

Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 Transforming Teacher Education in Pennsylvania

In Pennsylvania as in much of the country, the teacher shortage is growing. In recent years, the rate of teacher attrition has increased while the number of newly certified teachers entering the profession dwindles.

Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 (CAIU)—one of 29 educational service agencies in Pennsylvania—is tackling the problem head on with an innovative program for its member school districts. Now, thanks to CAIU’s Capital Area Pathways to Teaching Program, over 50 future educators (and more to come) are on the path to fill critical classroom vacancies by earning their education degrees and certifications on the job.



“Through our partnership with BloomBoard and a group of forward-thinking higher education institutions, intermediate units, and districts, we have created a pathway to begin addressing the teacher shortage that is rigorous and research-based. I am extremely proud to be a part of this solution.”

– Dr. Andria Saia,
Executive Director of CAIU

The Challenge of Traditional Pathways into Teaching

Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 serves 24 member school districts, 2 area vocational technical schools, over 50 non-public schools, and several charter and cyber schools in the Harrisburg, Pennsylvania area. In the spring of 2023, the service center responded to growing concerns about the region's teacher shortage with a study on how to create pathways for aspiring teachers.

CAIU conducted a survey of over 500 paraeducators and learned key insights:

- There was a tremendous desire for new pathways to help current school support staff become teachers.
- This pool of committed staff members had a varied history in higher education—from no college experience to associate degrees to bachelor's degrees in other fields.
- Respondents identified time and cost as the biggest barriers keeping them from pursuing a teaching degree and certification.

Finding a Solution with BloomBoard

Capital Area Intermediate Unit reached out to BloomBoard to discuss what an on-the-job, teacher residency program could look like. The CAIU team realized that in order to serve the paraeducators in their member districts, their teacher preparation program would need to have multiple entry points depending on the participant's prior college coursework. It would also need to be affordable and designed for busy, working adults.

BloomBoard's expertise in partnering with school districts and universities to bring on-the-job degree programs into K–12 classrooms made the company an ideal choice for CAIU. Unlike traditional or online teacher education programs, BloomBoard helps districts and universities implement programs with a residency-like approach, which allows educators to earn a university degree by demonstrating what they know through their daily classroom work with students. For CAIU, this was the solution they were looking for.

“Capital Area has been an amazing partner. From the beginning, they were committed to creating sustainable pathways for anyone who wanted to become a teacher and were willing to push systems to ensure that the pathways removed barriers that have prevented access.”

*– Misha Freeman,
Senior Learning
Strategist at BloomBoard*



The Launch of Capital Area Pathways to Teaching

Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 partnered with BloomBoard to create the Capital Area Pathways to Teaching (CAPT) program, which launched in the fall semester of 2023. Through CAPT, paraeducators and certified staff currently working in CAIU, in districts served by CAIU, or in other participating IUs can earn an on-the-job Bachelor's Degree in Education at no cost to them—with additional pathways for those who have not yet earned an associate degree and those with a bachelor's degree in a field other than education.

“Being a working mother of three, finding time to go back to school to pursue my dream of having my own classroom has been next to impossible. Not only has having the time been a major hurdle, but also having the finances available to take additional classes. The CAPT program has made my dream a reality by putting this all within reach!” shared Kristie Folckemer, CAPT participant pursuing a Bachelor's Degree in Special Education

The CAPT bachelor's degree program in either elementary education or special education is offered by Point Park University, a dynamic and growing Pittsburgh-based university and statewide leader in educator preparation. Through a unique on-the-job delivery format, paraeducators and other classified staff receive the instruction, coaching, and classroom experience they need to become effective teachers.

Features of Point Park's Residency Program:


- **Relevant, portfolio-based learning**
- **On-the-job practice**
- **District mentor and university faculty support**
- **Cohort of local paraeducators**

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How CAIU Is Leading the Way

When the first CAPT cohort graduates in spring of 2025, CAIU will introduce 19 new teachers into the workforce to fill Harrisburg-area teaching vacancies. Saia says she is excited to increase the impact of the program through continued growth in the future. As the first IU in the state of Pennsylvania to implement this kind of program, Capital Area Intermediate Unit 15 is leading the way in helping recruit, advance, and retain great teachers.



“As a 39-year-old who attempted traditional college settings numerous times, only to struggle with balancing work and parenting three young children with traditional coursework demands, the CAPT program has given me a better pathway to finally attaining my teaching degree and licensure.”

*– Catherine DeLaBarrera,
CAPT Elementary Education Candidate*

Learn more at bloomboard.com

Learn how BloomBoard can help you build a sustainable teacher pipeline through on-the-job, residency-based teaching degree and certification programs. Contact us today: bloomboard.com/contact-us.