# **Massachusetts Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program (RTAP)**

## **Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)**

1. **What is the Massachusetts Registered Teacher Apprenticeship Program (RTAP)?**

The RTAP is an innovative pathway into the teaching profession designed enhance educator workforce diversity, strengthen the educator pipeline, ensure equitable access to teacher preparation ((particularly in hard-to-staff roles), and (particularly in hard-to-staff roles), and to support high-quality instruction. It allows individuals to earn their Initial teaching license while gaining hands-on experience in a classroom. Each RTAP is supported by a partnership between an employing school district and approved educator preparation providers (EPPs).

1. **What is the difference between a registered teacher apprenticeship program, teacher residencies, and a grow-your-own program?**

An RTAP is a formal program that provides a paid path to becoming a teacher. It combines on-the-job training with academic coursework so participants can earn a salary while working toward their teaching license. RTAPs in Massachusetts are approved by the state’s Department of Elementary & Secondary Education and authorized through the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development in accordance with state laws governing preparation and licensure and U.S. Department of Labor requirements and guidelines for registered apprenticeships.

Grow-Your-Own (GYO) programs vary in program design and objectives. While they often focus on recruiting aspiring educators from the local community into pipeline programs related to education, they may or may not adhere to state preparation and licensure requirements nor result in licensure.

Teacher residencies also vary in scope and program design. These are typically post-baccalaureate programs that allow an individual to be employed in a teaching position (often on a Provisional license) while completing the requirements for Initial licensure.

More information about the differences between RTAPs, GYO programs, and teacher residencies is available [here](#_Characteristics_of_RTAPs,).

1. **Who is eligible to operate a RTAP?**

In Massachusetts, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) approves all district-based RTAPs and serves as the intermediary to the state’s Division of Apprentices in the Executive Office of Labor and Workforce Development. A public school district or school may apply to operate an RTAP pathway as the employer in partnership with an approved educator preparation provider as the related technical instructional provider.

1. **Who is eligible to be a teacher apprentice?**

To qualify as an apprentice, candidates must be at least 18 years old or older and employed in a full-time instructional role related to the teacher occupation (e.g., paraprofessional, teaching aide). Apprentices may not be teachers-of-record, including teachers in the classroom through emergency licensure waivers. Candidates must have a high school diploma or a Massachusetts High School Equivalency Credential. Candidates must meet the physical requirements set by the employing Massachusetts Local Education Agency and be able to access and navigate all areas of a school. Employment eligibility within a Massachusetts Local Education Agency includes passing background checks, fingerprinting, and other pre-screening processes. Additionally, candidates must meet the admission requirements of the educator preparation provider. More information can be found in Appendix A: Work Process Schedule, SELECTION PROCEDURES. All other eligibility requirements are determined by the school districts and EPPs. Applicants must meet the qualifications outlined by these entities. Individuals cannot apply directly without district sponsorship.

1. **Who should apply?**

This program is ideal for career changers, paraprofessionals, college and community college students, or anyone seeking a cost-free pathway to become a teacher.

1. **How does the RTAP differ from the Performance Review Program for Initial Licensure (PRPIL)?**

PRPIL (Performance Review Program for Initial Licensure) is an alternative Massachusetts Teacher's License program for teachers who wish to advance from a Provisional license to an Initial license. Candidates engaged in PRPIL earn their Initial license while they continue to teach.

While both PRPIL and RTAP result in Initial licensure, PRPIL candidates are teachers-of-record with at least three years of experience teaching on a Provisional license. Registered teacher apprentices are not required to have a Provisional license, and they may not be employed as teachers-of-record while completing their apprenticeship term. An individual may also pursue Initial licensure via PRPIL on their own, while a registered teacher apprentice must by sponsored by an employing district.

1. **What are the goals and main components of the RTAP?**

The RTAP aims to diversify the educator workforce, expand access to the teacher profession in hard-to-staff roles, and support high-quality instruction. Key components include a culturally responsive curriculum, wrap-around supports, mentorship and supervision from experienced educators, flexible programming, and access to an earn-while-your-learn preparation model with progressive wage increases.

1. **How is the RTAP structured?**

Each RTAP involves a partnership between the sponsoring school district and an approved EPP(s). Apprentices are employed full-time in classrooms in an instructional role while completing coursework through their EPP and demonstrating on-the-job competencies under the supervision of a licensed supervising practitioner. RTAPs are flexible enough to be designed around a post-bac model that supports college graduates or career changers, or it may serve as a degree-granting baccalaureate pathway for recent high school graduates or individuals with their associate's degree.

1. **Can EPPs partner with multiple districts to run RTAPs**?

Yes. However, it is strongly encouraged that districts and EPPs focus on one partner in Year 1 of implementing a RTAP. Eventually, districts may propose RTAPs with more than one EPP or in more than one licensure area.

1. **How long does it take to complete a RTAP?**

Registered teacher apprentices must complete at least 2,000 hours of on-the-job learning and no less than 150 hours of related instruction per year to three to four college courses per year. Given that a typical academic school year is comprised of 180 instruction days, this type of model will likely yield apprenticeship terms that span at least two academic years. RTAPs may extend beyond two years depending on prior experience and the requirements of the license.

1. **What degree pathway(s) are offered through RTAP?**

RTAP standards in MA have been designed to accommodate multiple pathways to licensure, including baccalaureate, post-baccalaureate, degree- and non-degree-granting routes. DESE is initially encouraging RTAPs focused on post-baccalaureate tracks, in addition to baccalaureate pathways serving apprentices who have already completed an associate’s degree or a similar level of course credit hours. These tracks are ideal for recent graduates, paraprofessionals, career-changers, or anyone seeking a low-cost pathway to becoming a teacher.

1. **What licensure areas can an apprentice pursue through RTAPs?**

In Massachusetts, RTAPs must be explicitly designed to expand pipelines into our hardest-to-staff roles. Grant-funded RTAPs will prioritize four licensure areas: special education, English as a Second Language (ESL), secondary STEM, and early childhood. These areas are the hardest to staff, with ongoing shortages, high turnover, and inadequate pipelines across the state. However, districts can propose RTAPs in other high-need fields if they can show a local, persistent need, partner with an EPP capable of preparing educators in the field, and support a cohort of apprentices.

1. **Can a district operate an RTAP focused on multiple licensure areas?**

To keep things manageable, districts are strongly encouraged to focus on one licensure area with the first cohort of apprentices. Districts should consider their open positions and hard-to-staff roles when selecting a licensure area to focus on. Districts may eventually propose RTAPs to offer apprenticeships in multiple licensure areas.

1. **How does the RTAP support culturally responsive teaching?**

Districts will work closely with EPPs to teach apprentices how to use culturally responsive teaching. This means they help apprentices create classrooms where all students feel included and valued, no matter their background. Districts and EPPs make sure apprentices are trained to understand and respect students' different cultures and experiences. Employing districts and partner EPPs will need to demonstrate evidence of expertise in cultivating culturally and linguistically sustaining teaching and learning environments.

1. **What does the apprenticeship look like in practice? What would an apprentice’s day to day look like? How do the required on-the-job training hours align with an aspiring teacher’s required practicum?**

Each apprentice will be assigned a mentor teacher and will complete a full-time apprenticeship in a classroom under their mentor’s supervision. Like a student teaching practicum, apprentices will participate in a range of instructional experiences that align with Massachusetts teacher certification requirements and those established between the supporting district and Education Preparation Provider (EPP). These may include lesson observations, lesson/unit development, small group and whole group instruction, administration of formative and summative assessments, and data analysis to inform instruction. Apprentices can expect a gradual release of responsibility from observation and support roles to full instruction and responsibility for the classroom.

1. **What are the requirements and expectations of apprentices’ mentor teachers?**

Mentor teachers are required to be licensed, full-time employees of their district, have at least three full years of experience under an appropriate license, and have achieved a summative performance evaluation rating of Proficient or Exemplary on their most recent evaluation. Mentors should be carefully selected by their district/school, in accordance with state requirements and a set of shared expectations established with the designated EPP. Ideal mentors will have demonstrated:

* + Positive impact on student outcomes, particularly with students from historically marginalized groups and communities
  + Culturally responsive and linguistically sustaining proficiency in their instructional practices
  + Ability to effectively mentor and coach a diverse set of adult learners

Mentor teachers will meet regularly with their apprentice mentees to ensure understanding and integration of related instruction and to provide training and feedback that corresponds with licensure requirements. Mentors will be responsible for formally assessing each apprentice’s level of proficiency in the approved skillsets and performance areas for teacher certification. They will collaborate with the partnering EPP and their school and/or district administrators to ensure alignment and final sign-off on all the approved skillsets and performance areas prior to the apprentice’s completion of the apprenticeship program.

1. **What training and support will mentor teachers receive?**

DESE will provide training for mentors on effective mentoring approaches with a focus on Culturally and Linguistically Sustaining Practices. Topics will include the presence of historical and ongoing structural, systemic, and interpersonal racism in school environments, how this impacts the experiences of educators of color, and how to respond to bias as both an ally and an advocate. Mentors will also receive individualized coaching and support to:

* + Offer culturally sustaining mentorship that reflects the diverse identities of their apprentices.
  + Support apprentices in implementing culturally responsive teaching practices that meet the diverse needs of students.
  + Foster a sense of belonging and empowerment for apprentices navigating the challenges and opportunities of the teaching profession.
  + Engage in ongoing reflection, feedback, and adjustments to practice in partnership with apprentices.

Training will be provided for mentors prior to the start of the apprenticeship period as well as during the apprenticeship. Schedules and logistics will be coordinated by districts and the related Instruction Providers.

1. **Can a journeyworker/mentor support more than one apprentice?**

No. There must always be one dedicated mentor per apprentice during the apprenticeship.

1. **What are the costs and financial assistance obligations associated with the RTAP?**

RTAPs are intended to be an affordable way to become a teacher. While apprentices earn a living wage based on the employer’s wage schedule, employing districts and EPPs cover almost all costs associated with obtaining licensure through state and federal grant programs. Remaining costs for individual apprentices may be covered through scholarship programs.

1. **Do apprentices need to pass the MTELs?**

Apprentices do not need to take the MTELs in order to work as a registered teacher apprentice. Apprentices will need to pass the Communications and Literacy MTEL, as well as the MTEL corresponding to their licensure area, in order to earn an Initial license. Apprentices will pursue licensure towards the end of their apprenticeship, after completing OTJ and RTI hours.

1. **What happens after an apprentice completes the RTAP?**

Upon successful completion of the program, apprentices are endorsed for their Initial teaching license and are eligible for full-time teaching positions in Massachusetts.

1. **How does the RTAP align with Massachusetts' educational goals?**

The RTAP supports diversity, equity, and excellence in teaching, aligning with DESE’s Educational Vision and commitment to cultivating and sustaining an educator workforce that is diverse, culturally responsive, well-prepared, and committed to continuous improvement, ensuring that all students have equitable access to effective educators. The program also works to expand the pipeline into hard-to-staff fields such as STEM and special education. As a potential apprentice, you might wonder what type of teacher you could become. RTAP provides pathways to train in subjects like early childhood, STEM, or special education, depending on the needs of the districts involved.

1. **How will DESE support districts and EPPs in implementing RTAPs?**

RTAP is designed with built-in supports to help districts and EPPs succeed, including handbooks, PLCs for managing implementation and change, and training programs for supervisors and mentor teachers. Mentor training will focus on supporting diverse early-career educators, with a focus on implementation of culturally and linguistically responsive practices. Districts and EPPs will also receive guidance on securing state and federal funding and external evaluations to assess the program’s impact. These resources are designed to ensure the successful and sustainable implementation of RTAP across participating districts.

1. **What financial support is available for districts and EPPs interested in a RTAP**?

DESE will be offering grant funding in individual awards ranging from $100,000 to $250,000 per year, for up to three years, depending on available funding. Grant funding will prioritize Title I/underperforming schools and districts, and districts with large student-teacher demographic gaps. Grant-funded RTAPs must demonstrate evidence of culturally and linguistically sustaining teaching and learning environments, the use of high-quality instructional materials, a focus on high-needs licensure areas, and the ability to provide wraparound supports to ensure program success.

1. **Is the grant application the same as the application to run an RTAP? How does a district apply for grant funding?**

The RTAP grant application process is separate from the general application for a RTAP. When the grant application window opens, districts can attend informational webinars and office hours to get support with the application process. In the **spring,** selected districts will be notified as part of the Cohort 1, with the next steps including the Department of Apprenticeship Standards (DAS) registration and apprentice recruitment. Finally, in the **summer and fall,** the program officially launches. This includes mentor training, completion of summer coursework, and the start of employment and apprenticeships in the fall.

1. **Can additional terms of requirements be added to the RTAP paperwork for apprentices?**

No, it’s best to limit the apprentice agreement strictly to the terms related to the apprenticeship program, in line with the DAS guidelines. The agreement should cover only the term of apprenticeship and end upon program completion.

1. **Could DESE establish any additional agreements with the apprentice outside of the RTA paperwork?**

The focus should remain on the DAS-defined apprenticeship terms and completion criteria. Adding separate agreements is generally discouraged to keep the process straightforward and focused on the apprentice’s progress through the program.

1. **Who can I contact for more information about the RTAP?**

For more information, contact us at [EducatorApprenticeships@mass.gov](mailto:EducatorApprenticeships@mass.gov)

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## **Characteristics of RTAPs, GYOs, and Teacher Residencies**

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| **Element** | **MA RTAP** | **GYO** | **Residencies** |
| **Federally recognized** | • |  |  |
| **Community-based recruitment** | • | • | ° |
| **Individualized support** | • | • | ° |
| **Multiple pathways (e.g., HS, UG, Grad)** | • | ° | ° |
| **Progressive wages** | • |  |  |
| **Paid work-based learning** | • | ° | ° |
| **Aligned coursework** | • | ° | • |
| **Minimum number of hours/years of work-based learning** | • |  | • |
| **Cohorts** | • | ° | ° |
| **Culminates in a degree** | ° | ° | ° |
| **Prepares candidates for Initial licensure** | • |  | • |
| **Focused on diversifying the profession** | • | ° |  |
| Mentorship and Coaching | • | ° | • |
| In partnership w/ Educator Prep Provider | • | ° | • |
| Long-term Career Support | • | ° |  |
| Equity-Focused Pedagogy | • | ° | ° |
| Formal Evaluation and Feedback Loop | • |  | • |

• = always present ° = sometimes present

*Adapted from “*[***What's the Difference Between Grow Your Own, Teacher Residency, and Teacher Registered Apprenticeship?***](https://www.newamerica.org/education-policy/edcentral/whats-the-difference-between-gyo-teacher-residency-and-teacher-registered-apprenticeship/)***”*** *by New America, 2024*