

South Dakota Department of Labor & Regulation
123 W. Missouri Ave.
Pierre, SD 57501
dlr.sd.gov

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Media Contact: [Dawn Dovre](mailto:Dawn.Dovre), 605-773-3101

South Dakota's Teacher Apprenticeship Program Earns National Honors

PIERRE, S.D. – The Department of Labor and Regulation (DLR) was honored with the prestigious **Pinnacle Award for Business Development** for its Teacher Apprenticeship Program. This award is given to a state demonstrating excellence and innovation in employer engagement by the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) and was presented at the 2025 Winter Policy Forum in Washington, DC.

The Teacher Apprenticeship Program provides a pathway for paraprofessionals to earn a nationally recognized credential and a bachelor's degree in education, as well as a teaching certificate.

"Current paraeducators are gaining invaluable work-based learning experience paired with top-notch technical instruction—an incredible opportunity," said **state Labor and Regulation Secretary Marcia Hultman**. "The best part is they get to continue working with their students right in their own communities. I'm so proud of my team for their dedication to making this happen. As a former teacher, I wholeheartedly applaud these participants for stepping up to grow professionally and make a lasting impact on their schools."

With a 90% retention rate, the program is expected to fill nearly half of the state's 300 open teaching positions. A key factor is apprentices being paired with both local and regional mentors, providing guidance and support throughout the training journey.

"South Dakota's Teacher Apprenticeship Program is helping state school districts retain these valuable individuals," said **NASWA President and CEO Scott B. Sanders**. "This program not only enhances the professional with career development, but it also strengthens effective learning for the students those districts serve."

This program is a joint effort by state agencies, universities, and school districts. To enhance accessibility, universities have streamlined course delivery by condensing 16-week courses to eight weeks, improving focus and facilitating higher credit completion and GPAs. All coursework is offered virtually at convenient times, so participants can continue to work while enrolled.

DLR was also presented with NASWA's State Excellence award in 2019 for the Start Today SD Incentive program, an initiative to expand the number of Registered Apprenticeships and apprentices in South Dakota.

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About the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (www.naswa.org):
NASWA is the national organization representing all 50 state workforce agencies, District of Columbia, and U.S. territories. These agencies deliver training, employment, career, business, and wage and hour services, in addition to administering unemployment insurance, veteran reemployment, and labor market information programs. NASWA provides policy expertise, shares promising state practices, and promotes state innovation and leadership in workforce development.

Photo link: <https://bit.ly/3EwSbic>

Photo caption: The South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation was awarded the National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA/CESER) Pinnacle Award for Business Development for its Teacher Apprenticeship Program this week in Washington, D.C. Pictured from left to right are: Michelle McNertney, NASWA Employment and Training Committee Chair Division Administrator, Workforce Services, Iowa Workforce Development, Kendra Ringstmeyer, Director of Workforce Development, Tara Bartekoske, Registered Apprenticeship Program Manager, and Joe Barela, NASWA Board Chair and Executive Director, Colorado Department of Labor and Employment.