



THE GLIMPSE

SHARING BEST PRACTICES FOR BIPOC RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION



A SINGLE QUESTION AT ELKHART ELEMENTARY LEADS TO ITS EXCEPTIONAL GROW YOUR OWN (GYO) TEACHER PROGRAM

By Antonio Vigil, APS_Promise54 POSA

Questions often have the uncanny power disrupt the status quo. For the past thirteen years as the **Principal of Elkhart Elementary, Ron Schumacher**, has asked deliberate questions about how his leadership and school team center equity and inclusion to ensure their students have the best opportunities for learning. In those early years at Elkhart, Ron asked the question of himself, and he also asked his Elkhart families, "**How does a blue collar white guy like me lead a school that is predominantly Hispanic and has a large number of academically underperforming African American students?**" Resoundingly, his response and the response of his families underscored the issues of equity and inclusion, namely they purported the school must promote high systemic expectations, and its instructional staff must reflect the faces of the community. In a space of vulnerability and empathy, Ron and his team listened to these ongoing community-based recommendations, and further to their credit, they incorporated them from the ground-up into the regeneration of their school mission and vision of "**Every Kid Can.**"

For the past seven years, as a deliberate investment in equity and inclusion, Ron in tandem with **Assistant Principal, Angelica "Angie" Paz**, have worked concertedly to systematize their school-based **Grow Your Own (GYO)** teacher program to ensure Elkhart students have access to and benefit largely from prospective BIPOC teachers. As Ron states, "Teacher onboarding takes considerable time, from becoming proficient with our high systemic expectations to developing curriculum and assessments, teaching at Elkhart in particular is as demanding as it is rewarding. To ensure we have a steady stream of highly-skilled BIPOC teachers from our local community, we invested deeply in this GYO approach."

At present, Elkhart has systematized partnerships with the Public Education and Business Coalition (PEBC) Teacher Residency Program, UCD Graduate School of Education, UNC Center for Urban Education, and the UCD NxtGEN Teacher Residency Program. In total, there are 12 teacher candidates who are in various stages of becoming licensed teachers.

"Grow Your Own (GYO) teacher programs help address teacher shortages, retention issues and teacher diversity by engaging in a variety of strategies that aim to recruit teachers from local communities in hopes that the pool of candidates will increase in diversity and will be more likely to stay teaching in the community."

[Dr. Angela Valenzuela](#)
[UT-Austin, College of Education](#)



Ron Schumacher
Elkhart Elementary
Principal

Angelica "Angie" Paz
Elkhart Elementary
Assistant Principal



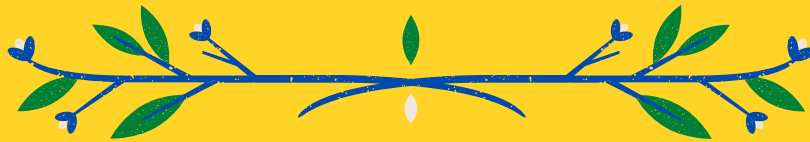
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The purpose of this monthly newsletter is to share exemplary practices that align with and support our APS-Promise54 Action Plan to strengthen BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) recruitment and retention.



FACES OF THE FUTURE

Angelica "Angie" Paz, Assistant Principal, who is in her sixth year at Elkhart, supervises and manages the GYO teacher program at Elkhart, and she is responsible for ensuring that teacher candidates have in-house mentors, for providing systemic professional learning, training and support, and for collaborating with partnering institutions to align the work to each teacher candidate's developmental plan. From her perspective, she sees the GYO teacher program as an essential aspect of Elkhart's deeper commitment to equitable and inclusive learning. She states, "By focusing on hiring more BIPOC teachers who look like our students, we are focusing on equity. That is the first goal of our school. The second goal is to provide all of our teacher candidates with high-leverage training and support, because ultimately, we want them to be successful and stay in this profession for many years to come." Ron and Angie point out that honoring one's ethnic identity is an important part of building an equitable and inclusive culture, and Ron further affirms, "In our teacher interviews, we ask the question, 'How do you maintain your identity while maintaining your ability to operate in a functional system?'" Ron and Angie emphatically state they want and need teachers who disrupt the status quo, and they clarify this disruption must show up in small and purposeful ways to better serve their students. Ron underscores the importance of employing and growing BIPOC teachers, and it is his observation that "**Young BIPOC teachers, even without all of the years of experience of their counterparts, can still get the same academic results because our kids immediately connect with them.**" Given Elkhart's rigorous teacher candidate selection process, Angie states that all of their teacher candidates come to them with an unconditional willingness to support students, to collaborate with an instructional team and to communicate seamlessly and respectfully with all community members. Based on Elkhart's "Every Kid Can" philosophy, Angie states that all of their teacher candidates will be able to independently run their classroom and build their capacity and culture for making an impact for learning.



MEET THE FACES ELKHART TEACHER CANDIDATES

PEBC: Starr Cooper and Valeria Tolliver

UCD: Sarah Gonsalves, Andrea Kaplan, Senika O'Connor, and Sam Holley

UCD NxtGEN: Angela Thomas, Lily Smith, Steicy Cabrales, Emily Viramontes, and Jayden O'Connor

UNC Center for Urban Education: Fatima Castillo



Starr Cooper, PEBC Teacher Candidate

*I was working as an educational paraprofessional in another school district when I decided to join the PEBC. I chose to come to Elkhart to learn from my Kindergarten Teacher mentor, **Tanya Tenane**. What struck me about her technique was that she had Kindergarten students working collaboratively and effectively in small groups. Tanya and the entire Elkhart Team are amazing, and I am learning so much from them about how this school works with regard to curriculum, instruction, and how to develop relationships with our community. I have always wanted to become a teacher since I was sixteen years-old, and I have been striving towards that goal ever since. You know it is so important for our Black and Brown babies to have teachers who like them since they acknowledge and elevate that background knowledge about them. By seeing our faces, those who look like their family members, it encourages our students to develop their identity beyond stereotypes.*

Emily Viramontes, UCD NxtGEN Teacher Candidate

*Growing up for me, I never had teachers who looked like me or spoke like me. You know these systems are so one-dimensional and not really designed for children of color to be successful, and I remember feeling as a kid that I had so much to offer. There was so much cultural knowledge and linguistic diversity and expression that I could have brought to my classroom, but I was never given the opportunity. As an aspiring teacher-leader, I feel like I would betray my students by not allowing them to bring all of their life and cultural dimensions into the classroom as student-leaders. I want to give them as many opportunities to express themselves in various ways that are culturally creative and relevant. Once my students know that I speak Spanish, they immediately make a connection with me, and they want to share so many personal stories with me. These are their **funds of knowledge**, and this **cultural storytelling** are so important to acknowledge and grow in any classroom. At the end of the day, I am inquisitive, and I will keep asking questions to improve my instruction, and I will keep asking questions of my students to promote their learning, too.*





Andrea Kaplan, UCD Teacher Candidate

You know the reason I wanted to become a teacher is because I wasn't the best student, and it took a really long time and a lot of hard work and dedication to get to where I am now. I deliberately chose to invest in becoming a teacher, and these Elkhart students give back more than I invested. The community aspect at Elkhart is really strong, and I feel completely recognized, integrated and respected as an equal here. As a Latina, it was always really important for me to know that my family was valued by my teachers growing up. I feel like Elkhart is a place where that same value exists. When my Elkhart students and families find out that I speak Spanish and identify as Latina, they are absolutely surprised, and they immediately see me as a resource to support them. Our families see me as a resource for helping them become more mindful of how to support their children to become more successful in school. This is what our community looks like here at Elkhart.



Senika O'Connor "SJ", UCD Master's Teacher Candidate

Senika goes by SJ because so many people, as she states, 'slaughter her name.' Ironically, SJ comes from a family of teachers, but she never wanted to become one. Sitting down with her grandpa a couple years ago, he made an aside comment about his family "that all these women are teachers," and SJ wondered if it was just in her DNA. As a Communications Major and Ethnic Studies Minor, SJ supported her family during her undergraduate experience as a single-mother by serving as a guest teacher. Among all of her responsibilities, she also wrote her undergraduate thesis on the **Prison-to-School Pipeline** because of her passion and adoration for the children she was working with at the time. She kept saying to herself, "Teaching is not for me, and I am not going to make any money. My mom is a teacher, and my partner is a teacher. I don't really want to do it." SJ completed her undergraduate thesis, and she learned so much about the appalling data and the repressive stories behind those data points. She was further convinced that she was not going to become a teacher, because she did not want to become complicit with a system that was the catalyst for placing children on the school-to-prison track. SJ said, "I had convinced myself that I could not go into a system that was so absolutely horrifying in nature based upon my research." She graduated, and she worked in the corporate world for eight months. And, she hated it. In her own words, SJ states, "It was awful. I was just pushing paper, and there was no purpose behind it even though I was really good at it." Once the pandemic hit, while stuck at home with her daughter, SJ began to re-evaluate what she wanted to do with her life. She came to the conclusion that she missed working with kids in an educational setting, and she decided to pursue her Master's degree in education.

SJ recalls that when she was working in schools, her students, particularly her students of color, would light up and proclaim, "Miss O is here today!" SJ concedes that while she might not be able to fix the system, she believes that she can inspire her students not give up. SJ states, "I was born here, and I went through the K-12 system, and it was hard." SJ, who is also biracial, believes that seeing her students for who they are, especially for all of their complexity and beauty, is foundational for transforming the system. SJ knows firsthand what it is like to struggle as a young person, and despite her challenges, most of her teachers only saw her misbehavior without understanding its root cause. Later, she was diagnosed with PTSD after surviving a traumatic childhood. At school, she was often punished and seen as problematic when what she really needed was for the system to recognize and help her with her challenges. As a result, SJ is a big proponent of building relationships with her students, and she wants to be open and present for seeing them for all of their humanity. SJ clarifies that growing up that she did not see teachers who looked like her, and now, when she is not at Elkhart because she is attending classes, her students ask for her. Itzamara, one of her Elkhart students, asks, "Where is Ms. O today?" *She is at college.* Itzamara says, "Which college is she at?" *She is at the University of Colorado.* Itzamara replies, "Well then, that's where I am going to college, too!"



Nikki Wood, 3rd Grade Mentor Teacher at Elkhart Elementary

I have been teaching for the past thirteen years exclusively here at Elkhart, and I don't have any intention of going anywhere else. I am really in love with this school, the leadership and this community. The best part of being a mentor teacher is the collaboration piece, namely I really enjoy having someone else in the room to provide fresh ideas and to provide feedback. I really enjoy supporting our teacher candidates in setting goals, providing feedback and helping them become successful as independent teachers. What I also appreciate about our teacher candidates is that they are all such high-quality people with an incredible passion for teaching, and they also have really strong work ethics. My hope is that every teacher candidate will internalize our motto of "Every Kid Can," and in doing so, really respect and value the diversity that we have here. More than anything, I want them to take away an appreciation that our work is more valuable than it is challenging.



Tanya Tanane, Kindergarten Mentor Teacher at Elkhart Elementary

I have been teaching for the past nine years exclusively here at Elkhart, and before that, I taught for thirteen years at Fletcher Elementary. My favorite part of being a mentor teacher is that I reflect back on my experience when I was first mentored at the start of my career. Those mentors played such a significant role in helping me achieve success as a teacher, and now I have an opportunity to do the same for this cohort. I now get to make that difference. This is especially true this year since we have so much on our plates already as teachers, and we always feel like there is more that we can do. I am so thankful that our teacher candidates bring different perspectives and background knowledge, and they have been phenomenal in working in tandem to support all of our kids. Having a mentee has really helped me fine tune my instruction, and I need to be able to share the lens and purpose of my thinking process at all times. Overall, I really hope that our teacher candidates will walk away with a sense of confidence that this is a profession they are able to do.



"EVERY KID CAN"

Ron Schumacher, Principal at Elkhart Elementary states very clearly that he is not going to be around forever at Elkhart Elementary, and it is his hope that the next Principal is a BIPOC leader. By centering equity and inclusion, Ron has also centered the broader Elkhart community. He listens closely to all his stakeholders, and he is particularly attentive to his students and families. While Ron has been criticized from time to time for making seemingly rogue decisions, he has done so because he shows up every day with the following mindset, "I work for my students. I work for my families. I work for the community." Ron reflects on when he first took over the Principalship thirteen years ago. "No one wanted to be here, and I had 150 requests from families to get bussed elsewhere." Since that time, Ron has processed numerous difficult conversations where he has been called out by Elkhart families, teachers and other community members to ensure his leadership and the school exhibit more sensitivity, equity and inclusion. Instead of balking at their suggestions, **Angie Paz, Assistant Principal** states, "What makes the difference is that Ron listens, and he processes what is said. He is willing to make himself vulnerable as a White male, and he listens to help make things better for everyone, especially for our students and families. I really respect him for that." When focusing on and centering equity, Ron recommends that schools and their leaders must stay the course regardless of the setbacks and critiques. He states, "If you work on just one thing, then all your boats will rise." From a single question, **Ron and Angie** in tandem with the entire Elkhart team have responded by systematizing the way in which BIPOC leaders and teachers further bridge the learning for their students to unconditionally support the educational belief that "Every Kid Can."

APS-PROMISE54 ACTION PLAN

In response to the APS Board of Education's February 2020 "Resolution on the Recruitment and Retention of Educators of Color," APS has been engaged in evaluating its own talent and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion work, particularly as it relates to the recruitment and retention of educators of color. Goal 3 of the APS-Promise54 Action Plan is as follows:

Goal 3: Strengthen/Enhance Grow Your own Program to enhance pipeline in workforce for both students and classified staff.

- Year 1: Talk about Teaching as a Career. Promote teaching careers with students so that students see it as a career option, just as they do other career options we talk about in APS. Year
- 1 and Beyond: Grow-Your-Own for students. Enhance career pathways for APS students to enter the education field, whether first as paras or to teachers.
- Year 1 and Beyond: Grow-Your-Own for Staff. Enhance career pathways for staff (para to teacher pipeline).

