



Education Department Newsletter

August 2026

La Roche University's Education Department proudly celebrates our 2025-2026 graduates.



This spring, thirteen undergraduate education majors completed their degrees and are entering the profession with strong foundations in instruction, collaboration, and meeting the diverse needs of learners. Fourteen undergraduate students (pictured above with LRU Education faculty) took part in commencement, including one student who finished their degree during the fall semester, making it a wonderful opportunity to celebrate together.

Congratulations to Bella Garlitz, Hazel Lombardi, and Conner Radecki (pictured at right), who were nominated for the President's Award for Leadership and Scholarship. These students demonstrated strong academic performance, leadership, and a commitment to the field of education.

Bella Garlitz was also the recipient of the Teacher Education Award. Bella graduated with summa cum laude honors as a Middle Level Language Arts Education Major.



Final MAT Graduates



We also recognize the final cohort of the Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) Middle Level program, with three graduates completing the program as it comes to a close. Their work reflects the program's commitment to preparing thoughtful and responsive middle level educators.

Lexi Kronander (pictured at left with Dr. Andrea Peck) was the recipient of the MAT Action Research Award. Lexi's action research project examined how AI-supported feedback through TeachFX can strengthen high-leverage teaching practices. The study explored how data on teacher talk, wait time, and questioning patterns can support greater student participation and engagement. Lexi presented her research at the Three Rivers Educational Technology Conference, Rewiring Learning: Building Bridges & Strengthening Connections, on January 19, 2026.

GUIDE Graduation



This year marked a meaningful milestone with the graduation of the first cohort from the GUIDE (Grow Your Own University Integrated Deaf Education) program. Five students completed the program (pictured above with Dr. Natalie Rugg), which was developed in partnership with DePaul School for Hearing and Speech and Robert Morris University and designed around a hands-on, apprenticeship-based model. Led by Dr. Natalie Rugg, this program was built through collaboration with both school partners and alongside the Pennsylvania Department of Education and the Pennsylvania Department of Labor and Industry to create an alternative pathway preparing teachers of the deaf and hard of hearing. The cohort was honored during a celebration at DePaul on Wednesday, May 13, 2026 recognizing their accomplishments and the strong partnership that made the program possible.

FrED Camp University

Education Majors participated in the first-ever FrEd Camp University on February 20, 2026 at the William Pitt Student Union at the University of Pittsburgh. The event was based on the principles of Fred Rogers, which are rooted in his philosophy of validating feelings, fostering self-worth, and treating everyone with unconditional acceptance.



After hearing from keynote speaker Gregg Behr, one of the authors of the book *When You Wonder, You're Learning*, attendees moved into breakout sessions of their choice facilitated by local educators, a lunch activity, and panel discussion. All students left with a copy of Behr's book, #bethekindkid t-shirts, new ideas and a newfound sense of pride for the work they are doing as future teachers!

Also, in honor of Fred Rogers, the organizers challenged attendees to a cardigan competition. Kayla Mull, a Middle Level Math Education Major at La Roche, was one of the winners with her sweater design!

To prepare for the competition, all of the LRU students and professors attending the conference had a cardigan decorating party, complete with sewing supplies, such as teacher patches and buttons, as well as pizza and snacks!

Dr. Andrea Peck was on the planning committee for the first FrEd Camp University, and she is spearheading the effort to bring this event to the La Roche campus this fall on Friday, October 30th.



Future Educators Day

Students from Beattie Technical School and Seneca Valley High School spent a day at La Roche on April 16, 2026 to learn about becoming a teacher at LRU. They engaged in activities alongside current students and education faculty members, explored campus, and learned more about the field of teaching.



Current La Roche Education Majors were paired with the high school students to solve fraction puzzles using pattern blocks. This activity was used as a way to demonstrate how manipulatives can be used to help students understand math concepts and the importance of providing an appropriate level of challenge within a supportive environment.

The visiting students also played a collaborative Bingo game, where they were tasked with asking current LRU students about their college and teaching experiences in order to fill in their Bingo board.

It was a productive and exciting day with this next generation of teachers and we are thrilled to be part of their journey.



STEAM Day at BC3

Annie Linsday, Adjunct Professor at La Roche University (LRU) and Associate Professor at Butler County Community College (BC3), organized a collaborative STEAM Day with FluxSpace in the new Paserba Teaching and Learning Lab at BC3. This event was designed to highlight the power of hands-on learning, advising, and cross-institutional partnership.



During the event, Education Majors from BC3 and LRU explored a variety of materials and activities that can be used to support Social Studies themes in early childhood classrooms. Students created cardboard designs with *ChompSaw*, engineered circuits with *Makey Makey*, and practiced coding techniques with *Cubetto*.

Following the STEAM experiences, BC3 students had the opportunity to meet with Dr. Kate Silvis (La Roche Education Department Chair) to discuss transfer pathways and ask individualized questions about continuing their education. Two BC3 alumni, Madyson Fields and Natalie Volek (pictured at right), who are now completing their bachelor's degrees at La Roche returned to share their experiences and offer encouragement to prospective transfer students. This event strengthened the connection between BC3 and LRU and also provided students with meaningful academic guidance and an engaging, future-focused learning experience.



Teaching Junior Achievement

La Roche Education Majors continued the tradition of teaching Junior Achievement (JA) for the practicum component of the *Social Studies Methods* course this spring. Students in Kindergarten through fourth grade at Blessed Trinity Academy learned about economics concepts with games and activities led by these future teachers. As usual, it was difficult to tell who enjoyed this experience more - the college students or the elementary students!



Madelyn Kolarosky teaches first graders about how families earn money to pay for their economic needs and wants.



Oscar Saracco helps third grade students identify how money moves throughout a community.

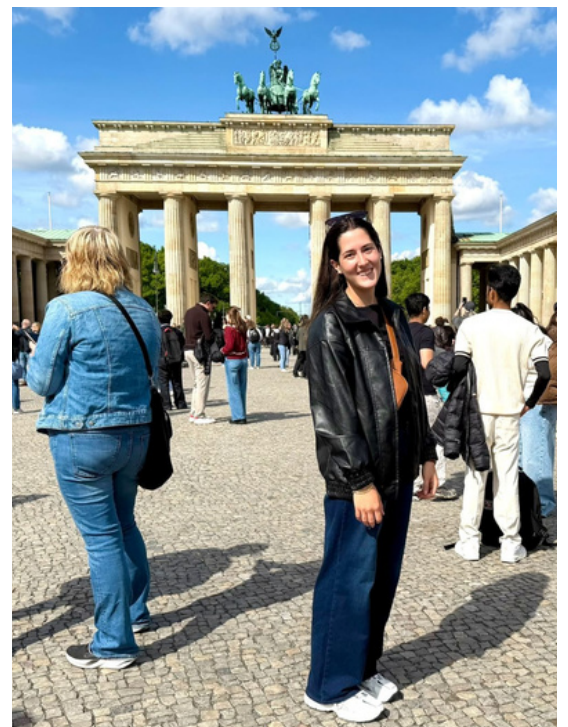
Study Abroad Trip to Germany and Poland

La Roche students, including several Education majors, traveled to Germany and Poland this past May on a short-term study abroad trip.

In Germany, students explored the city of Berlin and spent time learning about the Cold War and what it was like when the Soviet Union was in power. They visited museums and historical landmarks, such as the Brandenburg Gate (shown in the picture).

In Poland, the trip took students to the cities of Warsaw and Krakow where they learned about Polish culture. The students also experienced Europe's darker days while touring Auschwitz-Birkenau.

Samantha Bainbridge, a Middle Level English and Language Arts Education Major who is pictured in the photo, reflected: "My time on this trip was incredible. I got to see where my family is from while touring Warsaw while also experiencing places I formerly only knew of from history books, bringing those lessons to life."



TEACH Conference

The National State Teachers of the Year PA Chapter (NSTOY-PA) invited pre-service teachers, professors and educators to the TEACH mini-conference at Carlow University on Saturday, March 21, 2026. The conference theme was centered on “America 250: Celebrating Future and Current Stars in Education.” All of the LRU spring 2026 student teachers attended with professor Dr. Andrea Peck.

It was a great day hearing from presenters, including the current and former PA teacher of the year awardees, interactive workshops, mock interviews, and Q&A sessions. There were also themed gift bags and fabulous door prizes! It was an incredible day of learning and fun together with fellow educators and leaders from the state!



Mock Monday

The La Roche Education Department hosted “Mock Monday” on Monday, March 22, 2026. The event was sponsored by the Western Region of the Pennsylvania Association for Middle Level Education (WR-PAMLE) and was facilitated by Dr. Andrea Peck. Spring student teachers from La Roche and other local colleges and universities were invited to participate. Attendees first heard from Hampton Township Assistant Superintendent Dr. Rebecca Cunninham about “Moving from Student Teaching to Contract”.

Then, the student teachers were split into breakout rooms to meet with a variety of local elementary and middle level administrators, including principals, assistant principals and WR-PAMLE board members. The student teachers were asked a series of interview questions and provided immediate feedback. This annual event helped students build confidence in speaking about their teaching philosophy and experiences, exposed them to “real” interview questions used by schools, and prepared them for the 2026 PERC Job Fair later that week.

There was also a debriefing session that took place at the end of the event to hear insider tips from the interviewers and ask questions. Many of the student teachers commented that they felt more prepared for the upcoming interview season as a result of participating in Mock Monday.

Technology Presentations

La Roche University student teachers and supervisors utilize an AI-based technology called TeachFX. Using an app, student teachers obtain audio recordings of their lessons. Then, TeachFX's AI models analyze each recording to give the student teachers live data and feedback to support their use of high-leverage instructional practices, such as open-ended questions, wait time, pressing students to explain their thinking, and behavior specific praise. The data shares specific information related to instances of teacher-student talk ratio, use of academic vocabulary, and more. The student teachers reflect weekly on the data that they receive to explain how they have grown and how their pedagogy impacts student performance.

At the Future Focused Learning Summit at South Fayette High School last fall, May 2025 graduate Elizabeth Fite, Dr. Andrea Peck, and Dr. Michelle Rimbey (pictured at right) shared their experiences using TeachFX. Their session provided an overview of the implementation process and results of using TeachFX with student teachers during their spring 2025 student teaching placement. Action-based research, empowering educators with feedback on their instruction and student reflections were the focus of this informative and interactive session.



A May 2026 graduate, R.J. Gillner (pictured at left), presented at the Three Rivers Educational Technology Conference in January. RJ's presentation examined how generational differences shape learning, communication, technology use, and expectations in today's classrooms and workplaces. His session offered a practical look at how Gen Alpha learners think and how they interact with technology.

Teaching Certification Update - ACT47 of 2025

Instruction Grade Band Changes

Recently, the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE) announced changes to the teaching certification grade bands. After July 1, 2028, the grade bands will become:

- Primary (PreK-6th grade)
- Secondary (7th-12th grade)

What does this mean for graduates of La Roche University?

- Graduates with a degree in Middle Level Education (4th-8th grade), should make sure they have completed the required testing for middle level certification and have submitted their certification application on TIMS before July 1, 2028.
- Graduates with a degree in PreK-4 Education should make sure they have completed the required testing for PreK-4 Education and have submitted their certification application on TIMS before July 1, 2028.
 - If you currently have PreK-4 teaching certification, you are also eligible to teach 5th and 6th grade with no additional testing required.
 - This does not change what is on your official teaching certificate...it will still be listed as PreK-4th grade.
 - If you would like to formally expand your PreK-4 teaching certification to include 5th and 6th grade or add on middle level certification (and have these noted on your official teaching certificate), make sure to complete the required tests for these areas and submit your certification application before July 1, 2028.
- Graduates with Secondary (7th-12th grade) teaching certification are eligible to teach 6th grade under their current active certificates.

You can find more details about ACT47 of 2025 on the [PDE website](#).

You are also welcome to contact Dr. Silvis (Kathryn.Silvis@LaRoche.edu) if you have any questions about these teaching certification changes.