

**Special Purpose Project:
Committee on Legislative Action (COLA) Targeted Advocacy Campaign**
Submitted By: Berks County Intermediate Unit Creative Team

Campaign Objective: The objective of the COLA Targeted Advocacy campaign was threefold: create awareness of state mandates and their impact on local school districts; collaborate to generate positive change based on a shared vision; and influence policy that impacts public education and local taxpayers. The advocacy campaign focused on two areas: Cyber Charter Schools and Special Education Funding. The call-to-action for the campaign was to visit <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy> to learn more about the legislative priorities and get involved by contacting your local legislators.

Campaign Timeline: February 2021 through April 2021

Campaign Tactics (*see links below and corresponding page numbers*):

- Coordinated Efforts with 18 Berks County School District Superintendents through Zoom meetings
- Videos to illustrate Special Education Funding at work for social media / web
 - Social Media Videos
 - Meet Paisley's Team: <https://fb.watch/aXRmwyPCrh/>
 - Access to Education: <https://fb.watch/aXRoQTvPsw/>
 - Full-length Videos (for web; hosted on YouTube)
 - Meet Paisley's Team: <https://youtu.be/YbX-fx5XBCE>
 - Access to Education: <https://youtu.be/szlSaiF1fIU>
- Dedicated COLA Legislative Advocacy Webpages
 - General Legislative Advocacy: <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy>
 - Special Education Funding: <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy/special-education-funding/>
 - Cyber Charter Schools: <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy/cyber-charter-school-funding/>
- One-page overview for each targeted area
 - Special Education Funding (*pages 2-3*)
 - Cyber Charter Schools (*pages 4-5*)
 - Cyber Charter Schools 2021-2022 (*pages 6-7*)
 - Mandated Training (*page 8; this was just a One-page document separate from the campaign*)
- Targeted Communication Calendar (*pages 9-11*)
- Letter Templates
 - Kick-Off Email to Berks County Legislators (*pages 12-14*)
 - Campaign Kick-Off Letter Template (*page 15*)
 - Special Education Educator / Family Advocacy Letter Templates (*pages 16-17*)
- COLA Targeted Advocacy Campaign Social Media Posts (*pages 18-20*)
- Targeted Advocacy Campaign Press Release (*page 21*)



BERKS COUNTY COLA

Committee on Legislative Action

THE ISSUE:

Title 22, Chapter 14

Special Education Services and Programs

The Special Education regulations in Pennsylvania for school districts are found under the Title 22 PA Code, Chapter 14. Chapter 14 includes regulatory guidance to comply with federal statutes set forth in the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act of 2004 (IDEA). Several provisions of Chapter 14 exceed requirements set forth by federal law and contribute to exorbitant costs for school districts related to child find, evaluation and identification of students with disabilities, staff credentialing and training, teacher caseloads, and support services for students. **These rising costs not only impact school district costs and budgets, but also impact taxpayer dollars.**

PRIORITY:
Provide access to a high-quality education for the 70,000+ students in Berks County

TARGETED ADVOCACY AREA: SPECIAL EDUCATION FUNDING

MORE THAN
13,500
BERKS COUNTY STUDENTS
received special education support
during the 2018-2019 school year

DATA POINTS

Between 2008 and 2019,
Berks County has seen a
24% increase of students
with intellectual disabilities
133% increase in autism
152% increase in other
health impairments

BERKS COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICTS HAVE SPENT
\$203,999,328
on special education
during the 2018-2019 school year

BERKS
COUNTY
SCHOOL
DISTRICTS
HAVE
SEEN AN



expenditure
growth for
special
education
funding
from 2008
to 2019

Data points above are from
Penn Data and Education Law.

KEY TALKING POINTS POLICY PRIORITIES

- Special education is an overarching term for a wide range of supports that are tailored to meet the individual needs of the child. Special education and related services provided by school districts include:
 - Autistic Support
 - Assistive Technology Devices
 - Audiology
 - Behavior Support and Consultation
 - Community-Based Vocational Training
 - Emotional Support
 - Hearing Services and Support
 - Learning Support
 - Multiple Disabilities Support
 - Nursing
 - Occupational Therapy
 - Orientation and Mobility
 - Personal Care Assistance
 - Physical Therapy
 - Psychology
 - Speech and Language Therapy
 - Social Work
 - Transportation
 - Travel Training
 - Vision Services and Support

Each of these areas requires additional, highly trained, and specialized personnel to provide the services outlined in a child's individualized education plan (IEP).

- In addition to the overall growth of the special education student population, school districts are also seeing an appropriate increase in evaluation, intensity of services, and specialized support for students with complex learning, behavioral, and/or medical needs.
- Tuition costs for special education students enrolled in cyber charter schools are set at a flat rate and not based on level of service needed.
- School districts are incurring greater costs related to the transportation of students in special programs and schools.
- As demand for qualified staff and personnel increases, school districts are forced to spend more on recruitment, training, and retention efforts.
- Additional costs are incurred by school districts to meet Chapter 14 requirements for secondary transition and transitions from preschool early intervention to K-12 schools.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Increased state funding for special education
- Equitable distribution of funds to cyber charter schools for students with IEPs
- Timely implementation of the Special Education Funding Formula
- Revise Chapter 14 regulations specific to evaluations / reevaluations, secondary transition, and transition from preschool early intervention for students with developmental delays
- Incentives / alternate pathways to teacher and specialist certifications



IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD / ACTION NEEDED

- **Increase special education funding at the state level to ease the burden being placed on property owners in the local school districts.** Berks County's 18 school districts spent a combined \$204 million on special education services in 2018-2019. State and federal funding accounted for just 23.2% of that total, leaving local school districts to make up \$156 million through property taxes.
- **Ensure equitable distribution of funds to eliminate undue expenses from school district budgets.** The current funding formula for cyber charter school students with IEPs is costing school districts more than it costs to educate the child in-district.
- **Ensure full implementation of the Special Education Funding Formula.** The Special Education Funding Formula provides a more equitable distribution of state funds to school districts across the Commonwealth. Currently only 14% of funding for schools is distributed through this formula. Full implementation will better equip school districts to provide special education services to a growing number of students.

- **Revise Chapter 14 to fall in line with federal definitions.** Chapter 14 currently exceeds federal requirements related to child find, the evaluation and identification of students with disabilities and transition processes. Revising the code would both streamline processes and lower the costs associated with these services.

- **Create incentives or alternative pathways to teacher and specialist certifications.** This will create a larger pool of teachers and ease the burden that schools face in recruitment and training in a highly competitive environment.



NEED MORE INFORMATION:

Dr. Michelle Reichard-Huff, Director
Early Childhood and Student Services
Berks County Intermediate Unit
1111 Commons Blvd. | Reading, PA 19605
610-987-8446 | mcrei@berksiu.org

January 29, 2021



BERKS COUNTY COLA

Committee on Legislative Action

THE ISSUE:

24 P.S. §§ 17-1701-A et seq.

Cyber Charter Schools

Cyber Charter Schools are independent public schools established and operated under a charter from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. These schools utilize technology to deliver a significant portion of instruction to students virtually. The current cyber charter funding mechanism forces school districts to overpay cyber charter schools, including the costs for special education students attending these schools, by hundreds of millions of dollars each school year, according to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA).

Overpaying cyber charter schools, in addition to rising costs, not only impacts school district costs and budgets, but also impacts taxpayer dollars.

PRIORITY:
Provide access to a high-quality education for the 70,000+ students in Berks County

TARGETED ADVOCACY AREA: CYBER CHARTER SCHOOLS

DATA POINTS

BERKS COUNTY

\$13,117

COST PER STUDENT

\$30,250

COST PER SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT

46%

increase in Berks County students enrolled in cyber charter schools between May 2020 and December 2020

\$11.7 million

the expected increase in cyber charter school expenses for Berks County school districts for 2020-2021

\$350 million

the expected increase in cyber charter school expenses for all Pennsylvania school districts for 2020-2021

Data points provided are from the 2020-2021 school year to date.

KEY TALKING POINTS POLICY PRIORITIES

- Under current charter school law, tuition payments are calculated based on the budgeted expenditures of the student's school district of residence, rather than the charter school's cost to educate a student. This calculation includes services that may or may not be covered by cyber charter schools, including food services, library services, and athletic and extracurricular activities.
- School districts are required to provide individualized supports to special education students, with costs ranging greatly from child-to-child based on needs. However, cyber charter schools receive the same rate per each child with special needs, regardless of the differences in needs, costs, and services provided.
- A 2016 PSBA study of charter / cyber charter school enrollment data found that school districts paid charter schools in excess of \$100 million more for special education than charter schools spent on special education services.
- In almost all cases, school district costs are not reduced when students attend cyber charter schools, as school districts must incur the fixed costs of building space, maintenance, utility bills, and transportation.

Berks County school districts offer in-house alternative cyber education at a cost that is, on average, between 20-30% less than what districts pay in cyber charter school tuition.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Change in Funding Formula
- Reduction in Tuition Fees
- Accountability for Funds
- Transparency of Funds
- Support of District Options



IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD / ACTION NEEDED

- **Develop a more equitable funding formula which is critical for both school districts and the taxpayers they serve.** By bringing funding of cyber charter schools in line with the actual cost of educating a child in a virtual environment, school districts will not have to pass the unnecessary charges to their constituents in the form of property tax increases.
- **Ensure that any change in the funding formula results in a reduction of the tuition fee charged to local school districts.**
- **Focus on the funding structure without limiting choice.** Legislative changes with the funding formula would remove tension between school districts and cyber charter schools.
- **Increase the oversight of cyber charter school budgets.** This is necessary in order to create a level playing field among school districts and their cyber charter school counterparts. Because cyber charter schools are funded by the same taxpayer dollars as local school districts, the accountability for funds should be the same across the board.

- **Ensure cyber charter school expense transparency, equivalent to the requirements for school districts.** Transparency regarding how much a cyber charter school is spending on educational needs, compared to administration and other costs, will help parents and caregivers make more informed decisions, and will help school districts educate taxpayers on the costs associated with tuition payments.
- **Continue to promote the availability of a high-quality alternative cyber education option offered through the student's home district.** Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts offered a local option for alternative cyber education. Since the pandemic, these have become an increasingly viable option for students and families. In Berks County, enrollment in district-sponsored alternative cyber education is up more than 300% compared to the 2019-2020 school year. With increased support from the state level, school districts can continue to provide a high-quality education in an evolving environment.



NEED MORE INFORMATION:

Dan Richards, Director

Office of Professional Development & Curriculum
Berks County Intermediate Unit
1111 Commons Boulevard | Reading, PA 19605
610-987-8370 | danric@berksiu.org

February 9, 2021



BERKS COUNTY COLA

Committee on Legislative Action

MOVING FORWARD 2021-2022

THE ISSUE:

24 P.S. §§ 17-1701-A et seq.

Cyber Charter Schools

Cyber Charter Schools are independent public schools established and operated under a charter from the Pennsylvania Department of Education. These schools utilize technology to deliver a significant portion of instruction to students virtually. The current cyber charter funding mechanism forces school districts to overpay cyber charter schools, including the costs for special education students attending these schools, by hundreds of millions of dollars each school year, according to the Pennsylvania School Boards Association (PSBA). **Overpaying cyber charter schools, in addition to rising costs, not only impacts school district costs and budgets, but also impacts taxpayer dollars.**

PRIORITY:
Provide access to a high-quality education for the 70,000+ students in Berks County

TARGETED ADVOCACY AREA: CYBER CHARTER SCHOOLS 2021-2022

BERKS COUNTY AVERAGE CYBER CHARTER TUITION

\$13,515

COST PER STUDENT

\$32,025

COST PER SPECIAL EDUCATION STUDENT

DATA POINTS
2021-2022

\$34 million

the total estimated cyber charter school expense for Berks County school districts

3,193

the number of students served by Berks County school districts with in-house alternative cyber education options

\$16.5 million

the estimated savings for students attending Berks County school district alternative cyber education options

Data points provided are from the 2021-2022 school year to date.

KEY TALKING POINTS POLICY PRIORITIES

- Under current charter school law, tuition payments are calculated based on the budgeted expenditures of the student's school district of residence, rather than the charter school's cost to educate a student. This calculation includes services that may or may not be covered by cyber charter schools, including food services, library services, and athletic and extracurricular activities.
- School districts are required to provide individualized supports to special education students, with costs ranging greatly from child-to-child based on needs. However, cyber charter schools receive the same rate per each child with special needs, regardless of the differences in needs, costs, and services provided.
- A 2016 PSBA study of charter / cyber charter school enrollment data found that school districts paid charter schools in excess of \$100 million more for special education than charter schools spent on special education services.

Berks County school districts offer in-house alternative cyber education at a cost that is, on average, between 20-30% less than what districts pay in cyber charter school tuition.

- In almost all cases, school district costs are not reduced when students attend cyber charter schools, as school districts must incur the fixed costs of building space, maintenance, utility bills, and transportation.



PROPOSED SOLUTIONS

- Change in Funding Formula
- Reduction in Tuition Fees
- Accountability for Funds
- Transparency of Funds
- Support of District Options



IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD / ACTION NEEDED

- **Develop a more equitable funding formula which is critical for both school districts and the taxpayers they serve.**

By bringing funding of cyber charter schools in line with the actual cost of educating a child in a virtual environment, school districts will not have to pass the unnecessary charges to their constituents in the form of property tax increases.

- **Ensure that any change in the funding formula results in a reduction of the tuition fee charged to local school districts.**

- **Focus on the funding structure without limiting choice.**

Legislative changes with the funding formula would remove tension between school districts and cyber charter schools.

- **Increase the oversight of cyber charter school budgets.**

This is necessary in order to create a level playing field among school districts and their cyber charter school counterparts. Because cyber charter schools are funded by the same taxpayer dollars as local school districts, the accountability for funds should be the same across the board.

- **Ensure cyber charter school expense transparency is equivalent to the requirements for school districts.**

Transparency regarding how much a cyber charter school is spending on educational needs, compared to administration and other costs, will help parents and caregivers make more informed decisions, and will help school districts educate taxpayers on the costs associated with tuition payments.

- **Continue to promote the availability of a high-quality alternative cyber education option offered through the student's home district.**

Even before the COVID-19 pandemic, many school districts offered a local option for alternative cyber education. Since the pandemic, these have become an increasingly viable option for students and families. With increased support from the state level, school districts can continue to provide a high-quality education in an evolving environment.



NEED MORE INFORMATION:

Dr. Richard Faidley, Superintendent
Wilson School District
FaiRic@wilsonsd.org | 610-670-0180 ext. 1115

Mr. Andrew Potteiger, Superintendent
Brandywine Heights Area School District
andpot@bhasd.org | 610-682-5100 ext. 1101

November 9, 2021



BERKS COUNTY COLA

Committee on Legislative Action

THE ISSUE:

Mandated Training

As stated in the Public School Code, school district personnel are required to participate in mandatory trainings in a variety of critically important topics. However, the cumulative impact on time, for training, tracking, and management, requires school administrators to continually revisit how to provide the mandated training in a thorough and efficient manner. Addressing the number of mandated training hours is essential. **Ultimately, taxpayers are the ones paying educators' salaries and, subsequently, are paying for all mandated trainings.**

PRIORITY:
Provide access to a high-quality education for the 70,000+ students in Berks County

TARGETED ADVOCACY AREA: MANDATED TRAINING

\$3.8 million

DATA POINTS

spent annually by Berks County school districts on mandated training

\$768

spent per educator on mandated training each year

17

TRAININGS required by law for PA educators

ANNUALLY,

13%

of training hours are devoted to fulfilling state mandates

Data points provided are from the 2020-2021 school year to date.

NEED MORE INFORMATION:

Dan Richards, Director
Office of Professional Development & Curriculum
Berks County Intermediate Unit
1111 Commons Boulevard
Reading, PA 19605
610-987-8370 | danric@berksiu.org

KEY TALKING POINTS POLICY PRIORITIES

- Mandated trainings are time consuming for school districts, not only for those participating in the trainings, but also for those responsible for the coordination, management, and tracking of training sessions.
- There is a layering effect to this legislation as more mandated training hours are being added each year. **Currently there are 17 trainings required by law for educators in Pennsylvania totaling 15 hours.** Most recently, four hours of mandated trainings were added in 2019 to address Trauma-Informed Practices and School Safety and Security.
- Based on the number of hours, Berks County school districts are **spending a combined \$3.8 million annually** on mandated training for employees.

PROPOSED SOLUTIONS IDEAS FOR MOVING FORWARD ACTION NEEDED

- **Provide a framework and proposed components for each mandate.** There is no question that all of the required trainings are critically important, but rather than focusing on the amount of time spent on each training, the emphasis should be on the required content to be addressed. This will allow school districts to retain a greater local control while still following the state's guidance. It will also alleviate the time spent on tracking and management of hours.
- **Consider the impact on educators of additional trainings.** Acknowledging that there will certainly be additional topics in the future that merit mandated trainings, legislators should consider the layering effect on the time of educators and district personnel including the subsequent cost to taxpayers for any future mandated trainings. Relief from mandated hourly requirements can help to save school districts' and taxpayers' money.

February 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
31	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	9 COLA Meeting	10	11	12	13
14	15 Campaign Kick-Off Letter to Legislators	16 Campaign Kick-Off Announcement to All Others	17 One-Pager Special Education	18 Tag Legislators' Committees	19 Fact Friday: 13,569 Students Served in Berks	20
21	22 One-Pager Cyber Charter Campaign Kick-Off BCIU Internal	23	24 Tag Legislators' Committees	25	26 Fact Friday: \$37.2 Million Cost for Cyber Charter in Berks	27
28	1	2	3	4	5	6
7	8	Goals <u> </u> 1. _____ 2. _____ 3. _____ 4. _____ 5. _____				

Remember
Facebook
Twitter
LinkedIn
All Social
Email - All
Email - Leg

March 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	1 Launch Campaign Toolkit to School Districts	2 Special Education Video #1	3 Tag Local Legislators	4 Best Practices for Writing Your Legislators (include templates)	5 Fact Friday: \$204 million Cost in Berks	6
7	8 Call-To-Action: Write Your Legislators	9 Cyber Charter Video #1	10 Tag Local Legislators	11	12 Fact Friday: Cost Per Student Cyber Charter	13
14	15 Call-To-Action: Write Your Legislators	16 Infographic: Special Education Services Offered	17 Social Media Push Like, Share, & Engage! (links to videos)	18 Call-To-Action: Write Your Legislators	19 Fact Friday: Special Education Funding Local vs. State	20
21	22 Follow-up with Legislators (Half-way point)	23 Special Education Testimonial	24 Tag Legislators by Party	25	26 Fact Friday: Increased Need for Special Education	27
28	29	30 Cyber Charter Testimonial	31 Tag Legislators by Party	1	2	3

4	5
Goals	

To Do

Remember

Facebook	
Twitter	
LinkedIn	
All Social	
Email - All	
Email - Leg	

Notes

April 2021

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
28	29	30	31	1	2 Fact Friday: Charter School Costs Special Education	3
4	5 Make A Difference: What you can do to advocate for both issues...	6 In-House Virtual Options	7	8	9 Fact Friday: In-House Virtual Options	10
11	12	13 Call-To-Action: Special Education Funding Reform	14 Tag Legislators - All	15	16 Fact Friday: Special Education	17
18	19	20 Call-To-Action: Cyber Charter Funding Reform	21 Tag Legislators - All	22	23 Fact Friday: Cyber Charter	24
25	26 EVALUATE CAMPAIGN COMMUNICATION SUCCESS	27	28	29	30	1
2	3	Goals <hr/> 1. 2. 3. 4. 5.				

To Do

Remember

Notes

Kick-Off Email to Berks County Legislators



TO: Berks County State Senators
Berks County State Representatives

FROM: Dr. Jill Hackman, BCIU Executive Director

DATE: February 15, 2021

RE: Committee on Legislative Action (COLA) Targeted Advocacy Campaign

On behalf of the Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA), thank you for your continued commitment to the more than 70,000 students we serve in Berks County. Your collaboration, leadership, and advocacy on our behalf has made a positive impact on our students, schools, and the education community. While we have had the privilege of working with you on several mandated initiatives, we are especially appreciative of our combined efforts to address special education funding and cyber charter reform.

As you know, both special education funding and cyber charter reform have been long-standing education issues that need to be addressed. At the local level, special education funding and cyber charter reform directly impact our school districts' costs and budgets, which ultimately increase taxpayer dollars. While our top priority continues to be providing access to a high-quality education for the students of Berks County, we also have an obligation to address the rising costs that are directly impacting our local taxpayers.

Therefore, to address these two issues, the Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA) will be launching a twenty-week targeted advocacy campaign on Tuesday, February 16, 2021, centered on special education funding and cyber charter reform. The campaign will inform the public how special education funding and payments to cyber charter schools impacts our local education community, the cost challenges that exist for public schools, as well as the impact for taxpayer dollars. The campaign will utilize social media venues, websites, meetings, and targeted one-page summaries.

In order to provide you with specifics related to the targeted advocacy campaign and to strategize solutions, we will hold a virtual briefing for our Berks County State Legislators on Thursday, February 25, 2021, from 9:00 A.M. until 10:00 A.M. At that time, we will provide Berks County data points, policy priorities, proposed solutions, and ideas for moving forward together. Your leadership, guidance, and advocacy to support these efforts is extremely important to us.

The following COLA leaders will be in attendance with me for the Thursday, February 25, campaign briefing:

Special Purpose Project:
COLA Targeted Advocacy Campaign
BCIU Creative Team

- Dr. Richard Faidley, Superintendent, Wilson School District
- Dr. Robert Pleis, Superintendent, Twin Valley School District
- Mr. Andrew Potteiger, Superintendent, Brandywine Heights Area School District

In the meantime, if you would like to follow the campaign that will be launched on February 16, links to the social media venues are provided below:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/berksiu>
- Twitter - https://twitter.com/BCIU_ExecOffice
- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/berksiu/>

Please contact Ms. Beth Kozloski, Executive Assistant, BCIU Office of the Executive Director, at betkoz@berksiu.org or 610-987-8486, to let us know if you are available to attend the virtual briefing on Thursday, February 25, 2021, at 9:00 A.M. Additional meeting details and Zoom connection information will be sent closer to the meeting date.

As always, please contact me if you have any questions or if we can be of assistance to you or your office at any time regarding education matters.

Again, thank you for your continued collaboration and for being a voice for the more than 70,000 students in Berks County and across the Commonwealth!

Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA) Members

Antietam School District

Mrs. Tracy Detwiler, Acting Superintendent
Director of Finance and Business
Mrs. Ann Sellers, Board Member
Mr. James Glendening, Board President

Boyertown Area School District

Mrs. Marybeth Torchia, Acting Superintendent
Ms. Patricia Denicola, Chief Financial Officer
Mrs. Jill Dennin, Board Member

Brandywine Heights Area School District

Mr. Andrew Potteiger, Superintendent
Mr. Craig Neiman, Business Manager
Mrs. Laura Walizer, Board Member

Conrad Weiser Area School District

Dr. Randall Grove, Superintendent
Mr. Mark Moyer, Director of Business

Daniel Boone Area School District

Dr. Brett Cooper, Superintendent
Mrs. Kathlene Haines, Chief Financial Officer
Mr. Kevin Stroble, Board Treasurer

Kutztown Area School District

Mr. Christian Temchatin, Superintendent
Mr. David Miller, Business Administrator
Mr. Randy Burch, Board Vice President
Dr. Eric Johnson, Board Member

Muhlenberg School District

Dr. Joseph Macharola, Superintendent
Mr. Shane Mathias, Business Manager

Oley Valley School District

Dr. Tracy Shank, Superintendent
Mrs. Loree Machese, Business Manager
Mr. Eric Clemmer, Board Member

Reading School District

Dr. Khalid Mumin, Superintendent
Mr. Wayne Gehris, Chief Financial Officer

Schuylkill Valley School District

Mr. Michael Mitchell, Superintendent
Mrs. Changming Wang, Business Manager
Mr. Robert Dempsey, Board Member

Special Purpose Project:
COLA Targeted Advocacy Campaign
BCIU Creative Team

Mrs. Linda Lash, Board Secretary

Exeter Township School District

Dr. Kimberly Minor, Superintendent
Mr. Brian Feick, Dir. of Finance/Support Svcs.
Dr. David Hemberger, Board Member
Dr. Sharon McClendon, Board Member

Fleetwood Area School District

Dr. Greg Miller, Superintendent
Mrs. Heidi Orth, Business Manager
Mr. Kevin Manmiller, Board President

Governor Mifflin School District

Mr. William McKay, Superintendent
Mrs. Diane Richards, Chief Financial Officer
Mr. Donald Kennedy, Board Treasurer

Hamburg Area School District

Dr. Richard Mextorf, Superintendent
Ms. Michele Zimmerman, Business Manager
Mr. Cory Johnson, Board Member

Berks Career & Technology Center

Dr. James Kraft, Executive Director

Tulpehocken Area School District

Mr. Andrew Netznik, Superintendent
Mr. Thomas Kowalonek, Chief Financial Officer

Twin Valley School District

Dr. Robert Pleis, Superintendent
Mrs. Elaine Mathias, Business Administrator
Mr. Gary McEwen, Board President
Mrs. Christine Osborn, Board Vice President

Wilson School District

Dr. Richard Faidley, Superintendent
Mrs. Christine Schlosman, Chief Financial Officer
Mr. Mike Martin, Board Treasurer

Wyomissing Area School District

Mr. Rob Scoboria, Superintendent
Mr. Mark Boyer, Business Administrator
Mr. Christopher McCaffrey, Board Member

Reading/Muhlenberg Career & Tech Center

Mr. Eric Kahler, Administrative Director

Berks County Intermediate Unit

Dr. Jill Hackman, Executive Director
Mr. Daniel Richards, Director

Mrs. Donna DeLoretta, CFO/COO

Dr. Michelle Reichard-Huff, Director

Campaign Kick-Off Letter Template

February 16, 2021

Dear (Name):

On behalf of the Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA), I would like to officially announce the kick-off of our targeted advocacy campaign. As a valued member of our education community impacting more than 70,000 students across Berks County, we are asking for your support to strengthen advocacy efforts regarding two long-standing public education issues: special education funding and cyber charter reform.

At the local level, special education funding and cyber charter reform directly impact our school districts' costs and budgets, which ultimately increase taxpayer dollars. While our top priority continues to be providing access to a high-quality education for the students of Berks County, we also have an obligation to address the rising costs that are directly impacting our local taxpayers.

The goal of this campaign is to inform the public how special education funding and payments to cyber charter schools impacts our local education community, the cost challenges that exist for public schools, as well as the repercussions for taxpayer dollars. The campaign will utilize social media venues, websites, meetings, emails, letters, and targeted one-page summaries. A dedicated advocacy page is linked here: <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy/>.

Beginning Tuesday, February 16, 2021, through Friday, April 23, 2021, you can follow the campaign on social media and help us increase our reach by 'liking, commenting on, and sharing' our targeted posts and participating in call-to-action items. Links to the Berks County Intermediate Unit social media channels (**and our district channels**) are provided below:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/berksiu>
- Twitter - https://twitter.com/BCIU_ExecOffice
- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/berksiu/>
- Add school district social media channels

Throughout the campaign, we will also be providing helpful materials including targeted one-page summaries surrounding the two issues, short video clips, sample social media posts, an advocacy letter template, and tips for how you can help strengthen our advocacy efforts.

Thank you in advance for your support in this important endeavor. Together we can be a unified voice for the more than 70,000 students in Berks County and across the Commonwealth.

Sincerely,

(Your Contact Information)

Special Education Educator Advocacy Letter Template

DATE

Dear [Senator / Representative] XXXX,

As a(n) [educator / specific title] of students who receive special education services from [School District Name / IU], I know how impactful these services are and can attest to the great progress I witness on a daily basis as a result of these services. Unfortunately, rising costs are impacting our school district costs and budgets resulting in the families we serve paying more out-of-pocket in school taxes. In addition, certifications and trainings needed to provide special education services are becoming more specialized making it more difficult and costly to obtain.

[Share your experience as an educator / specific title here.]

As noted in my own personal experience above working with students in special education, these services are critical to the future of our children. I ask that you increase special education funding at the state level to ease the burden being placed on property owners in the local school districts. Additionally, Berks County educators and families are calling on Pennsylvania legislature to do the following:

- Ensure equitable distribution of funds to eliminate undue expenses on school district budgets.
- Ensure full implementation of the Special Education Funding Formula.
- Revise Chapter 14 to align with federal definitions.
- Create incentives or alternative pathways to teacher and specialist certifications.

All of these proposed solutions will help lessen the financial burden on school districts and taxpayers while still ensuring that more than 13,500 Berks County students will continue to receive special education services outlined in their individualized education program (IEP).

Thank you for your continued support and advocacy on behalf of our students. Together we can make sure our youngest population are able to reach their fullest potential!

Respectfully,

SIGNATURE

Special Education Family Advocacy Letter Template

DATE

Dear [Senator / Representative] XXXX,

As the [parent / guardian] of a child who receives special education services from [School District Name / IU], I know how impactful these services are and can attest to the great progress my child has made as a result of the services they receive. Unfortunately, rising costs are impacting our school district costs and budgets resulting in families paying more out-of-pocket in school taxes. Our family, and many others here in Berks County, rely on special education services and programs to help support our children in key developmental areas.

[Share your child / family experience here.]

As noted in our own personal experience above with [Special Education service or program], these services are critical for our child's(ren's) future. I ask that you increase special education funding at the state level to ease the burden being placed on property owners in the local school districts. Additionally, Berks County families are calling on Pennsylvania legislature to do the following:

- Ensure equitable distribution of funds to eliminate undue expenses on school district budgets.
- Ensure full implementation of the Special Education Funding Formula.
- Revise Chapter 14 to align with federal definitions.
- Create incentives or alternative pathways to teacher and specialist certifications.

All of these proposed solutions will help lessen the financial burden on school districts and taxpayers while still ensuring that more than 13,500 Berks County students will continue to receive special education services outlined in their individualized education program (IEP).

Thank you for your continued support and advocacy on behalf of our children. Together we can make sure our youngest population are able to reach their fullest potential!

Respectfully,

SIGNATURE

COLA Targeted Advocacy Campaign Social Media Posts

Facebook:

Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · February 26, 2021 ·

On this #BCIUFactFriday, we take a look at Cyber Charter School funding in Pennsylvania. Because cyber charter schools are tuition-free for students, it is local school districts - and ultimately, taxpayers - who pay that tuition. In Berks County, the average payment to cyber charter schools per student is \$13,117, and the average payment per special education student is \$30,250.

The 18 school districts in Berks County offer in-house virtual options for district residents at a cost that is, on average, between 20-30% less than what districts pay in cyber charter school tuition.

That's why the Berks County Intermediate Unit and education leaders from across Berks County are calling on our legislature to change the funding formula and to bring tuition in line with actual costs. To learn more about our proposal and to learn how you can join our advocacy efforts, visit <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy>



Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · February 22, 2021 ·

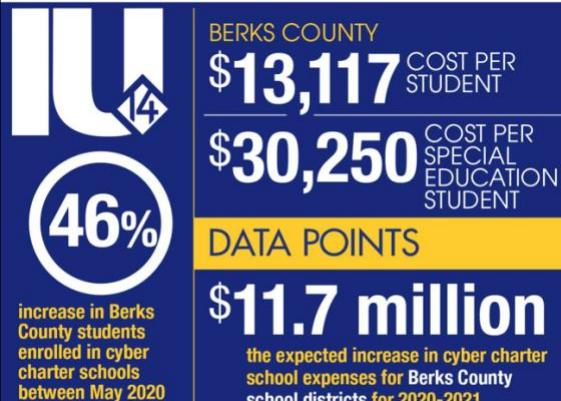
The Berks County Intermediate Unit and education leaders across #BerksCounty are calling on our legislators in Harrisburg to address funding reform for cyber charter schools.

For each student who enrolls in a cyber charter school, school districts are required to pay the student's tuition. Under current cyber charter school law, that tuition is calculated based on the budgeted expenditures of the student's school district of residence, not the cost to the cyber charter school. This calculation includes services that may or may not be provided by a cyber charter school, such as food services, library services, and athletic and extracurricular activities.

At the same time, Berks County school districts offer in-house alternative cyber education at a cost that is, on average, between 20-30% less than what districts pay in cyber charter school tuition.

This year, it is estimated that Berks County school districts will pay \$11.7 million more in cyber charter school tuition than during the 2019-2020 school year. And ultimately, the tuition payments to cyber charter school tuition are paid in taxes by local property owners.

If you would like to learn more about the issue and how you can lend your voice to our advocacy efforts, visit [berksiu.org/advocacy](https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy).



Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · February 19, 2021 ·

Today's #BCIUFactFriday: More than 13,500 K-12 students receive special education services each year in #BerksCounty, and that number has grown by 25% over the last decade.

As the number of students receiving services increases, so does the educational costs to school districts. Currently, state and local funding only account for 23% of the total special education costs in Berks County. That's why we are calling on our legislators in Harrisburg to take action and increase state funding for special education services to ease the burden being placed on local property owners in Berks County and across the Commonwealth.

Learn more about special education funding and how you can lend support to our advocacy efforts by visiting [berksiu.org/advocacy](https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy).



Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · February 17, 2021 ·

The Berks County Intermediate Unit and education leaders across #BerksCounty are calling on our legislators in Harrisburg to address state funding for special education services. Berks County school districts provide special education support to more than 13,500 students at a cost of more than \$203 million. That's an 87% increase in expenditures over the last decade. These rising costs not only impact school district costs and budgets, but also impact taxpayer dollars. That's why we are calling on the state legislature to take action by:

- Increasing special education funding at the state level to ease the burden being placed on property owners in local school districts.
- Ensuring equitable distribution of funds to eliminate undue expenses from school district budgets.
- Ensuring full implementation of the Special Education Funding Formula.
- Revising Chapter 14 to fall in line with federal definitions
- Creating incentives or alternative pathways to teacher and specialist certifications.

Learn more about the issue of special education funding and find out how you can help us advocate for state funding by visiting [berksiu.org/advocacy](https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy).



Special Purpose Project:
COLA Targeted Advocacy Campaign
BCIU Creative Team

Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · March 19, 2021 · ...

In 2018-2019, state and federal funding for special education covered just 23.2% of special education expenses in Berks County school districts. That leaves school districts to make up the remaining 76.8% - roughly \$156 million - through property taxes.

A better, more equitable funding formula already exists, but only for new state funds. We are calling on the state legislature to increase special education funding and fully implement the Special Education Funding Formula for all state funds.

Learn more about state special education funding and how it impacts local taxpayers - and lend your voice to our campaign - by visiting <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy/special-education-funding/>



State Funding for Special Education



berksiu.org/advocacy

Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · March 12, 2021 · ...

On this #BCIUFactFriday, we wanted to highlight a common misconception about cyber charter school enrollment. In almost all cases, school district costs are not reduced when a student chooses to attend a cyber charter school. That's because school districts have fixed costs associated with building space, maintenance, utilities, and transportation.

The BCIU and education leaders from across Berks County are calling on the state legislature to enact reforms to the current cyber charter school legislation to address the following:

- Develop a more equitable funding formula (and ensure that any change in the funding formula results in a reduction of the tuition fee to local school districts)
- Focus on funding structure without limiting school choice
- Increase the oversight of cyber charter school budgets.
- Ensure cyber charter school expense transparency, equivalent to the requirements of school districts.
- Continue to promote the availability of a high-quality alternative cyber education option offered through the student's home district.

To learn more about these proposals and to lend your voice to our advocacy efforts, visit [berksiu.org/advocacy](https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy)



cyber charter school tuition



berksiu.org/advocacy

Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · March 5, 2021 · ...

Special education is one of the most vital services offered by school districts. At the same time, special education has been critically underfunded at both the federal and state levels. Berks County's 18 school districts spent a combined \$204 million on special education services in 2018-2019. State and federal funding accounted for just 23.2% of that total, leaving local school districts to make up \$156 million through property taxes.

That's why the Berks County Intermediate Unit along with education partners from across #BerksCounty are calling on Pennsylvania's state legislature to increase funding for special education in the Commonwealth with a more equitable distribution of special education funds.

Learn more about the issue and join our advocacy efforts by clicking here: <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy/special-education-funding/>

#FactFriday #BCIUFactFriday



How much does special education cost?



berksiu.org/advocacy

Berks County Intermediate Unit
Published by Zach Brown · April 2, 2021 · ...

During the 2019-2020 school year, Berks County school districts served 1,641 K-12+ students with autism. At the same time, BCIU Early Intervention served 550 preschool age students with autism. That is nearly 2,200 children across #BerksCounty who experience - and receive services for - some level of autism.

Autism takes many forms and each person is affected differently - with varying combinations of strengths and challenges. That means that all of the 2,200 children have unique special education needs.

Currently, more than 75% of special education costs are the responsibility of local school districts. That's why we are calling on our state legislature to increase funding for special education - more than 13,500 students in Berks County. Discover more facts about special education and learn how you can lend your voice to our advocacy efforts by visiting <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy/special-education-funding/>



Autism Awareness Day



berksiu.org/advocacy

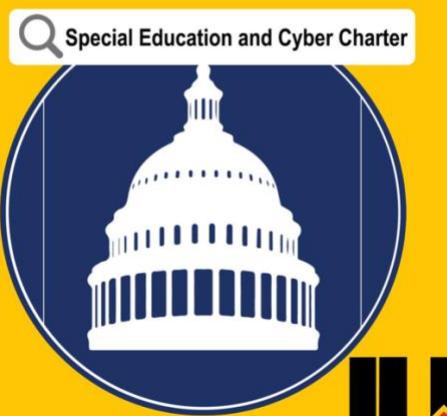
Special Purpose Project:
COLA Targeted Advocacy Campaign
BCIU Creative Team

Twitter:

 BCIU Exec Office
@BCIU_ExecOffice

In today's #BCIUFactFriday, we look at the intersection of our two main areas of advocacy: special education funding and cyber charter reform.

On average, #BerksCounty school districts pay a tuition of \$30,250 for each student who enrolls in a cyber charter school. 1/



berksiu.org/advocacy



 BCIU Exec Office @BCIU_ExecOffice · Apr 2, 2021

During the 2019-2020 school year, Berks County school districts served 1,641 K-12+ students with autism. And BCIU Early Intervention served 550 preschool age students with autism. That is nearly 2,200 children across #BerksCounty

Learn more: berksiu.org/advocacy/speci...



berksiu.org/advocacy





PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

February 16, 2021

CONTACT: Jill M. Hackman, Ed.D.

Executive Director

Berks County Intermediate Unit

610-987-8404 or jilhac@berksiu.org

Berks County Committee on Legislative Action Targeted Advocacy Campaign Kick-Off Announcement

READING, PA – The Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA), in partnership with the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), the 18 Berks County school districts, and the two career and technology centers, launched a targeted advocacy campaign on Tuesday, February 16, 2021, to address two long-standing public education issues: special education funding and cyber charter reform. The goal of the campaign is to inform the public how special education funding and payments to cyber charter schools impact the Berks County education community, the cost implications that exist for public schools, as well as the impact for taxpayer dollars.

The Targeted Advocacy Campaign, specific to funding issues surrounding special education services and cyber charter schools, will be highlighted through various mediums including targeted one-page summaries, videos, a dedicated advocacy webpage, meetings, emails, letters, and social media venues.

The Targeted Advocacy Campaign provides an opportunity to address the costs that are directly impacting local taxpayers while also maintaining the top priority of providing access to high-quality education for the students of Berks County. The public can follow the campaign by visiting <https://www.berksiu.org/advocacy> and BCIU social media channels:

- Facebook - <https://www.facebook.com/berksiu>
- Twitter - https://twitter.com/BCIU_ExecOffice
- LinkedIn - <https://www.linkedin.com/company/berksiu/>

The Berks County Committee on Legislative Action (COLA) was established in 2016 to provide school districts with a forum for review, analysis, and comment on state and federal legislation and regulations affecting education in Berks County and across the Commonwealth. Membership is comprised of one school board representative (and one alternate), the superintendent, and business official from each of Berks County's 18 school districts and the two career centers; and the Executive Director and officials from the Berks County Intermediate Unit.

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