

MALCOLM AUGUSTINE  
*Legislative District 47*  
Prince George's County

PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE

Executive Nominations Committee

Education, Energy and the  
Environment Committee



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THE SENATE OF MARYLAND  
ANNAPOLIS, MARYLAND 21401

March 5, 2024

**Senate Bill 937 - Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program – Established**

Dear Colleagues,

I am pleased to present **Senate Bill 937 - Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program – Established**, a legislative endeavor poised to establish a grant program aimed at fortifying and diversifying our state's teaching workforce. As we are all acutely aware, the shortage of teachers in our state is a pressing concern that transcends mere numerical insufficiency. It extends into a crisis of teacher retention and a teaching workforce that inadequately mirrors the rich racial diversity and multilingual composition of Maryland's student body.

Extensive research underscores the incontrovertible benefits derived by all students when exposed to a diverse array of educators. Notably, studies indicate that Black and Hispanic students, instructed by educators of the same racial or ethnic background, exhibit enhanced academic outcomes and improved attendance. The gravity of the educator shortage is familiar to this committee, as evidenced by the passage of House Bill 1219, the Maryland Educator Shortage Reduction Act, during the preceding year, a legislative action endorsed by Governor Moore's administration.

The bill under consideration today revisits and expands upon a program embedded in the initial version of the Educator Shortage Reduction Act, subsequently omitted before its final enactment—the Grow Your Own Educators Program. Grow Your Own initiatives epitomize investments made by states and counties in cultivating the local educator workforce, often manifested through certification programs or apprenticeships. The initial iteration of this program, within last year's bill, specifically targeted education support professionals, such as paraeducators, aspiring to attain teacher certification.

These candidates, through the program, have the opportunity to earn a teaching degree and certificate, committing in return to serve within the school system for a stipulated duration. Unfortunately, the Grow Your Own Educators program did not feature in the final version of the Educator Shortage Reduction Act last year, partly attributable to the presence of federal ESSER funding supporting short-term, county-level Grow Your Own programs—a funding stream set to expire in September of the current year, necessitating the establishment of a permanent program.

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Acknowledging the promising potential of Grow Your Own programs, the U.S. Department of Education, MSDE, and the AIB have advocated for their implementation as effective strategies to recruit high-quality and diverse teachers. The deliberate focus on education support professionals in this program stems from the understanding that not every individual in this category aspires to become a teacher, nor should such an aspiration be deemed obligatory.

Research corroborates that education support professionals acquiring teacher certification exhibit a higher likelihood of persisting as classroom teachers compared to those prepared through alternative pathways. Additionally, they demonstrate greater efficacy in enhancing students' test scores in reading and math, surpassing teachers without prior classroom experience.

This effectiveness can be attributed to the pre-existing experience of education support professionals in working with students within their local school community, affording them familiarity with the daily rigors of the classroom environment before undertaking a teacher certification program. In Maryland and across the U.S., education support professionals are more likely to be individuals of color and possess multilingual capabilities compared to certificated educators.

Establishing pathways to certification for interested education support professionals is imperative in constructing a teaching workforce reflective of the diversity inherent in Maryland's student populace. Exemplifying the success of these initiatives, consider the paraeducator-to-teacher Grow Your Own program in Georgia, where 85% of program participants were Black, in stark contrast to the College of Education's overall enrollment, which stood at a mere 16% Black.

Furthermore, more than 92% of program graduates from Georgia went on to serve in low-income schools, boasting an incredible 95% retention rate over a decade. Another exemplary case is Tennessee, the first state to transform such a program into a federally registered apprenticeship, thereby establishing a sustainable source of federal funding. This Tennessee program has earned national acclaim, praised by U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona and former U.S. Labor Secretary Marty Walsh.

The success of Tennessee's program underscores that direct state funding is not the sole route to successful Grow Your Own initiatives. Instead, the most prosperous programs leverage creative federal and state funding sources, including apprenticeship and workforce development funds, Pell grants, and education funds earmarked for addressing shortage areas.

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In Maryland, we observe the emergence of developing Grow Your Own models. Washington County Public Schools, utilizing temporary federal ESSER funds, recently collaborated with Frostburg State University's Maryland Accelerates Program—a one-year teacher certification program—encouraging education support professionals to apply. Today, you will hear from Sheila Jones Wagner, a 6th-grade teacher and alumna of the Paraeducators' Pathways to Culturally Responsive Teaching Program—an exemplary Grow Your Own model spearheaded by a collaborative of Bowie State University, the Howard County Education Association, and Howard County Public Schools.

The grant program, as delineated in Senate Bill 937, designates MSDE for its administration. Collaboratives comprising LEAs, institutions of higher education, and educators' unions are eligible to petition for grant funding, with a focus on instituting or perpetuating Grow Your Own programs targeting critical shortage areas, such as special education and early childhood education.

This program strategically incorporates best practices from successful initiatives, emphasizing sustainable funding sources, equity in recruitment, meaningful support for program participants, and accountability in tracking results. A noteworthy aspect is the mandate for collaboratives seeking grant funds to identify long-term funding sources, including apprenticeship and workforce funds.

Grow Your Own Educator Programs stand as proven strategies for cultivating a robust pipeline of future educators and recruiting a cadre of diverse, high-quality teachers committed to long-term service to our students. Senate Bill 937 enjoys support from a diverse array of education stakeholders.

Senate Bill 937 is poised to address teacher shortages, mitigate high rates of teacher attrition, and rectify the lack of diversity among educators, all while fostering improved student academic outcomes.

Thank you for your attention to this critical matter. I urge the committee to give a **favorable** report for **Senate Bill 937 - Grow Your Own Educators Grant Program – Established**.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Malcolm Augustine".

Senator Malcolm Augustine