



NEWS RELEASE

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Nebraska Department of Education Launches Innovative Teacher Apprenticeship Program

In a significant stride toward addressing the teacher shortage crisis in the state, the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) announces the Nebraska Teacher Apprenticeship Program. This groundbreaking initiative seeks to bolster the recruitment and training of educators across Nebraska through an apprenticeship model, following the enactment of LB705 in 2023.

The program is a visionary move by the Nebraska legislature, earmarking \$1 million towards developing a robust mechanism for preparing future educators. The State Board ratified a partnership in August with the National Center for Grow Your Own (NCGYO), utilizing federal Title II set-aside funds. NCGYO's involvement has been pivotal, offering expert consultation to NDE and spearheading technical assistance and informational sessions for prospective educator preparation provider and district pairings in Nebraska.

Unlike other para to teacher programs, teacher apprenticeships capitalize on hands-on training, allowing apprentices to work alongside their supervising teachers directly within the classroom. At the same time, apprentices benefit from education and training provided by partnering higher education institutions, while also being employed by the district.

The selection process for these partnerships focused on entities previously involved in the pandemic relief-funded Educator Shortage Initiative, particularly those with a track record of transitioning paraprofessionals into teachers. Highlighted partnerships include:

- Midland University and Omaha Westside's "Growing Our Own Educator Assistant (EA) to Teacher Ladder Program,"
- University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Lincoln Public Schools' initiative for "Building the Special Education Teacher Pipeline,"
- Chadron State College's "Panhandle Para to Teacher Academy including North Platte Public Schools."

These collaborative projects exemplify the program's commitment to innovative and sustainable solutions for the statewide education sector's challenges.

"The Nebraska Teacher Apprenticeship Program is a game-changer," said Nebraska Commissioner of Education Brian Maher. "By fostering strong partnerships between education providers and districts, we're not just addressing the immediate need for more teachers; we're investing in a future where every Nebraska child has access to highly qualified educators committed to their success."

"Congratulations to these amazing paraeducators. They have the determination and the skills to become fabulous teacher,"

said LPS Superintendent Dr. Paul Gausman. “This partnership will allow us to support them, and that will allow them to help students in every way possible. We’re investing in these individuals, but we’re also investing in our kids. I’m really proud of them and what they’re doing at LPS to help kids.”

“UNL is excited to partner with Lincoln Public Schools in a new pathway that will allow paraeducators to become special education teachers, said Sue Kemp from UNL. “There are many barriers in place that prevent para’s from pursuing an endorsement in special education and the apprenticeship program through the Department of Labor removes these barriers. By creating this new pathway we anticipate an increase the number of highly qualified special education in the state of Nebraska.”

“Westside Community Schools is proud to have been selected to participate in the Nebraska Teacher Apprenticeship Program,” said Assistant Superintendent Dr. Andrea Haynes. “WCS has a long tradition of leading the way in innovative initiatives in education. As we continue our partnership with Midland University through our “Growing our Own ~ Educational Assistant to Teacher Ladder Program”, we are dedicated to cultivating a robust pipeline of exceptionally skilled educators for our classrooms. We appreciate the support and leadership of the Nebraska Department of Education and Commissioner Maher.”

“Midland University is honored to be invited by Westside Community Schools to collaborate through the “Growing Our Own ~ Educational Assistant to Teacher Career Ladder Program,” said Dr. Mary Ritzdorf, Dean of the Walker School of Education at Midland University. “Participating together with WCS in the Nebraska Teacher Apprenticeship Program is an example of how Midland University strives to equip students and future teachers with the skills necessary to succeed in their career by providing a dynamic, relevant, and innovative learning experience. We are grateful for this opportunity to continue our work with Westside Community Schools.”

“North Platte Public schools is extremely fortunate to partner with Chadron State College for the teacher apprenticeship program,” said North Platte Public Schools Superintendent Todd Rhodes. “We have exceptional paraprofessionals in our district and this program allows for our paraprofessionals to remain employed in the district and work to complete the necessary course work through Chadron State College. The program is allowing North Platte Public schools to meet the teacher shortage head-on by growing our own.”

“I am proud to be a part of the innovative and formative programming efforts we are currently witnessing within our Nebraska teacher education community; efforts that are working to further meet our teacher shortage needs,” said Professor of Education Dr. Don King from Chadron State University. “The NDE leadership too, have taken a lead role by providing key funding opportunities in support of “growing our own” teacher programs. The NDE Teacher Education Apprenticeship Partnership Program initiative is a provocative example of how we are now thinking differently about teacher education program recruitment.”

This ambitious program represents a critical step forward in ensuring equitable, quality education for all students in Nebraska, solidifying the state’s commitment to excellence and innovation in education.

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