

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS

K-12 PRINCIPAL OCCUPATION

ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF A REGISTERED APPRENTICESHIP IN K-12 PRINCIPALSHIP FOR LOCAL EDUCATION AGENCIES

OVERVIEW

The Pathways Alliance and our national partners have advanced apprenticeship pathways in K-12, now teaching in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico since 2023. This represents a **991% increase in active apprentices** since the model's inception. Building on this momentum, the new Pathways NGS for Principal Apprenticeship creates a registered pathway for school leadership. The program is grounded in the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL) and is designed to ensure apprentices learn the work of the principalship by working directly alongside accomplished mentor principals while completing state-approved leadership preparation programs that result in school leadership certification.

This fact sheet summarizes the essential elements of a Registered Apprenticeship for the K-12 principal occupation.

NATIONAL GUIDELINES FOR APPRENTICESHIP STANDARDS K-12 Principal Occupation

A high-quality Registered Apprenticeship for principals includes:

- At least 2,000 hours of paid, competency-based on-the-job learning (OJL) in a school under the supervision of a journeyworker principal.
- A journeyworker-to-apprentice ratio of no more than 1:2
- Admission requirements that ensure apprentices have:
 - A bachelor's degree,
 - Full teacher licensure (or equivalent credential), and
 - At least three years of full-time K-12 experience.
- Completion of a master's or post-master's degree in educational leadership (or equivalent), aligned to state licensure requirements.
- Demonstration of competencies outlined in PSEL, as determined jointly by the mentor principal and supervising faculty from the preparation program.

Apprenticeship Terms

Apprentice = Candidate Principal

Journeyworker = Mentor Principal

On-the-job Learning (OJL) = Clinical School Leadership Practice

Related Instruction = Principal Preparation Coursework (e.g., M.Ed., Ed.S., certification pathway)

Work Process Schedule = Leadership Competencies & Clinical Experiences Required throughout the apprenticeship

- Progressively increasing levels of responsibility and autonomy during OJL, but apprentices may not serve as the “principal of record.”
- Satisfactory completion of at least 144 hours of related instruction required by the preparation program

DURATION OF THE APPRENTICESHIP

The apprenticeship is competency-based. While completion depends on demonstrated mastery, it is expected that apprentices will require a minimum of one school year (approx. 2,000 hours). Early programs of promise have found that structuring experiences over 18–24 months to allow candidates to complete related coursework and leadership licensure requirements.

Key Difference: Principal apprentices learn leadership by leading alongside an accomplished mentor principal while completing licensure requirements, not through disconnected coursework alone.

WORK PROCESS SCHEDULE

Apprentices must demonstrate competencies aligned to the Professional Standards for Educational Leaders (PSEL). These include:

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| • Mission, Vision, and Core Values | • Professional Capacity of Personnel |
| • Ethics and Professional Norms | • Professional Community for Staff |
| • Equity and Access | • Family and Community Engagement |
| • Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment | • Operations and Management |
| • Community of Care and Support | • Continuous Improvement |

RELATED INSTRUCTION

The apprenticeship integrates coursework required for principal licensure. Typical requirements include:

- Graduate-level instruction (M.Ed. or post-master’s certificate) in school leadership.
- Coursework in instructional leadership, school law, operations, resource management, and community engagement.
- A minimum of 144 hours of formal instruction, often delivered through 30 graduate credit hours (approx. 450 hours of class time)

Related instruction and OJL are designed to be interdependent and mutually reinforcing, co-constructed by the employer and the preparation program.

PROGRAM ADMISSION

Program sponsors must ensure admissions processes that:

- Increase diversity of the principal pipeline in terms of race/ethnicity, gender, linguistic diversity, and disability status.
- Identify candidates with demonstrated teaching excellence, leadership capacity, and commitment to their communities.
- Match apprentices with experienced mentor principals who have at least three years of demonstrated effectiveness.

PROGRAM WAGES AND COSTS

- Apprentices must be paid progressively increasing wages tied to district salary schedules.
- Apprentice compensation should align with local district salary schedules and increase as apprentices demonstrate competency attainment and program milestones.
- Apprentices should also receive the same benefits as other LEA employees.
- Costs of related instruction are often covered through financial aid, institutional support, and apprenticeship funding.

SUMMARY

The Principal Apprenticeship provides a rigorous, equitable, and sustainable model for preparing the next generation of school leaders. By embedding aspiring principals in authentic leadership contexts with progressive wages and structured coursework, this model ensures leaders are ready on day one to advance teaching, learning, and equity in schools.