

## Testimony by the Alliance of Approved Private Schools

### For the Pennsylvania Senate Education Committee’s Hearing on Pennsylvania’s Teacher Shortage

February 28, 2023

Approved Private Schools (APS) provide a publicly funded education to Pennsylvania’s most severe and complex students, for whom a traditional educational placement is not effective. APSs provide an individualized education to approximately 4000 students in Pennsylvania who are not able to participate in general education settings, thus the APSs provide highly specialized educational services to these students.

The teachers who work at APSs have a high-level of training specific to the type of school in which they teach. Yet APS salary range is considerably lower than most public schools offer, and the added benefit of PSERS often lure teachers away from an APS. The shortage of special education teachers was erupting prior to the pandemic, but in the face of quarantines and in effort to keep classrooms open for students, many school administrators have spent many hours in the classrooms, to ensure that student learning continued throughout the school year. APS Administrators are in the classrooms teaching because of these shortages and forestall their administrative duties to the weekends to ensure that students learning priorities occur.

The Alliance of Approved Private Schools (Alliance) on behalf of the 32 APSs, thank state lawmakers for their support of special education with the increases to the Special Education line item over the past few years. This increase and the added funding from the American Rescue Plan have been extremely helpful. However, if we don’t have teachers in the pipeline to work with our students, we can’t assist the public schools meet the educational needs required of them under Individuals with Disabilities Act and Free Appropriate Public Education

Pennsylvania has long been considered a state in which we were “exporting” outstanding teachers. The students receive exceptional education through Pennsylvania universities only to leave Pennsylvania to obtain a teaching position in another state. With the decrease population in Pennsylvania, coupled with the reduction in enrollment in teacher preparation programs, we need to take actions to retain our high-quality teachers in Pennsylvania. This is particularly relevant because the low-enrollment has resulted in universities’ closure of many critical education programs that APSs rely on.

In collaboration with the Bureau of Special Education, members of the Alliance are participating in a Steering Committee to study and discuss solutions to the teacher shortage in Pennsylvania. This Steering Committee is proactively pursuing many pathways to resolve the teacher shortage, offering incentives, encouraging a “grow-your-own” alternate pathway, cultivating interest in teaching as a career pathway beginning with high school

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| <i>Barber National Institute</i>    | <i>Devereux</i>                     | <i>McGuire Memorial</i>                   | <i>Valley Day</i>       |
| <i>CADES</i>                        | <i>Easter Seals Southeastern PA</i> | <i>Melmark</i>                            | <i>Vanguard School</i>  |
| <i>Camp Hill Special School</i>     | <i>Easter Seals Western PA</i>      | <i>PACE</i>                               | <i>Vista School</i>     |
| <i>Centennial School of Lehigh</i>  | <i>Elwyn</i>                        | <i>Pathway School</i>                     | <i>Watson Institute</i> |
| <i>Children’s Institute</i>         | <i>Fairwold Academy</i>             | <i>Pressley Ridge</i>                     | <i>Wesley</i>           |
| <i>Clarke School</i>                | <i>Green Tree School</i>            | <i>Pressley Ridge School for the Deaf</i> |                         |
| <i>Community Country Day School</i> | <i>HMS</i>                          | <i>Royer-Greaves</i>                      |                         |

students. The Attract, Prepare, Retain (A-P-R) Steering Committee has set up a repository for ideas and solutions to serve as an incubator of ideas. The Approved Private Schools are very well positioned to provide excellent fieldwork for teacher preparation programs under this model.

**Some Thoughts Regarding the Grow Your Own Legislation for the Committee’s consideration:**

**1. Develop legislation to address the broad needs in the teacher shortage, including:**

- **Address the cost of Higher Education for attaining teacher certification** - For those from low economic circumstances higher education is unattainable and the student debt doesn’t align with the starting salary of a teacher. “Grow your own” legislation would help to offer those with economic limits the ability to achieve their goal to be a teacher. Since these candidates understand the urban areas including the history and culture, offering a pathway for success will ensure that urban classrooms of the future will have a more diverse population of teachers that truly meet the needs of the students.
- **Defining of “high need” school as:**
  - Highest need areas for teachers are typically in urban and rural settings, or
  - High-needs schools as defined by students’ educational needs, rather than economic conditions, and
  - **An Approved Private School** that serves Pennsylvania’s public schools by assisting with their most severe and complex students.

**2. Developing Effective Apprenticeships:**

- Consider developing the grow-your-own concept to allow for dual enrollment (issuing credit through school-to-work co-ops) and enrollment in college credits during high school.
- Garner support for teacher-training programs (such as apprenticeships) to be recognized by the Department of Labor and Industry, and eligible for funding, potentially through workforce development funds.
- Real-time field experience (as a classroom aide / para-educator) help to vet out the role of teaching before significant cost of college tuition occurs.
- Field experience may also help students to realize and understand what educators do each day.
- Apprenticeship provide exposure to the many opportunities for employment in schools.

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**3. Items specific to the Tier Three Special Education Programs: (Low-incidence / most intense needs of students)**

- Low-incidence disabilities require the most highly trained teachers, (Tier Three specialized services) yet due to the low-incidence, these programs are often the first to get eliminated in higher education programming.
- A grow your own model that uses a consortium of already existing coursework from several universities allows for a collaborative venture. Micro-credentials can be developed “on the job” to deliver the specific content needed, in the context of a functioning classroom.
- Other states have developed alternate pathways for obtaining certification, which:
  - channel the candidate’s credentials directly to the department of education,
  - presenting the candidate’s credentials from a compilation of universities as complete, and then;
  - The department of education has the authority to accept this compilation as a complete package for certification. This flexibility is agreed upon as a contract, and maximizes both acceptance of university coursework and is cost-effective for the student.
- APS are funded in Pennsylvania to service the Tier-Three students. These schools are experiencing a critical shortage of teachers and para-educators. APSs would like to pilot a grow-your-own program to create a pipeline for increasing the number of specialized educators in Pennsylvania. DePaul School is facing a crisis for finding teacher of the deaf, because University programs in southwestern Pennsylvania have been closing for the past 15 years, eliminating a pipeline of future specialized educators for this unique student population.
- Certification for Teacher of the Deaf (TODs) is very different from a Certification for Special Education. TODs teach communication skills, Special Education teachers teach behaviors. Many education certification programs in Pennsylvania are in a period of re-organization, (Bloomsburg and Edinboro). Presently there is a limited number of programs that are proximal to southwestern PA to meet the present demand for certified teachers.

**4. Perspective on the value of publicly funded education:**

The long-term impact to the teacher shortage in the United States could present us with a cultural crisis, without a long-term investment. Our education system is integrated into the foundation of our beliefs; without a strong educational system, the very fibers of our civility are in jeopardy. An educated populace allows the standardized

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expectation of public decency, which is currently challenged through social media, artificial intelligence, and pluralistic moral codes. A first step in a system-wide transition to address modern needs begins by increasing the number of teachers in classrooms. We respectfully request that any Grow your own proposal takes into account the needs of the members of the Alliance and includes our schools in the legislative framework.

Please don't hesitate to reach out to me or Kara Beem at Keystone Ingenuity at [kara@keystoneingenuity.com](mailto:kara@keystoneingenuity.com) or (717)433-8056, the Alliance's government affairs representative, with any questions. We look forward to working with you on this critical matter.

Respectfully submitted,

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