



# Pennsylvania Department of Education

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## Shapiro Administration Puts More Special Education Teachers in Pennsylvania Classrooms

*The Shapiro Administration's Accelerated Program for PK-12 Special Education Teacher Certification expedites the certification process for prospective Special Education teachers.*

*With this third round of funding, the Shapiro Administration will help train an additional 175 Special Education teachers - bringing the program's total to more than 450 teachers being trained to teach in Pennsylvania classrooms.*

**East Stroudsburg, PA** — This week, **Secretary of Education Dr. Carrie Rowe** announced nearly \$1 million in grants to 11 institutions of higher education to provide an accelerated pathway to certification for Special Education teachers in training, delivering on [Governor Josh Shapiro's pledge to stabilize the Commonwealth's pipeline of highly qualified teachers](#) and ensure that all Pennsylvania students – including students with disabilities -- have the freedom to chart their own course and the opportunity to succeed.

These grants allow higher education institutions to expedite training and certification for Special Education teachers like **Nick Tanzillo**, who earned his certification in the [first cohort of 142 educators who completed the Accelerated Program for PK-12 Special Education Teacher Certification in 2025](#). Tanzillo is now a Special Education teacher for Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 working with students in a therapeutic emotional support program at Pleasant Valley Middle School in the Pleasant Valley School District and a mentor to students in East Stroudsburg University's second cohort of aspiring educators in the accelerated program.

"The Accelerated Grant Program created an opportunity that once felt out of reach, the ability to become a certified special education teacher while continuing to work and support my family. The mentorship, field experience, and coursework worked together to accelerate my growth as an educator," **Tanzillo** said. "Because of that investment, my students now benefit from a classroom led by someone who understands their needs from years of hands-on experience."

Created under the Shapiro Administration and [first announced in 2023](#), the Accelerated Program for PK-12 Special Education Teacher Certification expedites the certification process for prospective special educators who are currently working on emergency permits, experience-based certificates, or serving as paraeducators in Pennsylvania schools.

**Jieh Xuan (Tina) Pan** began her career in 2018 and worked as a paraeducator supporting students with autism until 2022, when she was accepted into the accelerated program through East Stroudsburg University on an emergency permit. Pan completed the program in 2024 and earned her full teaching certification. Today, she works as a Special Education teacher for Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 in a K-2 autistic support classroom at Morey Elementary School in the Stroudsburg School District.

“This accelerated program gave me the opportunity to grow from a paraprofessional who loved supporting students into a certified teacher leading my own classroom,” **Pan** said. “As a single mom, it wasn’t always easy but now I get to help my students learn, grow and celebrate the small victories that make this work so meaningful.”

In 2025, a [second group of students began coursework through the accelerated program](#) to become certified Special Education teachers in Pennsylvania. Enrolled at 14 colleges and universities throughout the Commonwealth, those 150 students are on track to obtain their teaching certification later this year.

With the third round of funding announced this week, the Shapiro Administration is helping to train and certify an additional 175 Special Education teachers - bringing the total to more than 450 Special Education teachers being prepared to teach in Pennsylvania classrooms through this expedited pipeline.

“People like Nick Tanzillo and Jieh Xuan Pan were already showing up for students every day. What they needed was a pathway to earn their full teacher certification without putting their lives or careers on hold. That’s exactly what this accelerated program provides,” said **Secretary Rowe**. “By partnering with institutions like East Stroudsburg University, we’re helping dedicated Pennsylvanians move into the classrooms where they’re needed most and making sure students with disabilities have access to the highly qualified teachers they deserve.”

Since 2023, the Shapiro Administration has invested \$3.5 million in three rounds of grants to colleges and universities that partner with at least one school district, approved private school, career and technical center, charter school, cyber charter school, or intermediate unit. Through these partnerships, individuals who already hold bachelor’s degrees receive mentoring and instructional coaching from experienced special educators while completing an accelerated postbaccalaureate program leading to PK-12 special education teacher certification within 18 months. Programs must offer both in-person and virtual options to support full-time workers and include at least 12 weeks of student teaching.

East Stroudsburg University is a three-time recipient of the grant. The University collaborates with Northampton Community College and has partnerships with Colonial Intermediate Unit 20 and local school districts to remove roadblocks that can prohibit a student from becoming special education professionals. A total of 32 students completed the Accelerated Special Educator Certification through the first two rounds of grant funding.

“East Stroudsburg University is thankful to receive grant funding once again for the Accelerated Special Educator Certification. The objective of this grant falls in line with a variety of other initiatives ESU’s College of Education is working on to help put well-prepared teachers in classrooms and alleviate the teacher shortage in the commonwealth,” said **Dr. Brooke Langan, Dean of ESU’s College of Education**. “We are always working closely with area school districts to address the need for teachers including creating post-baccalaureate opportunities such as this accelerated Special Educator Certification program.”

The latest round of grants, ranging from \$35,000 to \$100,000, has been awarded to the following institutions to serve about 175 aspiring educators in the third cohort:

- DeSales University
- East Stroudsburg University
- Gannon University

- King's College
- Kutztown University
- Mercyhurst University
- Moravian University
- Penn State University
- Point Park University
- Robert Morris University
- Temple University

Governor Shapiro believes that growing Pennsylvania's economy and creating opportunity for future generations starts in the classroom. Over the past three years, his Administration has increased K-12 funding by nearly 30 percent. Governor Shapiro's 2026-27 budget proposal boosts Special Education funding by an additional \$50 million, totaling \$1.58 billion to support students with disabilities and special needs.

The Accelerated Program for PK-12 Special Education Teacher Certification is just one way the Shapiro Administration has strategically targeted investments and partnered with education organizations to tackle Pennsylvania's teacher shortage problem. After many years of decline in the number of new highly qualified teachers ready to enter Pennsylvania classrooms, since the 2021-22 school year, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) [has seen a steady increase in the number of Instructional 1 certificates issued every year](#). Under Governor Shapiro's leadership, PDE has issued more than 25,000 teacher certifications.

To tackle Pennsylvania's teacher shortage, the Shapiro Administration has:

- **Reduced teacher certification processing times by more than 10 weeks**
- **Made experience-based certificates free to aspiring educators:** In 2024-25, the number of experience-based certifications issued to aspiring educators increased by more than 45 percent – up from 382 in 2023-24 to 555 in 2024-25. [Experience-based certificates are an alternative to emergency permits](#) and provide new teachers with both mentorship and a pathway to a highly valuable permanent teaching credential.
- **Created a new Career and Technical Education (CTE) program in Education for high school students:** The new Career and Technical Education (CTE) program in Education for high school students has also shown promise in helping students earn industry recognized credentials prior to graduating high school. Since launching two years ago, 37 public schools representing 25 counties have received PDE approval to offer the CTE program in Education.
- **Created and expanded the Student Teacher Support Program to provide a stipend to student teachers:** The [Student Teacher Support Program](#) – administered by the Pennsylvania Higher Education Assistance Agency – provides stipends to eligible student teachers in Pennsylvania to ensure student teachers are compensated for their hard work. Student teaching is a fulltime job – one that typically keeps student teachers from working another paid job – and the stipend program lowers a barrier to entry into teaching for students who would otherwise struggle to afford to student teach. Last year,

student teacher stipends supported more than 2,000 student teachers in Pennsylvania. To build on this progress, Governor Shapiro's 2026-27 budget proposal increases funding for student teacher stipends by \$5 million, bringing total support to \$35 million annually.

- **Made it easier for Pennsylvanians to find jobs in education:** In 2025, [PDE launched the newly refreshed Teach in PA website](#) to help individuals interested in obtaining a career in education more easily find relevant job opportunities.
- **Launched a [first-of-its-kind teacher apprenticeship program partnership](#):** Through a partnership between the departments of Education and Labor & Industry (L&I), the Shapiro Administration [announced a \\$7.76 million investment in grants to 16 organizations](#) throughout Pennsylvania to start their own earn-as-you-learn teacher apprenticeship programs.

Finally, this week, Secretary Rowe also announced Paraeducator Advancement Grants of up to \$100,000 to 12 intermediate units to help current paraeducators earn bachelor's degrees and PK-12 Special Education teacher certification at no cost while continuing to serve in Pennsylvania schools. About 150 program participants will earn their credentials by the end of 2028. The following intermediate units received Paraeducator Advancement Grants:

- Blast Intermediate Unit 17
- Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15
- Central Susquehanna Intermediate Unit 16
- Chester County Intermediate Unit 24
- Colonial Intermediate Unit 20
- Intermediate Unit 1
- Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18
- Midwestern Intermediate Unit 4
- Montgomery County Intermediate Unit 23
- Pittsburgh – Mount Oliver Intermediate Unit 2
- Schuylkill Intermediate Unit 29
- Seneca Highlands Intermediate Unit 9

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