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Written Testimony of Joe E. Ross, J.D.  
President & CEO, Reach University

Before the U.S. House Committee on Education & Workforce  
Higher Education and Workforce Development Subcommittee  
Hearing on *Workforce Rewired: Modern Apprenticeships for a Modern Economy*

Chairman Owens, Ranking Member Adams, and Members of the Subcommittee: my name is Joe Ross and it is an honor to appear before you on behalf of Reach University, the nation's first accredited university to focus entirely on turning jobs into degrees. Our North Star is upward mobility and our model is the Apprenticeship Degree.

I come before you the son of a postal-service custodian disabled in an accident; my mother passed away when I was four. When I was adopted, a judge told me I'd have a new last name. I must have thought: *You can do that? What else about the hand you're dealt can you just...change?* I went on to college and the Navy, and now have the privilege of serving as Reach's inaugural president.

What led us to found Reach six years ago was this very idea: that a person, no matter their circumstance, should be able—with opportunity and hard work—to change their own destiny. My message today is that higher education can and should change itself—reinvent itself—by embracing the workplace as a learning place and incorporating the hallmarks of apprenticeship, principles that have demonstrated their value across centuries of professional workforce development.

Every year, millions of Americans turn down the promise of a degree because they need to work. Many take jobs in the very schools and hospitals where employers can't fill the higher-paying roles that require postsecondary credentials. Workforce shortages and untapped talent sit side by side, often in the same building.

But what if no one had to choose between a job and a degree? What if you could turn your job into a degree?

Reach University launched in 2020 with this single, transformative idea: to turn jobs into degrees. The Apprenticeship Degree pioneered by Reach can operate within a Registered Apprenticeship Program or as a standalone degree pathway. Through Reach Teachers College and the Apprenticeship College of Health, two of Reach's faculties, Reach confers fully work-embedded associate, bachelor's, or master's degrees in which half the learning comes from

structured workplace experience and the other half from rigorous, faculty-led coursework. The result is a postsecondary pathway that meets working adults exactly where they are—on the job, in their communities, without asking them to stop earning in order to start learning.

The ABCs of the Apprenticeship Degree make this possible.

**A stands for “Affordability.”** An Apprenticeship Degree is intentionally designed to minimize costs, eliminating student loan debt. No candidate at Reach pays more than \$75 per month. Braided funding utilizing the Pell Grant, employer contributions, and workforce dollars cover the rest. Apprentices have always been asked for sweat, but not for debt. Same for the Apprenticeship Degree.

**B stands for “Based in the workplace.”** An Apprenticeship Degree transforms the workplace into a college campus. Classmates are colleagues, and experienced colleagues are mentors, and professors of practice are faculty.

**And C stands for “Credit for work.”** Half the learning comes from on-the-job work, the other half from rigorous, human-to-human seminars, where theory is met with practice.

Together, the ABCs make it possible for a full-time worker—a paraprofessional, a community health worker, a behavioral-health aide—to earn an accredited degree without leaving their job, and in part, by doing their job.

Alongside the ABCs, Reach employs distinct educational practices to deepen learning and ensure the Apprenticeship Degree is truly higher education. Immersive, single-subject semesters enable mastery and foster meaningful faculty-learner relationships. Conversation-based seminars, led by faculty practitioners and attended by learners from across the country, create opportunities for collaboration, reflection, discourse and the integration of learning across workplace and academic settings. Intentional instruction in mathematics, computational thinking, and AI literacy equips learners to navigate an increasingly complex technology-driven economy. Together, these practices combine the enduring strengths of a liberal arts education with the applied learning of the workplace, developing graduates who are both professionally prepared and broadly educated.

Reach now serves 3,400 such working adults across 10 states, 65% Pell eligible with a 68% on-time graduation rate and an 84% immediate job-placement rate.

Take Nichole Menard in St. Mary Parish, Louisiana. As a widowed mother earning \$20,000 a year, college felt unattainable. She worked full-time as a special education aide. Then, with Reach, she turned that job into her degree. And today, she's a math and science teacher—earning

more than double the salary and serving the community that invested in her.

The Apprenticeship Degree is built for the 50 million working adults like Nichole, who shouldn't have to leave their job or community, or go into debt, to get ahead. Reach does not intend to scale this alone: through our National Center for the Apprenticeship Degree, known as NCAD, we share the model with peers in nearly 20 states. As my state colleagues say, that's called R&D, as in "rip off and duplicate!"

I am heartened by the enthusiasm for apprenticeships and the Apprenticeship Degree we are seeing in statehouses across the country, here in the United States Congress, and across successive Administrations.

From the California State Capitol and the school districts of Alabama to the halls of this Congress and the U.S. Department of Labor, growing support among governors, state legislators, Members of Congress, and leaders from both parties reflects a shared recognition that the time has come for higher education to reinvent itself to meet the needs of today's learners, employers, and economy.

The demand is there. The infrastructure is there. And the proof points are emerging. Together, we can make the American workplace its learning place, addressing critical workforce shortages and revitalizing the American Dream. Thank you.

# Turning Jobs *Into Degrees*



## The Apprenticeship Degree Model *Explained*

The Apprenticeship Degree turns the workplace into the learning place—and jobs into accredited degrees—through the ABCs:

- A Affordability by Design**  
No learner pays more than \$75/month. Affordability is a design choice, supported by sustainable funding.
- B Based in the Workplace**  
From day one to graduation day, learners keep their full-time job, income, and benefits. Employers recruit the students.
- C Credit for Work**  
On-the-job work earns academic credit—roughly half the degree comes from work, half from live seminars with professors of practice.

## Reach *by the Numbers*

- 3,400** Working adults enrolled
- 10 states** Direct service nationally
- 575** Employer partners
- 65%** Pell-eligible
- 36%** Learners in rural communities
- \$75/mo** (Or less) No student loan debt

## The Apprenticeship Degree *In Action*

- 1** Reach Teachers College has a six-year track record and outcomes that beat national benchmarks; the **Apprenticeship Degree proof point**.

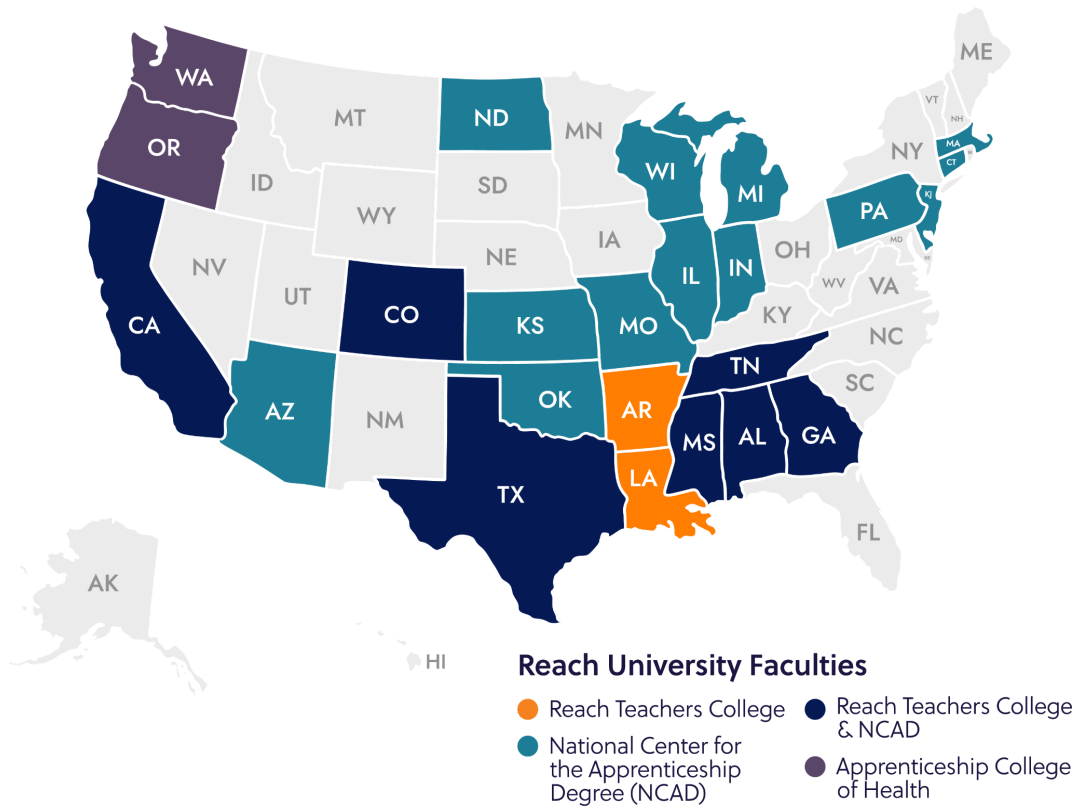
- 900** Alumni with 457 in Spring '26
- 37** Average age of undergraduate
- 68%** On-time completion (150%)
- 65–110%** Wage gains (aide to teacher)
- 60+** Candidate NPS vs. benchmark of 32
- 84%** Emerging job-placement rate

- 2** Reach's Apprenticeship College of Health, launched in Spring 2026, brings the Apprenticeship Degree to healthcare, starting with behavioral health, offering **proof of efficacy in a new sector**.
- 3** National Center for the Apprenticeship Degree Together with Reach, reaches **25 states** and is growing, catalyzing Apprenticeship Degrees across higher education and industry and building **proof of scalability nationwide**.



# Visuals of *Impact*

## Reach's *Reach*



## Reach's *Vision*

### THE NATIONAL IMPACT VISION

By 2030, Reach and our partners will help **10,000** *working adults* turn their jobs into degrees and better careers — with *zero student debt*.

Proving the American workplace can be its learning place — and scaling a model for upward mobility and human flourishing that can revitalize the American Dream.

#### 2020 Starting point

Nation's first accredited university built for the Apprenticeship Degree

#### 2025 Proof point

Five-year track record; Reach is proof point #1 for the model

#### 2030 Tipping point

10,000 jobs turned into degrees; validated causal impact at scale

#### 2035 Moonshot

3 million Apprenticeship Degree starts across U.S. higher education