START TODAY SD PRE-APPRENTICESHIP

Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

TARGET AUDIENCE	TOTAL FUNDING	KEY REQUIREMENT
SD Public School Districts	$30,000 per approved application – with up to 5 awards available for this pilot	Strict 2/3 and 1/3 partnership funding split

General Overview & Operational Models

What is the Pre-Apprenticeship Competitive Pilot Program?

The Pre-Apprenticeship Competitive Pilot Program is an initiative administered by the South Dakota Department of Labor & Regulation (DLR) through Start Today SD. It awards competitive grants of up to $30,000 to as many as five (5) South Dakota public school districts to plan, develop, and launch structured high school pre-apprenticeship pathways connecting students directly to Registered Apprenticeship Programs (RAPs) or high-demand careers.

Who is eligible to apply for this funding?

All South Dakota public school districts are eligible to apply. **Districts can apply under one of two operational models:**

- **Option A (Sponsor Partnership):** The school district partners with an established, active Registered Apprenticeship Program (RAP) employer or group intermediary sponsor.
- **Option B (District-Led Model):** The school district establishes its own registered standards, acting as both educational provider and program sponsor (utilizing internal school departments such as facilities, IT, or early childhood education).

Does our district need to be a registered sponsor before applying?

- **Option B (District-Led): No.** Selected districts do not need registered standards in place when submitting an application. Districts will build and register their standards alongside dedicated Start Today SD staff during the guided planning cohort (January–April 2027).
- **Option A (Sponsor Partnership): Yes.** The partner business or entity must already be an active, officially registered sponsor with approved standards in place at the time of application to receive the employer funding split.

Can our school partner with an unregistered local business (e.g., an onsite daycare)?

- **Under Option B: Yes.** The school district serves as the registered program sponsor and can designate the local business as an approved work-based learning or training site.
- **Under Option A: No.** Under Option A, partner businesses must already hold active, recognized apprenticeship standards to qualify for the $10,000 employer funding distribution.

Funding, Budgets, & Incentives

How is the $30,000 grant award split?

- **Option A (Sponsor Partnership):** Uses a 2/3 and 1/3 split, $20,000 is awarded to the school district to manage academic integration and coordination, and $10,000 is awarded directly to the registered employer sponsor to offset on-the-job training, mentoring, and administrative costs.
- **Option B (District-Led Model):** The full $30,000 is awarded directly to the school district to cover all internal development, coordinator stipends, instructional resources, and student onboarding expenses.

Does contracting with an external university or technical college for instruction reduce an Option B district's $30,000 award?

No. Under Option B, the full $30,000 grant is disbursed directly to the school district. The district maintains complete local budget discretion and may choose to use a portion of these funds to contract with an external Related Instruction (RI) provider (such as a University or a state technical college) without reducing or penalizing the award amount.

Can pilot grant recipients still qualify for the $7,500 Program Development Incentive under Policy 5.52?

Yes. The $30,000 pilot grant is completely independent from the standard Start Today SD Program Development Incentive (Policy 5.52). Receiving pilot funds does not disqualify an organization from receiving the $7,500 incentive, provided standard Policy 5.52 eligibility criteria are satisfied (subject to funding availability and state priorities).

What are the allowable uses of grant funds?

Funds are designed to be flexible. **Allowable expenses include:**

- Stipends for district coordinators, instructors, or guidance counselors managing the pathway.
- Curriculum acquisition, specialized instructional materials, and safety gear.
- Student credentialing and testing fees (such as OSHA 10 or CPR/First Aid).
- Program outreach, employer engagement materials, and student onboarding resources.

Program Structure, Pathways & Higher Education

Can a single application cover more than one occupational pathway?

No. Each competitive application is restricted to one discrete occupation/pathway (for example, Paraprofessional/Education or Information Technology). Because each occupation requires distinct work processes, specialized mentors, and specific curricula, districts wishing to establish multiple pathways must submit separate applications for each. Each application is scored independently on its own merits.

How does partnering with an intermediary work under Option A vs. Option B?

- **Under Option A:** The intermediary acts as the official registered Sponsor, while the district acts as the On-the-Job Learning Provider. The grant is split $20,000 to the district and $10,000 to the intermediary.
- **Under Option B:** The district serves as both Sponsor and the On-the-Job Learning Provider, receiving the full $30,000. The district may contract with the intermediary and establish articulation agreements.

Under Option A, can a district partner with multiple Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in one application?

No. Under current pilot guidelines, each Option A project application is structured around one employer partner per approved project to ensure streamlined administration and dedicated mentorship.

Does participating in this program obligate our district to hire students into permanent full-time (FTE) positions upon graduation?

No. Pre-apprenticeships are foundational career pipelines designed to equip high school students with skills, industry certifications, and hands-on workplace exposure. School districts are under no obligation or expectation to fund or create permanent FTE positions once students complete the program.

Milestones, SAA Transition & Student Safety

Must our Registered Apprenticeship Program be fully registered by the April 30 milestone?

No. By the April 30, 2027, milestone, awarded districts are only required to have their completed Pre-Apprenticeship Framework and standards package finalized and submitted for state and federal review. Start Today SD coordinators will guide cohort teams

through this process during monthly planning sessions. Formal registration in the federal system will be completed prior to student enrollment in Fall 2027.

With the transition to a State Apprenticeship Agency (SAA) under Senate Bill 63, where are standards submitted?

Standards packages will be assembled with direct technical assistance from Start Today SD staff. During the ongoing transition period under Senate Bill 63, standards packages continue to be submitted and reviewed in coordination with the USDOL Office of Apprenticeship until the SAA receives full formal federal recognition. Your assigned DLR Apprenticeship Coordinator will manage each milestone submission.

Can high school students under age 18 participate in facilities and maintenance roles?

Yes, within regulatory guidelines. While minors under 18 are subject to state and federal child labor restrictions regarding hazardous equipment, Start Today SD coordinators will work directly with school teams during the spring planning cohort to structure approved work process schedules that maximize hands-on learning while ensuring full safety and regulatory compliance.

Where can administrators find an official directory of approved Registered Apprenticeship sponsors in their local area?

Districts can utilize the USDOL national Apprenticeship Partner Finder:

1. Visit apprenticeship.gov/partner-finder.
2. Click the **"Search Sponsors"** tab.
3. Select **South Dakota** and filter by your specific **County**.

Key Dates and Deadlines

Milestone Activity	Deadline Date	Status
~~Written Questions Due Date~~	~~Friday, Nov. 20, 2026~~	Closed
Application Submission Deadline	Friday, Nov. 30, 2026	Upcoming
Notification of Successful Applications	Friday, Dec. 11, 2026	Upcoming
Milestone 1 submission deadline	Friday, April 30, 2027	Upcoming
First Student Cohort Launch and Milestone 2 submission deadline	Friday, Dec. 31, 2027	Upcoming

Resources and Support

For assistance in developing your application, aligning resources, or identifying a Registered Apprenticeship partner, please reach out to our team:

- Technical Assistance & Program Design: Start Today SD Apprenticeship Team
- Local Employer Connections: Contact your regional South Dakota Job Service Office
- Standards & Course Coding Alignment: South Dakota Department of Education (CTE Division)
- USDOL Training and Employment Notice 05-26: Framework for Effective Pre-Apprenticeships