



Highlights from Apprenticeship Survey Findings

Introduction

This summary synthesizes insights from recent interviews with apprentices, mentors, and program sponsor/employers in the TEACH Early Childhood® Minnesota Apprenticeship Program. It discusses their experiences with the program, including its strengths, and explores some of the challenges they faced.

Positive Impacts of the Program

Mentors emphasized the importance and impact of the apprenticeship model and described mutual growth.

"It bridges the gap between theory and practice."

"It's a positive for both mentors and mentees. I'm learning too."

Apprentices described their experience as "fantastic" and "meaningful." They valued putting theory to practice by connecting college coursework to daily classroom interactions, moving from "natural instinct" to "intentional teaching." The mentor relationship gave apprentices hands-on, practical knowledge from an experienced peer that cannot be found in a textbook. Photos and videos captured by mentors provided meaningful reflection and skill development.

Mentor support, including check-ins, reminders, and helping apprentices stay on track with classes and paperwork, was highlighted. Apprentices credited mentors for keeping them accountable. Mentors were credited with helping apprentices navigate specific, high-stakes classroom scenarios such as: behavioral strategies using parallel talk, and emotional regulation techniques; lesson planning and project management; and improving professional communication with coworkers and handling workplace conflicts with confidence.

Overall, employers described the program as transformative for individual educators, essential for stabilizing staffing, and effective in promoting professional growth at all levels.

"When a teaching position opens, we have someone internal who can move into that role."

They praised TEACH staff for responsiveness, friendliness, and willingness to troubleshoot:

"I don't think I've ever left feeling like my questions weren't answered."

"They really go above and beyond to get the correct answer."



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What are the strengths of the program?

Mentors appreciated bi-monthly community practice meetings as a valuable space for reflective practice. They also felt that TEACH staff provide helpful, warm, and encouraging support.

Apprentices said the apprenticeship scholarship offers unlimited class credits, a major advantage over the traditional TEACH scholarship program. They also appreciated how TEACH staff worked to provide quick response times, financial support, and—most notably—email reminders for deadlines.

Some employers felt that mentorship served as a stepping stone for career advancement for the mentors.

“One of our mentors has not really stepped up before to be in leadership roles... it kind of gave her a little bit of added confidence to know that she is an expert in this field.”

“This particular pathway felt like a way that more staff would be interested in pursuing... our hope is a trickle-down effect of people gaining knowledge and sharing it with coworkers.”

Several leaders described the program as helping create a culture of learning.

“I would hope that more of our staff would take advantage of it... It’s a great opportunity.”

Areas for improvement

Mentors told us that there could be clearer guidance on expectations and best practices, and stronger communications about apprentice progress.

Apprentices need more assistance with logging competencies and they would like additional workshops on practical skills.

Employers felt that the initial onboarding was confusing or rushed, that communication around stipend schedules could be better, and that payments needed to be better documented. They also felt that mentor capacity limited apprentice participation.

“I only have one mentor... that’s what’s limiting us more than interest.”

“A program that is one-fourth the size has the same cap... I don’t feel that’s very fair.”