



Molly Steur <msteur@ednc.org>

Fwd: For EdNC: 500 NC school employees to train as teachers without leaving their jobs

Molly Steur <msteur@ednc.org>
To: Molly Steur <msteur@ednc.org>

Tue, Oct 13, 2026 at 10:05 AM

From: **Kathryn Peterson** <kathryn.peterson@wgu.edu>
Date: Mon, Oct 12, 2026 at 11:30AM

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Western Governors University, Craft Education and The Innovation Project Join Forces to Scale Paid Teacher Apprenticeships in North Carolina****Federal grant creates an earn-and-learn pathway for 500 school employees to become licensed teachers**

RALEIGH, N.C., Oct. 12, 2026 — Teacher assistants, substitutes and other school employees in 15-20 North Carolina districts will be able to become licensed teachers while keeping their jobs and paychecks, through a five-year, \$5.5 million federal grant awarded to Western Governors University (WGU) and its apprenticeship organization Craft Education, in partnership with The Innovation Project.

North Carolina districts began this school year with 2,009 teacher vacancies, according to the N.C. Department of Public Instruction. Many school employees want to teach, but leaving a paycheck to finish a degree and student teach puts that goal out of reach.

The North Carolina Teacher Apprenticeship and Workforce Advancement Initiative is built to remove that barrier. It will prepare 500 teacher apprentices and train 250 mentor teachers, beginning in fall 2027.

"We start every year with at least 8 classrooms we can't fully staff, and some of our best candidates are the teacher assistants already working down the hall," said Dr. Jesse Pratt, superintendent of Hertford County Public Schools. "This apprenticeship lets us invest in people who already know our students and plan to stay in our community."

The Innovation Project, a North Carolina-based collaborative of public-school districts, will serve as the registered apprenticeship sponsor for all participating districts. WGU's School of Education will provide the coursework, and Craft Education will manage apprenticeship operations, from mentor support to federal reporting.

"Our districts know they cannot solve teacher shortages through recruitment alone," said Dr. Sharon Contreras, CEO of The Innovation Project. "We must create a statewide framework for

developing future teachers already working in our schools. By working together, we can expand access to the profession while building stronger local educator pipelines."

Apprentices will stay employed by their districts, work alongside mentor teachers and complete the final 60 credits of a WGU bachelor's degree in elementary or special education. They will also complete a North Carolina teaching license and a Registered Apprenticeship credential.

"Apprenticeship works in health care and the skilled trades because people learn on the job, with a mentor and a clear path to a credential. Teaching should work the same way," said Dr. Mallory Dwinal-Palisch, president of Craft Education at WGU. "We handle the hours tracking, funding and federal reporting behind the scenes, so districts can focus on developing great teachers and keep the program going after the grant ends."

About WGU and Craft Education

Western Governors University (WGU) is an accredited, nonprofit online university serving more than 190,000 students nationwide. Through flexible, competency-based degree programs and strong employer and community partnerships, WGU helps learners build skills and credentials aligned to workforce needs, including preparing educators for schools and communities. Through Craft Education, part of WGU, the university also helps school districts, colleges and employers design and run apprenticeship programs that let people earn a degree, a credential and a paycheck at the same time. Learn more at wgu.edu and craftededucation.com.

About The Innovation Project

The Innovation Project (TIP) is a collaborative of forward-thinking public education leaders who are unleashing student potential and shaping the future of learning. TIP incubates innovative projects that can be implemented at scale across North Carolina and the nation. Learn more at tipnc.org.

Federal Funding Disclosure: This project is funded 46.8% by a U.S. Department of Education Teacher Quality Partnership grant totaling \$5,506,131. The remaining 53.2% will be provided through nonfederal sources, including WGU, The Innovation Project and participating school districts.

Kathryn Peterson

Corporate Communications & Public Relations

Western Governors University

kathryn.peterson@wgu.edu

847-638-7383