

*Use this form to request authorization to plan a new baccalaureate major, associate degree program, or graduate program; formal approval or waiver of an Intent to Plan is required before a university may submit a related full proposal request for a new program. The Executive Director and/or their designees may request additional information. After the university President approves the Intent to Plan, submit a signed copy to the Executive Director through the System Academic Officer through the proper process. Only post the Intent to Plan to the university website for review by other universities after approval by the Executive Director, System Academic Officer or designee. This form is meant to capture critical elements for stakeholders to review prior to a full proposal.*

**University NSU - Northern State University**

**Degree AS : Associate of Science**

**Name of Major X999 : New Major Requested**

**Education**

**Specialization Required?** *Note: If the new proposed program includes specific specializations within it, complete and submit a New Specialization Form for each proposed specialization and attach it to this form. Since specializations appear on transcripts, they require Board approval.*

**College/Department** 5E : NSU School of Education/NESE : Elementary and Secondary Ed

**Intended Date of Full Proposal** Spring 2025

**Planned CIP Code** 13.0101

## **Program Description**

### **1. Provide the working program description that may appear in the university catalog.**

The Associate of Science in Education degree offers foundational preparation for individuals aspiring to pursue a career in education or related fields. This two-year program emphasizes core principles in teaching, learning, and child development, blending theoretical knowledge with hands-on experiences in classroom settings. Graduates will be equipped with essential skills in educational practices, classroom management, and student support, preparing them to enter the workforce in support roles, such as paraprofessionals/educational assistants, or seamlessly transition to a four-year degree in education.

## Strategic Impact

### 2. Describe how the program fits in with the institutional mission, strategic plan, existing institutional program array, and academic priorities.

The stackable Associate of Science in Education degree supports Northern State University's mission by providing various academic opportunities that would prepare students for future endeavors in education and help them build a foundation in essential teaching skills, fostering a professional journey that benefits both the student and the Aberdeen/regional community. This degree has the potential to increase the preparedness and retention of educational assistants and substitute teachers in Aberdeen and outlying communities. NSU's mission emphasizes preparing students for meaningful careers and service within their communities, and an Associate of Science in Education degree would directly support this by offering a streamlined, accessible pathway for students to enter the education field, particularly beneficial for rural and underserved areas where educators are in high demand.

Northern State University's vision emphasizes delivering transformational educational experiences and expanding partnerships that serve the public good. A stackable Associate of Science in Education degree supports this vision by creating accessible, flexible pathways for students interested in education. By creating a seamless transition to a 4-year Bachelor of Science degree in elementary, special, or secondary education, the program provides an educationally transformative pathway for students and, ultimately, for the K-12 schools in South Dakota. Graduates are better equipped to meet community needs as engaged, well-prepared educators. This program deepens opportunities for continued collaborative partnership with local school districts, which will benefit from the creation of a pipeline of paraprofessionals and future teachers who are ready to support the state's educational infrastructure.

The Associate of Science in Education degree builds on Northern State University's established legacy in teacher education and complements the successful design and implementation of the Associate of Science in Early Childhood Education. By introducing a broader Associate of Science in Education degree that also transitions into a Bachelor of Science in Education, Northern State University can continue to attract students who are interested in teaching but who may initially seek an associate degree before committing to a full 4-year program.

In addition, with the implementation of this program, NSU can attract students who may not have otherwise considered higher education, encouraging them to continue their studies in teaching and ultimately return to their communities to meet critical educational needs. One of the program's goals is to attract and recruit individuals who have completed some college coursework but have not earned a degree, providing them with an opportunity to obtain a practical, postsecondary credential. Additionally, recruiting individuals within the 28% of high school graduates in South Dakota who choose not to seek additional education at a university or technical college [1] aligning with Northern State University's strong commitment to develop the workforce for Aberdeen and other South Dakota communities. By creating flexible and accessible educational pathways, NSU strengthens its collaborative efforts to produce meaningful social, economic, and educational impacts in Aberdeen and the surrounding region.

[1] South Dakota News Watch. <https://www.sdnewswatch.org/south-dakota-universities-enrollment-change-data/>

### If the program does not align to the strategic plan, provide a compelling rationale for the institution to offer the program.

N/A

### 3. How does the program connect to the Board of Regent's Strategic Plan?

The Associate of Science in Education program promotes access and affordability (BOR Strategic Plan Goal 2) by offering an entry-level associate degree pathway into a 4-year Bachelor of Science in Education. This stackable approach is financially accessible, allowing students to begin their education at a lower cost before committing to a full bachelor's program. By easing the financial burden and time commitment, the Associate of Science in Education encourages a broader range of South Dakotans to enter the education field. Additionally, this program supports non-traditional students and those in rural areas who may need flexible, affordable pathways to achieve higher education credentials through its HyFlex and online delivery modalities. Full-time, degree-seeking students in this program could qualify for various scholarships, as well. In turn, this ensures that more South Dakotans can pursue careers in education without facing financial barriers, aligning with the regental system's mission to make higher education accessible across the state.

At its core, the Associate of Science in Education degree is designed with academic excellence and student success, which aligns with BOR Goal 3. By providing foundational coursework in teaching methods, child and adolescent development, educational psychology, and classroom management, the program ensures that students are well-prepared for the demands of the education field. The program also supports student outcomes by offering early exposure to hands-on teaching experiences, which improves educational attainment by enhancing students' preparedness and confidence as they move into the field as educational assistants or substitute teachers or as they advance into a 4-year Bachelor of Science in Education program. Furthermore, the seamless transition into a bachelor's degree encourages students to continue their education, thereby supporting higher levels of educational attainment and producing well-qualified, knowledgeable teachers for South Dakota's schools.

The Associate of Science in Education program directly contributes to workforce and economic development in South Dakota by addressing the critical need for educational assistants and substitute teachers, as well as another pathway for additional, well-trained and highly qualified teachers to enter the field, particularly in rural and underserved areas.

Federal guidelines set forth by the ESSA (Every Student Succeeds Act) require paraprofessionals working in Title I programs or Title I schoolwide programs must have [2]:

- completed two years of study at an institution of higher education; or
- obtained an associate's (or higher) degree; or

- met a rigorous standard of quality and be able to demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness).

According to the South Dakota Department of Education, there are 272 Title I schools statewide, requiring all paraprofessionals to meet the aforementioned requirements [3]. The Associate of Science in Education program would provide a formally recognized credential and equip individuals with the necessary training to effectively serve as paraprofessionals.

By creating a pathway that responds to the state’s projected educational workforce needs, the Associate of Science in Education aligns with South Dakota’s long-term economic development goals, which aligns with BOR Goal 4. This program ensures that future teachers are trained in skills that meet state and national standards, equipping them to succeed in diverse classroom environments. Additionally, by encouraging students to complete their degrees and enter the workforce as skilled professionals, the program helps address work force shortages and strengthens the educational infrastructure, which is foundational to economic growth. As Northern State University prepares these educational professionals, it also fosters a stronger public education system that contributes to the state’s broader workforce and economic stability for the future.

Through this program, Northern State University provides an affordable, quality, and strategically responsive education pathway that strengthens the future of South Dakota’s schools and communities.

[2] Every Student Succeeds Act. <https://www.everystudentsucceedsact.org/>

[3] SD Department of Education Title I Schools. <https://doe.sd.gov/title/index.aspx>

## Program Summary

### 4. If a new degree is proposed, what is the rationale?

*This question refers to the type of degree, not the program. For example, if your university has authorization to offer the Bachelor of Science and the program requested is a Bachelor of Science, then the request is not for a new degree.*

N/A

### 5. What modality/modalities will be used to offer the new program?

*Note: The accreditation requirements of the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) require Board approval for a university to offer programs off-campus and through distance delivery.*

<b>On Campus</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Intended Start Date</b>	
	Yes	Fall 2025	
<b>Off Campus Location</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Location(s)</b>	<b>Intended Start Date</b>
	Yes	Huron Community Campus	Fall 2025
<b>Distance Delivery</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Delivery Method(s)</b>	<b>Intended Start Date</b>
	Yes	Online, HyFlex	Fall 2025
<b>Does another BOR institution already have authorization to offer the program online?</b>	<b>Yes/No</b>	<b>Identify Institutions</b>	
	No	N/A	

### 6. If the program will be offered through distance delivery, identify the planned instructional modality:

Both / HyFlex

## Academic Quality

### 7. What peer institutions and current national standards will be referenced to develop the curriculum for this program? Include links to at least 3 comparable programs at peer institutions and links to national or accreditation standards, if any.

Northern's program is modeled after a peer institution, the University of Wisconsin – Superior: Associate of Science in Teaching:

Northern's AS in Education will follow these standards provided by accreditors and major education leaders:

- InTASC: InTASC Model Core Teaching Standards and Learning Progressions for Teachers 1.0 | CCSSO
- CAEP: 2022 CAEP Standards - Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation

### 8. What program accreditation is available, if any?

No. Accreditation is not available for this 2 year degree in education.

### 9. Will the proposed program pursue accreditation or certifications?

No

#### If no, why has the department elected not to pursue accreditation for the program?

Since this program does not lead to initial teacher certification, it will not require CAEP accreditation. However, it is a stackable program, with the potential to lead to our accredited 4-year BSED programs. All of NSU's BSED programs are accredited by CAEP.

## Duplication and Competition

### 10. Do any related programs exist at other public universities in South Dakota?

*A list of existing programs is available through the university websites and the RIS Reporting: Academic Reports Database. If there are no related programs within the Regental system, indicate **none**.*

No.

#### A. If yes, defend the need for an additional program within the state, Include IPEDS enrollment data and additional data as needed.

N/A

#### B. If yes, would this program be a candidate for Regental system collaboration?

N/A

### 11. Do any related programs exist at any non-Regental college or university within 150 miles of the university?

*List those programs here:*

Not within 150 miles.

#### A. If yes, use IPEDS to identify the enrollment in those programs.

N/A

#### B. What evidence suggests there is unmet student demand for the proposed program, or that the proposed program would attract students away from the existing program?

N/A

## Market Demand

This section establishes the market demand for the proposed program (eg Regental system need, institutional need, workforce need). Use the following sources for your data:

- [South Dakota Department of Labor & Regulation](#)
- [O-Net](#)
- [US Department of Labor Projections Central](#)
- SDBOR Workforce and Degree Gap Analysis Report

## 12. What is the expected growth of the industry or occupation in South Dakota and nationally?

*Include the number of openings, as well as the percentage of growth when possible.*

Recent data underscore a critical and growing need for paraprofessionals in both South Dakota and across the nation. In South Dakota, the projected growth rate for paraprofessionals is 6.3%, representing approximately 122 unfilled positions mid-year [4]. This shortage has forced some schools to operate with fewer paraprofessionals from the start of the academic year, while others have reopened vacancies just a few months into the term. Nationally, an estimated 155,000 paraprofessional openings arise each year [5], reflecting a consistent demand and an urgent need for qualified candidates. When left unaddressed, these gaps impede student achievement, increase the strain on current staff, and compromise the overall effectiveness of educational programs.

Creating a structured program to educate and prepare paraprofessionals is a proactive solution to current workforce shortages. It also strengthens classroom support and lays the groundwork for a sustainable pipeline of well-qualified individuals to meet growing demand. Meanwhile, data from the U.S. Census Bureau's American Community Survey [6] indicate that roughly 20% of South Dakota adults (25 and older) have some college experience but no degree. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics 2022 Annual Averages<sup>7</sup> an individual with:

- High school diploma, no college: median weekly earnings = \$809
- Some college, no degree: median weekly earnings = \$877
- Associate degree: median weekly earnings = \$963

Clearly, obtaining an associate degree not only increases lifetime earning potential but can also serve as a direct pathway to more advanced educational credentials.

An Associate of Science in Education can be tailored to meet critical state needs by offering a route to certified teaching roles while also providing an intermediary paraprofessional option. Paraprofessionals are essential in supporting student learning and classroom management. A well-trained, educated paraprofessional can significantly enhance the educational environment by offering targeted instructional support, fostering effective classroom management, and working seamlessly with certified teachers—resulting in a more inclusive setting that benefits both students and the broader school community. In special education contexts, paraprofessionals also address student behavior and safety, medical needs, academic support, and specialized disability services.

Although an associate degree is not always mandatory in schools that are not designated as “School-Wide Title Schools,” formal education greatly enhances paraprofessional effectiveness. In many districts, such as Aberdeen Public School District, candidates must have either 48 transcribed college credits or pass a proficiency exam to qualify for teacher assistant or substitute teaching positions. The intentional preparation provided by an Associate of Science in Education can improve job satisfaction and self-efficacy among paraprofessionals by equipping them with the skills and confidence needed to excel, thereby reducing burnout and turnover. School systems similarly benefit by cultivating a stable, highly skilled workforce, ultimately creating an environment where staff and students alike can thrive.

In essence, developing an associate degree program in education not only addresses critical workforce shortages but also raises the caliber of paraprofessional support available in K–12 settings. This initiative bolsters retention, fosters stronger schools, and enriches educational outcomes for students—all while offering a valuable credential that increases the earning potential and career opportunities for individuals who may later pursue a bachelor's degree in elementary, special, or secondary education.

[4] South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation. (search for paraprofessionals revealed 122 open jobs in South Dakota in January 2025). <https://www.southdakotaworks.org>

[5] Projections Central. <https://projectionscentral.org/longterm>

[6] U.S. Census Bureau American Community Survey. <https://data.census.gov/table/ACSST1Y2023.S1501?q=south%20dakota%20some%20college>

[7] U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. <https://www.bls.gov/>

## 13. What evidence, if any, suggests there are unfilled openings in South Dakota or nationally?

The SD Department of Labor currently reports 122 unfilled openings for paraprofessionals in South Dakota. [8]

Given the time of the school year, mid-year, this is alarming, as it shows that either these positions went unfilled from the beginning of the school year or attrition within the first quarter of the school year has caused re-openings of positions. These positions span 29 school districts across the state, including Rapid City, Aberdeen, Sioux Falls, Custer, West Central, Vermillion, and Pierre.

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, data released on the School Pulse Panel Dashboard [9] indicates that 32% of schools nationwide report being understaffed in the area of teachers assistants as of October 2024.

While schools that are not designated as Title I Schools have fewer qualifications needed to be a paraprofessional, entering the classroom to work

with students without knowledge or preparation does not create a successful learning environment. Paraprofessionals' attrition rates have increased over time. The attrition rate for paras in the 2021-22 school year was 23%, up sharply from 8% in the 2008-09 school year.

[8] South Dakota Department of Labor and Regulation. (search for paraprofessionals revealed 122 open jobs in South Dakota in January 2025). <https://www.southdakotaworks.org>

[9] National Center for Education Statistics. [https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press\\_releases/12\\_12\\_2024.asp](https://nces.ed.gov/whatsnew/press_releases/12_12_2024.asp)

#### **14. What salaries can program graduates expect to earn in South Dakota and nationally?**

Salaries in South Dakota range between \$23,910 and \$33,580 annually. [10]

Nationally, wages are \$35,550 for teacher assistants according to the US Bureau of Labor Statistics. [11]

[10] [https://dlr.sd.gov/lmic/documents/wages/sd\\_statewide\\_occupational\\_wages\\_2023.pdf](https://dlr.sd.gov/lmic/documents/wages/sd_statewide_occupational_wages_2023.pdf)

[11] <https://www.bls.gov/ooh/education-training-and-library/teacher-assistants.htm#>

#### **15. Optional: Provide any additional evidence of regional demand for the program.**

*e.g. prospective student interest survey data, letters of support from employers, community needs...*

Aberdeen School Superintendent, Becky Guffin, notes that Aberdeen, like many others faces significant challenges in ensuring that substitutes and paraprofessionals are confident and ready to meet the demands of their roles, "Graduates would be prepared to work as educational assistants, supporting teachers in creating an effective learning environment. The availability of qualified substitute teachers, familiar with classroom management and instructional strategies, addresses a critical need in our schools."

Although paraprofessionals in schools represent the primary occupational focus of this program, graduates would also be qualified for a variety of other roles. As YMCA CEO Mike Quast explains, "I can confidently affirm that an Associate Degree in Education would qualify an individual to serve as a lead teacher in our YDC classrooms."

\*Please see Superintendent Guffin's attached letter of support.

\*Please see CEO Michael Quast's attached letter of support.

## Student Demand

### 16. Provide evidence of student completers/graduates at that degree level at peer institutions that offer the same/similar program using data obtained from IPEDS.

*Choose programs not already listed in question 11. Use the most recent year available.*

University Name	State	Program Name	Number of Degrees Conferred in Program	Total Number of Conferrals at Level (Undergrad or Grad)
University of Wisconsin Superior	WI : Wisconsin	Education and Teaching	2	2
Blackhawk Technical College	WI : Wisconsin	Teacher Assistant	8	22
Gateway Technical College	WI : Wisconsin	Teacher Assistant	11	30

### 17. What evidence suggests there is interest from prospective students for this program at the university?

Recent enrollment figures and market research strongly indicate a growing demand for an Associate of Science in Education program. In just its second year, the associate degree in Early Childhood at NSU already has 21 students—clear evidence that learners value the quicker, more affordable pathway such programs provide to obtain specialized skills and enter the workforce promptly. Offering coursework in a HyFlex modality further enhances accessibility by enabling students to pursue immediate employment or balance other responsibilities, which a traditional four-year, on-campus model may not allow.

In addition, even though scholarships are available for the AS in Early Childhood Education, student enrollment more than doubles the number of available awards, pointing to the persistent need for two-year degree options. This preference aligns with recent studies on “stackable credentials”—an educational trend that allows individuals to accumulate qualifications progressively. Research from the RAND Corporation shows that 32–43 percent of certificate earners later re-enroll in college to attain further credentials, often advancing to degrees [12]. Similarly, the National Student Clearinghouse reported a 3.9 percent increase in undergraduate attainment due to students pursuing additional credentials [13]. These findings demonstrate a clear shift toward credential stacking and underscore students’ growing interest in two-year programs that serve as both a stand-alone credential and a stepping-stone to advanced degrees.

[12] Stacking Certificates and Degrees. <https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/blogs/beyond-transfer/2023/08/03/stacking-certificates-and-degrees-lessons-learned-so-far>

[13] Some College No Credential Student Outcomes. <https://nscresearchcenter.org/some-college-no-credential/>

## Enrollment

### **18. Are students enrolling in this program expected to be new to the university or redirected from existing programs at the university?**

*Include the number of openings, as well as the percentage of growth when possible.*

A substantial number of students entering this program are expected to be new to the university. Because the Associate of Science in Education fully transfers into any bachelor's degree in education at NSU—including elementary, special, physical, art, music, or secondary education—it offers a versatile pathway for prospective educators who are not yet ready to commit to a specific area of teaching.

By leveraging the existing Gateway to Teacher Education certificate and creating an associate degree as a second milestone, increased persistence toward preparation program completion could be the result. This approach offers tangible proof of progress, which reinforces student engagement and validates their investment in higher education. An associate degree further delivers immediate labor market value through better job prospects or higher wages for those who must work while pursuing additional studies. Students who exit with an associate degree are also more likely to re-enroll later and complete their bachelor's degree than those who leave without any credential, ultimately strengthening return rates and overall degree attainment.

Institutional data from Fall 2018 through Fall 2023 shows that 34% of the first-time, full-time students majoring in education at Northern left without a degree. On average, these students had earned at least 50 credits—just 10 credits shy of qualifying for an associate degree. Additionally, of the education majors who left with some college and no credential, 49% left the university with at least \$5000 in student debt.

Introducing a two-year Associate of Science in Education would allow these students to complete a recognized credential, enabling them to pursue roles such as teacher assistants or substitute teachers immediately. This credential also provides a solid foundation for returning to complete a four-year degree in the future.

### **19. Narrative Description of the preliminary estimates on annual enrollment in this program by year six**

*Include all students within the program, not just those new to the program.*

Preliminary estimates, based on enrollment within our Associate in Early Childhood Education program, for the Associate of Science in Education include 10 new student enrollments each year, starting in the 2025-2026 academic year. By the second year (2026-2027), 10 students are expected to complete and graduate from the program, creating a pattern of consistent enrollment levels as new students replace graduates. These estimates consider a steady retention rate, assuming students complete the program within two years. By year six (2030-2031), we expect consistent program capacity, with approximately 20 students per year enrolled in the program.