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CONTACT: [Mary Stadick Smith](#), South Dakota Department of Education, (605) 773-7228

[Nancy Van Der Weide](#), South Dakota Department of Education, (605) 773-2593

Teacher apprenticeship program to launch 2nd cohort this summer

PIERRE, S.D. – South Dakota’s successful Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway will be expanding, thanks to funding provided by the state legislature. The program provides paraprofessionals, or teacher aides, the opportunity to become fully certified educators. Applications are now being accepted for a cohort that will start this July. The program has room for up to 90 apprentices.

“We launched the first group of teacher-apprentices about a year ago, as one solution to the teacher shortage,” said Secretary of Education Joseph Graves. “Workforce has been a focus of Gov. Noem since taking office. These apprenticeships provide a clear pathway to filling open positions in our schools – with people who already live in our communities and are likely to stay and continue contributing.”

The first paraprofessional to complete the program will graduate this May from Dakota State University.

Through the apprenticeship program, participants earn a bachelor’s degree in elementary, secondary, or special education while continuing to work as a paraprofessional in their school. Northern State University (NSU) and Dakota State University (DSU) offer the necessary coursework over a two-year period, culminating in a student-teaching experience and resulting in the completion of a bachelor’s degree in education. All coursework is offered virtually at convenient times, so participants can continue to work while enrolled. School districts provide a local mentor to support the apprentices throughout the process.

"Investing in South Dakota's educator workforce is vital to our state and our students," said South Dakota Board of Regents Executive Director Nathan Lukkes. "By offering opportunities to dedicated paraprofessionals, two of our state's public universities, NSU and DSU, hope to turn the current teacher shortage into a well-established educator pipeline. We encourage school districts to support participation in the apprenticeship program and provide authentic on-the-job training within their community."

The program is a collaborative effort of NSU, DSU, South Dakota Board of Regents, Department of Labor and Regulation, Department of Education, and local school districts. Each partner plays a unique role in supporting the apprentices, whether academically or financially.

“The Department of Labor and Regulation is committed to keeping costs low for students as they gain on-the-job experience,” said state Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman. “This program exemplifies the benefits of an apprenticeship by allowing individuals to earn and learn while staying in their home community.”

Applicants must have a letter of recommendation from their school district administrator. Information about the program can be found on the Department of Education's [Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway webpage](#).