

SCHUYLKILL INTERMEDIATE UNIT 29

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PRESS RELEASE

SCHUYLKILL INTERMEDIATE UNIT 29 EXPANDS PATHWAYS TO ADDRESS SPECIAL EDUCATION TEACHER SHORTAGE

Mar Lin, PA – Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29 (IU 29) is expanding access to the teaching profession through a series of state-supported initiatives aimed at addressing the shortage of certified Special Education teachers across the region.

As part of this effort, IU 29 has been awarded a \$100,000 Paraeducator Advancement Grant from the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) and is one of just **12 intermediate units** selected statewide to receive this funding. IU 29 is also partnering with higher education institutions and regional organizations to create multiple pathways into the profession for aspiring educators at different stages of their careers.

“This is about options,” said Dr. Anthony Serafini, Executive Director of IU 29. “Every current or future educator has a unique path, and different programs will work better for different individuals. What works for one person may not work for another—that’s why it’s so important to have multiple pathways available.”

One of those pathways is the Paraeducator Advancement Program. Through this program, eligible paraeducators who hold an associate degree can complete approximately 60 credit hours toward a bachelor’s degree and PK-12 Special Education certification at no cost, while continuing to work full-time in their local school district or Intermediate Unit.

The program is built around a job-embedded model that blends coursework with real classroom experience. Participants work alongside experienced mentor teachers, receive ongoing instructional coaching, and build the skills and confidence needed to lead their own classrooms.

Participants will also receive support for key certification steps, including Praxis exam preparation and assistance in navigating the Pennsylvania Teacher Information Management System (TIMS), helping remove common barriers along the way.

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IU 29 is also partnering with Penn State Harrisburg, one of just 11 universities selected statewide, through the Commonwealth's Accelerated Program for PK-12 Special Education Teacher Certification. This program provides an expedited pathway for individuals who already hold a bachelor's degree to earn certification through a flexible model with significantly reduced tuition costs.

In addition, IU 29 is working with Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit (CSIU) to leverage funding through Pennsylvania's Teacher Registered Apprenticeship Program, supporting an "earn-as-you-learn" approach that combines paid, on-the-job experience with coursework and mentorship.

Each of these opportunities is designed for a different group of aspiring educators, but together they create a clear and flexible system for entering the profession.

By leveraging multiple funding sources—including state grants, financial aid, apprenticeship funding, and local partnerships—IU 29 is able to significantly reduce or eliminate the cost of teacher preparation. In many cases, this allows districts to grow their own workforce with little to no financial impact.

Together, these efforts reflect IU 29's expanded, multi-pathway approach to addressing the educator workforce shortage across Schuylkill County.

"Teacher certification can be confusing, and that's where we come in," added Dr. Anthony Serafini. "We're here to guide and support local educators who just need a little direction as they take the next step in their careers."

About Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29

Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29 provides educational services, professional development, and specialized programs to support students, educators, and school districts throughout Schuylkill County.

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