APPRENTICESHIPNC

# K - 12 Teaching Apprenticeships Guide



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# Overview

North Carolina's students deserve the highest quality education we can provide. Achieving this goal starts with ensuring they have access to exceptional teachers. Registered apprenticeship provides a proven pathway to develop and retain talented educators—turning aspiration into action!

In this guide, you'll find practical steps for designing and launching a registered teaching apprenticeship tailored to your community's needs.



# What is Registered Apprenticeship?

A registered apprenticeship is an employer-led training program that culminates in a nationally recognized certificate of occupational mastery, or **journeyworker certificate**. For aspiring teachers, this credential confirms they have acquired the full range of pedagogical skills needed to lead a classroom with competence and confidence.

Teaching apprenticeships are built on **four foundational elements**:

### 1) A USDOL- Recognized Apprenticeable Occupation

The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) has defined skill standards for more than 1,200 occupations. **Since 2022**, "K-12 Teacher" has been designated nationally as an apprenticeable occupation. Other related roles include:

- Lead Teacher
- Paraeducator
- K-12 Prinicipal
- Elementary School Teacher



### 2) Structured On-the-Job Learning with a Mentor

From the start of the program, apprentices are provided with a clear outline of the skills they must master. **Under the supervision of an experienced mentor/lead teacher**, they receive hands-on training and regular performance evaluations to ensure steady progress and skill development.

Unlike traditional new teacher–mentor relationships, registered apprenticeships begin with **a clearly defined roadmap of skills**. From day one, both the apprentice and mentor know exactly which competencies must be introduced and asssessed. This plan is informed by national best practices and customized to meet the specific instructional needs of each school or district.



### 3) Related Instruction - Blending Theory with Practice

Unlike traditional teacher preparation programs—where students spend most of their time in academic settings—registered teaching apprenticeships prioritize hands-on experience. Apprentice teachers spend the majority of their time in real classrooms, supporting lead teachers and gradually taking on instructional responsibilities.

At the same time, apprentices receive structured related instruction through coursework, delivered either online or in-person. Depending on the program design, **apprentices may earn either an associate's or bachelor's degree** while completing their apprenticeship—making it a powerful pathway to both certification and a college credential.



### 4) Progressive Wages - Earn While You Learn!

Teaching apprenticeships are paid positions. Apprentices begin with a starting wage that is lower than a licensed entry-level teacher salary. As they gain skills and demonstrate competency, **their wages increase progressively** throughout the program.

Upon completion, apprentices earn the full entry-level teacher salary. While teaching apprenticeships are new, the long-term financial benefits for registered apprentices are clear: *"Nine years after completing a program, apprentices earned about $6,000 more per year than demographically similar candidates who did not participate in an apprenticeship"* (BEST NC).

| Traditional, Educator Preparation Program (EPP) Approach | The Registered Apprenticeship Approach |
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| The majority of an apprentice's time is **spent in an educator preparation program**, sometimes with a semester-long residency in the classroom. | The majority of an apprentice's time is **spent in the classroom**, supplemented by related instruction at a university or community college. |
| The student receives **no pay** for their residency. | The apprentice is **paid and receives benefits**. |
| School districts play **a consumer role**, having little input on the way future teachers are being trained. | School districts play **a critical role** in training new teachers to fill vacancies. |

# 3 Benefits of Teaching Apprenticeships

Here are three reasons to consider teaching apprenticeships:



### Reduced Teacher Attrition

Teacher attrition is a growing concern in North Carolina. According to BEST NC, in the 2023–2024 school year, 14.4% of teachers left the profession. **This turnover is costly—between $10,000 and $20,000 per teacher.** With the rising number of vacancies, it's critical to hire candidates who will stay. A USDOL survey found **81% of employers say apprenticeships reduce turnover**, highlighting the ability of apprenticeships to retain educators.



### Better Prepared Teachers

A growing trend in North Carolina is placing inexperienced teachers in classrooms under an emergency or Permit to Teach license. **41% of new teachers lack formal preparation or in-class experience**. Apprenticeships offer a solution by **providing classroom experience, mentorship, and targeted coursework**. They help schools fill vacancies, retain effective teachers, and better prepare educators to boost student achievement from day one.



### A Clear Pathway to Lead Teaching

Many teacher assistants already have valuable school experience and are eager to become certified teachers—if given a clear pathway. Teaching apprenticeship is the answer! It **provides "a pathway to advancement for paraprofessionals and instructional aides"** (Registered Teacher Apprentice Manual, p. 9). These high-potential candidates receive financial, educational, and on-the-job support to transition into lead teaching roles.

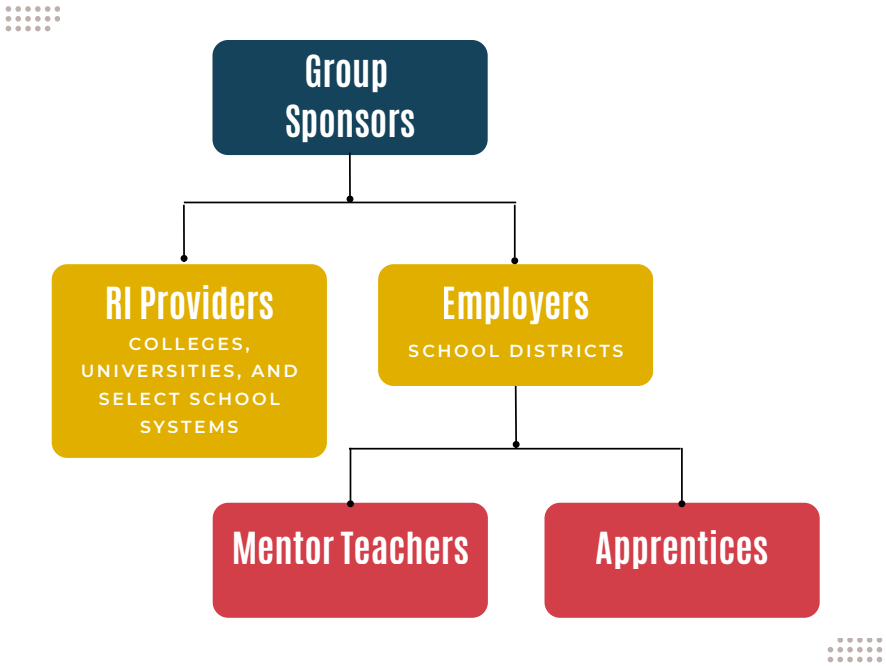
In North Carolina, an apprentice's entry-level experience determines their specific teaching pathway. Each pathway below offers **progressive pay under the guidance of an experienced mentor teacher** and results in the teacher apprentice being licensed and fully capable to become a teacher of record:

| Entry Level | Initial Related Instruction |
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| High school student | Dual enrollment or CTE courses |
| College students or adults *without* a bachelor's degree | Teacher preparation coursework in a community college; EPP coursework in a bachelor's program |
| Adults with a bachelor's degree | EPP coursework in a master's program *or* earning a post-baccalaureate Elementary Education certificate |

# The Teaching Apprenticeship Ecosystem

In the state of North Carolina, ApprenticeshipNC is the state apprenticeship agency working with the NC Department of Public Instruction (NC DPI), school districts, colleges and universities, and other community partners (e.g. local workforce development boards) to better equip teachers to fill school vacancies. The goal of teaching apprenticeship goes beyond helping apprentices earn their teaching certification (renewable every five years in North Carolina) - it is to **ensure all students have access to *effective, well-prepared* teachers.**

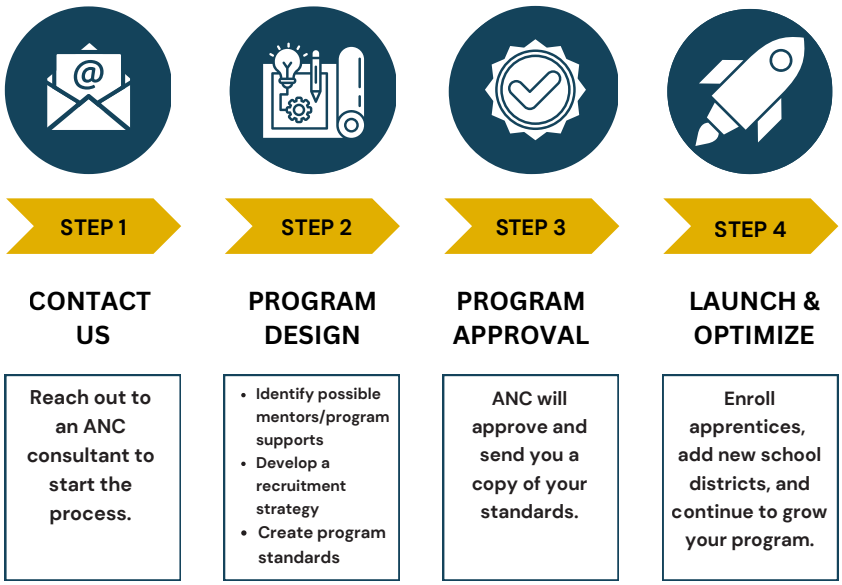
Here are the roles that are involved in administering teaching apprenticeship programs:




| Sponsor Responsibilities<br>Planning and Administration | Employer Responsibilities<br>Employment and Supervision |
|---|---|
| 1. Connect employers with related instruction providers<br>2. **Enroll apprentices** in a program<br>3. Complete and cancel an apprentice's participation in a program<br>4. **Determine competencies (skills to master)** for the occupation<br>5. Determine program and candidate requirements | 1. Fund the program<br>2. **Hire and onboard new apprentices**<br>3. Determine and follow its own wage rate<br>4. **Develop a plan for mentor teachers** to assess and grow apprentices<br>5. Communicate any new apprentice hires -or changes to an apprentice's participation - to the sponsor<br>6. **Track each apprentice's on-the-job learning and related instruction hours** |

# Starting a Program

There are four steps to starting a new teaching apprenticeship program with ApprenticeshipNC (ANC):




# FAQ

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| Why hire an apprentice instead of an emergency licensed teacher? | While apprentices may not offer immediate cost savings under a fixed headcount, they provide long-term value. Apprenticeship programs have a **90% retention rate** up to five years post-completion, leading to greater team stability and continuity for students. Programs like NC's Teacher Apprentice Grant also offer financial support for hiring local talent. |
| Will the apprentice be the teacher of record? | **No – apprentices should always work under a mentor teacher** who leads the classroom. However, the apprentice will actively contribute to lesson planning and delivery, gaining hands-on experience with a mentor's guidance. |
| Can a district use the registered apprenticeship model to train paraeducators? | Yes! Sponsors can consider launching **a Paraeducator apprenticeship**. It offers professional development and recognition for paraprofessionals, encouraging future interest in teaching roles through a supportive, structured pathway. They are already your employees; credit them for the work they are doing! |
| Can an apprentice serve as an emergency substitute? | This is **not recommended**, as it disrupts their time with their mentor teacher. However, if their mentor is substituting, the apprentice may assist alongside them. |

# FAQ (continued)

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| What happens if an employer needs to let an apprentice go? | North Carolina's At-Will employment allows districts to terminate apprentices at their discretion. Just **notify ApprenticeshipNC within 45 days** of this occuring.<br><br>**Note:** Apprentices typically have more than a 70% completion rate! |
| Are standard teacher evaluations required for apprentices? | This depends on the sponsor. If formal evaluations are required for apprentices, they should be **conducted by administrators**—not mentor teachers. Mentors should focus on informal feedback with minimal paperwork (those mentor teachers will thank you for this!). |

# Resources

Here are our recommended resources to learn more about the *why* and *how* of teaching apprenticeships:

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| "Teacher Apprenticeship in North Carolina: Exploring In-Classroom Preparation for Teachers" / BEST NC | *This 2025 policy brief from BEST NC – supported by data from ApprenticeshipNC, school districts, NC DPI, and myFutureNC, highlights the urgent need for state lawmakers to support registered teaching apprenticeship to address current teacher turnover trends.* |
| "Registered Teacher Apprentice Manual" from the Kansas State DOE | *This manual outlines Kansas's four-year, competency-based registered teaching apprenticeship. It highlights the state's unique model, offering guidance for employers on related instruction, wages, and candidate selection.* |
| "Apprenticeships Are the New Frontier of Teacher Preparation" by Madeline Will, EducationWeek | *This is helpful 2022 article explains the movement toward teaching apprenticeships.* |
| "K-12 Principal Registered Apprenticeship Playbook" by North Dakota DPI and National Center for Grow Your Own | *Although this guide is intended primarily for training principal apprentices, there are a handful of ideas that could be applied to any educational apprentice program's design. The sponsor vs. employer responsibilities section is also beneficial reading.* |
| ApprenticeshipNC – Resources for Employers | *Take a look at our website's Resources for Employers page, which includes guides, policy docs, and SOPs for current and prospective employers.* |