

The State of Apprenticeships

Spring 2023 Policy Snapshot



APPRENTICESHIPS
FOR AMERICA

Situation Analysis

Thanks to investments from the [Biden Administration](#) and [bipartisan majorities in Congress](#), as well as states including [Texas](#), [Alabama](#), [California](#), and [Maryland](#), **apprenticeships are gaining traction** as an approach that can both help businesses close persistent talent gaps and connect early-career American workers with job opportunities.

The rise of apprenticeships comes at a **critical time for the country's workforce system**, as a growing number of families and policymakers alike question the value and return-on-investment of college as a [single pathway to the workforce](#). Today, when most business sectors are [struggling to find workers](#), opportunities for job-related skill-building are limited. Increasingly, in-demand digital and other skills are harder to learn in a lecture and better learned by doing.

In short, it appears that **momentum is building for apprenticeships at both the federal and state level**. But is this enthusiasm a sign of a broad-based transformation in U.S. funding and policymaking – or a lot of lip service without real policy weight behind it?

Eager to backup intuition with data, Apprenticeships for America conducted an **analysis of all 50 states' approaches to apprenticeship policy**, based on recent legislative sessions and gubernatorial priorities. What we found is that there is indeed enthusiasm for new workforce pathways including apprenticeship programs across the country – but there's also **a long way to go**.

This policy snapshot summarizes the key findings of that analysis. Of course, it represents just a moment in time; and AFA will continue to share regular policy readouts about the **state of apprenticeships** over the coming months.

Key Takeaways



Regional Momentum: Growing apprenticeships is a bipartisan issue. Our analysis identified a few clusters of activity across the country, suggesting that groups of states often follow one another's lead when it comes to apprenticeship policy.

- Along the **west coast** in California and Oregon, state legislatures have been aggressive in introducing apprenticeship-related legislation, with 49 bills put forward in California alone last legislative session.
- Across the Midwest (Iowa, Kansas, Missouri, Nebraska, into Colorado), executive branch leaders joined state legislators in increasing funding

for apprenticeship programs, with multiple governors mentioning the model in their state-of-the-state addresses.

- And in the **Rust Belt** (particularly Michigan and Indiana), state policymakers are investing in ways to expand access to work-based learning, including apprenticeships for high school students and the creation of a course catalog for work-based learning in Indiana.
- The **mid-atlantic** states have been less vocal, but Maryland and Delaware leaders are active.



Broad Strokes, But Not Much Nuance: The analysis also found that while many state policymakers are keen to promote training, workforce development, and apprenticeships, they generally do so without considering the significant distinctions between those programs – not to mention all the policy ramifications that separate traditional postsecondary education from other forms of training.

In their state-of-the-state addresses this year, many governors used terms such as “higher ed” and “skills training” interchangeably, which blurs the lines between new investment in work-based learning programs and expansion of existing programs, like increased funding for colleges and universities which do not include work based learning opportunities such as apprenticeships. In most states, legislation to expand apprenticeship programs are single occupation priorities.

This lack of outcome based focus, and the conflation of terminology, can lead to ambiguous language in legislation, limited opportunity – and, in turn, a lack of understanding about the benefits of apprenticeships.



Lots of Talk, Less Action: Despite political momentum for apprenticeship programs, not every state was able to build on that momentum to enact actual policy change. For instance:

- While four apprenticeship-related bills passed in Missouri, there were 23 such bills introduced, many of which would have significantly increased funding and support for the model.
- Minnesota introduced 54 apprenticeship-related bills, many of them versions of appropriations bills that would have expanded apprenticeship funding, but just five became law.

While the introduction of legislation is a critical first step, it’s the enshrinement of apprenticeship into law that both fulfills the promise of the model and creates opportunities for success stories that can inspire further momentum.

What's Next: Recommendations for States

In the coming months, Apprenticeships for America will continue to evaluate state apprenticeship policies with an eye toward movement on the key points mentioned above. For state leaders interested in expanding apprenticeship programs, we recommend a few key considerations:



Follow the Leaders. California, Colorado, Maryland, South Dakota, New Mexico and West Virginia increased apprenticeship funding in their annual budget. Reviewing recent apprenticeship policies in those forward-thinking states may spark ideas for legislators considering bills of their own.



Get the Message Right. Because apprenticeships are jobs, they are meaningfully different from other forms of postsecondary and workforce training. But that message doesn't always come across at the highest level. Legislative and executive branch leaders should consider clarifying their language around apprenticeships, including the idea that apprenticeships – unlike nearly every other form of learning – are a full-time job with a paycheck in addition to being a training opportunity.



Think Big. AFA is working with policymakers, successful apprenticeship intermediaries, employers, unions, and other stakeholders to draft model state legislation to scale up apprenticeships across industries and across the nation. Join the conversation and stay tuned!

Methodology

This policy snapshot draws on research conducted across the legislative and executive branches in all 50 states, including:

- A full legislative review of legislation related to apprenticeships introduced by state lawmakers across the 50 states in the 2021-22 legislative sessions;
- A review of the top declared priorities of legislative leadership for 2023 in each state;
- A review of proposed 2024-25 executive state budgets for allocations toward specific apprenticeship programs;
- An examination of governors' state of the state speeches for any references to apprenticeship policies; and
- Recognizes the number of apprenticeship intermediaries or other apprenticeship-focused organizations active in each state, using Apprenticeships for America's network as a proxy.