

Building Futures: Strengthening the Educator Workforce Through Teacher Apprenticeships



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

[High-quality](#) and representative educators are essential for student success, yet [systemic barriers](#) continue to limit access to strong teacher preparation programs — particularly for candidates from low-income backgrounds and candidates of color — resulting in far too many students [lacking access](#) to the exceptional educators they deserve.^{1,2,3,4} This inequitable access not only deprives today's students of rich perspectives that are crucial for their growth and success, but it also reflects the urgent need to cultivate the representative talent needed to meet the demands of the nation's teacher workforce.

Investing in high-quality educator pathways is a commitment to providing all students with skilled teachers who are well-prepared and deeply connected to their communities. To achieve this, passionate individuals of all backgrounds must have the opportunity to access seamless, affordable, and flexible pathways that effectively prepare them to succeed and stay in the profession. Therein lies the promise of registered teacher apprenticeship programs (RTAPs).

Our Findings

Since their inception in 2022, RTAPs have been established in [over 45 states and territories](#), bolstered by support from the Biden administration's U.S. Departments of Education and Labor and the development of [national program standards](#) by the Pathways Alliance.^{5,6} While momentum continues to build, research on the experiences of teacher apprentices — especially those from under-represented backgrounds — has been limited. To address this gap, EdTrust and the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance (TECA) conducted a series of interviews with 32 apprentices of color in Tennessee and Texas.

Participants reflected on their introduction to the program, highlighted the value and challenges of their job-embedded apprenticeship, shared insights about mentorship, underscored the critical role of financial supports, and called for clearer, more consistent program communication. Through these conversations, we learned the following:

- Participants primarily learned about their program through word-of-mouth, typically from a close teacher or school leader, and wished there were more avenues for other aspiring educators to discover teacher apprenticeship opportunities.

- Apprentices most valued their time working with students in classroom settings, and many were confident their program was preparing them to be effective educators.
- Participants wanted more intentional opportunities to connect with peer apprentices.
- The mentorship component was important to participants — having mentors of color was especially valuable for apprentices of color.
- Apprentices believed that their program offered a better return on investment compared to other available pathways which were either financially inaccessible or seemingly low-quality, yet many still faced economic hardships due to the low salaries of the profession.
- Apprentices desired more clarity in communication from program leaders, especially around financial obligations.

Program Recommendations

Alongside these findings are a series of recommendations informed directly by the apprentices' perspectives to help program leaders enhance the apprenticeship experience. Some of these recommendations include:

- Invest in recruitment through advising, outreach events, and peer ambassadors
- Offer flexible timelines for program completion and robust supports to meet the unique needs of adult learners
- Ensure apprentices are consistently placed with high-quality, trained, and representative mentors
- Maximize the time apprentices spend with mentor-teachers and limit assignments that force them to teach alone in classroom settings during their apprenticeship
- Provide clear, regular, and transparent communication around program costs, salaries, and expectations
- Invest in structured cohort models to foster community and retention



State-Level Policy Considerations

There is much to learn about the effectiveness of RTAPs in preparing a high-quality and diverse teacher workforce. Still, it is clear from our interviews that many apprentices deem these programs as crucial on-ramps into the teaching profession by offering low-cost, paid, and high-quality training opportunities. As teacher apprenticeship programs continue to grow, it is imperative that state policymakers advance policies that sustain and scale high-quality programs and practices. The following state-level policy considerations were informed by this report's findings, EdTrust and TECA's work with educators across the country, findings and recommendations produced by other leading organizations in this space, and insights gathered while producing our RTAP [50-state scan](#).⁷

- Identify and actualize sustainable strategies to fund and scale high-quality teacher apprenticeship models.
- Prioritize supports for transfer students and paraprofessionals by targeting financial aid, streamlining credit transfer policies, or waiving fees for candidates forced to retake courses.
- Establish clear cross-agency alignment on key teacher apprenticeship terms, policies, and procedures.
- Collect and report data — disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and income status — to evaluate program impact and target investments equitably.

Introduction

Teachers have long been recognized as [the most important in-school factor](#) for student success, with high-quality educators consistently shown to [strengthen academic achievement](#) and improve student learning outcomes.^{8,9} The impact of good teachers extends beyond just test scores, helping drive students to attain [critical long-term achievements](#) such as high school completion, college enrollment, and higher future earning potential.¹⁰ And still, despite the positive effects of high-quality educators being so well-known, students of color and students from low-income backgrounds are [consistently less likely](#) to have access to these crucial supports than their white and higher-income peers.^{11,12,13}

Additionally, America's teacher workforce is less racially and ethnically diverse than the student population. Studies show that teachers of color [positively benefit all students](#), but especially students of color, by [reducing suspension rates](#) and increasing the likelihood of graduating high school, attending college, and obtaining a [post-secondary degree](#) or credential.^{14,15,16} Yet, the proportion of teachers of color in the workforce continues to lag far behind the share of students of color across the country — while more than half of U.S. public school students are students of color, only about [20% of teachers share similar racial and ethnic backgrounds](#).¹⁷ As a result of these gaps, many students attend schools [without a single teacher of color](#) — an absence that can be detrimental to a student's academic career.¹⁸

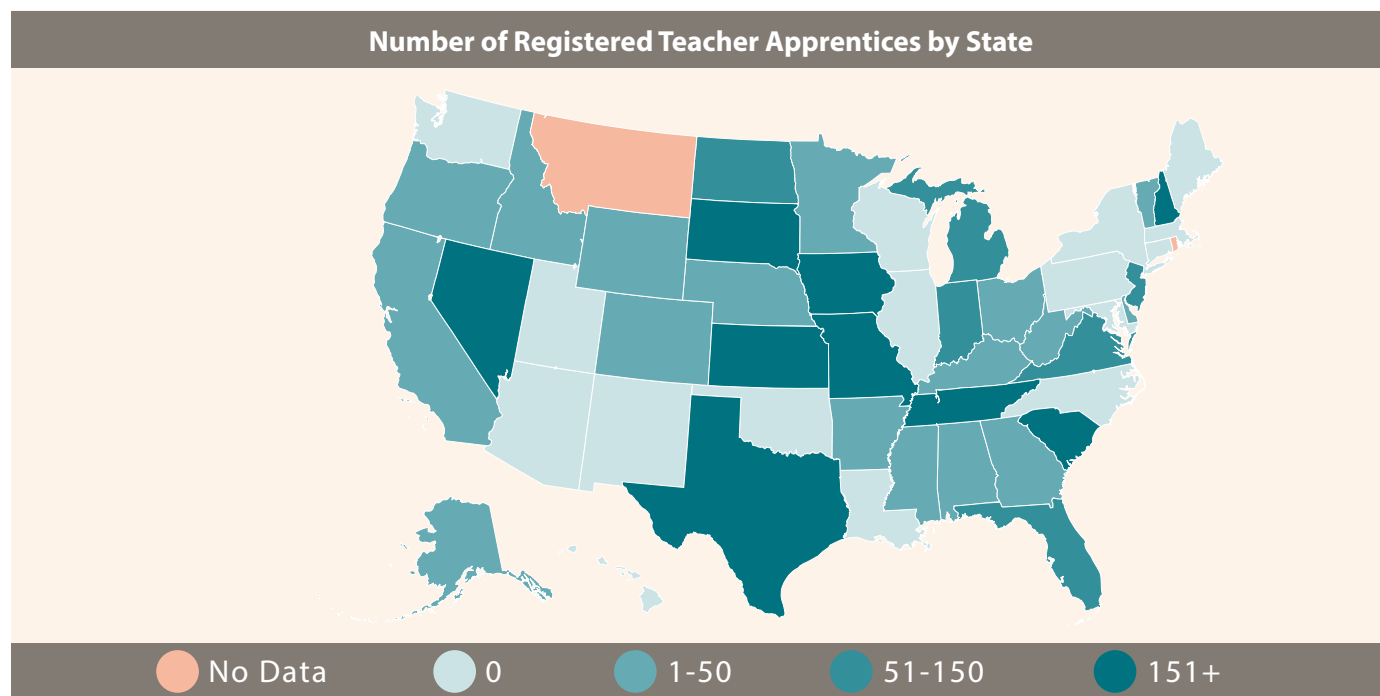
Inequitable access to representative and high-quality educators not only deprives today's students of rich perspectives that are crucial for their growth and success, but it also reflects the [urgent need](#) to cultivate the diverse talent needed to meet the demands of the nation's teacher workforce.¹⁹ Investing in high-quality educator pathways serves a crucial purpose beyond addressing classroom shortages — it is a commitment to providing all students with educators who are skilled, well-prepared, and deeply connected to their communities. To achieve this, passionate individuals of all backgrounds must be able to access seamless, affordable, and flexible pathways that effectively

prepare them to succeed and stay in the profession. Therein lies the promise of registered teacher apprenticeship programs (RTAPs).

RTAPs are a relatively new form of educator preparation that first arose out of [Tennessee](#) and [New York](#) in early 2022.^{20,21} During this time, the U.S. Department of Labor identified teaching as an apprenticesable trade, enabling qualified programs to register with the Office of Apprenticeship or their respective state apprenticeship agency. Over the span of three years, RTAPs have emerged in [over 45 states](#) and Washington D.C., Puerto Rico, and the U.S. Virgin Islands.²² Furthermore, the U.S. Departments of Education and Labor have flagged teacher apprenticeship models as a promising practice to address teacher shortages, supporting the development of the [National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards for K-12 Teacher Apprenticeships](#) by the Pathways Alliance (NGS).²³

Passionate individuals of all backgrounds must be able to access seamless, affordable, and flexible pathways that effectively prepare them to succeed and stay in the profession. Therein lies the promise of registered teacher apprenticeship programs (RTAPs).

Figure 1: Number of Registered Teacher Apprentices by State (May 2025)



Source: U.S. Department of Labor Apprentices by State Dashboard.²⁴

Note: According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Apprentices by State Dashboard, there were 3,832 active teacher apprentices in registered teacher apprenticeship programs nationwide on January 31, 2025, 2,299 when filtering for the educational services industry; and 1,533 when filtering for the public administration industry.

What is a Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program?

[Registered apprenticeship programs](#) are used across various industries, from advanced manufacturing, agriculture, and hospitality to K-12 teachers, tutors, and principals.²⁵ [According to the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship](#), registered apprenticeships are “an industry-driven, high-quality career pathway where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, receive progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally-recognized credential.”²⁶ Regardless of the industry, registered apprenticeship programs must contain the following core components:

- Apprentices are in paid positions and earn progressively increasing wages.
- Programs provide at least [2,000 hours](#) of structured on-the-job training, which must contain instruction from an experienced journeyworker (i.e., mentor).^{27,28}
- Apprentices receive supplemental classroom education based on the industry's unique training needs.
- Programs are designed to reflect the communities in which they operate through strong non-discrimination, anti-harassment, and recruitment practices.
- Apprentices earn a portable, nationally recognized credential within their industry.²⁹

Registered teacher apprenticeship programs (RTAPs) are a type of registered apprenticeship recognized by the U.S. Department of Labor and must contain the above features. Differences in the education industry, however, necessitate that RTAPs tailor programming around teacher certification and preparation requirements. To help districts, states, and EPP partnerships build high-quality programs that satisfy teacher preparation requirements, the Pathways Alliance released the [National Guidelines for Apprenticeship Standards for K-12 Teacher Apprenticeships](#), a model of teacher apprenticeship approved and published by the U.S. Department of Labor.³⁰ These standards outline several essential elements of high-quality teacher apprenticeship programs:

- Teacher apprenticeships should be competency-based, ideally using the [InTASC standards](#), ensuring that program completion depends on mastery of research-based and evidence-backed competencies deemed crucial for effective educators.³¹
- Apprentices complete at least one academic year of on-the-job learning under a mentor-teacher. The apprentice to mentor ratio should not exceed two apprentices for every mentor.
- Apprentices complete at least 144 total hours of related technical instruction from their educator preparation program.
- Apprentices are paid a progressively increasing wage schedule. The entry wage must be equivalent to, or higher than, the pay rate for paraprofessional staff in the employing district or school.
- Program sponsors should establish a plan to ensure that apprentices reflect local population demographics.
- Apprentices may assume increasing levels of responsibility and autonomy but should at no point serve as the teacher of record.
- The apprenticeship results in the completion of all requirements necessary for full state teacher certification or licensure.
- While these national guidelines provide a standardized template, they are designed to be adaptable. States and local programs can customize the NGS to align with specific state requirements and local contextual needs.

In practice, high-quality RTAPs should remove financial and structural barriers often associated with ensuring accessible pathways into the profession. This includes offering low- to zero-cost pathways for candidates and covering tuition, books and materials, certification and licensure exams, and any other miscellaneous costs that may arise. According to the Pathways Alliance, the overarching goals of these national guidelines for K-12 teacher apprenticeships are to make the teaching profession more accessible and affordable through an “earn and learn” model, attract a more diverse pool of candidates into teaching, and ultimately build a more sustainable, capable, and representative teaching workforce nationwide.

Figure 2: Comparing Grow Your Own, Teacher Residency, and Registered Teacher Apprenticeships

Elements	GYO	Residency	Apprenticeship
Community-based recruitment	●	◐	◐
Individualized support for candidates	●	◐	◐
Multiple pathways offered (e.g., high school, undergraduate, graduate)	●	◐	◐
Progressive wages	◐	◐	●
Paid work-based learning	◐	●	●
Aligned coursework	◐	●	●
Minimum number of hours/years of work-based learning	◐	●	●
Cohorts	◐	●	
Culminates in a degree	◐	●	◐
Prepares candidates for certification/licensure	◐	●	◐
● = always present ◐ = sometimes present			

Source: *New America*, [What’s the Difference Between Grow Your Own, Teacher Residency, and Teacher Registered Apprenticeship?](#)²

RTAPs, and teacher apprenticeships more broadly, remove significant financial and structural barriers for aspiring educators by allowing them to earn a salary, train with experienced mentors, and work toward licensure and, when applicable, a degree at little to no cost. These programs, which exist as deep partnerships between districts and educator preparation programs (EPPs), offer customizable, employer-driven pathways that can be utilized to meet local workforce needs. Although teacher apprenticeships vary across programs and states, they are often tailor-made for currently employed, non-teacher school staff (such as paraprofessionals or long-term substitutes) who are looking to advance their careers as educators.

The teacher apprenticeship landscape is fast evolving, and, due to its recent emergence, little research exists on the efficacy of these programs to produce high-quality, well-prepared, and diverse educators. As states continue to build out teacher apprenticeship pathways, it will be crucial to learn from apprentices who have firsthand experience

navigating this new ecosystem. This report does just that — elevates the voices of apprentices of color, utilizing their perspectives to form considerations for programs and policymakers who can enhance teacher apprenticeship programs to better support the development of a high-quality and representative educator workforce.

Methodology

EdTrust and the Tennessee Educators of Color Alliance (TECA) conducted a series of one-on-one and group interviews with 32 apprentices of color, 19 of whom attended programs in Tennessee and 13 of whom attended programs in Texas. All participants were actively in, or had recently graduated from, a teacher apprenticeship program. Of the 32 apprentices interviewed, 23 completed a pre-interview survey that collected demographic information — of those 23 apprentices, 13 identified as Black, six identified as Latino, one identified as Asian, and three identified with multiple racial or ethnic identities. Most survey completers, 19 of 23, were employed as school staff before becoming a teacher apprentice, with 10 entering their program with less than 60 completed college credit hours and the remaining 13 having either an associate or bachelor’s degree. Only two apprentices did not self-identify as coming from a low-income background, with 18 having received federal financial aid, 10 having received state financial aid, six having received public assistance, and 12 having qualified for free or reduced-price school lunch as a K-12 student.

Figure 3: Gender Breakdown of Survey Completers

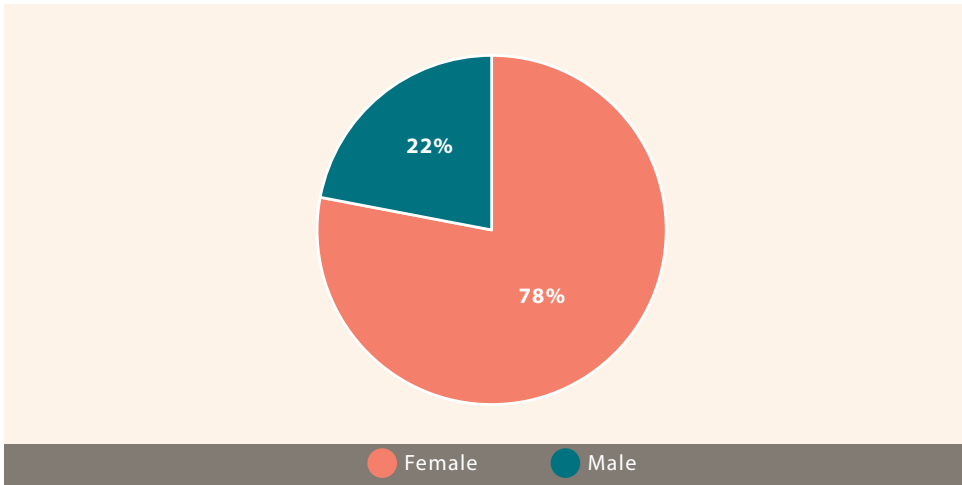
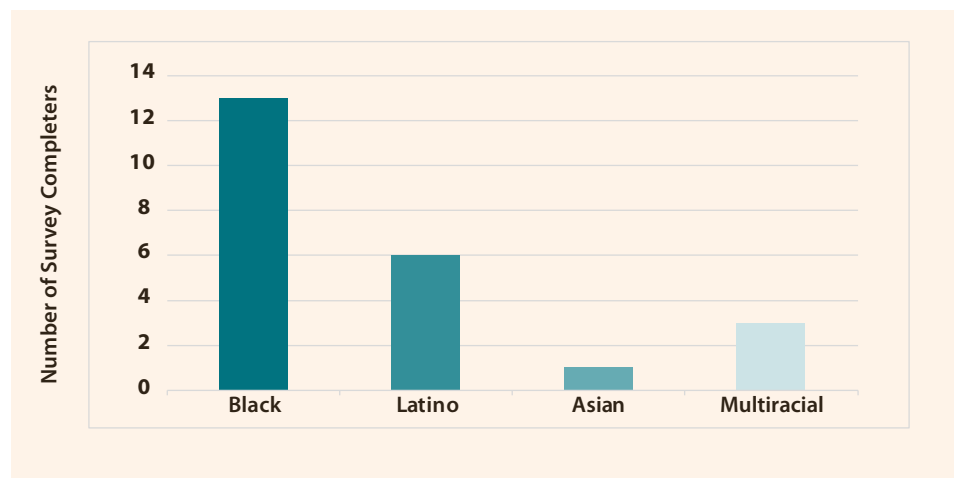
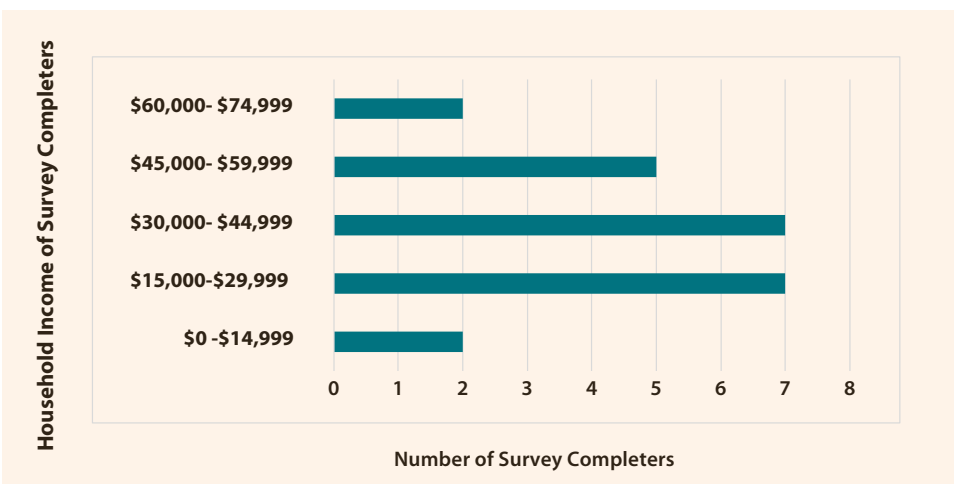


Figure 4: Racial and Ethnic Demographics of Survey Completers



Note: Of the 23 survey completers, 13 identified as Black, six identified as Latino, one identified as Asian, and three identified with multiple racial or ethnic identities.

Figure 5: Approximate Annual Household Income of Survey Completers



Note: Roughly 70% of survey respondents reported an approximate annual household income of \$44,999 or below.

Program components varied across the five school districts and EPPs from where we recruited apprentices. Most, although not all, programs were registered with the U.S. Department of Labor. All programs offered free or low-cost pathways into the teaching profession, paid progressively increasing wages, partnered apprentices with mentor-educators, and culminated in full teacher licensure. The apprentices we spoke to were placed in school settings between four and five days per week, as is common given the job-embedded nature of these programs, while fulfilling necessary and aligned higher education coursework and EPP requirements at night and over the weekends.

Teacher apprenticeship programs typically last between one and three years, largely based on what pathways are offered by the partnering EPP: bachelor's degrees for apprentices who enter with some or no prior college credit, bachelor's degrees for apprentices who enter with an associate's degree, and master's degrees or licensure-only opportunities for apprentices who enter with a bachelor's degree.

While no candidate said this outright, conversations with apprentices left us with the impression that many felt almost lucky to have found this opportunity — they were in the right district at the right time with the right support systems and mentors around them

Apprentices were recruited for listening sessions via emails distributed by EPP and school district administrators. Participants who attended an interview were offered compensation for their time, and they were assured their responses would be anonymous, with comments only attributed to their program's state. Most interviews took place remotely over videoconferencing software, but some were conducted in person. Participants were asked about their experiences navigating their teacher apprenticeship program, including the reasons they were drawn to the program, the types of supports they received, their work-life balance, and recommendations on how teacher apprenticeship programs can better attract and retain candidates from diverse backgrounds. The full list of interview questions can be found in Appendix A. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, then anonymized. Interview data was analyzed using qualitative analysis software, following the general inductive approach to identify and code.³³

RTAP Findings

The following findings reflect the experiences of previous and current apprentices of color in a small number of teacher apprenticeship programs in Texas and Tennessee. Participants reflected on their entry into the program, highlighted the value and challenges of their job-embedded apprenticeship, shared insights about mentorship, underscored the critical role of financial supports, and called for clearer, more consistent program communication. Each of these themes includes recommendations, informed directly by the apprentices' perspectives, aimed at helping program leaders enhance the apprenticeship experience.



Recruitment

Participants primarily learned of their program through word-of-mouth

Most apprentices we interviewed were already working at a school, usually as a paraprofessional with aspirations of becoming a teacher, when a school leader or close colleague encouraged them to look into their district's teacher apprenticeship program. For many, the program was first described as an opportunity to become a teacher without abandoning their current job.

"I chose to attend this program because another principal at another school mentioned it to me. She said, 'You already [work] as a substitute teacher at the adult education building and you [are an] education assistant [for the district], and have been doing it since 2008,' and I had been working as a substitute teacher in adult education for like 15 years. 'Why don't you look into doing this [RTAP]? You seem like you'll be a good candidate for it based on your passion for students and learning.'"

— Apprentice from Tennessee

In conversations with state- and program-level leaders, it was clear this word-of-mouth recruitment strategy was often intentional. Teacher apprenticeship programs, at their very core, are close partnerships between school districts and EPPs, with the employer supplying the apprentices. This means that recruitment strategies are often dependent on a school system's commitment and capacity to host a certain number of candidates. When asked how programs can better attract candidates, however, many participants believed program leaders should adopt more robust recruitment strategies so a greater number of aspiring teachers, especially candidates of color, could learn about these opportunities. While no candidate said this outright, conversations with apprentices left us with the impression that many felt almost lucky to have found this opportunity — they were in the right district at the right time with the right support systems and mentors around them.

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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Invest in robust communication strategies for recruitment, tapping into existing or graduated teacher apprentices who are interested and willing, to ensure prospective candidates have ample opportunity to learn about these programs through means besides just word-of-mouth, like advising and recruitment events. This is especially important for programs that funnel high school students through pre-apprenticeship opportunities.

High-Quality, Hands-On Apprenticeship Experience

Participants most valued their time working with students in classroom settings

RTAPs offer teacher candidates extensive in-classroom exposure, allowing them to apply what they learn from their degree programs and mentors directly to real-world teaching settings. Unlike candidates at many four- or five-year undergraduate teacher preparation programs, which typically conclude with a single semester of unpaid student teaching, teacher apprentices are embedded in classrooms with paid jobs for the full duration of their program. Participants found that working closely with students and experienced mentor-educators was an effective way to connect theory with practice.

Relatedly, participants generally believed their apprenticeship was preparing them to become effective educators with many identifying the in-classroom experience, that hands-on time spent training under a mentor while working with students, to be the highest value and most central component of their program.

“The amount of stuff that I’ve learned through the program made, in my opinion, my first year of teaching a lot smoother than how you would imagine a first year teacher’s classroom to be like. People would walk into my classroom and be like, you look like you’ve been teaching for a while, and that’s... ‘cause I have. I mean, you just kind of had to when you were in the program. So I will say 100% that it has definitely made me [a more effective teacher] compared to the traditional route student... Compared to a traditional student that goes through the teaching program... I definitely see that I have more experiences, and it has made me a better teacher than what I would have imagined I would be.”

— Apprentice from Tennessee

Participants also appreciated assistance from their EPP or institution of higher education. Several apprentices highlighted the importance of “success coaches” or advisors who helped them acclimate to the higher education aspects of their program, like navigating financial aid or course selection. Some participants noted their professors were supportive, though others felt not all professors were aware of the job-embedded nature of the teacher apprenticeship and were therefore less inclined to adjust homework and project deadlines or offer other supports. A couple of apprentices recalled seeing someone from their institution of higher education observe them in a classroom setting but were unsure how those observations were utilized. For the most part, apprentices considered the higher education components of their program as necessary but somewhat secondary to the in-classroom apprenticeship experience.

Apprentices wanted opportunities to connect with their peers

Additionally, apprentices found value in regular opportunities to connect with and learn from peer apprentices. Numerous teacher apprenticeship programs in this study were structured as cohort models where candidates gathered at least monthly, sometimes weekly, with EPP-level leaders to connect with other apprentices and receive deep coaching from faculty members. A recurring theme across nearly all our conversations was that most

apprentices, even those without access to formal cohort models, found it helpful to discuss the challenges of their apprenticeship with other teachers of color. This was especially true for apprentices that felt significant pressure to be a role model for students of color, largely due to the scarcity of teachers of color in their school building. Apprentices regularly highlighted the importance and significance of feeling connected — those with access to cohort meetings were grateful for the support, while others wished their programs offered more intentional time to connect with aspiring, current, and alumni apprentices.

“I feel like [the cohort model] really pushed me into like, considering that I want to take this path, because normally, if you go back to school, you know you’re on your own. But not with the district, they actually provided this. And we meet once a month, and that’s really helpful.”

— Apprentice from Texas

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Customize program and learning experiences to fit adult learners’ unique needs, as these candidates tend to experience more interruptive life circumstances that may delay program completion, including but not limited to offering flexible timelines for program completion, creating individualized support plans, and allowing access to early course registration.
- Invest in cohort models where apprentices have ample opportunities to gather with and learn from other apprentices employed in the district or enrolled in the program’s EPP. This support could be further extended by offering regular in-person or virtual meetups where prospective, current, and alumni apprentices can build relationships.



Mentorship

The mentorship component was important to participants

Apprentices found the teacher-mentorship component of their RTAP to be particularly beneficial. Many participants valued how their mentors offered real-world examples of different teaching styles within the classroom, consistent and detailed feedback on classroom management and student engagement strategies, emotional support to overcome the challenges to become a certified teacher, and opportunities to learn through a gradual release of responsibilities, where an apprentice begins with smaller tasks usually aligned with paraprofessional roles, like observations or one-on-one small group instruction, as they build up toward larger duties like co-leading whole group instruction. According to program leaders, mentors often receive a small stipend for training an apprentice.

“The best way to describe it is like you get like real life coaching. So like in a sport, you have Coach right there and they’ll watch you and say, okay, this is what you did wrong, this is what you can do better and stuff like that. And so essentially... you’re watching, then you do it... If you get a great cooperating teacher, [they] will give you pointers and say like okay, this is what you could have done better and stuff.”

— Apprentice from Texas

Unfortunately, not every participant had good or meaningful mentorship experiences. Some apprentices were assigned different mentors each year of their program, contributing to disjointed and fluctuating levels of support compared to apprentices who had the same mentor for the entire program duration. Sometimes the mentor-teacher would not actively engage with the mentee or provide opportunities to develop their teaching and classroom management skills — in one instance, a Spanish-speaking bilingual apprentice was upset after their mentor explicitly told them to only speak English in their shared classroom, despite working with a young multilingual learner who would only communicate in Spanish. Additionally, numerous apprentices expressed frustration at how little time they spent alongside their mentor, instead serving in long-term substitute roles or even as teachers of record for other classes.

“I don’t get as much, like, feedback from my teacher. She’s like, somewhat retiring... so she’s kind of checked out... she’s missed like so many days... There’s usually just me in the classroom, so I feel like that’s helping me because it’s like a sink-or-swim kind of thing. I mean, I wish she would [give] me some tips and like some ideas, but [usually] it’s me.”

— Apprentice from Texas

Having mentors of color was especially valuable for apprentices of color

Several participants were assigned mentor-teachers of color, which they described as a valuable source of representation and connection in a field where educators of color remain rare. By having mentors from similar backgrounds, participants felt they were able to better relate with their mentors’ teaching journey and experiences, develop a deeper sense of belonging in their school, and observe diverse student-teacher interactions. It is no surprise then that many interviewed apprentices emphasized the importance of accessing more diverse mentors within their school.

Recognizing that the educator workforce is [predominately white and female](#), these apprentices believed that greater exposure to diverse experienced mentors, whether those be teachers of color, male teachers, multilingual teachers, etc., would better prepare them to serve diverse student populations and lead their own classrooms one day.³⁴ To expand and strengthen a program's mentorship component, several participants encouraged districts, especially those prioritizing teacher diversity recruitment and retention efforts, to be more intentional in matching apprentices with mentors who reflect their lived experiences and identities, or by allowing apprentices to have some authority in choosing their mentor. For them, these deep mentor relationships enhanced what they viewed as their apprenticeship's most valuable and beneficial component — high-quality, relational, in-classroom training — and failing to pair every apprentice with a high-quality and compatible mentor compromises the program's effectiveness.

“To encourage people of color to come into the teaching field... we need that representation... There are children that look like us, that are going to go through some of the same things that we go through, and they need to see that we can be great, that we want to be educators, that we want to be there for them. And they also need to see that there's a pathway for them that may not be the traditional way of going to a university, but there is another way to get there that is cost effective.”

— Apprentice from Texas

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Maximize the amount of time that apprentices serve in classroom settings under the guidance of a mentor-teacher. This can be fulfilled by adopting a district-level policy to never place apprentices in long-term substitute assignments and teacher-of-record positions, or by heavily restricting similar placements that separate them from their mentors.
- If able, give apprentices more autonomy over mentor assignments, which could include a matching process between apprentices and mentors that allows both parties input in mentor assignment.
- Ensure there are adequate upward feedback processes that allow apprentices to weigh in on their mentor-teacher's performance.
- Establish clear, research-informed criteria for mentor-teacher selection, grounded in instructional effectiveness, with an opt-in policy to ensure experienced teachers are not assigned a mentor role without agreeing to participate.
- Implement a mentor development plan that includes initial training in providing high-quality and culturally responsive mentorship, regular check-ins, opportunities for mentors to deepen their skills over time, and adequate compensation structures.³⁵

Financial Support

Participants believed their teacher apprenticeship program offered a better return on investment compared to other available pathways

The most cited reason participants decided to enroll in their teacher apprenticeship program was affordability. Apprentices could become fully licensed teachers for low- to zero-cost paired with the stability of earning income and benefits through a paid job-embedded experience. The participants we interviewed tended to be adult learners who had wanted to become teachers earlier in life. Others had previously enrolled in undergraduate programs but were forced to pause or discontinue their studies due to personal or financial challenges. These apprentices shared that one of the greatest barriers that had prevented them from entering the teacher workforce was the high cost of getting the necessary advanced degrees and licensure — especially when coupled with the low average salary of teachers, which made the prospect of taking on substantial higher education debt seem financially untenable.

The accessible cost of these programs allowed for a diverse set of candidates, from experienced paraprofessionals and mid-life career changers to young, energized high school graduates, to enter the teacher workforce through a high-quality and paid educator preparation model. Furthermore, several RTAP leaders and some interviewed apprentices believed that, due to the financial accessibility of these programs, graduated apprentices may be less inclined to leave the education profession over concerns about repaying large student loans.

“I think many of us come from backgrounds where maybe we went to school first and we’re returning to school, but certainly for like, someone who’s out of high school and thinking that they want to go into education, or really serious about going to education, and you look at all of, you know, the things that surround education, some of the negatives... it’s hard being an educator... they don’t get paid enough, all of that that surrounds education. So you start looking at it from a point like, well, if I go to college and I’m paying \$30,000 I come out of college with [\$120,000] worth of debt, but I’m only going to be getting paid \$55,000 in my first year of teaching. And then you’re like, okay, well... the math is not really good there. But if you can look at that and say, okay... I’m going to come out of college with \$10,000 of debt, and I’ll have my degree, and I can actually go into the field that I want to be working in, like, that’s that. That’s a whole different scenario. And as a high school student, if I had the opportunity, I absolutely would have taken that and even as an adult, like now I’m taking that opportunity because I think it does certainly help and lowers that barrier.”

— Apprentice from Texas

While every apprentice we interviewed was deeply passionate about teaching and supporting students, often wanting to become a teacher earlier in life, many had struggled to find a financially sustainable, high-quality pathway into the profession until they discovered their teacher apprenticeship program. Ultimately, for many apprentices, this model provided a pathway to teaching licensure where they could 1) continue earning a salary, necessary for raising their family, paying mortgages, taking care of their aging parents, etc.; 2) continue receiving benefits of employment, like healthcare; and 3) avoid saddling themselves with cumbersome debt.

“You wouldn’t just be walking right into [a teaching degree program] how an 18-year-old or 19-year-old would be walking into school without the responsibility. It also took... weight off of trying to take care of home as well as doing the duties of finishing the program... the fact that they allowed us to receive a paycheck... as well as paying for everything else, [it] took a lot of stress off people. So I think that definitely helped financially overall.”

— *Apprentice from Tennessee*

While participants viewed RTAPs as more economically sustainable than other pathways, low salaries continued to pose financial challenges

Many participants noted the importance of other financial benefits besides reduced tuition and regular paychecks, such as free access to course textbooks and teacher certification exam fee waivers. Several, however, felt the salary for their classroom apprenticeship was not enough to make ends meet, especially if they were financially supporting a family. Multiple apprentices found the pay so insufficient that they or their peers had to work second or third jobs, underscoring the difficulty of maintaining financial stability while managing the intense demands of their job-embedded apprenticeship. A teacher apprentice’s salary is dependent on numerous factors, like a state’s minimum wage, paraprofessional wage schedules, and program-specific policies. Several of the programs included in this study aligned apprentice salaries with paraprofessional wage schedules, which seems to be a common approach and one that is suggested within the Pathways Alliance’s [National Guideline Standards](#) but can still result in quite low pay.³⁶ In fact, several apprentices who had worked numerous years in paraprofessional or administrative roles received pay cuts when transitioning to their teacher apprenticeship program, as [entry-level paraprofessionals are among the lowest paid staff](#) in school buildings.³⁷

“We don’t get paid during like any break... like the summer break. So we have to either work summer school or find another job. So like, yes, putting us through [higher education] is very nice, but then we’re kind of struggling to make ends meet... and people that do work two jobs, kudos to them. I don’t know how they do it because taking all these classes while working, you know, 8[am] to 4[pm], doing homework, and then working a second job — like it’s just not realistic for many people, and some do do it... I don’t think the pay is fair for all that we do ‘cause we’re in the position of basically teachers. We do the same things that they do... leave at the same time, so that’s a little not fair I think personally.”

— *Apprentice from Tennessee*

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Ensure that already employed school staff do not see salary cuts once they transition into apprenticeship programs.
- Examine the total net cost of attendance, including program-specific factors like how much apprentices get paid, the price of tuition, common higher education fees, etc., alongside external factors like average cost of living, to determine if apprentices can comfortably and realistically sustain themselves for the entire program duration. If not, maximize available financial support and more quickly scale salaries as candidates progress in their classroom roles.

Communication

Apprentices desired more clarity in communication from program leaders

Given the nascency of the teacher apprenticeship landscape, with RTAP stakeholders across the country [regularly publishing new resources and grappling with evolving funding streams](#), several apprentices reported experiencing what felt like constant changes in policies, procedures, and expectations throughout their time in the program.³⁸ Additionally, since these programs are built in close partnership between multiple organizations, some participants expressed confusion regarding what specific organization to turn to when issues arose.

“There’s a disconnect with communication, so I don’t feel like we’re getting feedback, at least for the residency portion of this whole program. I really think it’s just our cooperating teachers like basically mentoring us and like molding us into effective educators.”

— Apprentice from Texas

Several participants also mentioned that important financial components were not clearly communicated prior to their enrollment. For example, one apprentice was surprised to see a portion of their college tuition automatically deducted from their paycheck every pay period. Another participant expected to maintain the same level of pay when they transitioned from an administrative role into their district’s RTAP, only to notice they were placed on a lower pay scale upon receipt of their first apprenticeship paycheck. Disparities like this seemed to occur on a case-by-case basis but impacted participants, understandably, wanted program leaders to better communicate financial details before their enrollment so they could make a more informed decision when committing. While the participants were appreciative of the low cost of a program they perceived as high-quality, they still wanted more clarity to budget accordingly.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PROGRAM LEADERS:

- Establish advisory councils or governance structures where program leaders across partnering organizations can regularly communicate, clarify roles and responsibilities, foster alignment, and provide a forum for resolving challenges as programs evolve and questions arise.
- Ensure apprentices are regularly seeing information on program costs, such as the amount of tuition owed, recurring amounts taken from one’s paycheck, certification exam fees, information about available fundings sources like Pell Grants or scholarships, etc. Common situations that could incur charges, such as dropping out of a course, should be clearly communicated to aspiring candidates before program enrollment.

State-Level Policy Considerations

There is much to learn about the effectiveness of RTAPs in preparing a high-quality and diverse teacher workforce — many programs are in their early stages, having yet to graduate any apprentices, with even the oldest programs just finishing their third active year. Still, it is clear from interviews that many apprentices deem these programs as crucial on-ramps into the teaching profession by offering low-cost, paid, and high-quality training opportunities. This

sentiment alongside the rapid growth of teacher apprenticeship models, expanding from zero to over 45 states in three years' time, signals that these programs may serve as an important tool for local, state, and federal policymakers to strengthen and diversify teacher workforces and address shortage areas. As teacher apprenticeship programs continue to grow, it is imperative that state policymakers advance policies that sustain and scale high-quality programs and practices.

The following considerations, meant for state-level policymakers, were informed by the above findings, EdTrust and TECA's work with educators across the country, findings and recommendations produced by other leading organizations in this space, and insights gathered while producing a 50-state scan of RTAPs.³⁹ No two states will have the same education policy landscape, meaning the applicability and feasibility of certain policies may differ on a state-by-state basis. We encourage state RTAP leaders to analyze these considerations in conjunction with their deep understanding of the state-specific teacher preparation environment they operate in.

Secure Sustainable Funding for RTAPs

State leaders and policymakers must identify sustainable strategies to fund and scale high-quality teacher apprenticeship models and maintain their ability to offer zero- or low-cost pathways into the teaching profession. Reduced or stagnant teacher apprenticeship funding will deprive aspiring candidates from accessing these programs, while also potentially forcing EPPs to offload rising costs directly on apprentices.



Some states have begun to make major investments, like Tennessee which allocated [\\$5 million](#) from the governor's discretionary fund for teacher apprenticeship programs.⁴³ Similarly, in late 2024, the Florida Department of Education collectively awarded seven institutions of higher education [\\$5.4 million](#) to build teacher apprenticeship programs through the state's Pathways to Career Opportunities Grow Your Own Teacher Grants.⁴⁴ Beyond allocating more money in executive and legislative budgets and ensuring those funds recur year over year, state leaders could create new or increase existing teacher residency or apprenticeship allotments to help cover teacher wages, mentor stipends, and partnering EPP costs. These allotments should be weighted to prioritize aspiring diverse and multilingual teachers entering high-need subject areas and schools. Lastly, state education agencies should review existing discretionary teacher pipeline funding streams, like teacher residency or Grow Your Own grants, and consider making them accessible to teacher apprenticeship programs.

Prioritize Support for Transfer Candidates and Paraprofessionals

Many apprentices enter RTAPs having accumulated some amount of prior college credits but no degree, emphasizing the need for states to support transfer candidates. This may involve increasing access to financial aid for these students or simplifying credit transfer to ensure candidates reentering higher education with some credit will not have to 'start over' through actions such as adopting [academic fresh start](#) policies that remove prior poor performances from transcripts after a certain amount of time.⁴⁵

Policymakers may also consider waiving tuition and additional fees for candidates who are forced to retake courses because their university cannot accept prior credits, or permitting an apprentice's past paraprofessional or classroom experience to count towards a limited number of college credits and required on-the-job learning hours — provided apprentices demonstrate relevant competencies. State legislatures could also create or expand tuition exemptions for paraprofessionals, reducing the cost of higher education coursework for many apprentices.



Establish State-Level Guidance, Ensuring Alignment Across Agencies, and Strengthen Data Collection and Reporting Practices

State education agencies should develop a clear framework for RTAPs and provide structured technical assistance to districts and EPPs implementing these models. Throughout this process, stakeholders must ensure there is alignment across state agencies — such as departments overseeing K-12 and higher education, departments of labor, and workforce boards — so that teacher apprenticeship policies are coherent, definitions are agreed upon between workforce and education partners, and all parties agree how federal apprenticeship dollars will be allocated to teacher apprenticeships. These structures would help standardize quality, streamline communication between stakeholders, and provide guidance and clarity to new and existing programs.

Additionally, state education agencies should collect, report, and analyze relevant RTAP data (disaggregated by race, ethnicity, gender, and income status) while utilizing [federal apprenticeship datasets](#) to better understand their state's RTAP landscape, with the goal of assessing which programs and methods are effectively preparing teachers, especially those from under-represented backgrounds.⁴⁶ This level of transparency would enable education leaders, advocacy organizations, and policymakers to identify promising teacher preparation models that fit the unique needs of their communities. Additionally, leaders can use this data to drive continuous improvement and strategically allocate technical assistance and funding to districts or regions with limited access to teacher apprenticeship opportunities or ongoing and persistent teacher shortages.

Conclusion

Teacher apprenticeship programs serve as crucial on-ramps into the teaching profession by offering low-cost and paid training opportunities where aspiring teachers spend ample time in classroom settings with a mentor-teacher. These programs may serve as an important tool for local, state, and federal policymakers to strengthen and diversify teacher workforces while also addressing shortage areas; however, work is required to identify and build more high-quality programs, develop sustainable funding streams for program growth and technical assistance support, and ensure cross-agency collaboration and alignment to provide guidance and clarity to program leaders.

Appendix A (Interview Questions)

Introductions

1. What is your name, where you are from, and when did you first think about becoming a teacher?

RTAP Experience

2. Why did you choose to attend this particular program? How did you hear or learn about this program?
 - a. *Follow up:* How did you arrive at this point in your journey to become a classroom teacher?
 - b. *Optional follow up:* What attracted you to this program? Was there anything in particular that made you think “this is the right path?”
3. *Optional:* How do you define an apprenticeship?
 - a. *Optional follow up:* Did the fact this program is a registered teacher apprenticeship program draw you in? Why or why not?
4. What experiences and supports (i.e., mentorships, additional opportunities) has your program provided that you feel are particularly helpful as a candidate, particularly as a candidate of color?
 - a. *Optional follow up:* Have they provided you with targeted support along your journey?
 - i. *Prompt:* application; certification exams; securing jobs
5. *Optional (if relevant):* Many of you stated that you already felt prepared to teach in your role as an aide or paraprofessional. Is there anything specific that you’re learning in this program that you didn’t know as a paraprofessional/aide?

Affordability and Quality

6. Has this program been financially accessible and, if so, how?
7. How was your experience navigating and/or accessing financial aid through your program? How did you learn about the cost and/or financial benefits (salary/stipends) of your program?
 - a. *Prompt:* Did you know exactly how much the program would cost, and how much money you’d be paying out of pocket in tuition? What about the benefits, like salary, you’d receive during in-school clinical components?
8. How has your apprenticeship experience impacted your academic/work/life schedule?
9. Has your apprenticeship experience prepared you to become an effective teacher? Why or why not?

On Matters of Identity

10. To what extent do you feel like you belong and are supported in your racial/ethnic identity during your in-school/residency component? Why?
 - a. *Optional follow up:* What about during the course instruction components of the program? Do you feel supported? Why?

Barriers

11. Have you considered not moving forward in becoming a teacher? Why? If so, what kept you in your program?
 - a. *Optional follow up:* Do you plan to teach in TX/TN? What factors will or will not influence your decision to teach in TX/TN?
12. Do you think these challenges and supports are different for teacher candidates of color than white teachers? If so, how?
13. *Optional:* This group has brought up barriers like (XXX), are there any other challenges you've encountered during the apprenticeship that you'd like to share?

Recommendations

14. What can your program, and programs like it, do to better attract, and support, candidates of color? Why?
 - a. *Optional follow up:* If you had a magic wand and could change or implement anything related to teacher preparation (and/or your own experiences pursuing a teaching career), what would you change?

Conclusion

15. What else do you think is important and relevant to ensuring we have more teacher candidates of color entering teaching careers and succeeding as teachers?

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