



## The Impacts of Strong, Comprehensive Teacher Preparation Programs in Secondary Schools

New Research from PDK International



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## Executive Summary

Bohanan Strategies conducted an analysis of the national teacher preparation and student support program Educators Rising in 2024.<sup>1</sup> Educators Rising supports and serves more than 20,000 students nationwide, across districts both small and large.

This analysis examines the program's impact on 1) students who have participated in Educators Rising programming, 2) educators involved in Educators Rising programming, and 3) the communities where Educators Rising programming is offered, particularly in the context of the teacher shortage crisis.<sup>2</sup>

These initial findings suggest that Educators Rising 1) encourages, supports, and trains future educators through curriculum and student groups, 2) invigorates participating current educators who serve as mentors and coaches to the program, and 3) may help to address community-specific needs. In particular, the mentorship component emerged as a critical factor in the success of Educators Rising, highlighting the importance of investing in supportive relationships between experienced educators and aspiring teachers.

Based on these initial findings, Educators Rising should continue expanding in high schools across the nation to further expand and strengthen the national educator workforce. Further research and collaboration among educational stakeholders are essential to refine and scale these programs, ensuring their effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. Future research should also further analyze student voice, long-term student outcomes, and supports for future educators enrolled in institutes of higher education.



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<sup>1</sup> Educators Rising. [educatorsrising.org](https://educatorsrising.org)

<sup>2</sup> Fortin, J. & Fawcett, E. (29 August 2022). How bad is the teacher shortage? Depends where you live. *New York Times*. Retrieved from [www.nytimes.com/2022/08/29/us/schools-teacher-shortages.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/29/us/schools-teacher-shortages.html).

## Overview and Background

An entire generation of students has been educated in the midst of a teacher shortage resulting from a series of national and state-specific systems that largely leave schools understaffed and educators under-supported, particularly those representing low-income communities and communities of color. For over two decades, states have reported varying degrees of difficulty in identifying and retaining qualified educators.<sup>3</sup> Since the COVID-19 pandemic, the shortage has deepened in severity, with teaching vacancy rates remaining high in many states.<sup>4</sup> However, long before the pandemic, teacher preparation programs at colleges and universities were reporting a decrease in enrollment. Fewer students are choosing education as their career path, which has contributed to the shortage of new teachers.<sup>5</sup> Teachers have reported an intention to leave the profession within the first few years due to factors such as low salaries, challenging working conditions, and insufficient support.<sup>6</sup>



Notably, the teacher shortage is not uniform across the profession. Shortages are often more acute in subjects like math, science, special education, and in rural or low-income

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<sup>3</sup> Balingit, M. (24 August 2023). Teacher shortages have gotten worse. Here's how schools are coping. *Washington Post*. Retrieved from [www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/08/24/teacher-shortages-pipeline-college-licenses/](http://www.washingtonpost.com/education/2023/08/24/teacher-shortages-pipeline-college-licenses/).

<sup>4</sup> Schmitt, J. & deCourcy, K. (5 December 2022). The pandemic has exacerbated a long-standing national shortage of eachers. *Economic Policy Institute*. Retrieved from: [www.epi.org/publication/shortage-of-teachers/](http://www.epi.org/publication/shortage-of-teachers/).

<sup>5</sup> Kraft, M.A. & Lyon, M.A. (28 November 2022). The Rise and Fall of the Teaching Profession: Prestige, Interest, Preparation, and Satisfaction over the Last Half Century. *EdWorkingPapers*. Retrieved from: [www.edworkingpapers.com/ai22-679](http://www.edworkingpapers.com/ai22-679).

<sup>6</sup> Doan, S., Steiner, E.D., Pandey, R., and Woo, A. (21 June 2023). *Teacher Well-Being and Intentions to Leave: Findings from the 2023 State of the American Teacher Survey*. Retrieved from: [www.rand.org/pubs/research\\_reports/RRA1108-8.html](http://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1108-8.html).

areas.<sup>7</sup> The resulting larger class sizes, use of long-term substitutes, and hiring of under-qualified teachers can affect the quality of education students receive.<sup>8</sup>

Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher preparation programs typically recruit teachers from within and around a district's community. These programs often aim to identify and nurture potential educators, paraprofessionals, teacher aides, or community members, and provide them with the necessary training and support to become teachers. Sixty percent of educators teach within twenty miles of where they themselves attended school. GYO programs are predicated on the understanding that if teachers come from and feel like they belong in the same community where they work, they may be more likely to stay in their positions.<sup>9</sup> By recruiting locally, the programs aim to address teacher shortages in specific geographic areas and promote a sense of belonging and commitment to the community. These programs often emphasize the importance of culturally responsive education. Candidates who are already familiar with the local community may be better equipped to understand the needs of their students and create relevant and effective classroom environments.

These programs aim to address teacher shortages, improve the quality of teacher preparation, and encourage teachers to stay within the profession. While they offer a promising solution to some of the challenges in education, they also come with their own set of challenges, such as ensuring the quality of teacher preparation and aligning with state certification requirements.

Educators Rising is a national program, comprised of school-specific chapters and supported by state and national staff, which identifies, educates, and supports middle and high school students who are interested in pursuing careers in P-12 education, particularly in their own communities. Through student groups, or chapters, and a developed proprietary curriculum, the program provides opportunities for middle and high school students to engage in professional development activities related to education, which typically include workshops, conferences, and clinical experiences that help students build the skills and knowledge

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<sup>7</sup> Mcvey, K. & Trinidad, J. (2017). *Nuance in the Noise the Complex Reality of Teacher Shortages*. Bellwether Education Partners Report. Retrieved from: [files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596444.pdf](https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED596444.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> Garcia, E. & Weiss, E. (26 March 2019). The teacher shortage is real, large and growing, and worse than we thought. *Economic Policy Institute*. Retrieved from: [www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/](https://www.epi.org/publication/the-teacher-shortage-is-real-large-and-growing-and-worse-than-we-thought-the-first-report-in-the-perfect-storm-in-the-teacher-labor-market-series/).

<sup>9</sup> Tyler, S. (2019, April 4). The teaching shortage in America. *Teacher Ready*. Retrieved from [www.teacherready.org/the-teaching-shortage-in-america](https://www.teacherready.org/the-teaching-shortage-in-america)

necessary for a successful teaching career and aligned with the program’s cross cutting themes. Educators Rising also offers resources and support to help students explore different pathways within the field of education, such as micro-credentialing, counseling, administration, policy and research, and more.<sup>10</sup>

Educators Rising encourages networking and collaboration among students who aspire to become educators. Members have the chance to connect with peers who share similar interests and career goals. Educators Rising also hosts national and state-level competitions that allow students to demonstrate their teaching and leadership abilities through competition. These competitions cover a range of education-related topics and often involve career exploration, lesson planning, teaching demonstrations, and public speaking.

## Methodology

This research explores the extent to which the work of Educators Rising has impacted 1) students who have participated in Educators Rising programming, 2) educators involved in Educators Rising programming, and 3) the communities where Educators Rising programming is offered, particularly in the context of the national teacher shortage crisis.

Specifically, it explores the following research questions:

- How does integrating a student organization as a component of a teacher preparation program impact the development of pre-service teachers' pedagogical skills and classroom management abilities?
  - This question investigates how the incorporation of a student organization into a teacher preparation program delivered in high school influences the pedagogical and classroom management skills of pre-service teachers. The data set includes qualitative data from interviews focused on student participation and quantitative data collected by Educators Rising.
- Does the Educators Rising curriculum impact the pre-service teachers' understanding of the profession? In particular, how does the curriculum affect pre-service teachers’



<sup>10</sup> Educators Rising. [educatorsrising.org](http://educatorsrising.org)

understandings of diverse learning needs and their ability to differentiate instruction effectively?

- This question focuses on how engagement with Educators Rising curriculum shapes pre-service teachers' awareness of diverse student needs and their ability to adapt instruction accordingly. The data set includes a review of Educators Rising curriculum and qualitative data from interviews focused on implementation.

These research questions aim to investigate the effects of incorporating an after-school student organization into a teacher preparation program.

- A. Interviews: Approximately 15 interviews were conducted. Taken together, interviewees presented a diverse set of perspectives on the work of Educators Rising. Interviewees included Educators Rising staff, state departments of education, institutions of higher education, school systems, and educators. The interviews focused primarily on Educators Rising's impact in 1) local communities and 2) the field of educator preparation through a series of questions about the curriculum and student organization.<sup>11</sup> Over the course of the interviews and again upon the completion of the interviews, the research team analyzed the data using an inductive and deductive coding scheme that sought to identify trends.
- B. Membership data: Educators Rising collects quantitative data on programming, including non-identifiable information on student participation in student groups and enrollment.

## Findings

According to the findings, the two unique attributes of Educators Rising may positively impact student experience and the educator workforce: 1) high school participation in student organization and 2) the Educators Rising developed curriculum.

### Impact on students

Students who have participated in Educators Rising student groups, or chapters, demonstrate increased engagement, enhanced leadership skills, and a deep understanding of educational principles. Educators reported that participation in an Educators Rising

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<sup>11</sup> See [Appendix A](#) for a full list of interview questions.

chapter contributes to a sense of community and shared responsibility for academic success among participants. Chapter leaders, often educators and local education agency (LEA) staff, also reported that participating students expressed a heightened interest in pursuing higher education, specifically in the field of education, indicating a potential long-term effect on career aspirations. Student chapters, formed within the framework of the teacher preparation initiative, were found to significantly enhance the sense of community, collaboration, and shared purpose among program participants. These chapters served as dynamic platforms where aspiring teachers could engage in meaningful discussions, collaborative projects, and extracurricular activities that extended beyond the traditional classroom setting. Through these chapters, students not only gained exposure to diverse teaching strategies but also had the opportunity to apply their theoretical knowledge in practical, real-world scenarios. The student chapters were particularly effective in promoting peer mentorship and collaborative learning, as participants could share their insights, challenges, and successes in a relaxed and inclusive setting.



#### I. Pre-Service Training:

In addition to the social and emotional benefits, the findings also suggest that student chapters positively influenced the professional development of aspiring teachers. Participants engaged in chapter activities that ranged from collaborative lesson planning to organizing educational outreach initiatives within the community. This hands-on involvement not only strengthened their pedagogical skills but also deepened their understanding of the broader educational landscape.

Teachers involved in the program expressed satisfaction with the initiative, noting improvements in the classroom dynamics and an increased sense of collaboration among students. The mentorship component of the program was highlighted as a particularly valuable aspect, fostering positive relationships between students and teachers. Teachers observed enhanced self-efficacy among the participating students, contributing to a more positive learning environment within the high school. A district support staff member said that through Educators Rising, students are “getting to network with others across the state, submit proposals and lead sessions at conferences, learning about education in ways they might not have known about before and being prepared to teach.”

## II. Social and Emotional Growth:

Beyond academic outcomes, the qualitative data revealed the program's positive influence on the social and emotional growth of participating students. One educator who leads a student group in Louisiana noted that the chapter exhibits “young people using their voices. The club fuels students’ awareness of the [school] system around them and empowers them to claim their agency... these kids have learned how to participate in K12 education advocacy, rather than feeling like victims in a system that drowns out their voices.”

Interviews consistently highlighted the development of interpersonal skills, empathy, and a strong sense of community. Educators shared that students involved in the program reported feeling more connected to their peers and teachers, creating a supportive network that extended beyond the confines of the classroom. This aspect of the program's impact underscores the broader educational benefits associated with teacher preparation initiatives embedded within the high school setting.

## III. Teacher Preparation Program as a Catalyst for Future Educators:

A compelling finding was the program's role as a catalyst for future educators. Students who initially joined the program with a general interest in teaching often solidified their career aspirations through practical experiences and mentorship. One former educator noted that, through Educators Rising, students found a way to “fall in love” with being an educator: “when [the students] are working with kids, with educator support, you give students an opportunity to see maybe for the first time, their calling to become an educator.” Many educators noted this newfound passion for education and a desire to give back to their

“When districts reach out for hiring, they want to find candidates who were in EdRising, because they know that these students are that much more established than the standard new educator”

—Lindsey Jensen, 2018 Illinois State Teacher of the Year

communities by becoming teachers. These findings suggest that high school-based teacher preparation programs have the potential not only to address immediate staffing needs but also to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the teaching profession by inspiring the next generation of educators. A district support staff member said that in her district, she

can see that Educators Rising is having “a direct impact in elevating the profession and stoking the pipeline” in the community.

## Impact on educators

### I. Professional Growth and Efficacy:

Preliminary findings underscore the positive impact of the teacher preparation program on the professional growth and efficacy of participating teachers. Mentor teachers indicated a heightened sense of purpose and job satisfaction as they guided aspiring educators through their developmental journey.



Participants, in turn, expressed increased confidence in their teaching abilities, highlighting the program's role in refining instructional practices and expanding their pedagogical repertoire. One educator shared how she saw it “breathing new life for [her] peers without leaving the classroom.”

### II. Collaborative Learning Communities:

One recurring theme in the qualitative data was the cultivation of collaborative learning communities within the program. Teachers noted the value of interdisciplinary collaboration created and facilitated by Educators Rising, and shared best practices, fostering a culture of continuous improvement. The collaborative nature of the program not only enriched the professional development experiences of participating teachers but also contributed to a positive and supportive school culture that extended beyond the program itself. An educator who provides state support to Educators Rising staff noted that the organization is “very intentionally bringing chapter sponsors or teacher leaders together, to communicate with other teacher leaders and sponsors, learn from one another... creating a database for them, engaging in resource sharing, through planned time for teacher leaders to communicate with one other.”

### III. Sustainability of Teacher Retention:

The qualitative findings suggest a potential positive correlation between participation in the high school-based teacher preparation program and teacher retention. Educators who mentored aspiring teachers reported a sense of fulfillment and renewal in their roles, which, in turn, may contribute to increased teacher retention rates. The program's emphasis on professional support and mentorship emerged as a key factor in creating an environment

conducive to sustained commitment to the teaching profession. A state education agency official who supports teacher preparation programs across the state noted that Educators Rising “is a tremendous leadership experience. For instructors who have been teaching for a while, they enjoy the opportunity to lead and coach in this way. So many have told me how reinvigorated they have become in the profession and that speaks volumes.”

“For these teacher leaders, who have been in the work for decades, [Educators Rising] is breathing new life into the profession for them and their peers, who are looking for deeper impact without leaving the classroom, and ushering in the next generation”

— Kimberly Eckert, Louisiana

## Impact on communities

### I. Community Engagement and Empowerment:

One notable finding is the positive impact of the teacher preparation program on community engagement and empowerment. The program not only drew community members into the educational sphere but also provided a platform for collaboration between schools and local residents. One district official noted that she has seen “schools that do not have diversity, this helps them open the conversation of equity in the classroom. It shows them how we talk about embracing culture as a whole—if students walk into your classroom, you have to be ready to educate them, wherever they come from.” Through initiatives such as community workshops, informational sessions, and collaborative projects, the program empowered community members to actively participate in the educational process, fostering a sense of shared responsibility for student success.

### II. Strengthening Community-School Relationships:

A recurrent theme in the qualitative findings is the strengthening of relationships between the school and the community. The teacher preparation program served as a bridge, fostering positive connections between educators, students, and local residents. This strengthened collaboration was evident in increased attendance at school events, enhanced communication channels, and a shared commitment to the success of both individual students and the broader educational community. An educator in a high school classroom who implements the Educators Rising curriculum shared a story about the students engaging across the community by supporting elementary school students: “For instance our high school chapter, is helping to plan an elementary STEM enrichment event; another

high school in [the district] saw it and then replicated it themselves. I don't think that would have happened without Educators Rising."

## Conclusion

In light of these findings, there are noteworthy implications for educational policy and practice. Policymakers and educational leaders may consider the integration of similar teacher preparation programs within high schools as a strategic approach to addressing teacher shortages and fostering positive educational outcomes. Additionally, the mentorship component emerged as a critical factor in the success of the program, highlighting the importance of investing in supportive relationships between experienced educators and aspiring teachers.

Educators Rising should continue expansion in high schools across the nation to further grow and strengthen the national educator workforce.

Further research and collaboration among educational stakeholders are essential to refine and scale these programs, ensuring their effectiveness in diverse educational contexts. Future research should further analyze student voice, long-term student outcomes, and supports for future educators enrolled in institutes of higher education.

## Recommendations for Program Enhancement

As the study unfolds, recommendations for the enhancement of high school-based teacher preparation programs become apparent. These include the need for continued investment in mentorship training, the expansion of collaborative learning opportunities, and the integration of participant feedback into ongoing improvements. The study offers valuable insights for educational policymakers, school administrators, and teacher preparation program designers seeking effective strategies to nurture and retain talented educators within the high school setting. Additionally, because Educators Rising competitions and curriculum are based on the same standards, it is likely that competition outcomes are better for those implementing teaching fundamentals or the curriculum. Further research is warranted to explore the scalability and generalizability of these findings across diverse educational contexts.

## Recommendations for Schools, LEAs, SEAs, Legislators, and Partnering IHEs

In fostering a seamless and collaborative educational ecosystem, it is imperative for schools, school districts, state education agencies, and institutions of higher education to unite in establishing transformative partnerships by implementing initiatives such as college and high school signing days, guaranteed admission, and contractual commitments with graduating students. These partnerships will not only strengthen the educational pipeline but also cultivate motivation among participating students. Signing days serve as inspirational milestones, celebrating the pursuit of higher education, while guaranteed admission and contractual commitments provide tangible support for students' future endeavors. These collective efforts could foster a culture of collaboration and empower future educators toward lifelong success and achievement. Additionally, state legislators should implement legislation or appropriations to support the expansion of Educators Rising in their own state.

## Recommendations for Community-Centric Programs

As the study continues, recommendations for the development and implementation of community-centric teacher preparation programs begin to emerge. These include intentional efforts to involve community members in program design, ongoing communication strategies to maintain community engagement, and the integration of community needs into the program's curriculum. The study provides insights for educational policymakers, school administrators, and community leaders seeking effective strategies to leverage teacher preparation programs for the betterment of both schools and the communities they serve. Further research is needed to explore the long-term sustainability and replicability of these positive outcomes across diverse community contexts.

## Appendix A: Qualitative Interview Questions

### General Background

- When did the state/district/school begin its partnership with Educators Rising?

### Developed Curriculum

A streamlined, classroom-ready, co-curricular career and technical education pathway, the Educators Rising Curriculum is a set of guided lesson plans emphasizing the fundamental teaching practices critical for high school students to develop as they take their first steps on the path to becoming accomplished professionals. The curriculum consists of PowerPoint lessons that can be implemented during classroom instruction time or during a meeting after school.

- Do you use the Educators Rising Curriculum?
- Roughly how many sites in the state/district/school are delivering the curriculum?
- What modality is most frequently used?
- Do you track implementation fidelity?
- What are the most helpful elements of the curriculum?
- In what ways is the curriculum used to impact school climate?

### High School student participation

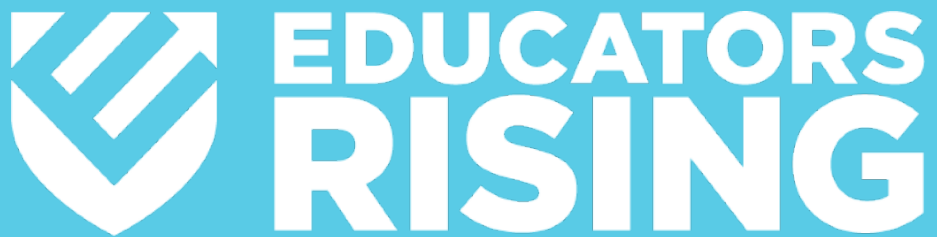
- Roughly, how many high school students participate in the program statewide?
- What does student participation in the program look like?
- Does your team currently do anything to track students after they graduate from high school?
- Why is it important that high school students participate in this program?
- In what ways does student participation impact school climate?

### Student organization

- What does student participation in the organization look like?
- How is the Career & Technical student organization (CTSO) structured in your school? District? State?
- How does the student organization impact school climate?

## Other

- What would be helpful for you to know about other sites like yours which would inform your work and programming?
- What would you want to know about organizations, actors, or institutions that are leading the field of educator preparation programs?



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