South Dakota Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway

Cohort 5: FAQ's

What is the program?

- South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway is a two-year registered teacher apprenticeship pathway to provide paraprofessionals employed in an accredited school system the opportunity to earn a teaching certificate.
- Participants will earn a bachelor's degree in elementary education, special education, or secondary education while gaining hand-on experience in the classroom and receiving support from experienced mentors.
- The South Dakota Department of Education is in partnership with the South Dakota Department of Labor, Dakota State University, Northern State University, the South Dakota Board of Regents, and local districts.

Who is eligible for the program?

- All classified/support staff in the accredited school system may apply for the program, but selected participants must be employed as a paraprofessional (also known as an "aide", "educational assistant", or "teacher's aide") during the apprenticeship until the beginning of student teaching.
- Participants will continue to be compensated throughout the program, including student teaching, at rates determined by the district.
- A paraprofessional will be considered a full-time school employee with a minimum of 950 hours.
- Upon selection for the program, participants must complete and submit the FAFSA (Free Application for Federal Student Aid). Eligibility for SD TAP is not based on the FAFSA award.
- Given the limited amount of time to complete the program due to funding, preference will be given to those with post-secondary credits already earned.

How is coursework delivered?

- Courses will be offered online or Hy-flex. A Hybrid-Flexible (Hy-Flex) course design enables flexible participation. Students may choose to attend face-to-face synchronous class sessions in- person, via Zoom, or they can complete the course learning activities online without physically attending class. Collaborative opportunities will be offered via Zoom.
- Participants will need computer and internet access to complete course requirements.
- Expected time to complete is two years, assuming a full course load each term. If additional time is needed to complete the program beyond the planned two years, the participant would be responsible for any financial obligations associated with their educational program, coursework, and related costs.

What is the cost for participants?

- Participants will be responsible for up to $1,000 per year to assist with tuition, along with the cost of required books and course materials, and state-designated assessments, such as the Praxis test.

What kind of support will participants receive?

- 1:1 mentoring will be provided by a local primary mentor in your district until the semester of student teaching at which time a cooperating teacher will be assigned by the university.
- Secondary mentoring will be provided remotely and assigned by the university.

How does someone apply?

- An application is only made available if it is determined that funding is available to support an additional cohort. The Cohort 5 application was live late October 2026 through November 10, 2026.
- The application requests background information, post-secondary credits, character and fitness questions (information needed when applying for a teaching certificate), and the name of an assigned primary mentor approved by the accredited district (if known).

What are the accredited school system's responsibilities?

- The district must complete the statement of assurance and paraprofessional recommendation upon receipt.
- The district should provide information to interested employees of the district.
- The district must include the board president or administrative signature on the recommendation.
- The district must provide a local primary mentor who is a certified teacher for the apprentice, if the apprentice is selected. Specific guidance on criteria to select the primary information is provided to the district.
- The district will be responsible for a financial payment of up to $1,000 per year per participant enrolled in the program to support the primary mentor's work up to the point of student teaching. During student teaching, a cooperating teacher is assigned in conjunction with the district and university. The cooperating teacher may receive a payment from the university.
- The district will submit the mentoring log documenting 10 hours and proof of payment to the primary mentor to SD Department of Education as directed in the grant agreement.
- The district must provide a laptop or similar technology (if needed) to the apprentice.
- The apprentice will continue to serve as a paraprofessional paid by the district until the applicant's transition to student teaching status. During student teaching, the applicant will no longer serve as a paraprofessional but will continue to be paid at a district determined rate throughout their student teaching period. It was not anticipated that the para-apprentice would lose any benefits they had been receiving during this time.
- The South Dakota Teacher Apprenticeship Pathway is a registered apprenticeship with the US Department of Labor. Federally, the para-apprentices are required to receive pay and benefits during the apprenticeship. Local control references the amount the para-apprentice is paid, not if the para-apprentices would be paid during the student teaching experience.
- The district is not obligated to hire the para-apprentice as a certified teacher.
- The district is not obligated to retain an individual's para position following student teaching. Unless paraprofessionals are given specific rights by their local school board, the paraprofessional is an at-will employee. Therefore, it is strictly a local decision on how a district handles the para position following student teaching and the completion of SD TAP.