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Baesler: New Student Loan Forgiveness Program For Teachers Begins

BISMARCK, N.D., Feb. 16, 2018 – State Superintendent Kirsten Baesler said North Dakota's newly revamped student loan forgiveness program for teachers may offer up to four years' worth of debt relief, which school districts may use to recruit or retain teachers.

Teachers who benefit from the program could have from \$12,000 to \$26,000 in student loan debt forgiven over four years, depending on their position and location, Baesler said.

“We’re hoping that our school districts will be able to use this, not only as a recruitment tool for our new teachers who are just graduating – or teachers who are just entering the field – but also as a retention tool, to help them stay in those school districts and pay off their student loan debt,” Baesler said.

The 2017 Legislature made major changes to the teacher loan forgiveness program. Applications now must come from school districts, rather than individual teachers. Teachers will no longer receive benefits under the state’s former program.

Districts may seek loan forgiveness for positions in areas where the Department of Public Instruction has determined that a teacher shortage or critical need exists. School districts may apply for debt relief for no more than two teaching jobs at any one time.

Once a teaching position has been filled, the teacher is eligible for as many as four years of student loan debt forgiveness. The teacher remains eligible even if his or her position is not included on a future shortage or critical need list. No more than two teachers in any one district may benefit from the forgiveness program at once. Payments on behalf of the teacher are made directly to the loan servicer.

The critical need teaching positions that qualify for teacher student loan relief are: Science, Business and Office Technology, Agricultural Education, Technology and Engineering Education, and Computer Science.

“These were the teaching positions that were most often left unfilled, and our students were going without those classes in many of our school districts,” Baesler said. “We’re becoming more targeted and more focused in providing a larger incentive for our teachers, where there is the most need.”

Teacher shortage areas are in prekindergarten through 8th grade; elementary music education; mathematics; English language arts; social studies; guidance counselors and special education teachers in prekindergarten through 12th grade; family and consumer sciences; foreign languages; English learners; library media specialists; and career clusters.

The North Dakota University System on Friday began taking debt relief applications for the 2018-19 school year. Login information was distributed earlier this week. Applications received before April 15, 2018, will get first priority, although later requests will be considered.

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“The North Dakota University System are excited for the opportunity to partner with DPI on this collaborative effort to recruit and retain our teachers in North Dakota,” said NDUS Chancellor Mark Hagerott. “We thank the legislators for looking at new ways through this program to keep our children learning and our teachers teaching in specific, targeted areas.”

Teachers who accept jobs in [critical need positions in rural or remote school districts that have fewer than 1,000 students](#) would qualify for as much as \$26,000 in debt relief over four years, paid in annual installments of \$6,500. Critical need positions in other districts would qualify for up to \$12,000 in debt forgiveness over four years, paid in four \$3,000 increments.

A teacher shortage position in a rural or remote school district with fewer than 1,000 students would be eligible for up to \$18,000 in student loan forgiveness over four years, paid in four installments of \$4,500 each.

“We needed to be focused with what we were offering our teachers who go to our rural, isolated school districts that have a critical need,” Baesler said.

The law and rules that govern the program are [NDCC 15-10-38](#) and [NDUS Procedure 508.1.2](#). Additional information about teacher loan forgiveness programs can be found [here](#) on the North Dakota Department of Public Instruction’s website.

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