



Rural Centered
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A Monthly Newsletter from the
Colorado Center for Rural Education



Rachel Hopkins, an apprentice teacher at Calhan School District RJ-1 in rural Colorado

Apprentices Support Rural Schools

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In [CCRE’s](#) monthly newsletter, we discuss ways to address the teacher shortage—pathways to licensure, funding sources for tuition, 100% online degree programs, and partnerships between organizations, to name a few. This month, we’re focusing on apprenticeship programs as a way to fill open educator positions with qualified personnel.

Sponsored Programs Help Apprentices Become Teachers

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Stephanie Curtis is the Executive Director of [Teacher Apprentice Coaching & Consulting](#) (TASCC), a firm that provides a pathway to teaching licensure. “A person starts the program by obtaining a substitute teacher license,” said Curtis. “They gain teaching experience under the watchful eye of a mentor, then go on to complete their degree program and apply for full licensure.”

TASCC is an official sponsorship program of teacher apprentices through the [U.S. Department of Labor](#). This allows them to work with a local higher education institution (in this case, the University of Colorado – Colorado Springs) to provide the first 24 credit hours toward a teaching degree at no cost. TASCC also works with two community colleges using [Career Advance Colorado](#) funds. Curtis said, “Our goal is to get as close to a zero-cost four-year degree as possible for our apprentices.”

Experienced mentors observe the apprentices by video and provide feedback on their teaching practice. They are supported not only by a TASCC mentor, but also by the mentor teachers on-site at the school. “Filling open teaching positions with apprentices is a better option than many other short-term solutions,” Curtis said. “Apprentices are excited to be in the classroom and really want to learn how to teach.”

Because apprentices come from the local community, they are also significantly more likely to stay in the position. “These are moms who are done raising their littles and are ready to go back to work. They’d like to be on the same schedule as their kids. And if they can become a teacher, all the better,” Curtis said.

If your school or district has already interviewed licensed teachers to fill your open positions and you cannot find a fit, consider signing on with TASCC as an employer district in their sponsored apprenticeship program. Contact Stephanie Curtis at sc.tascc@gmail.com or visit the [TASCC website](#) for more information.



Wyatt Pufpaff, an apprentice teacher at Calhan School District RJ-1 in rural Colorado

How Apprenticeships Are Helping a CO School District

[Calhan School District](#) RJ-1 is located northeast of Colorado Springs and serves northeastern El Paso County and parts of southern Elbert County. The district is in the second year of building its Calhan Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program. Superintendent Dave Slothower said, "I'm not sure people understand how dire the teacher shortage is in rural schools. Where an urban school might get 100 applications for an open position, we can post a position for six months and receive zero applications."

During the pandemic, the district maintained an in-person class schedule, as many rural districts chose to do. When teachers contracted Covid and had to isolate for days or weeks, Calhan was even shorter on teachers. They asked their paraprofessionals to step up and take over the classrooms to fill the gap. "We saw how well they presented the material and interacted with the students and asked ourselves how we could better access the talent within our own buildings. That's when we started our apprenticeship program," said Slothower.



Donna Carpenter, an apprentice teacher at Calhan School District RJ-1 in rural Colorado

“Delivery of the content is what makes the difference between an average and a master teacher, and that’s what the basis of the apprenticeship program is,” said Slothower. “It’s on-the-job training at its best, because the apprentices have support from other teachers and the district.” Slothower reported that the metrics they use to track teacher performance and learning outcomes are positive and have led them to be optimistic about the future of the apprenticeship program.

If you’re wondering if Calhan has a problem backfilling their paraprofessional positions, they don’t. One reason is that the University of Denver has allowed Calhan to incorporate the curriculum from their paraprofessional-to-teacher program into the high school curriculum. Upon graduation, the participants become elementary school paraprofessionals in Calhan or other cooperating school districts and continue on the path to degree completion and full licensure as a teacher.

Another reason Calhan doesn’t have trouble backfilling is that the district now goes to job fairs and recruits for paraprofessional positions on the platform of career development: Start as a para, and we have an established pathway to move you into a career as a teacher. “It’s surprising to people who never went to college and thought the opportunity to earn a degree and build a career based on that degree was long gone,” said Slothower.

If your school or district is facing a teacher shortage, Dave Slothower invites you to contact him at dslothower@calhanschool.org to better understand how to build an apprenticeship program. He recommends enlisting the help of someone who can translate from education speak to government speak, such as the staff at the [Colorado Urban Workforce Alliance](#). “There is hope,” said Slothower. “I believe in these programs, and we at Calhan can share the path to get there with other schools.”

Upcoming Application Timelines

National Board Certified Teacher Stipend applications for 2024 accepted:
January 1, 2024, through April 30, 2024

Rural Inservice Educator Stipend applications for fall 2024 accepted:
May 1, 2024, through August 31, 2024

Colorado Rural Student Teaching Stipend applications for spring 2025 accepted:
July 1, 2024, through October 31, 2024

The **Colorado Substitute Stipend** will be ending this summer. If you have substitutes who qualify for the stipend, please remind them to have their Colorado Substitute Stipend Certification Form signed by the school or district during the school year.

Visit TEACH Colorado's **Financial Aid and Scholarship Information** page for information about additional scholarships.

For financial aid available to in-service and aspiring educators, download the **Colorado Department of Education's Educator Recruitment and District Supports flyer**.

Featured Partners

Learn more about our [featured partners](#) and how they are helping to solve the teacher shortage in rural Colorado.



REGIS
UNIVERSITY

[Regis University](#) offers 100% online teacher licensure programs for those with a college degree and those seeking degree completion. Programs are available for elementary education, secondary education, and special education. Attend a virtual information session for more information. See this document for contact information. Email Student Success Coach [Michele](#) for more information.

Robert Fulton, PhD | Director

