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FEATURED

CSIU developing apprenticeship program to address teacher shortages

BY JOE SYLVESTER THE WEEKENDER

Mar 2, 2024



Dr. Alan Hack

MILTON — With fewer and fewer college students going into education, Pennsylvania is facing a growing teacher shortage.

To try to stem that shortage, Gov. Josh Shapiro's administration picked the Montandon-based Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) to design a registered apprenticeship program model for school districts across Pennsylvania. The state recently awarded CSIU a \$379,000 grant to expand the apprenticeship program for teachers.

The program model will include partnerships with various stakeholders, such as community colleges, higher education institutions, workforce development organizations, government agencies, and local education agencies.

"We are working in conjunction with the Department of Labor and Industry and a number of other partners, state Department of Education, and paraprofessional organizations that are supporting teacher recruitment," said Dr. Alan Hack, CSIU assistant executive director/chief academic officer.

Through the apprenticeships, those in the program would teach while working toward a degree. They will continue to earn more through a wage progression schedule based on completion of competencies.

"By the time they are finished, they will be able to step into a teaching position," Hack said.

CSIU will meet with state union representatives on wage progression.

"We have a year to complete this framework," Hack said. "We will be working with the consortium and with Commonwealth University for related course work and mentor training.

The timetable to become a teacher will depend on the point a teacher apprentice enters the program, such as whether someone has an emergency permit compared to another who is a paraeducator.

Hack estimated the timeframe would total one to two years or up to four to go through the apprenticeship program.

According to the governor's office, "The Departments of Labor and Industry (L&I) and Education (PDE) partnered to address Pennsylvania's teacher shortage in early 2023 by expanding the apprenticeship model in the education sector through the creation of the Certified Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program in Pennsylvania (TAP.PA). TAP.PA aims to provide training for individuals like paraprofessionals and teachers' aides who want to become certified elementary and secondary teachers."

"I think in terms of the shortage, we see definitely there has been a shortage, especially in math, sciences, CTC (career and technology center) programs, some of specialized education teachers," Hack said.

PDE issued a total of 6,153 teaching certificates in the 2021-22 school year, compared to 7,695 certificates in the 2020-21 school year, according to PDE Press Secretary Taj Magruder.

Those numbers are well below the 2010-2011 school year, when 21,045 certificates were issued. That number dropped to 19,838 the following year, rose to 25,728 in 2012-2013, but then plummeted to 12,907 in 2013-2014, and has decreased most years since then, according to PDE data.

"There has been a gradual decline over the last 10 years in terms of number of vacancies," Hack said.

He said there has been a higher rate of retirement than prior to COVID," he added. "This school year is the first year there were more emergency teaching permits than teaching certificates."

The reasons may be varied.

"Public education has been somewhat politicized and under attack the last 10, 15 years, and fewer individuals are going into teaching," Hack said. "In some parts of the state, wages have not kept up with the cost of tuition increases."

He said it is known there there is pay inequity in this region based on economics.

"I don't think it's any worse than across the state," Hack said.

He said that because of the shortage, there is more competition among districts for a much smaller group of teachers.

"It's never been better time to go into education" Hack stated. "There are quite a few incentives out there for high schoolers going in, as well as for folks with bachelor's degrees."

He noted CSIU's teachpa.csiu.org page lists a number of different pathways for students, young adults and adults seeking a career change. Funding is available for many of those programs.