness about pressing issues in the teaching profession and promote policies and practices that support educators and students. By mobilizing their members and community stakeholders, chapters drive meaningful conversations about educational equity, social justice, and systemic reform, ultimately shaping the landscape of education for the better.

**6. Establish an Apprenticeship Model to Support Paraprofessionals and New**

**Educators:** An apprenticeship model provides paraprofessionals and future educators with valuable hands-on learning experience in real classroom settings. Through direct observation, practice teaching, and mentorship from experienced educators, apprentices gain practical skills and knowledge that are essential for success in the field of education.

- **Professional Development and Growth:** Apprenticeships offer structured opportunities for professional development and growth. By working closely with mentor teachers and participating in ongoing training and reflection sessions, paraprofessionals and future educators can expand their pedagogical repertoire, refine their teaching techniques, and develop a deeper understanding of effective instructional practices.
- **Smooth Transition into Teaching Roles:** An apprenticeship model facilitates a smooth transition for paraprofessionals and rising educators into full-fledged teaching roles. By gradually assuming increasing levels of responsibility under the guidance and supervision of experienced mentors, apprentices build confidence, gain practical experience, and develop the necessary skills and competencies to excel as educators in their own right.
  - This structured pathway helps ease the transition from the role of a paraprofessional or rising educator to that of a fully certified

teacher, thereby enhancing retention and promoting long-term success in the education profession.

- 7. Practicum Teaching in Home District:** Student teachers should be provided the opportunity to complete student teaching requirements in the schools they attended as students. This practice can offer unique advantages and opportunities for both the student teacher and the school community.
- **Familiarity with the School Environment:** Student teachers who attended the school as students are often familiar with the physical layout, culture, and community dynamics of the school. This familiarity can help ease the transition into the role of a teacher and reduce the learning curve associated with navigating a new environment.
    - Student teachers may leverage their understanding of the school's policies, procedures, and expectations to adapt more quickly and effectively to their teaching responsibilities.
  - **Connection with Students and Staff:** Student teachers who have a personal connection to the school community may find it easier to establish rapport and build relationships with students, colleagues, and administrators. Their shared experiences as former students can foster trust, empathy, and mutual respect, enhancing communication and collaboration within the school environment.
    - Additionally, student teachers may feel more supported and welcomed by colleagues who recognize and value their ties to the school community.
  - **Enhanced Understanding of Student Needs:** Student teachers who attended the school as students may have firsthand knowledge of the diverse needs, backgrounds, and interests of the student population. This insight can inform their teaching practices, curriculum development, and classroom management strategies, enabling them to create inclusive and culturally responsive learning environments that meet the unique needs of all students.
    - By drawing on their personal experiences and perspectives, student teachers can tailor their instruction to better address the academic, social, and emotional needs of their students.

- **Community Engagement and Investment:** Student teachers who return to their home school district as educators demonstrate a strong sense of commitment and investment in their community. Their presence can inspire current students to pursue careers in education and serve as positive role models for academic and professional success.
- 8. Students Graduate with Teaching Credential:** Because of the work that the district and school have done, immediately upon graduation the newly certified educator is ready to enter the classroom.
- 9. Students Teach in their Home District:** Upon graduation, students are guaranteed a contract for employment as a teacher of record in the school/community where they participated in Educator Rising programming, as a part of their community and reflecting its values and diversity.
- **Cultural Relevance and Understanding:** Teachers who are from the same community as their students often have a deeper understanding of the cultural norms, traditions, and values within that community. This familiarity allows them to incorporate culturally relevant teaching practices and materials into their instruction, making learning more meaningful and engaging for students.
  - **Building Trust and Relationships:** Teachers who come from the same community as their students are often viewed as trusted members of the community. They may have existing relationships with students' families, community leaders, and other stakeholders, which can help foster a positive school-home connection. Building strong relationships with students and their families is essential for creating a supportive learning environment where students feel valued, respected, and understood.
  - **Addressing Community Needs and Challenges:** Teachers who teach in their own communities are often more attuned to the specific needs, challenges, and strengths of the community. They may have firsthand knowledge of the social, economic, and cultural factors that impact students' lives outside of school. This insight enables teachers to tailor their instruction and support services to better meet the needs of their students, promote equity, and advocate for resources and initiatives that address community-specific issues.
  - **Long-term Investment in Community Development:** When teachers teach in the community where they are from, they contribute to the long-

term development and prosperity of that community. By educating and empowering the next generation of leaders, professionals, and citizens, teachers play a vital role in shaping the future trajectory of their communities. Moreover, teachers who have a personal investment in their community are more likely to stay committed to their profession and contribute to the ongoing improvement of local schools and educational programs.

- 10. Educators Rising Teachers Prepare to Mentor Future Educators:** As an Educators Rising student begins to teach, they will support students currently enrolled in Educators Rising through mentorship. These new educators are encouraged by PDK and Educators Rising national to deepen leadership in their school communities, for instance by participating in National Board certification. The new educator is encouraged to continue to expand Educators Rising chapters in their school or district to further vitalize the local pipeline.

In Connecticut and other states across the country, Educators Rising partners have seen success at sites that are able to even partially implement the Future Teacher Cycle. States and school districts which take steps to implement all ten steps will further strengthen the teacher preparation pipeline.

For information on how to start a teacher shortage solution in your community, please contact Dr. Lisa Rollins, [lrollins@pdkintl.org](mailto:lrollins@pdkintl.org). 



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