

THE UNIVERSITY OF
ALABAMA

College of
Education
Education Policy Center

From Crisis to Innovation

Policy Architecture and
Program Design of Alabama's
Nursing Registered Apprenticeship Model

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Executive Summary

How Alabama Connected Policy, Education, Regulation, and Employment to Build a Prelicensure Nursing Apprenticeship Pathway

Alabama's Nursing Registered Apprenticeship was not created through a single law or program decision. Registered Apprenticeship provided the workforce framework, but nursing students also needed state authority to perform nursing activities before licensure. Alabama addressed that challenge through a layered policy architecture connecting apprenticeship administration, nursing regulation, higher education, healthcare employers, and program-level agreements.

The resulting model preserves distinct responsibilities while connecting them within one pathway. The Alabama Board of Nursing establishes the boundaries for prelicensure practice. Higher education institutions provide approved nursing education and serve as Registered Apprenticeship sponsors. Employers provide paid, supervised workplace learning, while the Alabama Office of Apprenticeship provides registration and administrative oversight. Standards, agreements, and work-process requirements translate those responsibilities into an operating program.

The architecture also determines how sustained workplace learning is integrated with nursing education. Apprentices remain nursing students while gaining paid, supervised experience before licensure. Education remains the foundation: required learning and any applicable competency validation requirements are met before approved skills are incorporated into workplace practice. As apprentices develop proficiency, they gain repeated supervised experience, assume increasing responsibility within the permitted scope, and receive wage increases tied to defined milestones.



Why These Findings Matter

For policymakers: Creating a prelicensure apprenticeship requires more than authorizing employment. Policy must connect apprenticeship governance, nursing regulation, education, employer participation, and implementation supports while keeping responsibility clear.

For higher education institutions: The nursing program remains the foundation for learning and progression. Serving as the Registered Apprenticeship sponsor adds a structured connection between related instruction, supervised workplace learning, competency development, and employer participation.

For employers: Apprenticeship creates a way to develop future nurses before licensure through sustained paid employment, supervised practice, progressive skill development, and wage progression. Employer incentives and cost-of-training policies can also reduce barriers to participation.

For apprentices and communities: The model connects nursing education to paid local employment while maintaining regulatory safeguards. Apprentices can build skills, earnings, and workplace experience as they progress toward licensure.

Alabama's experience shows that nursing apprenticeship is not simply employment added to nursing school. It is a coordinated policy structure that connects learning, regulated practice, employment, and progression before licensure.

¹ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code ch. 610-X-15, Student Nurse Apprentices; Ala. Admin. Code r. 610-X-3-13, Student Nurse Apprenticeship Programs; Student Nurse Apprenticeship Skills List.

² Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Sample Program documents. Registered Apprenticeship Standards; Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline (Appendix A); Apprenticeship Agreement (Appendix B); Employer Acceptance Agreement (Appendix D).

³ Alabama Apprenticeship Tax Credit, Ala. Code §§ 40-18-420–424. The credit expired December 31, 2024.

⁴ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Policy on the Cost of Training (Laney, 2020), clarified by Apprentice Work Commitments memorandum (Laney, 2023).

Building the Legal Foundation

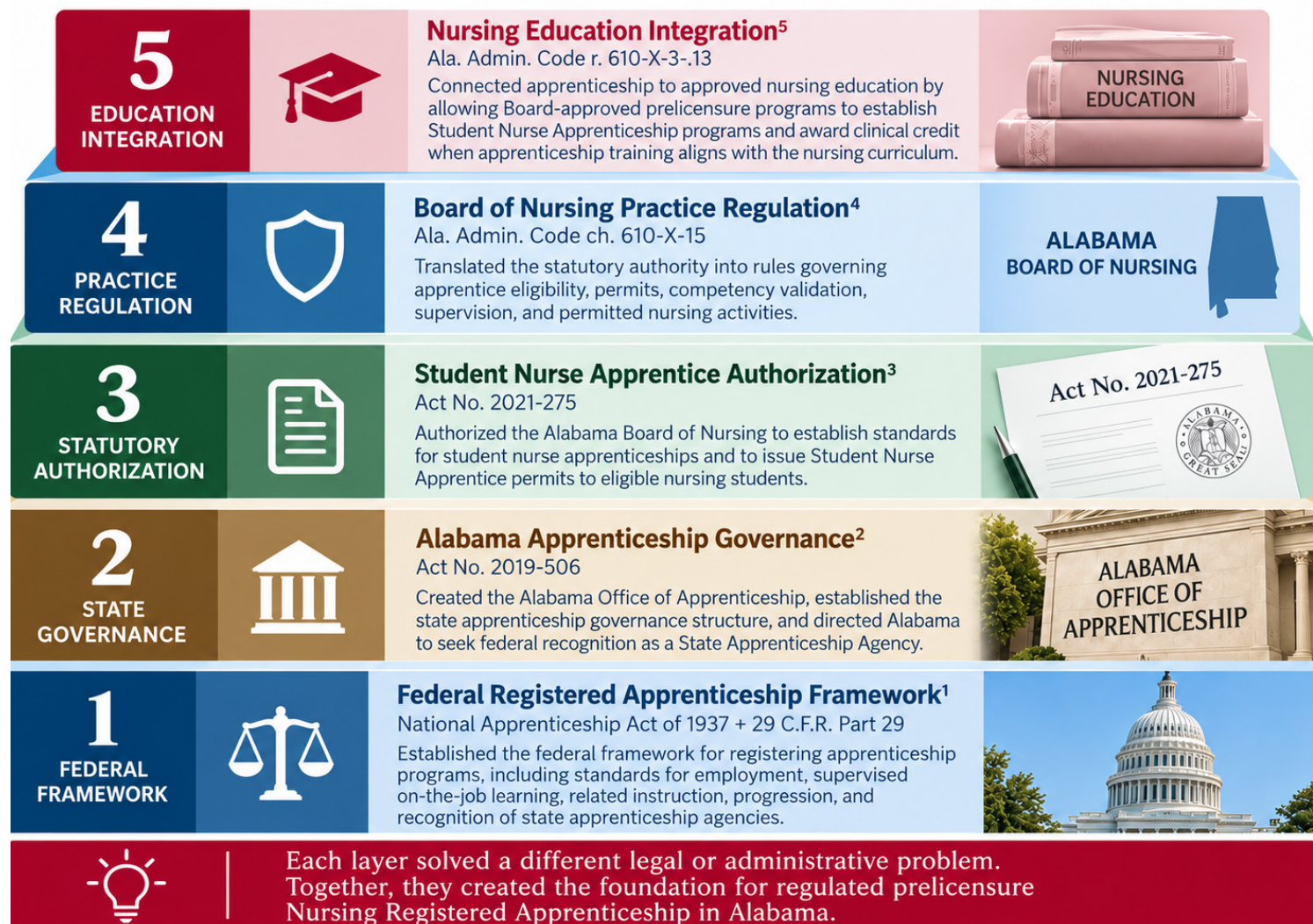
No single policy created Alabama's Nursing Registered Apprenticeship model. Federal and state laws, regulations, and administrative structures had to work together.

LAYERED LEGAL FOUNDATION

The sequence matters.

Federal Registered Apprenticeship law and regulation provided the employment and learning structure, but it did not authorize nursing students to practice before licensure.¹ Alabama first established a state apprenticeship governance structure, then gave the Alabama Board of Nursing explicit authority to establish standards for student nurse apprenticeships and issue apprentice permits.^{2,3} The Board translated that statutory authority into rules governing eligibility, practice, supervision, and education.^{4,5}

Together, these actions connected Registered Apprenticeship to Alabama's existing nursing regulatory and education systems.



¹ National Apprenticeship Act of 1937, 29 U.S.C. § 50; Labor Standards for the Registration of Apprenticeship Programs, 29 C.F.R. pt. 29.

² Alabama Industry Recognized and Registered Apprenticeship Program Act, Act No. 2019-506, § 3 (2019) (codified at Ala. Code § 41-29-332).

³ Act No. 2021-275 (2021), amending Ala. Code § 34-21-2.

⁴ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code ch. 610-X-15, Student Nurse Apprentices.

⁵ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code r. 610-X-3-13, Student Nurse Apprenticeship Programs.

Putting the Model into Practice

Legal authority made prelicensure nursing apprenticeship possible. Standards, agreements, and work-process requirements defined how the pathway would operate in practice.

FROM POLICY TO PRACTICE

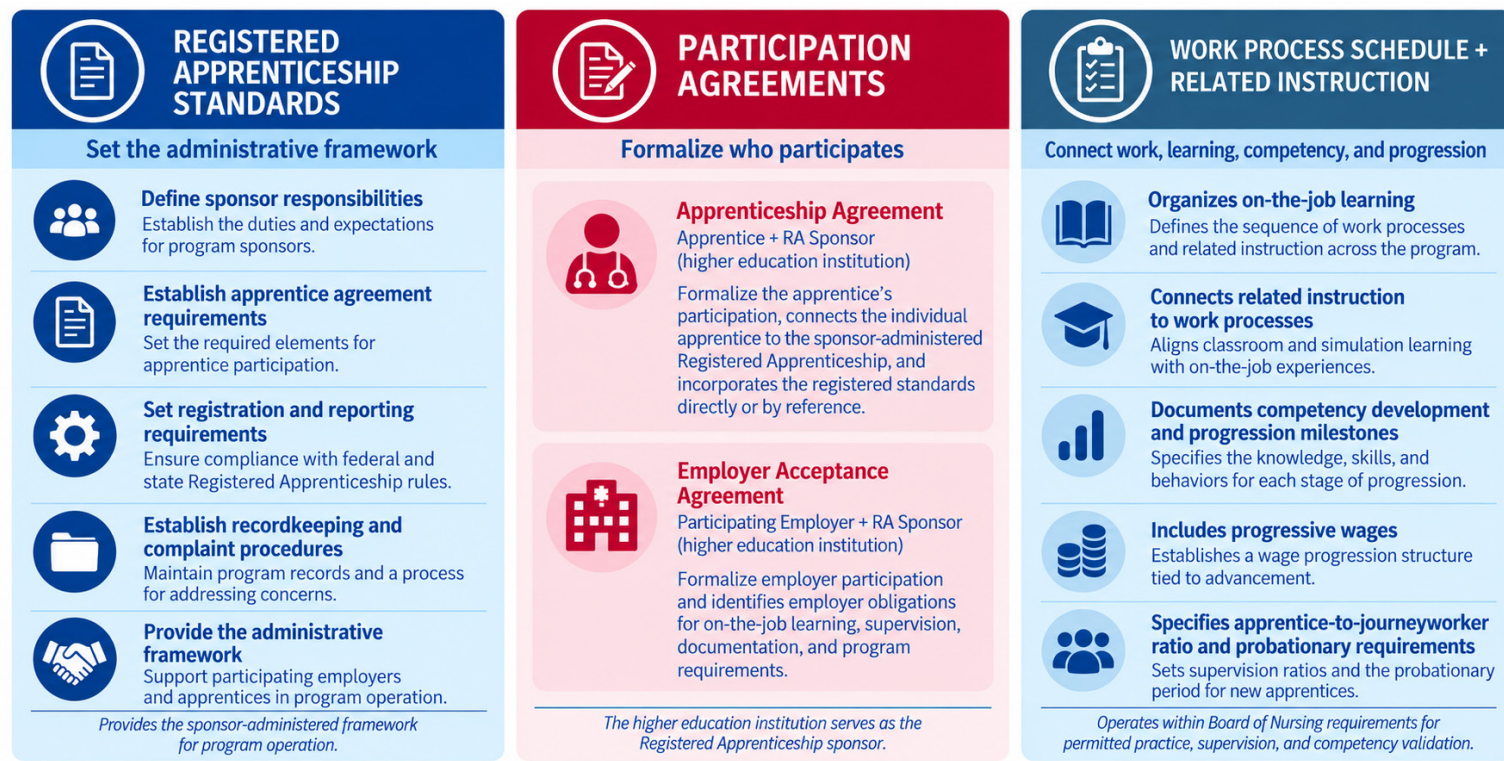
Establishing legal authority was only the first step. Turning Alabama's prelicensure nursing apprenticeship into an operating program required a structure for administering the Registered Apprenticeship, formalizing employer and apprentice participation, and connecting nursing education with supervised workplace learning.

Registered Apprenticeship standards, participation agreements, and the Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline defined how the program would operate. Together, these documents established sponsor responsibilities, organized on-the-job learning and related instruction, connected competency development to defined progression and wage increases, and formalized the roles of participating employers and apprentices.^{1,3}

Because this is nursing, the operating model also had to remain within the practice boundaries established by the Alabama Board of Nursing. Board rules and the Student Nurse Apprentice Skills List define permitted activities, supervision, applicable competency validation requirements, and activities that remain prohibited.^{3,4}

Same Goal. Different Architecture.

Nursing apprentice models can be structured in different ways across different dimensions.^{2,3}



¹ 29 C.F.R. Part 29, Labor Standards for the Registration of Apprenticeship Programs.

² Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Registered Apprenticeship Standards. Sample program document.

³ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline (Appendix A); Apprenticeship Agreement (Appendix B; ETA 671); Employer Acceptance Agreement (Appendix D). Sample program documents.

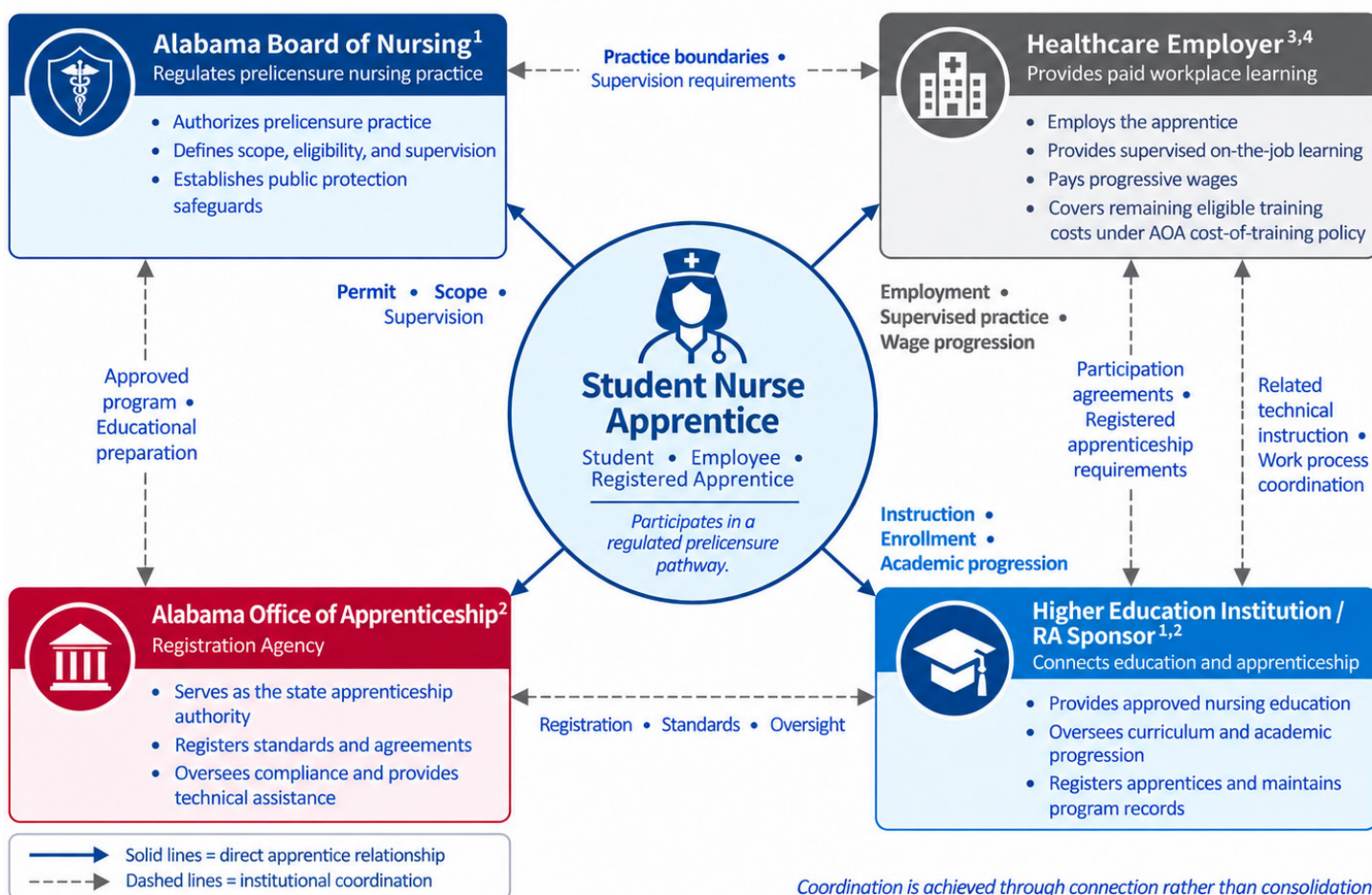
⁴ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code ch. 610-X-15, Student Nurse Apprentices; Student Nurse Apprenticeship Skills List.

Shared Responsibility, Distinct Roles

Alabama's model connects nursing regulation, apprenticeship administration, education, and employment without transferring the core responsibilities of one system to another.

Once the legal and operational structure was in place, the model still required multiple organizations to carry out distinct functions. No single organization controlled the entire pathway. Instead, regulatory, educational, apprenticeship, and employer responsibilities remained distinct while being coordinated around the Student Nurse Apprentice.

Each organization retains a distinct role within the pathway. The Alabama Board of Nursing sets the regulatory boundaries for prelicensure nursing practice, including eligibility, permitted activities, supervision, applicable competency validation, and public-protection safeguards. Higher education institutions remain responsible for nursing education and, as Registered Apprenticeship sponsors, administer the apprenticeship and coordinate participating employers. Healthcare employers hire apprentices and provide paid, supervised on-the-job learning. The Alabama Office of Apprenticeship serves as the state Registration Agency, registering and overseeing Registered Apprenticeship programs and providing compliance and technical assistance.



Shared responsibility does not mean blurred responsibility.

Alabama's model connect regulators, educators, apprenticeship administrators, and employers while preserving the distinct role each plays in the pathway.

¹ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code ch. 610-X-15, Student Nurse Apprentices; Student Nurse Apprenticeship Skills List.

² Alabama Industry Recognized and Registered Apprenticeship Program Act, Act No. 2019-506; Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Registered Apprenticeship Standards. Sample program document.

³ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline (Appendix A); Apprenticeship Agreement (Appendix B; ETA 671); Employer Acceptance Agreement (Appendix D). Sample program documents.

⁴ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Policy on the Cost of Training (Laney, 2020), clarified by Apprentice Work Commitments memorandum (Laney, 2023).

Moving Practice Upstream

Alabama's policy architecture moves selected elements of workplace preparation earlier in the nursing pathway by connecting approved nursing education with sustained, paid workplace learning during the prelicensure period.

FROM LEARNING TO WORKPLACE PRACTICE

Alabama's model brings structured workplace experience earlier in the nursing pathway. Instead of waiting until after graduation and licensure for most employer-based training to begin, Student Nurse Apprentices can participate in paid, supervised workplace learning while completing an approved nursing education program. This does not replace required clinical education or change licensure requirements; it adds regulated workplace learning before licensure.

Related instruction through the higher education institution provides the foundation for workplace learning. Students first receive the education and preparation required for nursing activities. Before an activity becomes part of the apprentice's work responsibilities, the required education must have occurred, the activity must be permitted under Alabama Board of Nursing requirements, and competency must be validated as required. Depending on the activity, validation may occur through the nursing program or in the workplace under the conditions established by Board rules.^{1,2} The Student Nurse Apprentice Skills List identifies activities that may be performed once applicable education and validation requirements have been met.

Repeated workplace experience then allows apprentices to apply authorized skills across work shifts and patient situations, receive observation and feedback, and develop greater consistency and proficiency over time. The Work Process Schedule connects related instruction, supervised on-the-job learning, competency development, defined progression milestones, and progressive wages.^{2,3}

Comparing the Education-to-Practice Sequence

Traditional Education-to-Practice Sequence



Nursing Education with Registered Apprenticeship



Alabama's policy architecture moves practice upstream by connecting approved nursing education with sustained, paid workplace learning during the prelicensure period while maintaining nursing education and licensure requirements.

¹ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code r. 610-X-3-.13, Student Nurse Apprenticeship Programs; Student Nurse Apprenticeship Skills List.

² Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code ch. 610-X-15, Student Nurse Apprentices.

³ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline (Appendix A); Registered Apprenticeship Standards. Sample program documents.

From Learning to Competency

Illustrative Progression Through the Apprenticeship

This page provides an illustrative example of how progression can work in a prelicensure nursing Registered Apprenticeship. As apprentices complete nursing coursework and meet applicable competency requirements and workplace milestones, they can take on additional approved responsibilities within the regulated prelicensure role.



Illustrative example. Specific course sequences and approved workplace responsibilities may vary.



PROGRESSION OCCURS WITHIN THESE GUARDRAILS



Approved Nursing Education
Coursework, clinical learning, and academic progression remain under the nursing program.



Board-Authorized Scope
Workplace activities must remain within approved, prelicensure boundaries.



Licensed-Nurse Supervision
Apprentices perform approved activities under licensed supervision.

How progress is documented

Apprentice progress is recorded in a digital apprenticeship tracking system, where on-the-job learning, competency validation, and required progression milestones can be documented over time.

¹ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code r. 610-X-3-.13, Student Nurse Apprenticeship Programs; Student Nurse Apprenticeship Skills List.

² Alabama Board of Nursing. Student Nurse Apprentice Skills List.

³ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline (Appendix A); Registered Apprenticeship Standards. Sample program documents.

From Policy Architecture to Workforce Opportunity

Alabama's Nursing Registered Apprenticeship model was created through a series of connected policy decisions rather than a single law or program. Together, those decisions established authority for regulated prelicensure practice, connected nursing education with paid workplace learning, defined responsibilities across participating organizations, and created a structure for competency development and progression.

The result is not simply a new employment option for nursing students. It is a regulated pathway that changes how education, practice, and workforce development are connected before licensure.

WHAT THE POLICY ARCHITECTURE MAKES POSSIBLE



Regulated Prelicensure Practice

Students can perform permitted nursing activities before licensure within Alabama Board of Nursing authorization and licensed supervision.



Education Connected to Employment

Nursing education remains the foundation while apprentices gain sustained, paid workplace experience while completing their nursing education.



Competency Development Over Time

Related instruction, workplace application, validation, progression milestones, and progressive wages are connected within the Registered Apprenticeship pathway.



Shared Structure Across Organizations

Regulators, higher education institutions, employers, and the apprenticeship system retain distinct responsibilities while operating within a common pathway.

SUPPORTING PARTICIPATION AND IMPLEMENTATION

Alabama paired the pathway with financial and policy supports intended to support implementation and reduce barriers to participation.



Employer Incentives

During much of the study period, qualifying employers could receive Alabama's apprenticeship tax credit.

Employer apprenticeship tax credit expired December 31, 2024.



Cost of Training

Alabama Office of Apprenticeship cost-of-training policy applies scholarships, grants, tax credits, and other offsets first, with remaining eligible training costs assigned to the employer rather than the apprentice.

FROM DESIGN TO PARTICIPATION

Creating a pathway does not tell us who will enter it. Once Alabama established the legal authority, operating structure, and shared responsibilities needed for prelicensure Registered Apprenticeship, the next question became who participated in the opportunity the state created.

**Policy architecture explains how the pathway was built.
Participation shows who entered it.**

¹ Alabama Board of Nursing. Ala. Admin. Code ch. 610-X-15, Student Nurse Apprentices; Ala. Admin. Code r. 610-X-3-13, Student Nurse Apprenticeship Programs; Student Nurse Apprenticeship Skills List. Sample program documents.

² Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Registered Apprenticeship Standards; Work Process Schedule and Related Instruction Outline (Appendix A). Sample program documents.

³ Alabama Apprenticeship Tax Credit, Ala. Code §§ 40-18-420–424. The tax credit supported qualifying employers during much of the study period and expired December 31, 2024.

⁴ Alabama Office of Apprenticeship. Policy on the Cost of Training (Laney, 2020), clarified by Apprentice Work Commitments memorandum (Laney, 2023).

The Education Policy Center at The University of Alabama

Established in 1924, the Education Policy Center is The University of Alabama's oldest center or institute. The Center connects research with policy and practice to strengthen education, workforce, and community systems and expand opportunity across Alabama and beyond. Through partnerships with educators, policymakers, employers, and communities, the Center helps move research into practice.

The Apprenticeship series examines how education, employers, and workforce systems can create stronger pathways into careers. It considers apprenticeship's role in addressing labor-market challenges, expanding opportunity in rural communities, and improving alignment between education and workforce demand.

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