



OUR PATH FORWARD

*Strengthening
South Dakota JAG*

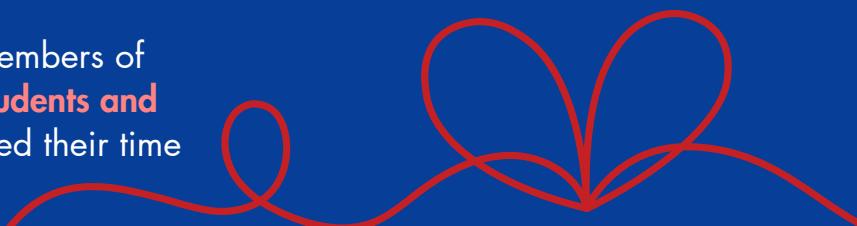
**JOBs FOR AMERICA'S
GRADUATES - SOUTH DAKOTA
2025 - 2030 BLUEPRINT**

SPECIAL THANKS

The following individuals made this report possible:

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ON THE COVER: *Ally Salomon, Bennett County High School 2025 Graduate, plans to attend Western Dakota Technical College for Dental Assisting.*

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***“We’re not just
advising. We’re
opening doors.”***

– Advisory Board
Member

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Strategies that work for everyone.

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JAG-SD 2025–2030 Strategic Plan
July 2025

The full JAG-SD 2025–2030 Strategic Plan document
is available at www.working-ventures.com



A note on design...

You may notice a red thread woven throughout this report. This is an intentional visual metaphor, representing the essential role JAG-SD plays in the lives of students across South Dakota. Just as a red thread binds different elements into a cohesive whole, JAG-SD connects students to meaningful relationships, skill development, and purpose. It symbolizes the strong, consistent support system that helps unlock each student's personal, academic, and professional potential, no matter where they start or what challenges they face.



**“IT’S NOT JUST SCHOOL.
IT’S A FAMILY, A FUTURE,
AND A SECOND CHANCE.”**

JAG-SD Student



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The JAG-SD 2025–2030 Strategic Plan charts a course for intentional growth, aiming to serve more students without compromising the program's proven model of personalized, relationship-driven support. By focusing on expanded partnerships and a more resilient funding base, this plan calls on all South Dakotans to help build a stronger future for youth across the state.



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Jobs for America's Graduates - South Dakota (JAG-SD) is a statewide program helping young people overcome barriers and succeed in school, work, and life. As part of a national network that has supported over 1.7 million youth, JAG-SD combines school-based instruction, career exploration, and individualized guidance. This is facilitated by dedicated JAG Specialists, employed by their school districts and supported through a partnership with JAG-SD.

Partnering with districts across South Dakota, the program serves students facing challenges, helping them graduate and successfully transition into college, careers, or the military. These supports not only change student trajectories, but also strengthen communities.

The strategic plan laid out within this document sets a bold intention: building a strong foundation for JAG-SD's intentional growth. Over the next five years, the organization aims to expand reach, deepen impact, and strengthen the infrastructure behind its success—without compromising program fidelity. Trusted relationships, well-supported cohorts, and trauma-informed practices will remain core to its model.

To achieve this, JAG-SD will focus on two priorities: expanding partnerships with schools, employers, and Tribal communities; and diversifying funding through increased philanthropic, corporate, and grant support. These goals will be advanced by improving internal systems, raising public awareness, scaling carefully, and building partnerships that reflect local values.

Ultimately, **this plan is a call to action**. It includes specific objectives intended to turn vision into action, but success depends on collective effort.

AFTER ALL, A STRONGER SOUTH DAKOTA JAG PROGRAM MEANS A STRONGER SOUTH DAKOTA.



BUILDING A STRONG FOUNDATION FOR INTENTIONAL GROWTH

Over the next five years, JAG-SD will lay the groundwork for lasting, scalable impact by attending to two key goals: expanding partnerships and diversifying funding. **This plan discusses those goals and outlines the overarching objectives that stem from them.**

Goal 1: Expand Partnerships

JAG-SD is deepening connections with schools, employers, and Tribal communities to better serve students and reflect the unique strengths of and opportunities within South Dakota's diverse regions. These partnerships are intended to result in programming and support, creating and enabling meaningful, mutually-beneficial experiences for young people and industry.

JAG-SD is also investing in its internal network. JAG Specialists (**the program's "secret sauce"**) will benefit from greater resource sharing, peer learning, and structured support to ensure consistent, high-quality program delivery statewide.

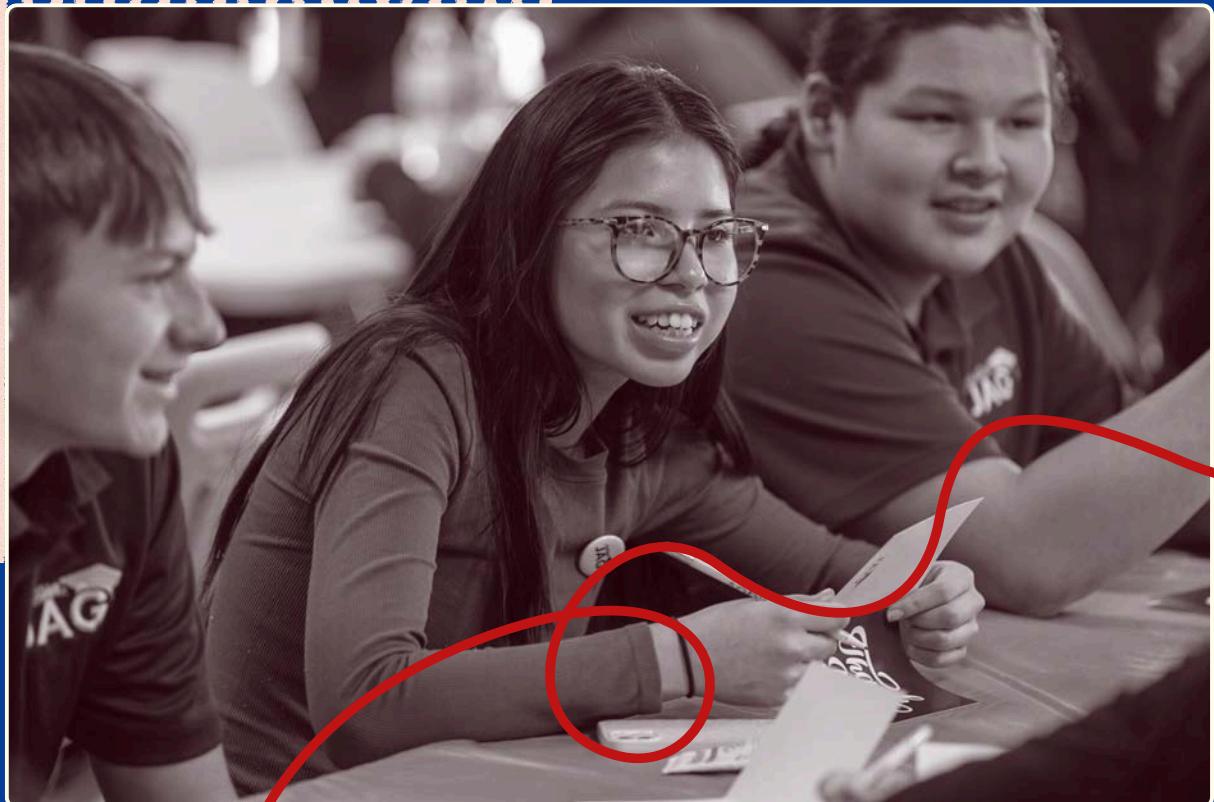


Goal 2: Diversify Funding Streams

To sustain and scale its impact, JAG-SD intends to build a more diverse and resilient funding base. Public investment provides the program with a solid foundation and fueled early growth. In the coming years, it will build on that foundation, expanding philanthropic, corporate, and grant support. This strategic diversification reduces risk, enables innovation, and allows JAG-SD to grow without compromising quality or mission.

“ **“**
LEADERS [SHOULD] NOT ONLY BE AWARE OF IT, BUT KNOW WHAT IT IS, WHAT IT DOES, AND HOW EFFECTIVE IT IS AS AN ORGANIZATION.

JAG-SD Board Member



STRATEGIC ROADMAP

This roadmap outlines JAG-SD's five-year plan to expand access while protecting what makes the program unique: strong relationships, trauma-informed instruction, and well-supported cohorts. With clear goals for partnerships, funding, and phased growth, the strategy ensures that scale enhances—not compromises—program quality and impact.

“ *The program has structures in place, and if you do it with fidelity, it works.* - School District Leader



Our guiding principal...

PROGRAM FIDELITY & QUALITY

JAG-SD's growth must be grounded in what already works. **Relationships, consistency, and responsive, high-quality instruction** are the foundation of student success—and the lens through which every future decision must be made.

FIDELITY COMMITMENTS



COHORT-BASED
EXPERIENCES &
INDIVIDUALIZED SUPPORT



JAG SPECIALIST SUPPORT
& PROFESSIONAL
DEVELOPMENT



TRAUMA-INFORMED,
PROJECT-BASED
INSTRUCTION

Objective 1

STRENGTHEN INTERNAL INFRASTRUCTURE TO SUPPORT PROGRAM GROWTH

Build internal practices that support consistent, high-quality delivery of JAG-SD programs, including JAG Specialist onboarding, professional development, collaboration, and knowledge sharing.

Objective 2

EXPAND SUSTAINABLE FUNDING THROUGH DIVERSIFIED REVENUE STREAMS

Build on strong foundation of public funding by building capacity for private fundraising, corporate sponsorship, and grant development.

Objective 3

LAUNCH A PUBLIC AWARENESS AND ADVOCACY CAMPAIGN

Develop and implement a statewide communications campaign that raises awareness about JAG's impact, builds public engagement and supports fundraising and recruitment.

Objective 4

DEEPEN STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS (SCHOOLS, EMPLOYERS, AND TRIBAL COMMUNITIES)

Formally engage with key external stakeholders (school districts, employers, and Tribal leaders) to build sustainable, and high-impact JAG program delivery across South Dakota.

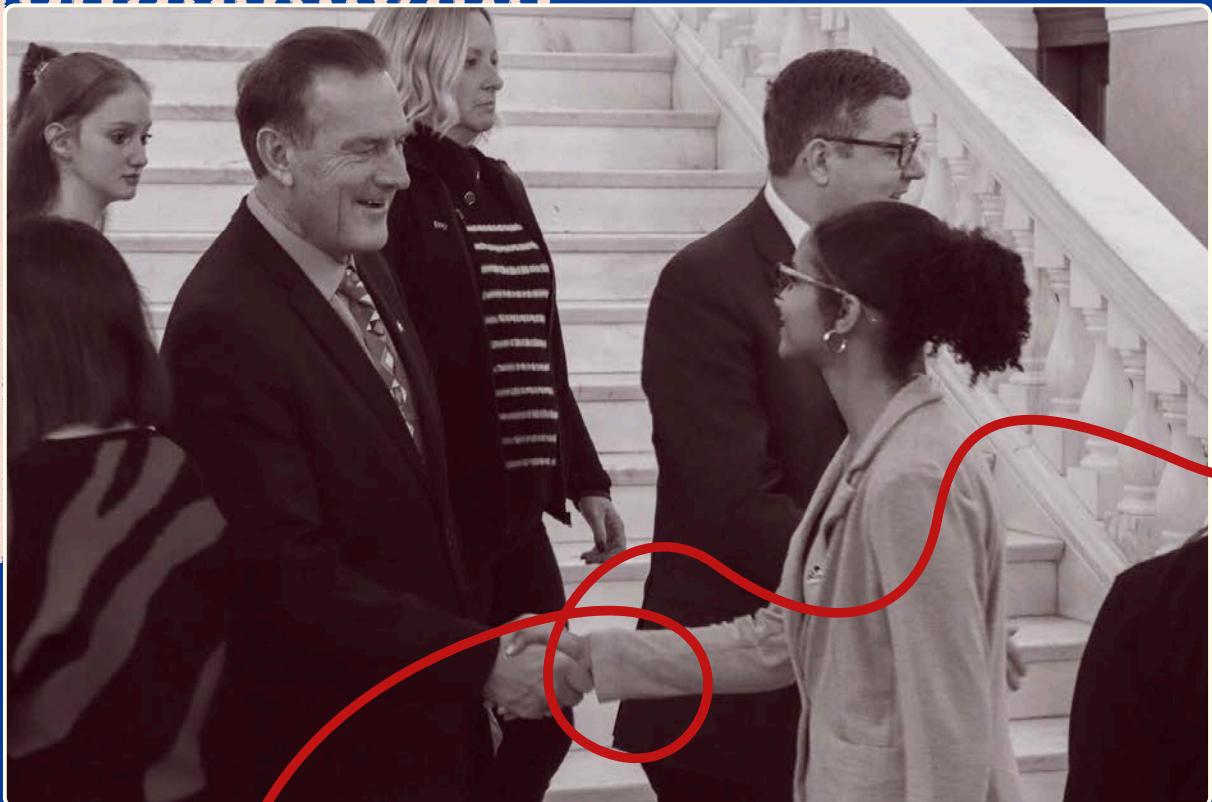
Objective 5

SCALE INTO NEW DISTRICTS WITH FOCUS ON PROGRAM FIDELITY AND QUALITY

Identify school districts/scaling partners that can support wider access. Maintain the strong program fidelity that drives JAG's success. Ensure they can provide the fiscal, political, and human capital needed.



**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE REACH OUT TO
JAGSD@STATE.SD.US**



WHAT IS JAG?

JAG Mission: Empower our nation's young people with the skills and support to succeed in education, employment, and life.

WHAT IS JAG?



A PROVEN NATIONAL MODEL

Jobs for America's Graduates (JAG) is a national nonprofit organization dedicated to preventing school dropout among young people who face significant challenges. In its 45 years of existence it has served over 1.7 million youth. The JAG National Model is built on a comprehensive, evidence-based program that combines school-based instruction with employability skills training, career exploration, and intensive follow-up services.

Operating in middle schools, high schools, and out-of-school programs across the United States, JAG serves students facing challenges, helping them graduate and successfully transition into college, careers, or the military. In South Dakota, this is facilitated by dedicated JAG Specialists, employed by their school districts and supported through a partnership with JAG-SD.

PARTICIPATING STATES

36

Continuing to Grow

JAG SITES

1,500+

Total JAG Sites
Nationwide

GRADUATION RATE

96%

Compared to 85% of U.S. High
School Seniors

The Problem: Across the nation, thousands of young people face tremendous barriers to thriving in school and in life. On average, JAG students face 11 obstacles ranging from poverty to past trauma.

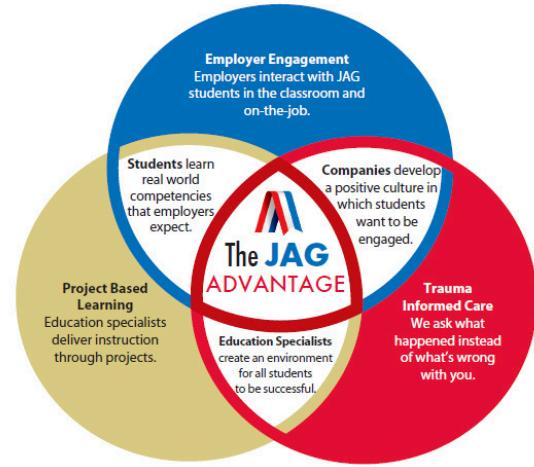
The Solution: JAG is the national program that's solving these challenges – and the only all-inclusive program of its kind. JAG Specialists teach elective classes for credit in high schools, middle schools and out-of-school school programs. JAG-SD provides vital job skills, hands-on experience, and a year of follow-up to support the transition from graduation to employment, military service, and/or postsecondary education.

WHAT IS JAG?

What Makes JAG Unique?

Core Program Elements and Curriculum

The JAG model integrates a structured, competency-based curriculum that includes up to 87 employability skills, career development activities, and life skills. The program is typically offered as a for-credit elective course within the school day. In addition to classroom instruction, students participate in project-based learning, career association activities, employer engagement, and service learning. JAG Specialists also provide year-long follow-up services for seniors to support their successful transition and retention in employment or further education. JAG's effectiveness is demonstrated through high graduation rates and positive postsecondary outcomes.



Student Selection Process

Students selected for JAG programs are typically those who face multiple barriers to success in school and the workforce, such as poverty, academic challenges, disabilities, or unstable family situations. Selection is not based on academic merit but rather on students' potential to benefit from additional support and guidance. Schools use a defined process to identify eligible students, which often includes referrals from teachers or counselors, review of academic and behavioral records, and completion of a needs assessment or barrier inventory. The goal is to prioritize students who are at risk of not completing high school or who may struggle to transition successfully without intervention. This targeted selection ensures that JAG resources are directed toward youth with the greatest need and the highest potential for positive change.

South Dakota's Distinctive Model

Unlike some state JAG affiliates that use centralized staffing, or hire all JAG Specialists through a single nonprofit or governmental organization, South Dakota's model supports local school districts who hire the JAG Specialists. This model encourages more consistent student engagement and also facilitates:

- Integration into local educational improvement plans
- Customization based on local student demographics and local community economic needs
- Enhanced collaboration with school-based counselors, administrators, and community organizations
- Strategic partnerships with technical colleges and universities to support seamless transitions from high school classrooms to postsecondary success.

MISSION

Empowering South Dakota's young people with the skills and support to succeed in education, employment, and life.

JAG-SD's Strong Education Roots

JAG-SD operates in both rural and urban areas across South Dakota, partnering closely with school districts to provide students with career readiness support and dropout prevention services. Its strong collaboration with local education agencies ensures that JAG-SD programming is tailored to meet the diverse needs of students statewide, from small-town communities to larger urban centers.

JAG-SD is a program supervised by the South Dakota Department of Education and is proven to help students persist through graduation.



What JAG-SD Means to Students

*Top themes from JAG-SD
Spring 2025 Student Survey.*



leadership integrity pathway
potential heartfelt talkative
ethic reliable educational choice
teamwork future hard-working
opportunities options interesting
helpful money great skills caring
teamwork pain responsibility speaking safe
cooperation assist determined inspirational success
people traveling home welcoming knowledge competitive
traveling support good open-minded preparation
opening experience progress class dedicated
program important sincere school growth respect
careers work readiness tools social
confidence communication family
service graduation organized community
hands-on goals workforce professional
interactive cool outgoing awesome



JAG-SD IN CONTEXT

The following pages provide a landscape analysis evaluating JAG-SD outcomes and structure against national and peer benchmarks.

PROGRAM FOOTPRINT & SCOPE

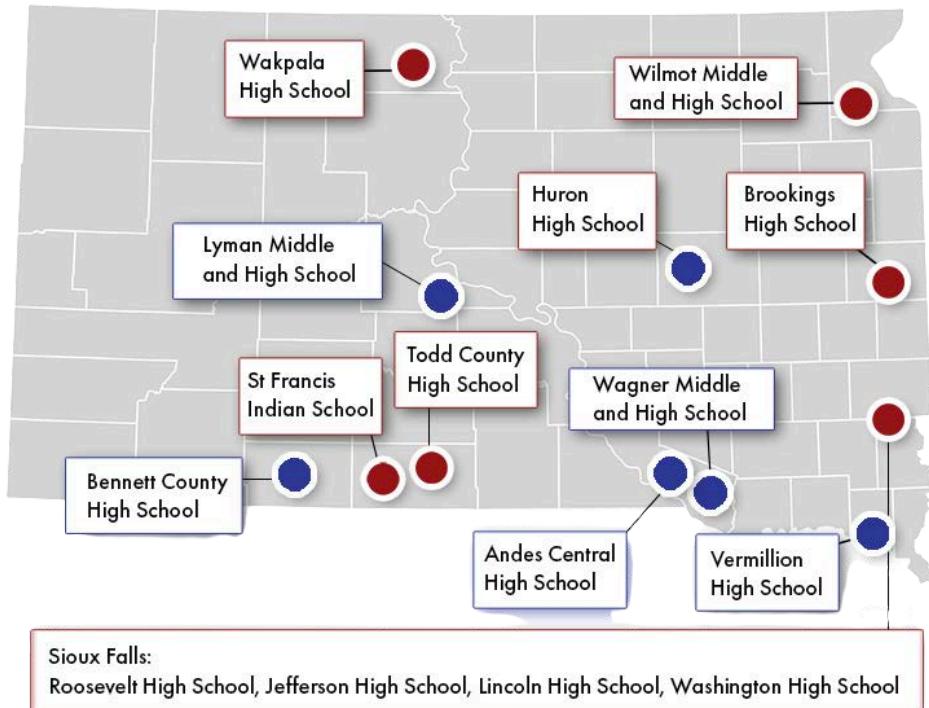
JAG-SD maintains a robust and strategic presence across the state's educational and workforce landscape. The program is structured to serve a wide range of student needs, including early intervention, dropout recovery, and postsecondary transition support.

The model for the program relies on key partnerships with school districts, taking on characteristics of the communities it serves while relying on the national JAG model for curriculum and resources.

"OUR KIDS ARE
SHOWING UP—
NOW WE NEED THE
SYSTEMS TO SHOW
UP FOR THEM."

— School Administrator

JAG-SD Schools



2024-25 JAG-SD STATISTICS

18
School Districts

566
Students

DELIVERY & STAFFING MODEL

Middle School Model

The primary mission of the Middle School Program is to help 6th through 8th graders to transition more support from middle to high school. Specialists provide an array of skills development, career association, and experiential learning experiences that improve their academic performance, school behavior, attendance, confidence, participation and self-esteem. Middle School participants improve their skills in leading and being an effective member of a team. This model is currently offered at Wagner Middle School, Lyman Middle School, and Wilmot Middle School.

Multi-Year Model

The Multi-Year Program helps 9th through 12th graders facing multiple challenges to graduation prepare for and successfully remain in high school, attain employability skills through classroom and work-based learning. The primary mission of the Multi-Year Program is to keep participants in high school through graduation and improve the rate of success in achieving education and career goals.

Decentralized Staffing Model

Unlike some state affiliates that use centralized staffing, South Dakota's model partners very closely with local school districts. JAG Specialists, employees of school districts, are trained and supported by JAG-SD. This strategic partnership enhances collaborations with other school staff, community partners, and local employers.

**AGE OF JAG
PROGRAM**

45 Years

**STUDENTS
SERVED SINCE
JAG'S LAUNCH**

1.7M +

In 2023, JAG served
79,228 students
in **1528 programs**
across **36 states**.



PARTNERSHIP ECOSYSTEM

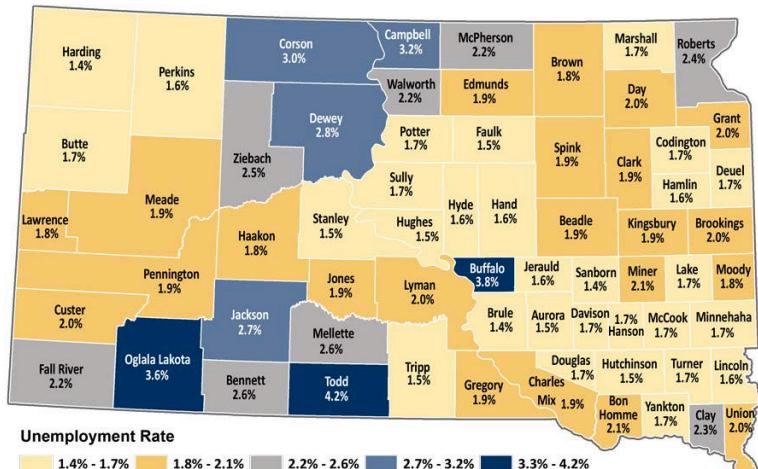


JAG-SD thrives through a dynamic partner ecosystem that includes funders, government agencies, employers, school districts, and community organizations, all working collaboratively to empower youth facing significant challenges. The South Dakota Department of Education provides oversight and implementation supports. The Department also partners with the Department of Social Services and the Department of Labor and Regulation. These organizations worked collectively toward aligned data integration, funding alignment, and career pathway creation.

School districts across the state integrate JAG-SD into their curricula, offering students elective credit focused on career readiness and personal development. Employers contribute by providing mentorship, internships, and job shadowing opportunities, bridging the gap between education and the workforce. Community organizations and volunteers further enrich the program by participating in events and supporting students' growth.

A pivotal supporter, the Wellmark Foundation, has significantly bolstered JAG-SD's reach and impact through substantial grants, including a \$300,000 challenge grant aimed at expanding programs into additional schools. This collaborative network ensures that JAG-SD provides vital resources and opportunities, fostering student success across South Dakota.

The South Dakota Workforce



Unemployment and Labor Force Data Based on May 2025 Data from DLR

1.8% Unemployment: South Dakota's unemployment rate remained at a historically low 1.8% in May 2025, underscoring a tight labor market that can create challenges for employers seeking to recruit and retain talent.

493,900 Labor Force: The state's labor force grew to 493,900 in May 2025, an increase of 6,600 over the past year to highlight a very modest expansion in available workers critical to supporting business growth and economic development. South Dakota needs more skilled workers.

A WORKFORCE PIPELINE

Building career pathways in the JAG-SD program around high-demand industries and occupations ensures that students develop the skills and experiences necessary to enter and thrive in sectors facing talent shortages. This strategic alignment not only enhances student outcomes but also strengthens South Dakota's workforce pipeline by directly addressing employer needs and supporting the state's economic vitality.

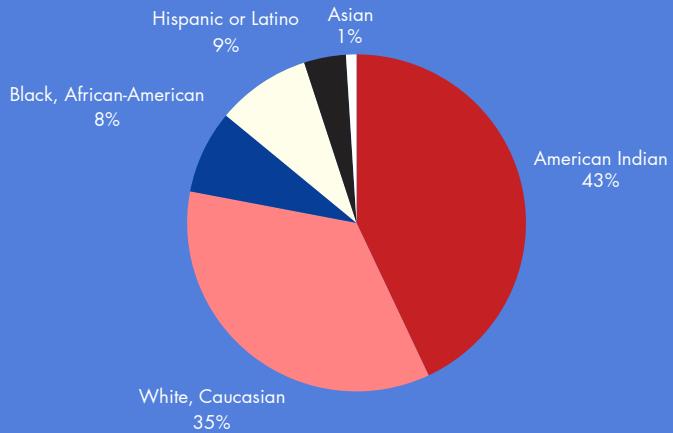
LONG-TERM PROJECTIONS 2022-2032 TOP INDUSTRIES



JAG-SD Program Outcomes and Alignments

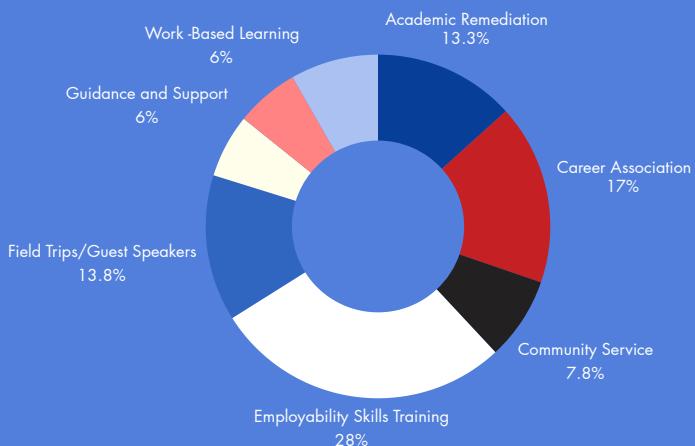
2024-2025 SCHOOL YEAR DATA

Race/Ethnicity



JAG MODEL SERVICES BREAKDOWN

MS & MY Combined



ECONOMIC BARRIERS OF STUDENTS



69% have inadequate or no work experience; lacking marketable occupational skills in local labor market

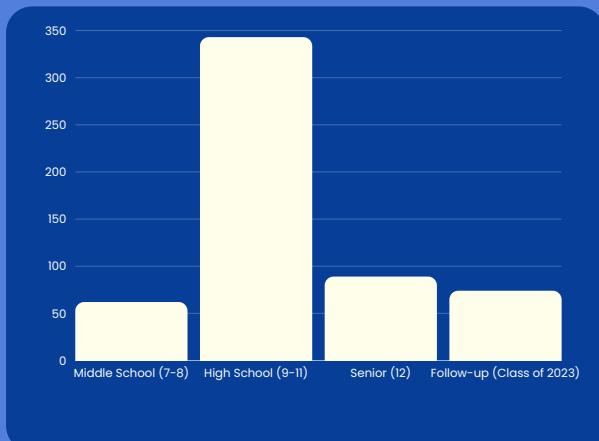


51% lack motivation or maturity to pursue educational goals



76% economically disadvantaged, receiving public assistance

ENROLLMENT BY GRADE

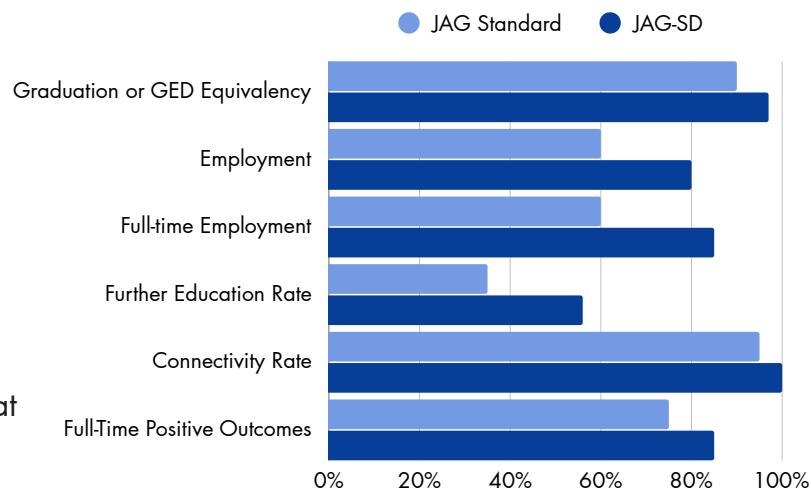


NATIONAL & REGIONAL COMPARISONS

JAG-SD shares the national JAG mission of helping students overcome barriers to success, yet its implementation reflects South Dakota's unique geographic, demographic, and economic landscape. Compared to the national JAG program, JAG-SD serves a higher proportion of students in rural communities, with program sites often integrated into smaller school districts where access to workforce readiness resources may be more limited.

The program structure in South Dakota emphasizes strong partnerships with school districts and community-based support, while maintaining key JAG programmatic components, including project-based learning, trauma-informed advising, and employer engagement. When compared to surrounding states such as Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, and Minnesota, JAG-SD operates at a smaller scale but demonstrates competitive outcomes.

OUTCOME COMPARISON NATIONALLY



STATE	YEAR STARTED	STRUCTURE	# OF STUDENTS	SITES AND DISTRICTS	FUNDING SOURCES
Iowa	1999	Nonprofit (standalone)	8,200+	165 Programs 67 Districts	State Legislature, School Districts, Private Funders
Kansas	2013	Nonprofit (standalone)	6,000+	112 Programs 47 Districts	State Legislature, TANF, Private Funders
Minnesota	2002	Nonprofit (PPL)	200+	14 JAG Specialists 23 LEAP MN Sites	State Legislature, USDOL funds, Private Funders
Nebraska	2018	Nonprofit (United Way)	4,000+	80 Programs 51 Districts	United Way, USDOL funds, TANF funds, School Districts
South Dakota	2009	State Government	566	19 Programs 13 Districts	School Districts, TANF, State Legislature, Private Funders

STUDENT DEVELOPMENT & LEADERSHIP

EMPOWERING STUDENTS

JAG-SD empowers students to become future leaders by engaging them in the JAG Career Association, a student-led organization where they hold officer roles, lead community service projects, and coordinate career readiness activities. Through project-based learning, mentorship, and career exploration opportunities, students gain essential workplace skills, confidence, and a clear understanding of their career pathways. JAG-SD also connects students with employers, training programs, and postsecondary institutions to ensure a smooth and informed transition into the workforce or further education.

In its short history, JAG-SD has served more than 3,000 students.

IMPACT ON STUDENTS



GRADUATION RATE

RETENTION RATE

FULL-TIME
POSITIVE
OUTCOMES





CASE FOR SUPPORT

This roadmap outlines JAG-SD's five-year plan to expand access while protecting what makes the program work: strong relationships, trauma-informed instruction, and intentional cohorts. This strategy ensures that scale enhances—not compromises—program quality and impact.

WHY AND HOW TO SUPPORT JAG-SD

“

JAG GAVE ME THE
CONFIDENCE TO BE
MORE THAN JUST A
STUDENT. I BECAME
A LEADER.”

JAG Graduate

Partnership Spotlight: School Districts

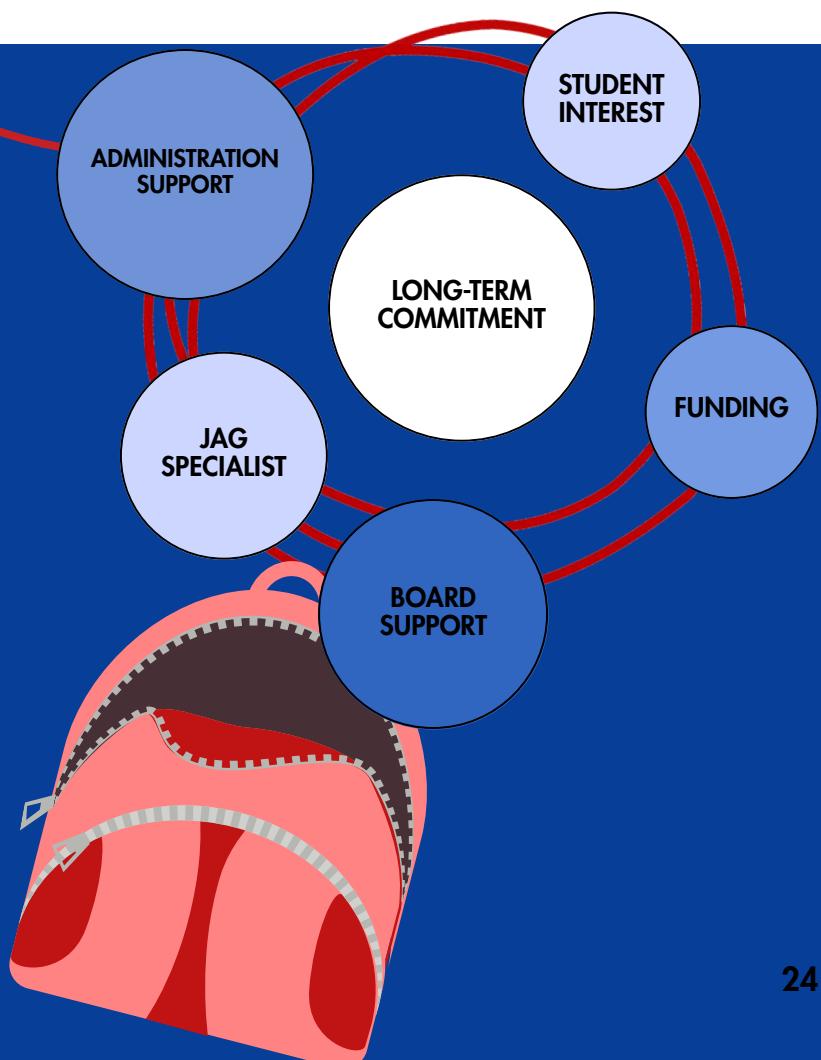
JAG-SD works hand-in-hand with schools to deliver a proven program that raises graduation rates, increases student engagement, and prepares young people for success after high school. At the heart of each program is a full-time JAG Specialist who provides students with consistent mentorship, trauma-informed instruction, and real-world skill-building.

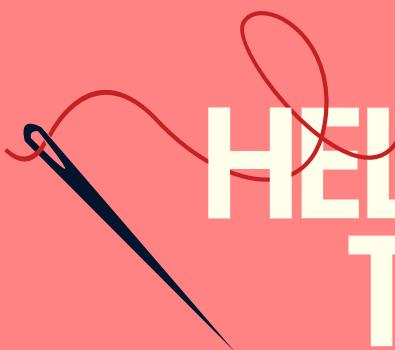
Launching a JAG program is a **local decision**. Its long-term success depends on school leadership to champion the effort, engage local partners, and commit the resources needed to sustain it.

See the graphic at right for the core elements of a successful school partnership.

Why Now?

Now is a **pivotal moment** to invest in the future of South Dakota’s youth by supporting JAG-SD. As students face growing challenges in education, mental health, and career readiness, JAG-SD provides a proven, life-changing program that delivers support, leadership development, and career pathways to those who need it most. With demand for the program growing across the state and an expanding network of dedicated educators, now is the time to ensure every young person has access to the tools, mentorship, and opportunities that set them up for lifelong success.





HELP US THREAD THE NEEDLE



Provide Funding

Your support of JAG-SD helps empower over 550 South Dakota students each year with the skills, experiences, and support they need to succeed in school, work, and life. Your investment directly fuels the future of South Dakota's workforce and leadership.



Start a Program

Starting a JAG-SD program in your school district is a powerful way to boost graduation rates, employment, and equip students with skills, with support and guidance from the South Dakota Department of Education. Start-up programs may receive \$10,000 or more in incentive funding.



Co-Author Partnership

Co-author a partnership with JAG-SD! You could sponsor a classroom, fund a career exposure trip, or provide direct mentorship by supporting an individual student. Whether you hire a student intern or help bring new opportunities to life, your partnership creates real impact and a lasting pathway to success.



DONATE TODAY



START A PROGRAM

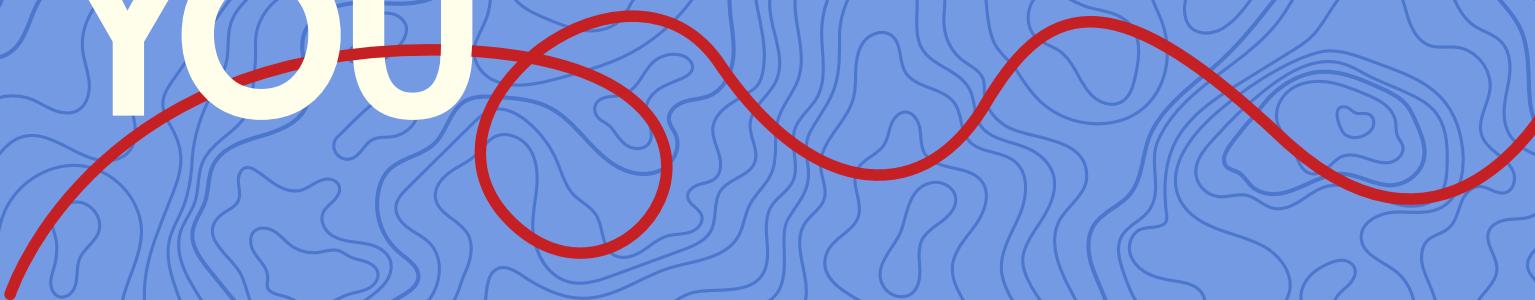


LEARN MORE

MISSION

*Empowering South Dakota's young people
with the skills and support to succeed in
education, employment, and life.*

THANK YOU



<https://doe.sd.gov/jag-sd/>



jagsd@state.sd.us