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REACH UNIVERSITY SECURES \$2M GRANT FROM CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK TO EXPAND ITS TEACHERS COLLEGE THROUGHOUT THE DELTA REGION

INVESTMENT SUPPORTS REACH'S MISSION TO STRENGTHEN LOCAL TEACHER PIPELINES AND ADVANCE UPWARD MOBILITY IN ONE OF THE NATION'S HIGHEST-NEED REGIONS

(WEST MEMPHIS, Arkansas) – May 14, 2026 – Reach University, the nation's nonprofit university advancing apprenticeship degrees, today announced a [\\$2 million grant](#) from Carnegie Corporation of New York to support a multi-state, multi-year expansion of the Reach Teachers College. The 24-month investment, one of the largest individual grants in Carnegie's most recent funding round, will deepen Reach's work throughout the Delta Region, where school systems face some of the most acute shortages of representative, qualified teachers in the nation.

The funding also comes as Reach advances a broader effort to scale apprenticeship degrees nationally, with additional philanthropic partners poised to invest and expand this work.

[Carnegie Corporation of New York](#), founded in 1911 by Andrew Carnegie to advance education and knowledge, has long invested in pathways to upward mobility and civic participation. This grant reflects Carnegie's continued commitment to supporting institutions that expand access to meaningful careers for working adults — and signals growing philanthropic confidence in the apprenticeship degree as a scalable solution to workforce challenges in high-need communities.

"At Carnegie, we invest in education both as an end in itself and as an engine of upward mobility," said [Saskia Levy Thompson](#), a program director for Education at Carnegie Corporation of New York. "Reach University is doing exactly that by opening pathways to higher education for working adults in the Delta Region and communities like it. Carnegie is delighted to invest in the continued expansion of their apprenticeship degree model."

Addressing a Critical Shortage, Close to Home

The Delta Region, encompassing eastern Arkansas, northern Louisiana, western Tennessee, northwest Alabama, and northwestern Mississippi, faces one of the most persistent educator workforce shortages in the nation. Rural isolation, high poverty, and limited access to teacher preparation programs create structural barriers that traditional higher education struggles to

overcome.

Across Delta Arkansas districts, 20% of teachers are “underqualified,” as defined by the Arkansas Department of Education, and select schools report half of local teachers are underqualified. Similar trends are reflected in rural communities in Tennessee, Louisiana, Alabama, and Mississippi. Schools rely heavily on paraprofessionals and long-term substitutes, many of whom have deep community ties and years of experience supporting instruction but lack a path to degree and licensure that is affordable, accessible, and compatible with full-time work.

Reach's apprenticeship degree is intentionally structured to address these challenges. By partnering directly with school systems, Reach supports high-potential paraprofessionals and school employees in transforming the workplace into the learning place, rendering academic credit for the learning they do on the job. After grants and scholarships, the expected out-of-pocket cost for a full-time undergraduate is \$900 per year, with no student loan debt.

Aspiring teachers, known as candidates, graduate with the experience of a two- to four-year teacher, hold a liberal arts foundation that prepares them to think critically and solve problems, and earn a credential that opens the door to a professional career in their home community.

"Carnegie Corporation of New York has been a force for education and human potential for more than a century — and today, we are proud to stand in that legacy," said Joe E. Ross, president and CEO of Reach University. "This investment is a signal that apprenticeship degrees can address specialized teacher shortages and that the Delta Region, one of our nation's most underserved multi-state communities, deserves to be at the center of that story."

Ross continued: "Every aspiring degree holder is proof that a frontline worker can become a licensed professional, that a community can build a strong pipeline of locally representative teachers, and that upward mobility is not a privilege reserved for the few. Carnegie has helped us plant a meaningful flag. Now we are calling on philanthropic funders to match this investment — because the tipping point we are building toward will only come when every community can transform its jobs into degrees."

Building Towards a National Tipping Point

Carnegie's investment directly supports Reach's strategic goal of enrolling 10,000 undergraduates by the end of this decade, a threshold that represents a tipping point for apprenticeship degree adoption in higher education. The Delta Region is central to that ambition. By deepening existing partnerships with school systems, Reach will expand enrollment and demonstrate that a work-embedded, debt-free, liberal arts degree can build careers, strengthen the workforce, and be replicated across institutions and sectors nationwide.

"Trauma, years of caregiving, personal loss, and life's challenges had left me second-guessing myself — and Reach changed that," said Towanna Jackson, a Reach University alumna in Helena-West Helena, Arkansas. "My professors didn't just teach me, they saw me. One told me,

‘Reach deep down and find that confidence, because you are a bright and passionate person.’ Another said, ‘When you teach, you transform. You become someone amazing.’ Hearing those words and having this transformative opportunity in my home community started me on a journey back to becoming myself again. I am now more confident, educated, and motivated, and I will carry every one of these moments with me. Reach has been life-changing, and I will always be its biggest cheerleader.”

Carnegie's investment is a signal — and an invitation. With many more learners and communities to serve, Reach welcomes funders who share a commitment to upward mobility and a new era in higher education to support this work. To learn more, please visit www.reach.edu or contact development@reach.edu.

ABOUT REACH UNIVERSITY

[Reach University](http://www.reach.edu) turns jobs into degrees, serving as our nation's first and only nonprofit university fully dedicated to advancing on-the-job degrees, known as Apprenticeship Degrees. By fostering upward mobility, building careers and the workforce, and inspiring deeper learning through inquiry, dialogue, collaboration, and on-the-job practice, Reach, its National Center for the Apprenticeship Degree, and partners are actively solving America's labor shortages by creating fully-embedded pathways for high-potential individuals to earn degrees, credentials, and professional careers in their home communities. Reach currently operates in Alabama, Arkansas, California, Colorado, Georgia, Louisiana, Mississippi, Texas, Tennessee, and Washington (Apprenticeship College of Health only).

ABOUT CARNEGIE CORPORATION OF NEW YORK

Carnegie Corporation of New York was established by Andrew Carnegie in 1911 to promote the advancement and diffusion of knowledge and understanding. Today the foundation works to reduce political polarization through philanthropic support for the issues that Carnegie considered most important: education, democracy, and peace. Learn more at www.carnegie.org