

A BLUEPRINT FOR QUALITY: WHY THE NATIONAL GUIDELINE STANDARDS (NGS) FOR APPRENTICESHIPS MATTER FOR EVERY STATE



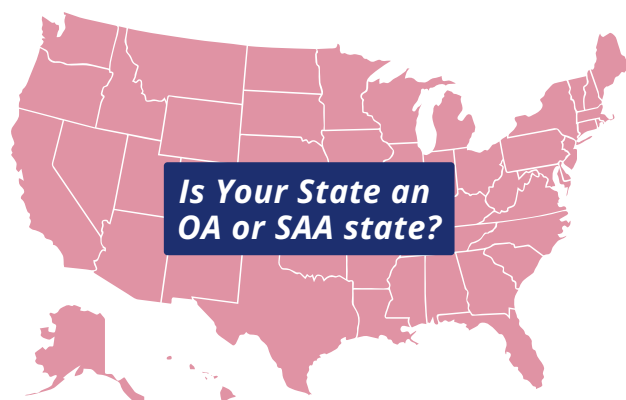
The Value of the Pathways Alliance Principal Registered Apprenticeship National Guideline Standards for the Office of Apprenticeship and State Apprenticeship Agencies States.

The U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) approved the [Pathways Alliance Principal Registered Apprenticeship National Guideline Standards \(NGS\)](#) in April 2026. Since its approval, some states have inquired whether the NGS applies to State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) states or only to states that register apprenticeship programs through the U.S. DOL's Office of Apprenticeship (OA).

Why are the Principal Apprenticeship NGS relevant to SAA states?

SAA leaders may encounter the Pathways Alliance Principal Apprenticeship National Guideline Standards and assume that, because the standards were certified by the U.S. Department of Labor's Office of Apprenticeship, they are only applicable only in OA states. **That is not the case.**

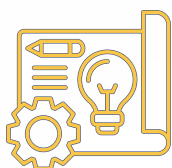
The Pathways Alliance NGS is a nationally certified, but locally registered, planning framework. It identifies core components and decisions that partners should consider when designing a high-quality principal apprenticeship. Program sponsors in both OA and SAA states can use the Pathways Alliance NGS as a starting point to strengthen a research-backed, evidence-based program and adapt it to their state's registration process, educator licensure requirements, terminology, and local context.



ApprenticeshipUSA
Apprenticeship System

The NGS can serve as a useful starting point in either system.

While registration processes differ between OA and SAA states, the NGS outlines the core components of a high-quality Registered Principal Apprenticeship Program (PRAP) rather than prescribing a single model. **The NGS is a blueprint, not an instruction manual.**



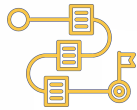
How to use the Pathways Alliance Principal NGS

The NGS provides a common framework while allowing programs to reflect state and local needs. Partners can use the NGS to:

- Build a shared understanding of the goals and program dimensions of a principal apprenticeship
- Compare national guidance with state licensure and apprenticeship requirements
- Identify which elements to adopt or adapt
- Clarify partner roles and support local program registration

Why the NGS is Valuable for SAA States

Although SAA states have authority over their own apprenticeship systems, the NGS provides several important benefits:



A planning framework for designing or refining PRAPs.



Common language that helps education and workforce agencies collaborate around program quality, as apprenticeships often require deep partnership across state agencies and partners.



A set of quality benchmarks developed through a national working group representing experts from education, workforce, and apprenticeship fields.



A resource that aligns with federal apprenticeship priorities.

NGS = Blueprint ➤ State Adaptation ➤ High-Quality Principal Apprenticeship

A Planning Framework

Rather than prescribing a single design or implementation method, the Pathways Alliance Principal NGS identifies the core components that contribute to high-quality apprenticeships. This includes related technical instruction, on-the-job learning, mentorship, progressive wage advancement, and program oversight. States retain the flexibility to determine how these components are implemented within their own educator preparation and apprenticeship systems.

Individual states may incorporate priorities that reflect their unique contexts. For example, Alaska (an OA state) incorporates cultural competency into its principal apprenticeship to better prepare leaders serving rural and remote communities that are predominantly Alaska Native. Other states may emphasize different competencies based on their own local needs.

Common Language Across Agencies

[Deep partnership](#) and [ongoing communication](#) across state and federal agencies is key to the success of a registered apprenticeship program. However, these agencies often use different terminology and operate under distinct policy frameworks, making coordination difficult.

The NGS provides a common point of reference for planning apprenticeships and refining design and quality. While it does not replace state-specific requirements, the NGS can establish a shared understanding of the key components to consider during program development.

A Set of Quality Benchmarks

Voices from the field, with diverse expertise representing different agencies and sectors related to educator apprenticeship programs, developed the NGS. Therefore, the NGS reflects a broad set of perspectives and tested design elements to build a high-quality program. States may choose to adopt or adapt any of the elements as written. The NGS was created as a benchmark to identify potential gaps and inform continuous improvement efforts, while maintaining the flexibility to meet state and local needs.



Terminology Matters

Education and apprenticeship agencies may use terms such as standards, competencies, and skills differently.

In Registered Apprenticeship, “Standards of Apprenticeship” refers to the program’s complete written plan, including its work processes, related instruction, wages, supervision, and administrative requirements.

Education agencies may use “standards” or “competencies” to describe what educators or students should learn, know, and be able to do.

Partners should clarify how each agency uses the terms such as these rather than assume they are interchangeable.

Organizations including The Learning Policy Institute, Arizona State University, InnovateEDU, Educator Registered Apprenticeships (RTI-ERA), Education Leadership Network/EdCounsel, CEEDAR Center (University of Florida), Austin Peay State University, North Dakota Department of Public Instruction, Elevate 215, University of Southern Mississippi, NYS Educator Workforce Development HUB, AACTE, New Leaders, Center for Educational Leadership (University of Washington), NAESP, Education Commission of the States, Western Kentucky University, and NASSP brought relevant knowledge to inform the development of the NGS.

Alignment with Federal Priorities

Although SAA states administer their own apprenticeship systems, the NGS was approved by the U.S. Department of Labor and reflects the structure and expectations of Registered Apprenticeship Programs. The NGS may serve as a helpful reference when designing or strengthening principal apprenticeship programs, as it demonstrates consistency with nationally recognized practices.

Using the NGS does not guarantee funding. Funding eligibility depends on local program registration and specific funding streams.

Using the Blueprint

The Principal Registered Apprenticeship NGS does not prescribe a single model for every state. Rather, it captures the essential research-backed and evidence-based program elements that define a high-quality principal apprenticeship while providing flexibility for states to build programs that reflect their own educator certification standards, workforce systems, and local priorities.

Whether your state registers apprenticeships through the Office of Apprenticeship or a State Apprenticeship Agency, the NGS offers a nationally recognized blueprint that can initiate valuable conversations, support thoughtful program design, strengthen cross-agency and partner collaboration, and position states for future growth.