Planning Registered Teacher Apprenticeships Playbook



ILLINOIS STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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What is Apprenticeship?

U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) representatives cited apprenticeships as having helped build America from its early beginning to present day, naming George Washington (surveyor), Benjamin Franklin (printer), and Paul Revere (silversmith) as notable apprentices in history (DOL, n.d.). According to DOL, there are 800,000 apprentices annually across the nation, with a 90% employment retention rate for apprentices who retain employment after apprenticeship completion. During 2023 DOL training held at Illinois State University, representees reported there were Registered Apprenticeship Programs in almost every industry, from health care to technology and even education for apprentices desiring to work in day care, but none that resulted in a Professional Educator License. The Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE) saw this as a promising opportunity to implement apprenticeships in partnership with educator preparation providers to offer candidates innovative pathways to teaching.

As defined by DOL, a Registered Apprenticeship is an industry-driven pathway to high-quality careers where employers can develop and prepare their future workforce, and individuals can obtain paid work experience, progressive wage increases, classroom instruction, and a portable, nationally recognized credential. A Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program (RTAP) is a long-term commitment to a training model that focuses on ongoing growth and development of skills and proficiencies. RTAPs must have seven components to be recognized by DOL: an industry-led design, paid employment, structured on-the-job learning/mentorship, supplemental education, equal opportunity employment, quality and safety standards, and credentialing. There are many similarities among other alternative models that are used nationwide, but yet there are a few distinct differences between apprenticeships, residencies, and Grow Your Own (GYO). Figure 1 displays some of the major differences between each program format.

Figure 1. Comparing Grow Your Own (GYO), Teacher Residency, and Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Elements

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

Source: New America, What's the Difference Between Grow Your Own, Teacher Residency, and Teacher Apprenticeship?

The apprenticeship system, as curated by DOL, consists of two types of entities responsible for registering and overseeing Registered Apprenticeship Programs: the Office of Apprenticeship (OA) and recognized State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAA). Both the OA and SAAs provide technical assistance and support sponsors through answering questions about the apprenticeship model, guiding partners on each phase of developing a program, connecting businesses to training providers, and advising partners on available funding sources to support apprenticeships. OA staff are federal employees, whereas SAA staff are state employees. While both entities function similarly, Figure 2 demonstrates some additional key differences that may apply.

Figure 2. Office of Apprenticeship (OA) vs. State Apprenticeship Agencies (SAAs)

Office of Apprenticeship	State Apprenticeship Agencies
• Registers and oversees programs in states without a recognized SAA through state field offices • May register a program in a state with an SAA under certain circumstances • Staff are U.S. Department of Labor federal employees • Registers all programs through standard documentation • Uses the RAPIDS system for registration, oversight, and tracking	• Recognized by OA to act on behalf of the federal U.S. DOL • Staff are state employees • May use federal or state-specific documentation • May use RAPIDS or a separate state system

Refer to official DOL resources for current listings: LINK

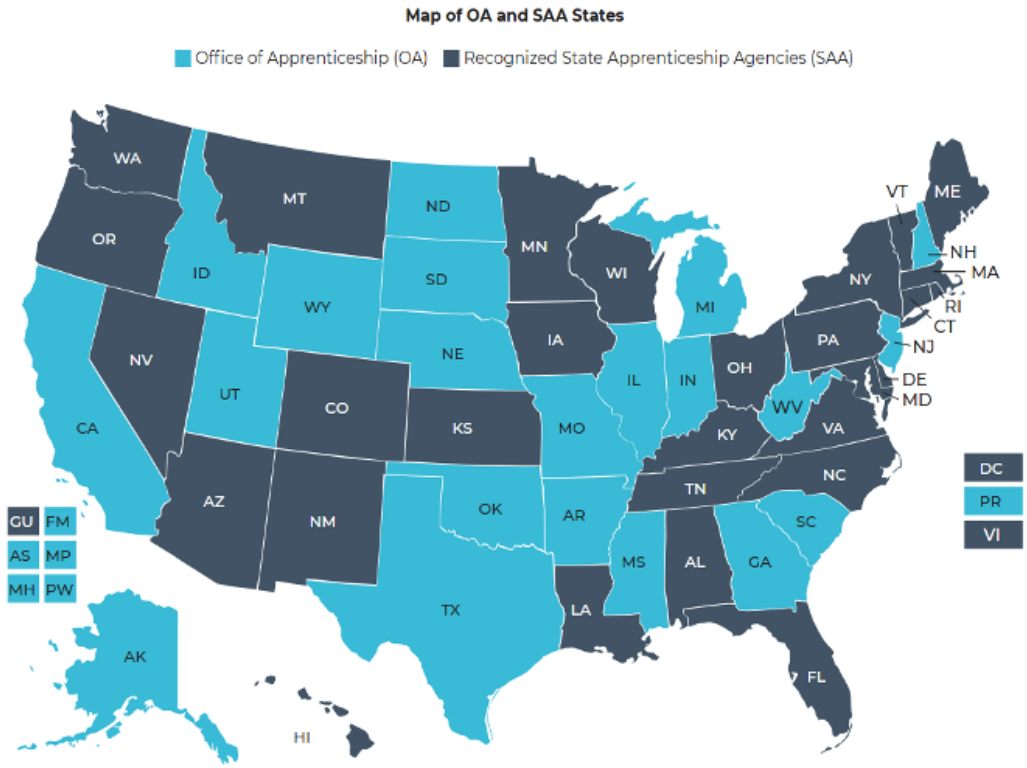
Apprenticeships in Illinois

ISBE is committed to preparing educators through multiple pathways and supporting them in delivering high-quality education to every child. This commitment aligns with Strategic Plan Goal 3, which emphasizes the importance of educator effectiveness and equity in education (ISBE, 2024). As part of this strategic vision defined in Goal 3.2, ISBE has prioritized collaboration with stakeholders to research, identify, and pilot innovative models of educator preparation.

One of the innovative models that has been recommended and recognized by the U.S. Department of Education in recent years is apprenticeship (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). In response, ISBE established objective 3.2.2 in its Strategic Plan, which sets the goal of supporting apprenticeship pilot programs at institutions of higher education (IHEs) by the end of fiscal year 2025 (ISBE, 2024). In alignment with this strategic vision, ISBE initiated efforts in 2023 to explore and develop teacher apprenticeship models, laying the groundwork through research and collaboration with key partners.

This playbook is designed for school districts and IHEs interested in establishing an RTAP. It provides practical guidance, resources, and best practices to help educational partners implement high-quality apprenticeship pathways that strengthen the educator pipeline and promote equity across Illinois.

Figure 3. Map of OA and SAA States



Reprinted from "Apprenticeship System," by Apprenticeship USA, U.S. Department of Labor, n.d., https://www.apprenticeship.gov/about-us/apprenticeship-system

The Illinois Journey

Although ISBE formally launched its strategic partnership in 2023, this initiative represents a continuation of our longstanding mission: to provide every child with safe and healthy learning conditions, great educators, and equitable opportunities through data-informed stewardship of resources and policy development, in collaboration with educators, families, and stakeholders.

In 2019, ISBE partnered with the Region 9 Comprehensive Center (R9CC) to analyze educator workforce data and identify barriers to recruiting and retaining a high-quality, diverse teacher workforce. The analysis revealed a growing teacher shortage across the state. Between 2017 and 2019, the number of unfilled teaching positions in Illinois increased significantly—from 1,006 to 3,558—highlighting the urgent need for innovative solutions, such as teacher apprenticeships to strengthen the educator pipeline (R9CC, 2019).

As a result of this collaboration, the Illinois Teacher Recruitment, Retention, and Recognition Project was published. This report provides a comprehensive overview of the current landscape of the teaching profession in Illinois, incorporating insights from student focus groups. Notably, the report found that perceptions of the teaching profession varied by group: While former teachers emphasized student-centered motivations, high school and college students were more likely to cite benefits such as having summers off and the structured school calendar. These findings informed ISBE's consideration of teacher apprenticeships as an innovative pathway for teacher preparation, essential for giving candidates early exposure to the realities of the profession. The report also identified additional recruitment challenges influenced by financial factors, particularly the rising cost of college and the discouragement associated with incurring student debt—burdens that can significantly impact life decisions, including homeownership. This is a key factor in ISBE's pursuit to offer teacher apprenticeships, which strive to reduce financial barriers for candidates.

Retention challenges were also noted, including a lack of professional support and insufficient time for development and mentorship. RTAPs aim to address these issues by providing candidates with immediate, on-the-job training and classroom experience. This early experience supports apprentices in gradually building capacity across various teaching competencies, making the workload feel more manageable over time as they transition to the role of teacher of record. These programs also offer progressive wage increases as apprentices demonstrate mastery of specific skills, creating financial incentives that support long-term retention. Most importantly, apprenticeship models are designed to minimize or eliminate the cost of educator preparation programs, thereby reducing the fear of student debt and making the teaching profession more accessible.

In 2022, U.S. Secretary of Labor Martin J. Walsh and U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel A. Cardona issued a joint call to state and local leaders to establish registered teacher apprenticeship programs as a strategy to attract and retain educators. Their letter referenced the U.S. Department of Commerce's case study The Benefits and Costs of Apprenticeship: A Business Perspective, which demonstrated that apprenticeship programs can lead to increased productivity, reduced turnover, and the development of a skilled workforce through customizable training models (Walsh & Cardona, 2022; U.S. Department of Commerce, 2024).

Building on the findings of the R9CC report, the unfilled position data, and the joint letter from federal leaders, ISBE partnered with the American Institutes for Research (AIR) to conduct a data-driven analysis of teacher shortage areas and identify targeted strategies for improvement. This collaboration reinforced earlier insights from the R9CC report regarding early career attrition, prompting ISBE to advance efforts to create a support network for institutions and districts as they implement teacher apprenticeship programs (R9CC, 2019; Walsh & Cardona, 2022).

Setting a Foundation in Partnership

The structure and success of apprenticeships is connected to the collaborative efforts of employers, education providers, and community partners. To maintain a foundation in collaboration, ISBE began its exploration of teacher apprenticeships in partnership with DOL, the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity (DCEO), and other key partners, including IHE educator preparation programs (EPPs), and the National Center for Teacher Residencies (NCTR) in 2023. These partnerships enabled ISBE to develop a comprehensive plan to assist IHEs in designing and implementing teacher apprenticeship programs.

ISBE pursued training held by DOL's Office of Apprenticeship. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship promotes and oversees quality, accessible Registered Apprenticeship opportunities for workers seeking higher-skilled, higher-paying jobs and engages employers seeking to build a qualified, diverse, and inclusive workforce. DOL trained attendees in four major areas: the history of apprenticeship, what a Registered Apprenticeship program is, the apprenticeship systems, and the building blocks for planning an apprenticeship.

DCEO emerged as a key and essential partner, sharing ISBE's vision of preparing qualified educators, reducing barriers, and supporting all Illinois students. A significant outcome of this collaboration was the launch of the Teacher Apprenticeship Pilot Grant. The grant supports the development of high-quality teacher apprenticeship programs by providing funding and coaching to three IHEs—DePaul University, McKendree University, and University of Illinois Chicago—to design and implement RTAPs. The critical component of coaching was provided by NCTR, which guided the grantees through their Design Academy. **The results of this pilot have informed this guide to support IHEs and school districts in creating, establishing, and sustaining RTAPs. As the pilot continues to report important successes, lessons, and outcome data, the playbook may be updated to include additional guidance. The following section spotlights grantees and shares the partnerships that have emerged from this grant.**



Grantee Spotlight

DCEO and ISBE awarded $1.5 million in grant funding to three Illinois universities through the Job Training and Economic Development (JTED) Teacher Apprenticeship Program. This pilot program is designed to provide career pathway opportunities and supportive services for the successful placement of paraprofessionals in the teacher workforce.

DePaul University – ASSET Teacher Apprenticeship Program

DePaul University's Apprenticeship in Special Education Teaching (ASSET) program represents a deeply collaborative and equity-centered approach to building the special education teacher pipeline. Designed in partnership with Chicago Public Schools (CPS), the ASSET pathway aligns fully with state apprenticeship expectations while directly responding to district workforce shortages. As of April 2025, CPS reported 311 unfilled special education positions, underscoring the urgency of creating innovative preparation models that meet critical staffing needs. DePaul University was awarded $499,735 through the Illinois Teacher and School Leader Job-Embedded Preparation (JTED) grant program to launch and scale the ASSET apprenticeship pathway.

The ASSET program was co-designed with CPS through a series of structured planning meetings beginning in September 2024 and continuing through early 2025. CPS provided non-identifying workforce data, informed the design around district needs, and contributed to program planning and implementation. Principals and mentor teachers play an essential role by supporting candidate placement and approving apprentices' participation as Special Education Classroom Assistants for the duration of the program. Apprentices also receive full access to CPS' Office of Student Teaching resources, ensuring alignment with district expectations for educator preparation.

McKendree University – Expanding Access Through Online, Affordable Teacher Apprenticeships

McKendree University was awarded $499,900 to strengthen and scale its teacher apprenticeship pathway, designed specifically to help paraprofessionals transition into fully licensed educators. Prior to receiving the grant, McKendree sought approval to offer a Master of Arts in teaching-apprenticeship pathway, which provides an accessible route to multiple high-need endorsements—including Elementary (1-6), Learning Behavior Specialist I (LBS1), Middle Grades, Secondary content areas, and Physical Education—and directly addresses regional teacher shortages. McKendree then applied to offer the LBS1 program as part of the grant.

Recognizing that paraprofessionals often juggle full-time work and family responsibilities, McKendree designed its apprenticeship pathway to be fully online, with most coursework delivered asynchronously. This flexible structure allows apprentices to advance at their own pace while immediately applying new learning in their school settings.

Faculty intentionally reduce financial barriers by using open educational resources in their courses, eliminating costly textbook requirements.

University of Illinois Chicago – Building a Workforce Pipeline Through Apprenticeship

The University of Illinois Chicago (UIC) received $499,064 to expand an innovative apprenticeship pathway designed to strengthen Illinois' special education workforce.

UIC's Special Education Apprenticeship Program stands out as a comprehensive, equity-driven model that enables paraprofessionals to advance into fully licensed LBS1 educators while remaining employed in their districts. Apprentices "earn while they learn," blending paid, on-the-job experience with university coursework that aligns directly to licensure requirements and the needs of Illinois classrooms.

At the heart of UIC's program is a multi-agency partnership with Chicago Public Schools, Niles Township District for Special Education #807, and the South Cook Intermediate Service Center. These partners jointly designed the apprenticeship to address local workforce shortages, align field placements with district needs, and ensure that every participant receives high-quality mentorship from experienced special educators. Together, they created a seamless model where apprentices gradually progress from observation to co-teaching to independently leading instruction under structured guidance.

Through these strategic partnerships, ISBE has laid the foundation for supporting Illinois IHEs in the creation and implementation of teacher apprenticeship programs.

Planning a Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program in Illinois

Key ISBE Terms

This section provides clear definitions of essential terms used throughout this playbook to support institutions, districts, and partners in understanding the requirements, structures, and processes associated with educator preparation programs and RTAPs in Illinois. These terms reflect statutory language, ISBE policy, and program approval expectations that guide the design, implementation, and oversight of preparation pathways statewide. Establishing a shared vocabulary ensures that all stakeholders—whether new to educator preparation or experienced in program administration—are aligned in their understanding of Illinois' regulatory framework and the components required for high-quality, compliant apprenticeship programs.

Alternative Program: This program type follows specific requirements set forth in 23 Illinois Administrative Code 25.60. It includes the issuance of an Alternative Provisional Educator License with Stipulations. This type includes content-specific and teaching-related coursework while the candidate serves as a teacher of record.

Apprenticeship: This program format includes content-specific coursework paired with structured on-the-job training, where candidates are employed by the school district and learn alongside a mentor teacher. Apprentices earn progressive wages as they take on increasing teaching responsibilities. The program is approved by both the U.S. Department of Labor and the Illinois State Board of Education, and it must meet specific criteria to receive federal funding. Apprenticeship programs are designed for district employees (e.g., paraprofessionals) seeking to earn teacher licensure in the subject area offered, and they often take longer to complete than residency programs.

Apprenticeship Addendum: The Apprenticeship Addendum is an ISBE-required supplemental submission that EPPs must complete in addition to the standard program approval process when proposing a Teacher Apprenticeship Program. Institutions must also provide ISBE with proof of DOL approval to operate the apprenticeship.

Educator Preparation Program (EPP): An approved educator preparation program is a licensure-leading program offered by a recognized institution. To qualify, an EPP must be operated by an institution recognized by the state superintendent and must receive individual program approval from ISBE in consultation with the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board. ISBE defines an EPP as a preparation pathway that leads to educator licensure in specific content areas.

Illinois Institute of Higher Education (IHE)/Sponsor: In a Registered Apprenticeship, the sponsor is the entity legally responsible for overseeing and operating the apprenticeship program. For Teacher Apprenticeships in Illinois, the IHE serves as the apprenticeship sponsor, meaning it works directly with the U.S. Department of Labor, submits required paperwork, ensures compliance with federal standards, and manages program design and reporting.

Program Format: Program format refers to the specific structural model an Illinois educator preparation program uses to prepare candidates for licensure. ISBE recognizes multiple formats—such as traditional programs, alternative programs, and registered teacher apprenticeship programs—each defined by its required coursework, field experiences, supervision expectations, and alignment to Illinois Administrative Code. A program format outlines how candidates progress through preparation, the nature of their clinical or on-the-job training, and the approval requirements unique to that pathway. All formats must meet ISBE standards and receive individual program approval.

Program Proposal: A program proposal is the formal set of documents an educator preparation program submits to ISBE when seeking approval for a new educator preparation program or for redesigning an existing program. Program proposals must meet requirements in 23 Illinois Administrative Code 25.120, which include demonstrating alignment to state teaching standards, admission requirements, assessments, faculty qualifications, and a full course of study including field experiences and clinical practice.

State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board (SEPLB): The State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board is an ISBE governing body responsible for reviewing and recommending approval or denial of educator preparation programs, ensuring programs meet state standards, and advising the state superintendent on licensure and preparation matters. SEPLB meets regularly and includes educators, administrators, and higher education representatives.

Traditional Program: This program type includes content-specific and teaching-related coursework, paired with university-supervised preservice field experiences, including early field experiences that culminate in a student teaching experience, all completed prior to licensure as outlined in 23 Illinois Administrative Code 25.120. This program also includes provisions for short-term approvals, which allow individuals to temporarily assume teaching roles despite not meeting full licensure qualifications, subject to specific requirements such as coursework, exams, and mentoring.

Getting Started

Launching an RTAP requires early coordination, thoughtful planning, and a shared commitment among institutions and districts. Illinois' approach to apprenticeship emphasizes collaboration, quality, and alignment to workforce needs, ensuring that programs support both aspiring educators and the districts they serve. As institutions and districts begin this journey, it is essential to become familiar with the state's licensure requirements, the expectations of the U.S. Department of Labor, and the partnership-driven nature of the apprenticeship model. Early engagement with ISBE and partner agencies helps establish a strong foundation

Planning Considerations

When designing an RTAP, institutions and districts should consider emerging best practices from Illinois pilot programs. Early lessons learned highlight the importance of:

- Building strong design teams with decision-making authority
- Prioritizing mentor selection and support
- Ensuring alignment between coursework and on-the-job experiences
- Creating clear communication structures between districts and universities
- Designing financially sustainable models that leverage available funding sources

Pilot institutions also noted challenges such as navigating time-intensive approval processes, balancing apprentice workloads, and ensuring mentor capacity. Addressing these challenges early strengthens program implementation and long-term sustainability.

Benefits

Illinois grantees repeatedly emphasized that the apprenticeship model creates powerful benefits for districts, candidates, and communities. Apprenticeships allow paraprofessionals and other school employees to "earn while they learn," gaining structured, mentored experience while progressing through licensure-aligned coursework. This on-the-job training allows candidates to build confidence gradually, assuming more responsibility as they demonstrate mastery of instructional skills. Programs also reduce or eliminate many financial barriers that traditionally limit access to teacher preparation, making the pathway more equitable and appealing to a broader, more diverse candidate pool.

Districts reported that apprenticeship models strengthened retention by providing apprentices with immediate classroom experience, consistent mentorship, and progressive wage increases—elements that help apprentices feel supported and valued. These insights mirror findings from state-level research showing that teacher turnover is often tied to insufficient mentoring, financial strain, and limited early career support—factors that apprenticeship programs are specifically designed to address.

The Building Blocks of Planning for Apprenticeship

To begin planning an RTAP, it is important to focus on the dual approvals needed to operate the program. As the licensing body in Illinois, ISBE procedures and requirements for an EPP must be followed. Additionally, DOL has procedures and processes that need to be noted for the department that will oversee apprenticeships.

The DOL recommends five core building blocks when considering the creation of a Registered Apprenticeship Program: explore, build, partner, register, and launch. These are further defined in Figure 4.

Figure 4. Department of Labor Recommended Five Core Building Blocks

There are five core building blocks involved in creating and operating a Registered Apprenticeship Program. Depending on where you are in the program creation process, you may choose to start at a different building block. For example, if you're new to apprenticeship you may start to first explore how apprenticeship is used across industry and geography. If you're already familiar with apprenticeship, you can begin to build, partner, and register your program. Regardless of where you are on the journey, we are here to help you.

Explore
Get to know apprenticeship, its benefits, and how different employers and sponsors are creating programs across industry and geography.

Build
Understand your options, the steps involved in building an apprenticeship program, and the tools we offer to help you get started.

Partner
Collaborate with apprenticeship representatives, workforce organizations, educators, and others to build your program.

Register
Take advantage of benefits such as funding opportunities, tax credits, and no-cost technical assistance when you register your program.

Launch
Recruit prospective apprentices, measure and monitor your program, and share your program success.

Source: DOL Building Blocks of Apprenticeship

Workshopping

Use the space below to workshop or outline how you plan to progress through each of the building blocks.

Explore

Build

Partner

Register

Launch

Establishing a Need

Districts should examine internal talent pools—paraprofessionals, substitutes, and community members who already understand local contexts and may be strong candidates for licensure pathways. Reviewing collective bargaining agreements ensures alignment with local labor expectations, while assessing the district's capacity to provide diverse clinical experiences helps determine feasibility and scope.

For IHEs and EPPs, establishing need involves examining institutional strengths, identifying alignment to district needs, and determining capacity to support apprenticeship models. This may involve reviewing existing curriculum structures, faculty expertise, advising systems, and clinical placement partnerships to ensure they can support the more intensive, job-embedded nature of an apprenticeship program.

Establishing a Partnership

Roles of Partnering Agencies

ISBE, in accordance with 23 Illinois Administrative Code 25.115, requires institutions to obtain formal recognition from the state superintendent before offering educator preparation programs, and each individual program must receive separate approval from the state superintendent in consultation with the State Educator Preparation and Licensure Board. All materials associated with these recognition and approval processes must be submitted electronically.

For institutions seeking to develop or modify a teacher apprenticeship pathway, this requirement means that close collaboration with ISBE is essential throughout the entire design and approval process. ISBE's Educator Preparation team supports institutions by helping them understand state approval requirements, ensure alignment between program design and state expectations, prepare all required materials for recognition or program approval, and navigate the proposal review timeline.

To further streamline this work, each IHE is assigned an ISBE Educator Preparation team liaison who serves as the institution's primary point of contact. The liaison acts as a thought partner throughout program development, provides clarity on expectations and compliance, reviews drafts, and helps institutions strengthen their proposals from initial brainstorming to final submission. Engaging with ISBE early and consistently helps ensure that apprenticeship programs meet Illinois standards, support efficient program review, and reduce the likelihood of extensive revisions later in the process.
In addition to ISBE's regulatory role, several partner agencies play critical roles in supporting the development of registered teacher apprenticeship programs.

DCEO's mission is to create equitable economic opportunities across Illinois. DCEO served as the grant administrator for the Job Training and Economic Development (JTED) grant awarded to DePaul University, University of Illinois Chicago, and McKendree University in August 2024. The grantees submitted all documentation, and DCEO provided technical grant support to the grantees. IHEs should monitor upcoming DCEO funding opportunities to support apprenticeship development, expansion, and workforce-aligned initiatives.

NCTR is a national organization dedicated to developing, supporting, and accelerating the impact of teacher residency programs. NCTR supported grantees during the planning period in the design process. NCTR's support included:

- Institutes: Institutes are structured meeting times where NCTR consultants introduce NCTR's Levers for Teacher Residencies, support design teams in unpacking the Lever Practices (or program artifacts), and provide implementation examples across NCTR's Network.
- Consulting: Consulting sessions are meetings during which NCTR consultants facilitate and support design teams in drafting artifacts and practices. These meetings also serve as a space for feedback on residency/apprenticeship design and a place for problem-solving. Consulting sessions typically happen after each Institute.
- Asynchronous Support: Asynchronous support can be provided if feedback is requested, or questions arise as design teams develop artifacts for their program between Institutes and consulting sessions.

Institutes and consulting sessions are most impactful when a design team is assembled and in regular attendance. Design teams are groups of people empowered to make decisions in their respective organizations and work with NCTR consultants to create Lever Practices (or program artifacts) needed to design and launch a residency/apprenticeship program. Institutions can also choose to partner with national partners such as NCTR to support in the planning of its teacher apprenticeship.

DOL has an Office of Apprenticeship that promotes and oversees quality, accessible registered apprenticeship opportunities for workers seeking higher-skilled, higher paying jobs and engages employers seeking to build a qualified, diverse, and inclusive workforce. IHEs can consult their DOL-appointed apprenticeship and training representative if they have apprenticeship-specific questions.

IHEs received funding to plan and implement the Teacher Apprenticeship Pilot Program with support from NCTR and ISBE. The IHEs will serve as the apprenticeship sponsor, working directly with DOL, and will report data to DCEO, ISBE, and DOL.

District-Initiated Steps

Districts begin the partnership process by identifying potential internal candidates and reaching out to an IHE with experience or emerging interest in apprenticeship pathways. Because apprenticeships are inherently collaborative, districts and IHEs must work together to align apprenticeship goals with broader workforce needs and district improvement strategies.

IHE EPP-Initiated Steps

IHEs play an equally critical role in the apprenticeship process. They begin by reviewing ISBE's approval requirements, including the program approval process and expectations for an Apprenticeship Addendum. Institutions then work collaboratively with districts to ensure the program design reflects local needs and provides apprentices with high-quality, job-embedded learning experiences. This shared partnership is essential to ensuring the RTAP meets both state licensure requirements and community workforce needs.

ISBE Approval Process

ISBE is committed to preparing educators through multiple pathways and supporting them in delivering high-quality education to every child. This commitment aligns with Strategic Plan Goal 3, which emphasizes the importance of educator effectiveness and equity in education (ISBE, 2024). As part of this strategic vision defined in Goal 3.2, ISBE has prioritized collaboration with stakeholders to research, identify, and pilot innovative models of educator preparation.

One of the innovative models that has been recommended and recognized by the U.S. Department of Education in recent years is apprenticeship (U.S. Department of Education, 2023). In response, ISBE established objective 3.2.2 in its Strategic Plan, which sets the goal of supporting apprenticeship pilot programs at institutions of higher education (IHEs) by the end of fiscal year 2025 (ISBE, 2024). In alignment with this strategic vision, ISBE initiated efforts in 2023 to explore and develop teacher apprenticeship models, laying the groundwork through research and collaboration with key partners.

This playbook is designed for school districts and IHEs interested in establishing an RTAP. It provides practical guidance, resources, and best practices to help educational partners implement high-quality apprenticeship pathways that strengthen the educator pipeline and promote equity across Illinois.

1. Complete the Current Program Approval Process

Institutions must submit a formal proposal for a new or modified educator preparation program. This includes aligning with the requirements set forth in 23 Illinois Administrative Code Part 25.

- ISBE Teaching Program Proposal Form
- ISBE Educator Preparation Program Proposals Page

These resources are designed to support institutions in navigating the approval and implementation process, ensuring alignment with state and federal standards and fostering strong partnerships for successful apprenticeship pathways.

- ISBE Teacher Apprenticeship FAQ and Fact Sheet
- ISBE Teacher Apprenticeship Program Overview
- Illinois WorkNet Teacher Apprenticeship Pilot Program Page
- ISBE Apprenticeship Rubric for Program Review

2. **Complete the Apprenticeship Addendum**

In addition to the standard program proposal, institutions developing apprenticeship pathways must complete the Apprenticeship Addendum. This document outlines how the program will meet federal apprenticeship components such as mentorship structures, on-the-job learning, and alignment with national standards. Institutions must also submit the Apprenticeship Addendum Review Document as part of the process.

- Apprenticeship Addendum Form
- Apprenticeship Addendum Review Document

3. **Submit the Traditional Program Proposal and the Apprenticeship Addendum and Seek SEPLB Review**

ISBE reviews program proposals in collaboration with the SEPLB, which evaluates whether programs meet state standards and recommends approval or denial. While ISBE manages overall program recognition and communication with institutions, SEPLB's role is focused on reviewing program quality, compliance, and alignment to licensure expectations. SEPLB will review the traditional program proposal but not the addendum, as rule has not yet been updated to include teacher apprenticeship. However, ISBE will work in collaboration with DOL to ensure all apprenticeship requirements and licensure requirements are met.

4. **Provide Proof of Approval from the U.S. Department of Labor**

To operate an RTAP, institutions must secure formal approval from the U.S. Department of Labor. This includes meeting federal apprenticeship standards and working with an assigned DOL apprenticeship representative to ensure program quality and compliance.

- U.S. DOL Apprenticeship Website
- U.S. DOL Apprenticeship Registration

Curated Resources

Funding

Sustainable funding is essential for successful teacher apprenticeship programs. Illinois institutions and districts have leveraged state grants, federal workforce dollars, and partnerships with DCEO to support program launch and expansion. However, the funding landscape is evolving, and institutions must navigate shifting federal requirements, competitive grant timelines, and variations in local budget capacity.

Pilot grantees emphasized the importance of establishing diversified funding streams—including tuition supports, wage reimbursements, and braided federal funding—to ensure the long-term viability of apprenticeship pathways. Program designers should stay informed about emerging state initiatives, federal apprenticeship incentives, and potential philanthropic partnerships that may strengthen financial stability. These resources can help institutions identify and leverage funding streams for sustainable program implementation.

- American Institutes for Research Funding Guide for RTAPs – Federal and state funding strategies for RTAPs
- Illinois WorkNet JTED Teacher Apprenticeship Pilot Program – State pilot funding and support for paraprofessional pathways
- Federal Resources Playbook for Registered Apprenticeship – Federal funding sources across multiple agencies
- Key Funding Sources for Educator Registered Apprenticeship Programs – Insights into funding models and sustainability

National Research

These resources provide evidence-based insights, program models, and national standards to inform high-quality design.

- RTAP National Report – EdTrust – Interviews with apprentices of color and recommendations for equitable program design
- 50-State Scan of RTAPs – EdTrust & Pathways Alliance – Overview of RTAP implementation across the U.S.
- ERA Resource Library – Pathways Alliance – Reports, toolkits, and profiles of educator apprenticeship programs
- ERA Intermediary Support – WestEd – Technical assistance and coaching for states and IHEs
- Apprenticeship Models Compendium – NEA – Examples of effective apprenticeship models nationwide

Implementation Tools and Playbooks

The following are practical guides and toolkits to support day-to-day planning, partnership engagement, and program launch.

- ISBE Work-Based Learning Manual – Guidance for integrating apprenticeships into broader work-based learning strategies.
- Apprenticeship Illinois Playbook – State-specific guidance for apprentices and institutions
- Apprenticeship Professionals Toolkits – Resources for colleges, employers, and intermediaries to build and sustain programs.
- Quick-Start Toolkit for Registered Apprenticeship – Federal guide to launching apprenticeship programs.

Final Thoughts

The development and implementation of Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Programs in Illinois represents a bold and innovative step toward addressing the educator workforce challenges across the state. Through strategic partnerships, data-informed planning, and a shared commitment to equity, Illinois has laid the groundwork for a sustainable and impactful teacher preparation pathway. This playbook serves as a foundational resource for institutions and districts seeking to build programs that are responsive to local needs, grounded in best practices, and aligned with both state and federal standards.

As Illinois continues to pilot and expand RTAPs, the lessons learned and insights shared by early adopters will be instrumental in shaping future iterations. The collective efforts of partners across education, workforce development, and government sectors underscore the importance of collaboration in driving meaningful change. Together, we can ensure that every student in Illinois has access to excellent educators prepared through rigorous, supportive, and financially accessible pathways.

ISBE extends deepest gratitude to the educators, administrators, policymakers, and partners who contributed their time, expertise, and passion to the development of this playbook. The commitment to strengthening the teacher pipeline and supporting aspiring educators is both inspiring and essential.

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The contributions have helped shape a pathway that will empower future educators and strengthen the teaching profession for years to come.

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