# USU Education Majors Begin Inaugural Apprenticeship Program for Full-Time Training in Utah Classrooms

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North Sanpete School District celebrates student participants in the URAPT program. Attendees
included apprentices, their journeyworker teachers, and USBE and district leadership.

In Fall 2025, USU joined several other universities in Utah to partner with the Utah State Board of Education, which has a grant from the U.S. Department of Labor and the Utah Department of Workforce Services to fund a new program called the Utah Registered Apprenticeship Program for Teachers (URAPT). This program gives undergraduate students the chance to work full-time in a classroom as an apprentice while earning their bachelor's degree and a certificate in education. The aim of URAPT is to give future teachers extensive hands-on experience, help them enter the profession, and encourage them to stay long-term.

Admission into the program depends on participation by a local school district or charter school, which is required to publicly post the job opportunity. Ideal applicants are current or returning degree-seeking university students who are already working as teacher's assistants or paraprofessionals in the school. Pairing the apprentices with the school district in which they already work can form a mutually beneficial relationship with the goal of long-term employment.

Once a student is accepted into the program by the participating school district or charter school, he or she is assigned to an experienced mentor teacher (called a journeyworker teacher). Apprentices earn a competitive wage and get reimbursed for the university classes they take at the same time. Students in the program can receive up to $10,000 a year for tuition and fees for up to three years. When they finish, they'll graduate with both a bachelor's degree and a Utah professional educator license.

"What we're really hoping is that programs like this will lead to better retention of Utah teachers," said Sylvia Read, associate dean of accreditation and undergraduate studies in the Emma Eccles Jones College of Education and Human Services at USU. "Because these apprentices have such an in-depth preparation, their commitment to staying in the teaching profession will be higher—and the mentoring they receive from their journeyworker teacher is crucial to that."

This is the first year of the URAPT program, and three USU students are currently participating, but the program places no limit on how many university students can participate in the future.

**Penni Dennis, Special Education Major**

Penni Dennis with her journeyworker teacher Morgan Christensen

Dennis had been thinking about going back to school and learned about the apprenticeship program through the school district. "I knew the cost of school would be a challenge, so the funding has been a blessing," she said. "I chose this field because I enjoy working with the students. I enjoy learning about them and making a difference in their lives. I have already been able to teach several social skills lessons and am a member of the IEP team for my students."

Dennis continued, "My journeyworker and I work side-by-side in the classroom. She has helped me with schoolwork as well as mentoring me on my responsibilities for the apprenticeship. She has not only been a great mentor, but an amazing friend as well. I am also surrounded by other

amazing teachers who have answered questions, tutored me, and just been a great support."

She also recognizes the value of spending so much time in the classroom. "With two-plus years of hands-on experience, I know I will be much more ready for my own classroom," said Dennis. "It is definitely not easy to work full-time, take classes for several hours every night, and raise a family, but I know I will have accomplished something amazing when I graduate."

**Aysha Shelley, Elementary Education Major**

Aysha Shelley will graduate with a degree in elementary education from USU in December 2026. She has worked off and on in North Sanpete School District for three years filling roles as a special education preschool teacher's assistant, reading group leader, and substitute teacher. She is now an apprentice in a fourth-grade classroom at Mt. Pleasant Elementary School.

Aysha Shelley with her journeyworker teacher Liz Cook

Shelley learned about the URAPT apprenticeship program through a university class, but at the time she didn't give it much thought. Later, she received a job posting in an email from North Sanpete School District detailing that an apprenticeship position was available at Mt. Pleasant, an elementary school she already knew and loved.

Shelley noted that being paid for the apprenticeship as well as the annual stipend to cover tuition and fees helped her make the decision to apply. But she views the long-term, full-time experience inside the classroom and the ability to work directly with a skilled mentor teacher as the greatest benefits of the program. "I chose this program because it allows me to be in a school full-time working with amazing teachers while I work toward my degree," Shelley said.

Shelley also loves working with fourth graders alongside her mentor. "My journeyworker is very chill, but she also knows how to set expectations," she said. "Part of teaching is thinking on your feet and improvising when needed. I feel like I'm getting more comfortable in the classroom. I enjoy seeing how much the students grow throughout the year and watching their personalities shine."

**Emma Syme, Elementary Education Major**

Apprentice Emma Syme

Emma Syme transferred to USU last year from Snow College and will graduate with a degree in elementary education in Spring 2027. She is currently an apprentice in a kindergarten classroom at Fountain Green Elementary School in North Sanpete School District.

Syme related that the most appealing part of the URAPT program is the long-term, in-classroom experience. "I know teachers can burn out within their first five years, and I'm personally scared to be in a classroom by myself," she said. "But I think the apprenticeship gives us such great support. We're taking responsibilities as a teacher, but with a mentor teacher beside us. I know how a classroom runs now, so I can take what I'm learning here and apply it in my own classroom someday."

She has come to enjoy working closely with her mentor teacher. "It's been great. I feel comfortable telling her that I want to try something and I know she'll let me," Syme related. "I know I'll get the support I need from her, so it's been really nice."

She says that the children she works with make all the difference. "It's cliche, of course, but they are just so sweet, and they have so many great ideas," she said. "I love talking with them and asking them questions about what they think about things."

Syme offered advice to university students who might be interested in pursuing the URAPT apprenticeship path to becoming a certified teacher. “I think it’s important to be in a school as much as you can,” she said. “If you’re interested in being an apprentice, talk to your local school district because it is a great program. Working closely with teachers in a school gives us really good opportunities to connect with them. They are a game changer.”

*To learn more about the URAPT teacher apprenticeship program, visit the USBE website.*