



OPI Special Education Para Pathways Project

LEVEL 3: TUITION REIMBURSEMENT APPLICATION

APPLICATION AND ALL SUPPORTING MATERIALS SHOULD BE SENT TO: OPIParaPathways@mt.gov

The OPI Special Education Para Pathways Program Level 3 is designed for undergraduate students who have completed PPP Level 2 coursework to become fully licensed Special Education teachers. Graduate students without a degree in education will be considered on a case-by-case basis*.

Deadline: Oct. 16, 2026

Additional application cycles will be available for subsequent semesters/cohorts as funding allows.

Eligibility for OPI Special Education Para Pathways Program Level 3:

- Applicants must have completed all OPI Special Education Para Pathways Program Level 2 requirements.
- Applicants must be enrolled in an **Education Preparation Program seeking an Education Degree with a Special Education Endorsement by Fall 2028**.
- Must complete and share information related to the FAFSA, American Indian Fee waiver, DCC non-traditional or rural waiver, MT teacher apprenticeship program, and any other scholarship opportunities.
- Applicants are required to provide an official Plan of Study from the higher education institute enrolled for courses. If this Plan changes, students must submit a new Plan of Study to the OPI Program Specialist administering the PPP Level 3 reimbursement payments. Students must maintain 9 credits per semester (*Exception: Final semester before Student Teaching*).
- Awarded Level 3 candidates will be required to **sign a contract with OPI** that will outline the terms and conditions of the program.

Funding Available

Fall 2026 Semester Starting Candidates: *Tuition Reimbursement is limited to a maximum of \$6,000 per state fiscal year (July 1, 2026- June 30, 2027) in the first year and a maximum \$8,000 for years 2-4 (July 1-June 30) for maximum total of \$30,000. Funds not spent in the fiscal year cannot be carried forward to subsequent years.*

Spring 2027 Semester Starting Candidates: *Tuition Reimbursement is limited to a maximum of \$6,000 in the first year (January 1, 2027- December 30, 2027) and a maximum \$8,000 for years 2-4 (January 1-December 30) for maximum total of \$30,000. Funds not spent in the calendar year cannot be carried forward to subsequent years.*

***Students with a bachelor's or master's degree not in education.** *Tuition Reimbursement is limited to a maximum of \$7,500 per year for 4 years for maximum total of \$30,000. Funds not spent in the fiscal/calendar year cannot be carried forward to subsequent years.*

Reimbursement Program

The OPI Special Education Para Pathways Program Level 3 is a **tuition reimbursement program**. Students will pay tuition to their university/college program at the beginning of the term, and submit receipts, transcripts, and other required documentation to OPI to be reimbursed.

Reimbursable PPP Level 3 Expenses

The following are allowable reimbursement expenses after other financial assistance has been exhausted (with full receipts submitted):

- Tuition
- Textbooks specific to courses
- University fees

Non-reimbursable PPP Level 3 Expenses

- IHE health insurance
- New computer or other electronic supplies
- Travel expenses such as gas, hotel, parking, and meals

Eligible University Programs and Colleges for Associate's Degree

Any accredited Montana Institution of Higher Education (IHE) offering first and second year courses tracking to a degree in education with a special education endorsement.

Eligible University Programs for Bachelor's Degree

Montana Universities/Colleges with Bachelor's in Education with Special Education Endorsement:

MSU-Billings, MSU-Bozeman, UM-Missoula, UM-Western, Carroll College

Employment Requirement for Continued Eligibility

- Remain employed at least 20 hours per week at a Montana public school working with students with disabilities—i.e. paraeducator, Class 09 Special Education Technician.**
***PPP Level 3 Tuition Reimbursement candidates cannot fill vacant educator positions under emergency authorizations or class 05 licenses.*

University Requirement for Continued Eligibility

- Remain in good standing academically maintaining 2.5 GPA or higher and meet campus and degree specific requirements.
- Maintain a minimum of 9 credits per semester unless you are in your final semester prior to student teaching.
- Be accepted and enrolled in an **Education Preparation Program seeking an Education Degree with a Special Education Endorsement within 2 years** of starting PPP Level 3.
- Applicants must stay on track with their plan of study.

Service Payback

The OPI Special Education Para Pathways Program Level 3 requires a service payback of two years.

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PPP LEVEL 3 CANDIDATE NAME: _____

APPLICANT INFORMATION	
FIRST NAME	LAST NAME
MAILING ADDRESS	CITY, STATE, ZIP
HOME PHONE NUMBER	HOME EMAIL ADDRESS
WORK PHONE NUMBER	WORK EMAIL ADDRESS
My intention is to be enrolled in an Education Preparation Program leading to an Education Degree with an endorsement in Special Education starting: ☐ Fall 2026 Semester ☐ Spring 2027 Semester	
APPLICANT SIGNATURE	DATE

EMPLOYER VERIFICATION INFORMATION	
Special Ed Director, Building Principal or District Superintendent - Please verify the following information (Initial statement if valid): _____ 1. Paraeducator named above is currently employed by our district. _____ 2. Paraeducator named above works with students with disabilities in our district.	
Print Name of Administrator	Email Address of Administrator
Signature of Administrator	Date

Original applicant and administrator signatures required. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed.

PPP LEVEL 3 CANDIDATE NAME: _____

YEARS OF EXPERIENCE

How many years have you been a special education paraeducator?

ESSAY QUESTION ATTACH SEPARATELY

What other education or experience do you have that relates to becoming a special education teacher? What prior experience do you have that makes you think you'd be a good special educator? **(Please attach your essay on a separate page, 500-word max, double spaced)**

VERIFICATION OF ANTICIPATED FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE

\$	Federal Pell Grant (Amount Approved to Receive each semester)
\$	DCC Non-traditional or rural waiver
\$	American Indian Fee Waiver (must be renewed each semester)
\$	VA Benefits
\$	GI Bill
\$	Job Service (only applies for associate degrees)
\$	Other scholarships, awards, or assistance: _____
\$	Other scholarships, awards, or assistance: _____

All applicants will be required to complete a FAFSA as part of the verification submission. All other financial assistance must be exhausted each school year before the OPI Para Pathways Project Scholarship can be awarded. Verification of financial assistance must be submitted before tuition reimbursement is made.

PPP LEVEL 3 CANDIDATE NAME: _____

Attach the following to your application:

1. **College transcripts**, official or unofficial copy. (Must have 3.0 GPA or higher for the four PPP Level 2 courses)
2. **Resumé**
3. **Essay Response**
4. **TWO Letters of Recommendation**; at least one must come from a person in a direct administrative or supervisory role over the paraeducator (see Level 3 Info Sheet for details)
5. **Plan of Study** from a Montana Institution of Higher Education (IHE). Consult with the program academic advisor. If the Plan of Study has not been created, submit a **letter of acceptance from the IHE**. Note, IHE must offer a degree in education with special education endorsement or have a 2+2 Agreement in place with such a program.
6. Evidence of completed **FAFSA application**.

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OPI Special Education Para Pathways Project Level 3 Contacts

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