

§ 115C-269.32. Teacher Apprentice Grant Program.

(a) Definitions. – The following definitions shall apply in this section:

- (1) Eligible high school graduate. – A graduate of a high school in a local school administrative unit who was enrolled in a Career and College Promise Transfer Pathway Program leading to an associate degree in teacher preparation and earned one or more credits toward that degree.
- (2) Eligible teacher apprentice. – An eligible high school graduate who meets the following criteria:
 - a. Is employed as a teacher apprentice in an elementary school in the same local school administrative unit where he or she graduated high school.
 - b. Is enrolled part time or full time in a recognized educator preparation program pursuing coursework toward a college degree that will result in teacher licensure.
 - c. Qualifies as a resident for tuition purposes under the criteria set forth in G.S. 116-143.1 and in accordance with the coordinated and centralized residency determination process administered by the Authority [State Education Assistance Authority].
- (3) Program. – The Teacher Apprentice Grant Program.
- (4) Teacher apprentice. – A teacher assistant who works with a teacher of record to develop an expertise in teaching by observing best education practices and gaining classroom experience with the goal of becoming a licensed teacher.

(b) Program Established. – The Department of Public Instruction shall establish the Teacher Apprentice Grant Program. The purpose of the Program is to provide grants to local school administrative units to award funds for (i) the cost of tuition at an educator preparation program for eligible teacher apprentices and (ii) salary supplements for teacher apprentices who become teachers in the unit.

(c) Applications. – Local school administrative units may submit applications to participate in the Program each year pursuant to a process to be established by the Department of Public Instruction. The application shall identify current and ongoing needs for licensed teachers and the expected number of eligible teacher apprentices that would participate in the Program.

(d) Award of Funds. – To the extent funds are made available for the Program, funds shall be awarded as follows:

- (1) Funds for tuition. – Eligible teacher apprentices shall receive awards of up to four thousand six hundred dollars (\$4,600) per academic semester, per eligible teacher apprentice, up to four academic years to defray the costs of tuition and fees for part-time or full-time coursework taken while employed in the local school administrative unit as an eligible teacher apprentice.
- (2) Funds for salary supplements. – Notwithstanding any other provision of law, any eligible teacher apprentice who becomes a licensed teacher and accepts employment in the same local school administrative unit shall receive a salary supplement each month during his or her first four years of employment as a teacher, without a break in service, equivalent to the difference between the State-funded salary of the graduate and the State-funded salary of a similarly situated teacher with four years of experience on the "A" Teachers Salary Schedule, as long as the teacher remains teaching in the same local school administrative unit.

(e) Additional Criteria. – The following additional criteria shall apply to funds awarded under the Program:

- (1) A local board of education may grant an eligible teacher apprentice academic leave to pursue coursework that may only be taken during working hours.
- (2) An eligible teacher apprentice shall fulfill the student teaching requirements of an educator preparation program by working as a teacher apprentice at his or her employing local school administrative unit.
- (3) An eligible teacher apprentice shall continue to receive salary and benefits while student teaching in the local school administrative unit as provided for teacher assistants in G.S. 115C-269.30(c).
- (4) Local boards of education receiving grants under the Program shall make efforts to promote the Program to high school students enrolled in a Career and College Promise Transfer Pathway Program.

(f) Selection of Teacher Apprentices. – The Department shall establish criteria for initial and continuing eligibility to participate in the Program. The Department shall adopt standards to ensure that only qualified, potential recipients receive an award of funds for tuition and fees under the Program. The standards shall include satisfactory academic progress toward achieving teacher licensure. Local school administrative units receiving grants pursuant to the Program shall prioritize for the award of funds for eligible teacher apprentices who received an award in the prior academic year.

(g) Endorsement of Tuition Assistance Awards for Recipients. – Each local board of education participating in the Program shall enter into a memorandum of understanding with the institution of higher education in which an award recipient under the Program is enrolled that includes procedures for at least the following:

- (1) Remittance of the award from the local board of education to the institution of higher education.
- (2) Endorsement of the funds awarded to the recipient to the institution of higher education for deposit into the account of the institution.
- (3) Return of a pro rata share of funds to the local board of education in the event (i) a recipient withdraws from the institution of higher education prior to the end of a term or (ii) the recipient's employment with the local board of education is terminated. The return of funds shall be consistent with procedures used by the institution under federal Title IV programs.

(h) Report to the General Assembly. – The Department shall report no later than May 15, 2024, and annually thereafter while funds are awarded under the Program, to the Joint Legislative Education Oversight Committee regarding the Program, including at least the following information:

- (1) Funds awarded under the Program, including the following:
 - a. Demographic information regarding eligible teacher apprentices.
 - b. Number of award recipients by local school administrative unit and educator preparation program.
- (2) Placement rates, including the number of award recipients who have been employed as licensed teachers in the same local school administrative unit in which they worked as a teacher apprentice and the time frame from the issuance of the initial award of funds to the time of achieving licensure.
- (3) Recommendations to improve the Program and increase the number of teachers in North Carolina. (2023-134, s. 7.44A.)