

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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Media Contacts:

Dr. Colleen Duffy
Assistant Professor
Chair, Teacher Education Department
Director, Graduate Teacher Education
Misericordia University
570-674-6338
cduffy@misericordia.edu

Dr. Anthony Grieco
Executive Director
Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18
570-718-4611
tgrieco@liu18.org

**Innovative Apprenticeship Partnership Aims to
Ease Teacher Shortage in Critical Areas**

Misericordia University (MU) and the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18 (LIU) have partnered to create an innovative apprenticeship-style program for Special Education (PK-12) Paraprofessionals to become teachers by earning a Bachelor of Science degree and a PK-12 Special Education PA Teaching Certificate and still working full-time.

As part of ongoing efforts to address the national teacher shortages, especially in the area of special education, the Luzerne Intermediate Unit 18 and Misericordia University (MU) collaboratively developed a new pathway program to allow working paraprofessionals to more efficiently earn a Bachelor of Science Degree in Special Education and a Pennsylvania Teaching Certificate. This unique opportunity combines coursework from both the Luzerne Intermediate Unit and Misericordia University and allows students to remain working full-time while demonstrating requisite professional competencies as they work towards earning the credits for a Bachelor of Science degree from Misericordia University. The first cohort will begin in March 2025.

Both organizations are excited about this initiative, which has already gained approval from the Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE) and the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE).

Dr. Colleen Duffy, chair of MU's Teacher Education Department said, "Misericordia has a long history of preparing caring and effective teachers. We are excited to create a new pathway into the teaching profession for adult learners who are already serving students in Pennsylvania." Luzerne IU 18 Executive Director Dr. Anthony Grieco adds, "The development of this program for working paraprofessionals is a great opportunity for dedicated educators to enhance their practical knowledge in teaching and learning while also being provided an opportunity for career advancement in a streamlined program. This is a 'win-win-win' solution to address the significant Pennsylvania teacher shortage crisis, allowing individuals to continue to work. While these paraprofessionals are learning, Misericordia and LIU are helping to develop qualified special education teachers to support students across the Commonwealth."

The program begins with an application to Luzerne Intermediate Unit's Paraeducator Associate to Bachelor's/Certification Program, where participants complete up to 39 asynchronous, accelerated credits. LIU18 coursework can be completed in as little as one year, with courses running in seven-week sessions. Participants can customize the learning pathway by choosing traditional coursework or competency-based options. By offering competency-based learning and accelerated coursework, the program equips currently employed paraeducators with the necessary skills and credentials to enter classrooms quickly while maintaining the quality of their preparation. Afterward, students transition to Misericordia University to complete the remaining credits, with student loan opportunities available to help manage costs.

For more information on the Special Education Certification program, please visit us at www.liu18.org or contact Dr. Jessica Jacobs at jjacobs@liu18.org.