

March 3, 2025

Subject: Support for Forward Together Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Cohorts

Dear Minnesota State Legislators,

We are contacting you on behalf of a cohort of school districts across the state in support of HF 1538, to provide funding for our Forward Together Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Cohort (TRAC) for K-12 ASD/EBD Special Education Licensure. This funding supports a registered teacher apprenticeship model—an innovative, structured pathway modeled after trade apprenticeships. The time-tested approach used in the skilled trades ensures registered teacher apprentices receive high-quality, job-embedded preparation while earning a wage and progressing toward full licensure.

In November 2021, the United States Department of Labor established K-12 teaching as an “apprenticeable” occupation. In response to this development, the Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry (DOLI) commenced work establishing registered apprenticeship programs for teachers in Minnesota, allowing individuals to become licensed teachers by working alongside an experienced teacher and receiving compensation while engaged as an apprentice teacher.

There are requirements that must be met through DOLI to be considered a teacher registered apprenticeship program. ISD 138, as the approved program sponsor through DOLI, is leading the Fall 2025 cohort for K-12 ASD/EBD dual-licensure cohort in partnership with Minnesota State University, Mankato. Our cohort is ready to launch this fall 2025.

The Forward Together TRAC is a job-embedded, registered apprenticeship model that blends theory and practice to ensure that teacher candidates are well-prepared, highly effective, and thrive in the profession. This program capitalizes on the expertise of current special education teachers, reducing barriers and increasing access for individuals within our communities to become licensed educators. This registered teacher apprenticeship program directly addresses the critical special education teacher shortage in small and mid-sized districts, which often lack the resources to compete for licensed teachers.

We are seeking an appropriation of \$1.655 million in both FY 2026 and FY 2027 to support our cohort of school districts across the state that are partnering in registered teacher apprenticeship programs, providing:

- Stipends to 35 registered teacher apprentices to offset costs of tuition and fees
- Direct program costs, wage progression, and program support for registered apprentices
- Stipends for journey teachers, ensuring continued mentorship and co-teaching support
- 5 teacher registered apprenticeship opportunities for additional districts to join this cohort.

The Forward Together registered apprenticeship cohort has already demonstrated a 96% retention rate in cohort one, underscoring its nimble, solution-focused, and sustainable approach. The two-year Associate's to Bachelor's degree pathway removes financial and logistical barriers, making it possible for dedicated paraprofessionals and community members to transition into teaching roles in an earn-while-you-learn model. With funding, this registered teacher apprenticeship model can continue with cohort two, expanding to address Minnesota's long-term teacher shortage.

We strongly urge your support for this cohort of 35 registered teachers to ensure students with Autism Spectrum Disorder and Emotional Behavior Disorder—receive the high-quality education they deserve.

In addition to special education, Minnesota continues to face critical teacher shortages in math, career and technical education (CTE), and computer science. To proactively address these needs, ISD 138 has been working to develop new teacher registered apprenticeship cohorts (TRACs) in these high-demand licensure areas. While these pathways are still in development, we propose the bill to also include \$50,000 to support ISD 138's ongoing work as a teacher registered apprenticeship sponsor, ensuring that these innovative, job-embedded training models can be expanded across the state. By investing in the continued development of these teacher registered apprenticeship opportunities, Minnesota is laying the foundation for a sustainable teacher workforce that can meet the needs of independent school districts for years to come.

Thank you for your time and commitment to Minnesota's schools. Teacher registered apprenticeships represent a promising practice that Minnesota's independent school districts can replicate statewide, providing a sustainable pipeline of highly skilled teachers. We welcome the opportunity to discuss this further and appreciate your leadership in supporting innovative, results-driven solutions to our teacher shortage.

We appreciate the leadership of bill authors: Mueller, Rymer, Bennett, Hill, Clardy, Bakeberg, Olson and Nadeau. ISD 138 Superintendent Sara Paul is our lead on behalf of our cohort of school districts if you would like to contact her with questions. She can be reached at spaul@isd138.org or 651-338-1302.

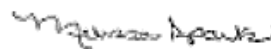
Sincerely,



Sara Paul
North Branch Area
Public Schools



Robert Routh
St. Charles Public Schools



Melissa Sparks
Henning School District



Brian Dietz
Chisago Lakes School District



Jill Peterson
Hastings Public Schools



Cindy Stolp
Pine City Public Schools

Jason Senne
Princeton Public Schools

Mary Morem
Houston Public Schools

Sarah Riebe
Albert Lea Area Schools

Sarah McGuire
Cannon Valley Special
Education Cooperative

Sarah Kloeckl
St. Croix Education

Chris Picha
Owatonna Public Schools

UMN NXT GEN Teach Apprenticeship

(Draft) An innovative system-wide initiative to enhance and expand teacher preparation licensure programs in K-12 Special Education (ABS and ECSE) across the state of Minnesota in service of our partner districts.



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What is "NXT GEN Teach Apprenticeship"?

NXT GEN Teach apprenticeship is a program that provides a **paid pathway for paraprofessionals with an AA degree** to earn their **bachelor's degree** and **Tier 3 Teaching Licensure in ABS or ECSE** while participating in **job embedded training** with a district partner alongside a skilled journey worker (cooperating teacher) and receive related technical service (coursework) online by the University of Minnesota.

Mission of NXT GEN Teach Apprenticeship:

Our mission is to empower aspiring educators by providing an accessible and innovative pathway to special education licensure. Through strategic partnerships within our community, we create dynamic learning experiences that cultivate dedicated, passionate, and skilled teachers. We are fiercely committed to fostering diversity within Minnesota's teaching profession, reflecting the varied identities of the students we serve, and addressing the unique challenges faced by our communities.

The NXT GEN Teach Partner District Benefits and Expectations:

- Direct involvement in program design
- District Serving teacher preparation program
- Clear Pathway for districts to recruit, hire and grow paraprofessionals
- Accessible and affordable Pathway for Paraprofessionals to become fully licensed teachers
- Develop more effective Tier 3 teachers in Special Education
- Teachers that accurately reflect your student population
- Thrive Team (Recruiter, Advisor, Navigator and Program Director) provided to districts

The NXT GEN Teach Apprentice Benefits and Expectations:

- Two year journey
- Year long "student teaching"
- Paid position from district partner
- Applied Behavior Analysis and Equitable Classroom course designed to support classroom behavior
- Continuous Improvement efforts on Mental Health and Supporting LGBTQIA+ students and teachers
- Grant/scholarship coordination that supports significant tuition reduction
- Online Related Technical Services (coursework from UMN)
- Due Process instruction and support from trained special education teachers
- Tier 3 License in ABS or ECSE upon program completion
- A Program Recruiter and Grant Guru to support candidates through the admissions process
- An Academic Advisor to meet individual academic and well-being needs of our candidates
- A Program Navigator to provide Individualized support during field experiences by connecting courses to on the job training
- Retention Supervisor provided upon successful program completion
- Cohort Model - Estimated 20 per apprentice per year

The NXT GEN Teach Journey Worker Benefits and Expectations:

- A trained educator working alongside the candidate for the entire school year
- \$4,000 stipend

- Journey Worker training and coaching support from UMN staff
- Direct involvement in growing the next generation of teachers for your school community

Benefits of an Apprenticeship Pathway:

School Districts:	Apprentices (paraprofessionals):	Journey Workers:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Recruit and retain staff ★ Grow staff invested and familiar with their schools ★ Teachers trained by exemplary Journey Workers who excel in classroom management and student relationships ★ Sub for when classroom teacher is absent ★ Release paperwork time for classroom teacher ★ Build teachers that work with the climate and culture of your building and system ★ Paid Evaluation System in place ★ Paid PD 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Pathway to teaching career while still working ★ Maintain income and benefits ★ Trained Licensed teacher ready to be the classroom teacher ★ Support on financial guidance to train as a teacher and navigating apprenticeship programs/higher education. ★ Yearlong experience ★ Computer provided ★ Gradual Release of assumed responsibility timeline 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ A second educator in the classroom for the entire year ★ \$4K Stipend provided* ★ Co-teaching model with extra support for classrooms and students. ★ University support ★ Training to be able to coach ★ Gradual release of assumed responsibility timeline
Unions (Paraprofessional and Teacher):		Families and Students:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Increased membership ★ Program will be a hiring point in the community ★ Addressing staff and workload shortages ★ Hire own district staff and not vendors or positions going unfilled. ★ Apprentices hired with a full year of district experience/experienced co-workers ★ Collaborative-teaching model. Extra support in the classroom during the apprenticeship year. 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Teachers who represent the communities of our students ★ Provide a pathway for graduates of our high schools and community members to a meaningful career ★ Pathway and support to become a teacher ★ Provide navigation support for becoming a teacher (financial opportunities, FAFSA, etc.

Roles and Responsibilities in an Apprenticeship Pathway:

Role of University:	Role of Districts:	Role of Candidates:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Recruit ★ Provide financial support ★ Train to be Tier 3 teacher ★ Retain: Provide Induction Support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Recruit-both journeyworkers and apprentices ★ Hire, Support and Retain ★ Work with unions to provide clarity and MOUs as appropriate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ★ Full Time Employee ★ Full Time Student ★ Obtain a Tier 3 license ★ Work in District for 3 - 5 years upon completion

For more information contact: Danaya Franke dfranke@umn.edu

*Pending Approval from PELSB and DLI.