



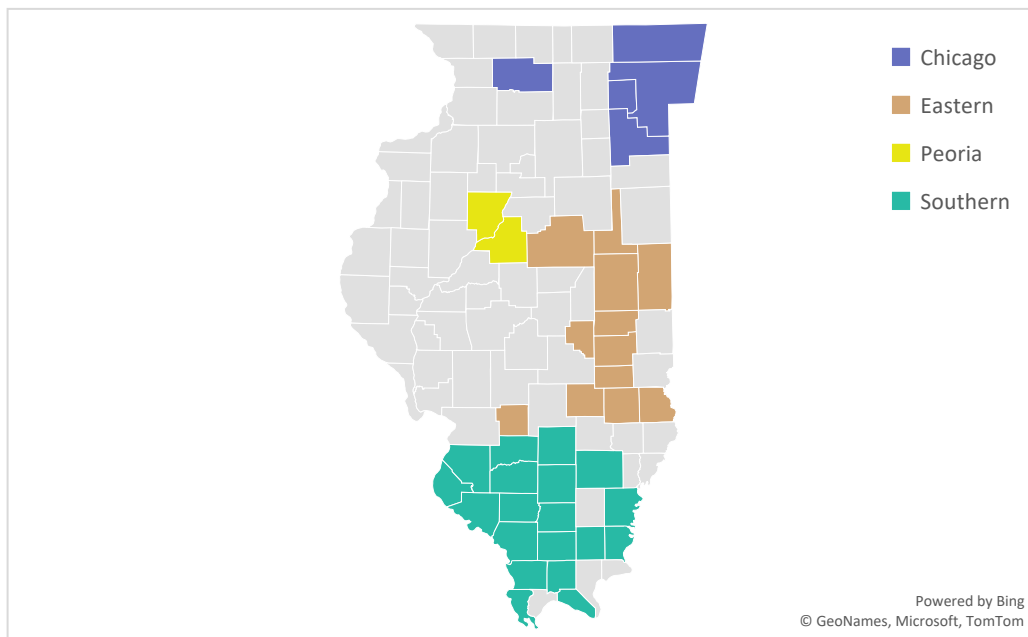
# GROW YOUR OWN TEACHERS

## Growing Strong: GYO-IL's Impact on Illinois Teacher Pipelines

The Illinois Grow Your Own (GYO) Teacher Education Act, initiated in 2005 under Public Act 93-802, marked the inception of the first statewide and state-funded GYO program in the U.S. The Act aimed to prepare highly skilled, committed teachers to teach in hard-to-staff schools and positions and increase the racial and ethnic diversity of teachers. Grow Your Own Illinois (GYO-IL) consortia funded under the Act are innovative partnerships of higher education institutions, community organizations, and school districts that support parents, community members, and paraprofessionals across the state to become licensed teachers in their home neighborhoods (Figure 1).

In this report, we present data from fiscal years 2020 to 2023, the period in which we have administered the Illinois GYO program.<sup>i</sup> We demonstrate our achievements in increasing the number of teacher candidates served and graduating more racially diverse candidates who take teaching positions in their home communities. We also show the distribution of tuition funding through the forgivable loan program and point to the additional resources our candidates highlight as paramount to their success. Finally, we underscore that our ability to continue creating strong teacher pipelines in current and additional regions throughout the state will require further investments.

**Figure 1. Where GYO-IL's candidates reside, FY20-23**



# Expanding the Teacher Pool

Over the past four fiscal years (FY20-23), GYO-IL served 342 prospective teacher candidates across Illinois in four consortia: Eastern Illinois University (Eastern), Southern Illinois University-Carbondale (Southern), Peoria Public School District 150 (Peoria), and Chicago-Lake County (Chicago) (Table 1). Our programs have annually increased the total number of candidates served between FY20 (159) and FY23 (207). This is a 30.2% increase in program capacity. We added 275 new candidates to our rosters between FY20 and FY23. Over the same time, we have produced 174 graduates, with the number increasing every year—from 14 in FY20 to 59 in FY23.

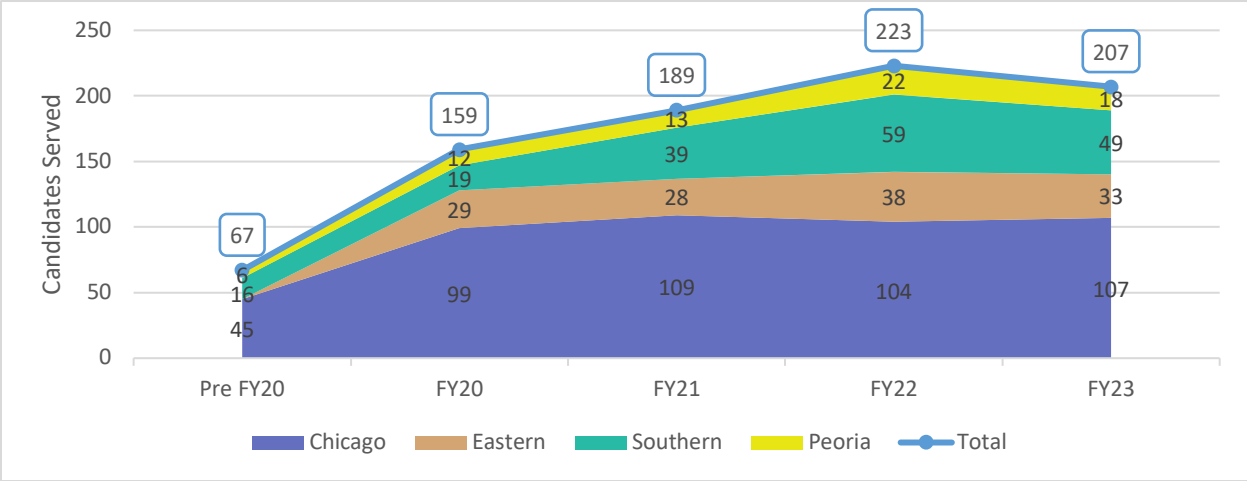
**Table 1. Overview of GYO-IL candidates, FY20-23**

	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY20-23
Candidates Served <sup>a</sup>	159	189	223	207	342
New Candidates <sup>b</sup>	92	46	89	48	275
Continuing Candidates <sup>c</sup>	60	95	86	98	209
Graduates	14	47	54	59	174
Exiting (non-graduates)	2	8	10	10	30

*Notes. (a) Candidates Served includes all candidates who enrolled at some point during the fiscal year. This includes new candidates, continuing candidates, graduates, and exiting candidates (non-graduates). (b) Across the four fiscal years, there were some candidates who started and graduated and/or exited in the same fiscal year. (c) Continuing candidates were enrolled in a prior fiscal year and persisted into the following fiscal year.*

GYO-IL’s growth captured above is due to sustained investment from the Illinois legislature and our centralized and streamlined administration of all the programs, which involves collaborating with consortia to support local candidates (Figure 2).

**Figure 2. GYO-IL candidates served, FY20-23<sup>ii</sup>**



Since GYO-IL became the state administrator:

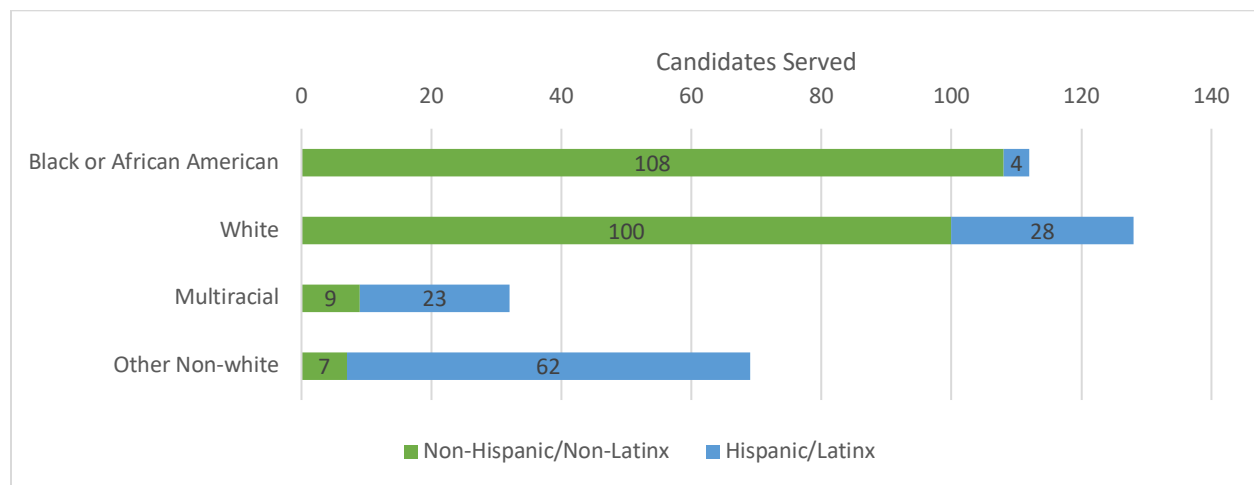
- Our Chicago consortium grew in program capacity (from 45 pre-FY20 to 107 in FY23) and expanded into Lake County in FY21.
- Eastern stretched from serving two cohorts of paraprofessionals, Special Education in Jasper County and Elementary Education in Vermillion, to include two additional cohorts in the Champaign region (ROE 9) in FY22.
- Peoria, which had previously relaunched as part of the Chicago consortium, became its own consortium in FY21.<sup>iii</sup>
- Southern, which has worked with Regional Offices of Education to identify aspiring Special Education teachers, now also includes cohorts of prospective Early Childhood educators.

## Diversifying Teacher Pipelines

Not only has GYO-IL increased the number of candidates we serve, but the candidates we have admitted are racially and ethnically diverse, with more than 70% (241 of 342) identifying as people of color (Table 2). Comparatively, fewer than 30% of Illinois teacher candidates identify as people of color.<sup>iv</sup>

Black or African American candidates comprise our largest demographic group (31.6%), followed by White (non-Hispanic) candidates (29.2%) (Figure 3).<sup>v</sup> Additionally, 34.2% of our candidates identify as Hispanic or Latinx.<sup>vi</sup>

**Figure 3. GYO-IL candidate demographics, FY20-23**



Across our consortia programs, GYO-IL has prioritized supporting racially and ethnically diverse candidates in both urban and rural areas. The Illinois State Board of Education’s (ISBE) recent “2023 Educator Supply and Demand Report” indicated that fewer than 10% of teachers outside of Northeastern Illinois (Northeast region and Chicago) identify as people of color.<sup>vii</sup> Notably, our Eastern and Southern Illinois consortia have made gains in serving a more racially diverse group of candidates, over the past four fiscal years (Table 2).

**Table 2. Percentage of people of color (non-white) teacher candidates served by GYO-IL Consortium, FY20-23**

Consortium	FY20	FY21	FY22	FY23	FY20-23
Chicago-Lake County	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
Chicago	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
Lake County		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	<b>100.0%</b>
Eastern	10.3%	10.7%	31.6%	30.3%	<b>25.0%</b>
Peoria	91.7%	92.3%	95.5%	94.4%	<b>96.2%</b>
Southern	5.3%	10.3%	11.9%	8.2%	<b>9.9%</b>
GYO-IL	71.7%	67.7%	64.6%	66.7%	<b>70.5%</b>

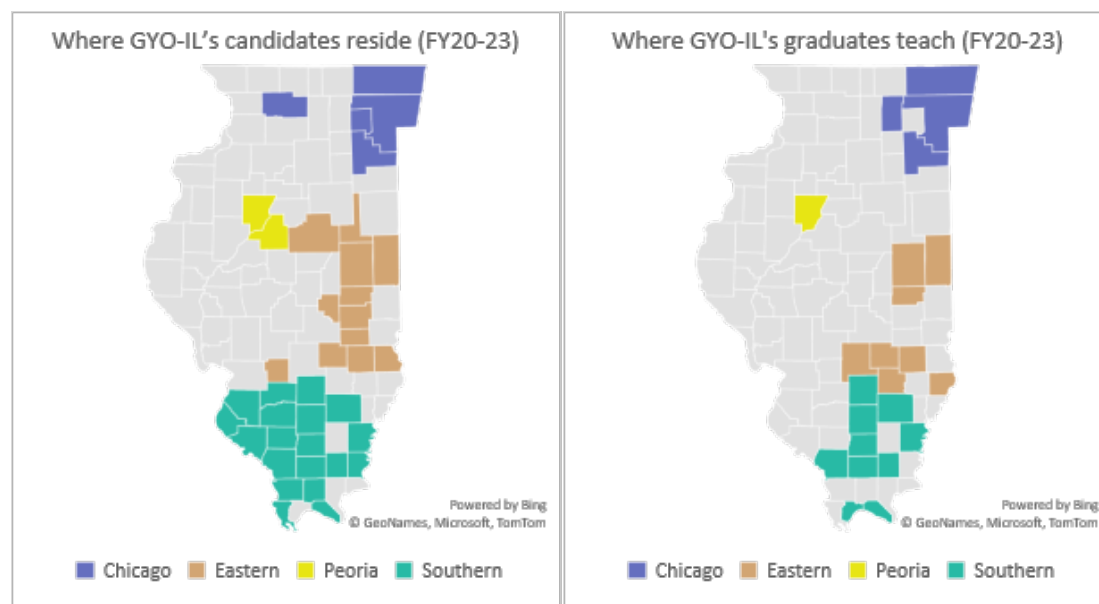
GYO-IL used distinct strategies to provide these consortia with direction, resources, and technical assistance to recruit more teacher candidates of color. We awarded funds to Eastern to recruit cohorts in the Champaign region. We assisted Southern in developing a more robust recruitment strategy and supporting partnerships with community colleges. These approaches enable our rural consortia to connect with and recruit from a more diverse pool of parents, community members, and paraeducators looking to become classroom teachers.

## Producing the Teachers Illinois Needs

*“It is meaningful to teach in my neighborhood because I know where my kids come from, and they know where I come from. We know our past, and we know we have a connection.”*  
 – Chicago Graduate (FY21)

GYO-IL is unique in prioritizing recruitment, support, and placement of candidates who desire to return to their home communities to teach. Comparing the maps of where our graduates resided when they enrolled in our program and where they are now teaching, it is evident that the majority are continuing their teaching careers in their home communities (**Error! Reference source not found.**).

**Figure 4. Where GYO-IL’s graduates are teaching compared to where they initially reside**



Further in line with our mission, our graduates are taking their teaching assignments in hard-to-staff schools or positions, serving a substantial portion of students from low-income communities (Table 3).

**Table 3. GYO-IL graduates teaching outcomes, FY20-23**

Fiscal Year	Number of Graduates	Number of Graduates working towards licensure <sup>viii</sup>	Teaching in FY24		Teaching in a hard-to-staff school or hard-to-staff position in FY24	
			Number of Graduates	Percent	Number of Graduates	Percent
2019-2020	14	0	12	85.7%	12	100.0%
2020-2021	47	2	38	80.9%	36	94.7%
2021-2022	54	9	37	68.5%	37	100.0%
2022-2023	59	9	44	74.6%	42	95.5%
<b>Total</b>	<b>174</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>131</b>	<b>75.3%</b>	<b>127</b>	<b>96.9%</b>

Of the 174 total graduates between FY20 and FY23, 131 are currently teaching in FY24 (75.3%) as certified classroom teachers, 127 (96.9%) of whom are working in hard-to-staff schools or hard-to-staff positions in Illinois.<sup>ix</sup> Moreover, 82% of those who graduated in FY20 and FY21 continue to work as classroom teachers three or more years after completing their teacher preparation programs.

## Investing in GYO-IL, Investing in the Future

*“The GYO Program has provided me with a way of achieving my dreams of being a teacher. GYO has allowed me to go back to school without quitting my job.”*

*– Southern Graduate (FY23)*

*“[A GYO program director] basically sat me down and said, ‘You’ve worked here long enough. You need to finish. You are way too good with these kids not to be certified. You are going to get your degree.’”*

*– Peoria Graduate (FY23)*

With funding from the Illinois Board of Higher Education, GYO-IL provides dollars to each consortium for the administration and implementation of the forgivable loan program. Every candidate is eligible to receive \$25,000 in loans during their initial licensure program. GYO-IL loans help pay for candidates’ tuition, books, and fees not covered by their grants-in-aid and other consortium resources. The loans are fully forgiven if a graduate completes five years of teaching service in a hard-to-staff school and/or a hard-to-staff position in Illinois.

GYO-IL disbursed just over \$4 million in forgivable loans to 325 of 342 (95%) teacher candidates enrolled between FY20 and FY23 (Table 4). These tuition dollars and additional assistance helped attract non-traditional teacher candidates and enabled them to persist in their teacher licensure programs. The average loan distribution to a GYO candidate (\$12,482) or to a GYO graduate only (\$15,604) remained below the \$25,000 maximum, allowing us to extend grant dollars to more prospective teachers, as well as to cover some of their non-tuition school costs.

**Table 4. Total forgivable loans distributed, FY20-23**

<b>Consortium</b>	<b>Total Number Served</b>	<b>Number receiving forgivable loan</b>	<b>Total forgivable loan amounts distributed<sup>x</sup></b>	<b>Percent receiving forgivable loan</b>	<b>Average forgivable loan amounts distributed</b>
Chicago	197	183	\$2,348,263	92.9%	\$12,832
Chicago (Chicago)	183	169	\$2,210,033	92.3%	\$13,077
Chicago (Lake County)	14	14	\$138,230	100.0%	\$9,874
Eastern	48	48	\$701,741	100.0%	\$14,620
Peoria	26	23	\$300,530	88.5%	\$13,067
Southern	71	71	\$706,104	100.0%	\$9,945
Total Candidates (including graduates)	342	325	\$4,056,640	95.0%	\$12,482
Total Number of Graduates	174	169	\$2,637,013	97.1%	\$15,604

GYO-IL offers candidates a full range of wrap-around services to assist them as they navigate the hidden costs of attending college (e.g., childcare, transportation, technology, etc.). These types of services vary based on state funding availability. GYO-IL has also used non-state funds (e.g., private grants and donations) to provide candidates emergency aid for rent, utilities, food, and other living expenses.

Our graduates recognize the importance of financial assistance. They also underscore the significance of GYO-IL’s holistic model: flexible consortia structures that enable them to maintain their current employment while going to school and a nurturing community of staff and peers.

## More than Finances

*“Without the financial support, I wouldn’t have been able to go to school. I think what helps us a lot more is the support we get—the monthly meetings, the advisors constantly checking on us, the support from peers. I’ve never seen or heard anything like what GYO has created...and that’s helped me and kept me going.”*

*– Chicago Graduate (FY23)*

*“[With the help of my program director] I think I’ve become more confident and developed a stronger personality.”*

*– Eastern Graduate (FY23)*

GYO-IL's investment in teacher candidates goes beyond financial support—we focus on building relationships and trust. The close advising of GYO staff helps aspiring teachers navigate obstacles that arise during their preparation programs, builds their confidence, and encourages them to keep going.

Candidates also attend monthly cohort meetings, a requirement of the GYO structure. The primary purposes of the cohort meetings are to foster community for candidates along their journey in becoming teachers, offer community-connected and justice-focused

learning opportunities not typically found in traditional teacher preparation programs, and instill candidates with leadership and advocacy skills for themselves and their students. Students across Illinois can now benefit from the skilled and community-invested teachers who graduate from our programs.



*Chicago/Lake County cohort meeting, 2023*

## Continuing to Grow: A Look Ahead

GYO-IL is dedicated to preparing teachers for diverse classrooms and addressing critical teacher shortages. With our four current consortia programs, we anticipate welcoming 118 additional teachers to Illinois schools in the next two years. With additional funding this fiscal year (FY24), we are providing student teaching stipends for all candidates at this stage in their licensure program and coaching for new graduates.

We've also extended our commitment to sharing best practices for diversifying the teacher candidate pool by continuing two professional learning communities (PLC): a Deans and Directors of Teacher Education PLC and a Community College PLC. With them, we are developing teacher pathway programs at John A. Logan College (Southern) and Richland Community College (Central) as well as a marketing and outreach campaign to recruit more underrepresented individuals in teacher licensure programs.

We have started to expand our efforts in more regions of Illinois.

- We awarded Northern Illinois University a planning grant to develop a Northern Consortium based in Rockford. The Northern consortium, involving Rockford Public Schools, Rock Valley College, YMCA of Rock River Valley, and Wabongo Leadership Council, is set to launch by the end of FY24.
- We issued a planning grant to the University of Illinois-Springfield to serve Central Illinois, specifically Sangamon and Macon Counties, which have reported a combined shortage of 100 teachers—the majority in Special Education and Elementary Education. This Central consortium, developed in partnership with Richland Community College, Decatur Public Schools, Springfield Public Schools, and the Springfield Urban League, is expected to launch at the start of FY25.
- We also issued a planning grant to Western Illinois University. In their early planning stage, they have identified the following partners across their catchment area: John Woods Community College; Carl Sandburg College; East Moline School District 37; Macomb CSD 18; Regional Offices of Education (ROE) 26, 33, and 49; the Association of Illinois and Rural Small Schools; Western Illinois Dreamers; and the Rural Schools Collaborative.

Our GYO program stands as a proven and worthwhile investment in shaping the future of educator preparation and support in Illinois. In four short years, and with consistent state funding, we have expanded our pool of teacher candidates and cultivated a more diverse cohort of graduates committed to teaching in their home communities. However, school communities and young people in our state will continue to be hampered by a persistent classroom teacher shortage and a lack of a diverse pipeline. More areas could benefit from our focus on addressing hard-to-staff schools and positions and increasing teacher racial diversity, particularly given our low attrition rate. But with expansion there will be a need for more monies for forgivable loans, wrap-around services, and critical staffing. It will require a strategic and sustainable investment to ensure the continuity of our progress. With increased state funding, we are poised to make an even greater impact on producing diverse, community-driven teaching educators in the years ahead.

---

<sup>i</sup> The data in this report come from GYO-IL's central database, using standardized reporting techniques. Prior reports used data from GYO-IL consortia-generated annual reports. In standardizing the data, year-to-year numbers may not always align with prior reports.

<sup>ii</sup> Pre-FY20 data is limited to candidate records compiled after GYO-IL was named the administrator of the state's GYO grant program (2019). Peoria candidates are counted separately from Chicago prior to Peoria starting its own consortium. Candidates in Lake County are counted as part of the Chicago consortium.

<sup>iii</sup> Under the current regulations, institutions of higher education or Grow Your Own Illinois are allowed to serve as fiscal agents for the grant. However, Peoria City School District was allowed to serve as the fiscal agent since it operated a Grow Your Own funded consortium prior to 2010.

<sup>iv</sup> See the Illinois Educator Preparation Profile (IEPP) (<https://apps.isbe.net/epp/public#/state-report>).

<sup>v</sup> One candidate declined to identify their race and ethnicity and therefore is not represented in the chart.

<sup>vi</sup> GYO-IL records candidates' ethnicity and race are recorded as two separate questions: first whether they identified as Hispanic or Latinx and then their race. This is in line with U.S. Census Bureau. In collapsing the data around a single race/ethnicity variable we are making some assumptions about candidates' primary racial identity. We recognize that some candidates counted as White or Multiracial in this report may primarily identify as Hispanic or Latinx were we to ask about race/ethnicity using a single question.

<sup>vii</sup> See the Illinois State Board of Education "2023 Educator Supply and Demand Report" (<https://www.isbe.net/edsupplydemand>).

<sup>viii</sup> Although 11% of GYO-IL's recent graduates are still working to pass their content exams, several continue to work as classroom teachers without a professional educator license (e.g., as long-term substitute teachers) or continue serving their schools as paraeducators. Per regulations, GYO-IL candidates have up to two years after receiving their Professional Educator License (PEL) to begin teaching in an eligible school or position.

<sup>ix</sup> GYO-IL verifies candidates' employment status in multiple ways. Beginning in the fall of each year, we send out annual questionnaires to our graduates asking them about their employment status and requesting additional documentation (e.g., letter from a supervisor or copy of their licensure data). We also utilize public datasets listing teachers and their positions. The data, as reported, is based on our employment verification efforts between September 2023 and December 2023. Current regulations define "Hard-to-staff School" as an early childhood program or a public elementary, middle, or secondary school in this State that, based on data compiled by the State Board of Education in conjunction with the Board of Higher Education, serves a substantial percentage of low-income students, as defined by the State Board. "Schools Serving a Substantial Percentage of Low-income Students" means schools that maintain any of grades pre-kindergarten through 8, in which at least 35% of the students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches, and schools that maintain any of grades 9 through 12, in which at least 25% of the students are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunches. A "Hard-to-staff Teaching Position" is a teaching category (such as special education, bilingual education, mathematics, or science) in which statewide data compiled by the State Board of Education in conjunction with the Board of Higher Education indicates a multi-year pattern of substantial teacher shortage or that has been identified as a critical need by the local school board.

<sup>x</sup> Not every candidate receives forgivable loans. Some candidates' tuition may be covered through grants-in-aid or other resources of the consortium. Additionally, a small number of candidates may exit the program before receiving any loans.