



September 1, 2023 ([/ospa-blog/2023/9/1/empowering-education-the-success-of-grow-your-own-in-the-lincoln-county-school-district](#))

## Empowering Education: The Success of Grow Your Own in the Lincoln County School District ([/ospa-blog/2023/9/1/empowering-education-the-success-of-grow-your-own-in-the-lincoln-county-school-district](#))

Lincoln County School District's Grow Your Own program, led by OSPA members Tiana DeVries, HR Director, and Jennie Williams, HR Specialist and 2018 OSPA HR Specialist of the Year, is a local success story that is making waves in the Oregon school district landscape. This program has not only become a steppingstone for professional development but is also helping to diversify the education workforce, remove barriers, and strengthen the community. Here we will explore a few key factors contributing to its success and discover what recommendations Tiana and Jennie have for Oregon school districts considering, planning, or implementing a Grow Your Own program.

### **The Journey of *Grow Your Own***

The momentum of Lincoln County School District's Grow Your Own program was initiated by a Meyer Memorial Grant awarded in 2018 and implemented in collaboration with Oregon Coast Community College (<https://yachatsnews.com/lincoln-county-school-district-community-college-try-to-grow-their-own-educators-through-teach-at-the-beach-program/>). This in grant laid the foundation for the current Grow Your Own program by replicating an established, successful nursing education pathway. The key was to create an AAOT (Associate of Arts Oregon Transfer) degree that could be seamlessly transferred to Oregon universities with education programs, and specifically, Western Oregon University, for students to obtain their teaching credentials.





*Chandler Turner, a student at Western Oregon University, also works as a substitute teacher in the Lincoln County School District after the district sponsored him to receive an emergency teaching license. He often teaches in the same rooms he was once a student in, working alongside teachers who knew him as a much younger man.*



*Previous classified employee Ashlee Contee earned her Bachelors through GYO and is a counselor in LCSD*

In 2020, the Oregon Department of Education (ODE) further boosted the program with funding to support classified staff. The focus was on diversity—embracing individuals with various backgrounds, including race, ethnicity, interrupted education, single parenthood, and other barriers. The collaborative work between Oregon Coast Community College and Lincoln County School District is a cornerstone in this endeavor by offering essential support and resources to participants.

### **Breaking Down Barriers**

One of the most remarkable aspects of Lincoln County School District's Grow Your Own program is its commitment to breaking down barriers that often hinder educational pursuits. For many classified staff members, time is a precious commodity. The cost of higher education is only one barrier. Juggling familial responsibilities and other jobs makes it even more challenging to pursue a degree. The program addresses this by allowing participants to attend face-to-face or synchronous classes without losing pay or benefits. This flexibility is a game-changer, especially for those who are parenting alone, share a single car or need time to study outside school hours.

### **The Location Challenge**

Location is also a common barrier, especially in rural areas. To address this, Grow Your Own recognizes the need to extend its reach beyond traditional boundaries and dispel a common myth that the only positions in the education workforce that require a degree are classroom teachers and administrators. By helping all Lincoln School District employees learn about the variety of professional positions that comprise the education workforce, the possibilities for professional growth are abundant – employees discover that they do not need to leave their community in order to achieve their career aspirations.

### **Key Recommendations for Oregon School Districts**

Tiana and Jennie share just a few of their insights with districts that are:

1. **Contemplating *Grow Your Own*:** Consider how you might ease the prerequisites for entry into the program. Many interested classified staff members are new to the field, and the Grow Your Own program can serve as a bridge to a fulfilling, long-term career in your district. If there is a district employment time requirement, say for example one or two years, motivated classified staff may seek other opportunities before they are eligible for Grow Your Own.

Another consideration is to let go of an employee's work commitment to the district tied to the completion of Grow Your Own. Making career growth possible benefits not only the participants, but also the community, and students they serve. For example, in the Lincoln County School District, there are many employee spouses who are Coast Guard and might be required to transfer. The employee's obligation to the Grow Your Own program upon completion might become an unintended barrier with negative PR.

Flexibility is key—create an environment where participants don't feel forced to quit due to the program's demands. Recruitment and retention, especially for classified staff, can be enhanced with Grow Your Own by offering paid classes and dedicated time for learning.

2. **Planning:** Ensuring a focus on and providing active advising is essential. Jennie has played an invaluable advising role, taking the time to understand the diverse background of each individual Grow Your Own participant and helping to tailor the program to meet their needs. This is especially important when helping to navigate a path between an associate and bachelors' program.
3. **Implementing Best Practices:** In the Lincoln County School District, secretaries, volunteers, and principals have been indispensable as Grow Your Own recruiters. Their face-to-face interaction with new hires is key to identifying prospective Grown Your Own participants' career goals. An emphasis on helping new hires and staff learn about the various licensed positions has been eye-opening to prospective participants who find out that there are education workforce positions that align with their future career goals.

Because flexibility and support is crucial, allocating grant funds to cater to specific building needs has been vital.

### **In Summary**

The remarkable success of Lincoln County School District's Grow Your Own program showcases the transformative power of education. By removing barriers, embracing diversity, meeting school district employees where they are, and cultivating strong community connections, this initiative is not only shaping the local education workforce, but also influencing the next generation. In fact, Lincoln County School District just hired its first full-time teacher who was part of the inaugural 2018 Grow Your Own program.

As other school districts in Oregon explore, plan, or implement similar programs, they can draw inspiration from Lincoln County School District's journey. Tiana DeVries and Jennie Williams welcome OSPA members' requests to learn more about their Grow Your Own experience. Education is a shared endeavor that thrives when nurtured and Grow Your Own is a testament to that spirit.

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