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“Someone That I Wish I Had”: Tapping Service-Minded Individuals to Stem the Teacher Shortage

DENVER, Colo.—Syntya Guzman has always wanted to spend her life in a Colorado school like the ones she grew up in, perhaps in school counseling or a related field. She had never pictured herself at the front of a classroom.

But when Guzman discovered an alternative pathway to obtaining her Colorado teaching license in just one year after serving with AmeriCorps at Colorado Youth for a Change, what was once just the seed of an idea became her future.

“I was looking for a way to get involved in the education system and an opportunity to serve my community,” Guzman said. “AmeriCorps allowed me to do that and gain experience in education. I then heard about the pathway program through an AmeriCorps member training early in the year, but it was just an idea at that time. What got me interested was the experiences I had through my service term. My students inspired me, and it felt like I was meant to be here.”

Guzman is participating in The AmeriCorps Alternative Residency Program. This program leverages a partnership between two Denver-based nonprofits, Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) and The Public Education & Business Coalition (PEBC), and is funded by the Colorado Department of Education. Piloted this school year with plans to expand in the fall, the program creates a pipeline for individuals already interested in education careers to enter the workforce. These individuals can complete their required student teaching via two tracks but regardless of their choice, they are eligible to receive their licensure after just two years.

In both tracks, the first step is to complete a full year of AmeriCorps service through CYC, which places over 300 members in 30 school districts across Colorado every year to support students in early literacy and numeracy, reading and math proficiency, and school attendance and engagement.

In Guzman’s case, she has spent the 2022-2023 school year serving at New America Aurora, a charter school that primarily serves immigrant students whose native language is predominantly Spanish. As a lifelong Spanish speaker and Aurora resident, Guzman supports 9th-12th grade students at New America with school engagement, attendance, connection to



resources, and more—fulfilling her dream of giving back to her community just a mile and a half from her alma mater, Aurora Central.

As Colorado’s educator shortage has worsened in the wake of the pandemic, a variety of solutions and mitigations have been attempted by state agencies, individual districts and schools, nonprofit organizations, and more. While each of these measures has offered unique value, new data has borne out the complexity of this issue: the proportion of unfilled teaching positions in Colorado more than doubled between the 2020-2021 and 2021-2022 school years.

Much has already been written on the economic and societal impacts of this educator shortage, not to mention the harm to students. Crucially, these unfilled positions impact schools disproportionately; rural and high-poverty schools face the biggest challenges in educator recruitment and retention. Meanwhile, just 13 percent of Colorado teachers identify as a race other than white.

The CYC and PEBC partnership is structured specifically to address these challenges. First, PEBC works in rural and urban areas and prioritizes placing teacher residents in hard-to-staff teaching positions to stem the shortage. Second, 40% of CYC AmeriCorps members last year were a race/ethnicity other than white, and 79% reported that they are interested in pursuing a career in education.

“This partnership bridges substantial barriers to access to the profession such as a living wage, health insurance, and extensive support during the training year and the teacher’s first years in the classroom,” said PEBC Senior Director of Residency Jessamyn Lockhart. “Through this partnership, [we] hope to significantly contribute to Colorado’s teacher shortage solution and train teachers worthy of each and every student in our communities.”

In the program, aspiring educators will receive nearly 250 hours of instruction and over 1,500 hours of classroom experience. The program has been successfully established in the Denver Metro, San Luis Valley, Colorado Southwest, Colorado Mountain West and Northern Colorado areas. With proper funding and support, the program has the potential to be implemented in all areas of the state.

“I want to be someone that I wish I had when I was in school,” said Guzman. “These experiences I have had this year have completely shifted my plans. I was inspired by these students to follow this career path.”



Established in 2005, Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC) addresses barriers to learning by providing individualized supports throughout pivotal stages of students' education journeys. CYC's prevention and reengagement programs span from ages 3-21 and serve over 6,000 Colorado students every year. CYC also contributes to a robust educator pipeline in Colorado by recruiting, training, and deploying over 300 AmeriCorps members in 30 school districts across the state.

Forged in Denver in 1983, the Public Education & Business Coalition (PEBC) represents a convergence of stakeholders keen to uplift learning opportunities for each and every student. PEBC is one of the nation's leading teacher prep and professional learning organizations. PEBC works in Colorado and across the nation to prepare outstanding new teachers, help practicing educators become exceptional, and shape policies that foster vibrant growth and lasting student success.

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