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21**

# **Annual Report**

## *Connecting Activities*

**ADVISING, ASSISTING, & ADVOCATING FOR YOUTH  
EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES SINCE 1998.**

**MASSCONNECTING.ORG**

## At a Glance

### By the Numbers: FY2021 Connecting Activities (CA)

Through state funding:

In FY2021, **7,294** students participated in work-based learning experiences through CA

**2,271** employer sites hosted work-based learning experiences through CA

Employer-paid wages for placements with work-based learning plans and/or classroom and workshop instruction represented an investment of **\$11,250,000** in work-based learning.

**206** schools are formal CA partners and include suburban, urban, rural, and traditional and regional vocational technical high schools.

**41** schools in the CA network have created Innovation Pathway programs and 31 of the schools in the CA network have Early College programs.

Career development education activities led by CA during the year included over **1,200** events including online workshops, virtual career panels, virtual career fairs, and more, with events serving over **160** different schools, as well as many regional and statewide events serving all schools.



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## Welcome

With the generous support of state funding, in the 2020-2021 school year, School to Career Connecting Activities known as “CA” continued to act as a critical strategy utilized to support the career development of youth across the Commonwealth. CA leaders at MassHire Workforce Boards along with DESE, district educators, and employers were able to support the best investment a state can make---employing their youth.

The 2020-2021 school year proved to be just as challenging as the Spring of 2020 and relied on already existing systems working together to achieve positive outcomes for youth. CA leaders at MassHire Workforce Boards were ready for the challenge.

Innovation and a sense of urgency were necessary to be able to offer career development experiences to students. CA leaders worked seamlessly and tirelessly with districts to ensure that this happened. While school districts continued to refine virtual delivery modes of instruction, CA leaders did everything they possibly could to ensure that youth were engaging in high quality work-based learning experiences.

The CA Network convened over 20 meetings to support quality work-based learning and evaluated virtual models. CA leaders became experts in virtual career development to ensure that their students would still have access to work-based learning even if they weren’t going to attend school in person for a large part of the school year. Additionally, CA leaders put over eight hundred twelfth grade students to work as academic tutors, teaching assistants and substitute teachers to improve academic outcomes for K-8 students, to begin to prepare and diversify the teacher pipeline, and to support districts in their efforts to combat the ongoing teacher shortage.

I am grateful for the state funding that has enabled CA leaders at MassHire workforce boards to continue to invest in our future workforce.

Sincerely,

Kerry Akashian, Career Development Education Lead, DESE

## What is Connecting Activities?

Connecting Activities (CA), Fund Code 428, line item 7027-0019, is a statewide network led by DESE and organized through sixteen MassHire Workforce Boards, charged with supporting work-based learning and other career development education activities for students.

Through the network, educators can exchange ideas and practices by accessing a wide range of tools, resources, and experiences that support students. Also, employers and community partners can find channels to connect with schools in order to promote career awareness and the career growth of local students.

To learn more about Connecting Activities and find a connection to your regional workforce board, visit:

<http://www.massconnecting.org>

## About the 2020-21 School Year

During the 2020-2021 school year, a year dominated by pandemic, racial reckoning and economic stress, students, staff, teachers and community partners in the Connecting Activities network were actively, creatively and positively engaged in all of the key issues of the year.

- **In a year of social distancing and remote work** → the network expanded offerings of virtual internship opportunities, capstone projects and career-focused project-based learning opportunities for youth.
- **In a year of remote and hybrid learning** → high school students supported local teachers, explored their interests in teaching careers, built skills and earned money in the High School Student Internship in Education Program (HSSIEP), an internship program created in response to the pandemic, under the umbrellas of the CA and YouthWorks programs.
- **In a year that focused an equity lens on all aspects of society** → students learned skills to build equity into their future careers, particularly through the seminars offered by HSSIEP.
- **In a year of upheaval in labor markets** → the CA employer partners, school partners and students came together to engage in learning about the labor market and to explore in-demand career fields.
- **In a year of financial, emotional and social stress** → the CA network brought speakers and resources to schools to support financial literacy and social-emotional learning, giving students the knowledge, skills and tools that can help to navigate challenging times.

## Adapting the Connecting Activities Model: Creating Virtual Internship Opportunities

As the summer of 2020 approached, summer jobs program staff across the state recognized that the pandemic would require very different models for programming.

As in most summers, CA staff work side-by-side with other program sponsors within their cities and towns to support summer job experiences, bringing together a blend of opportunities, including work experiences paid by local employers and work experiences with wages paid or subsidized by the statewide YouthWorks program or by a variety of other state or city-level grants and funding sources.

In response to the pandemic:

Many of the employers who offer summer jobs each year adapted their summer programs to provide virtual internship opportunities. Through virtual internships, students helped to update company publications, helped to set up new databases, helped with online research projects, gathered and catalogued photos and media, shadowed staff to learn about professional career opportunities, and other projects that could be shared remotely.

For example, at the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston, an intern in the Fitness Center worked with the General Manager and Fitness Director to create wellness programs, research trending topics and create drafts of marketing materials.

For Healthy Chelsea, Healthy Chelsea Youth Food Movement (YFM) interns worked collaboratively with the Healthy Chelsea coordinators to become food activists and supporters of well-being within their schools and communities. Interns received training on food systems, workshop building, healthy eating, and federal/local school food policy, and led projects related to these goals.

Interns at the Community Music Center of Boston helped to add closed captioning, tagging, and other features to the center's YouTube channel, making the videos easier to find and more accessible to viewers.

During the summer, the YouthWorks program (with which CA staff work side-by-side every summer) created a project-based learning model called YouthWorksStrong, designing seven community-based projects that local programs could use as the focus for programming, including projects about voter registration, social media, community gardening and other focus areas.

Many virtual experiences have included opportunities to meet online with a variety of industry professionals, observe and participate in department meetings, participate in professional development workshops, and research and write about various departments within the organization. These career exploration experiences enabled the intern to learn more about all aspects of the organization, and offered employees an opportunity to share career insights with these local youth.

As the school year began, CA staff drew on the experiences of the summer to create additional work experience opportunities, with many virtual internships, as well as in-person and hybrid work experiences where and when possible.

Mirroring the experiences of workers across the state and across the country, many students were able to participate in in-person and hybrid work experiences, following careful safety protocols. The CA network has a longstanding commitment to workplace safety, and staff worked with school district and employer partners to create safety protocols for in-person and hybrid work experiences. As in other years, students enjoyed opportunities in construction, manufacturing, health care, retail, business and finance, human services, environment, law, public safety and many other fields during 2020-21.

Meanwhile, some internship programs were put on hold for the year, based on local decisions about the best approach to balancing health and safety and student experiences in the pandemic. Our network helped to create alternative experiences. For example, in Palmer High School, one teacher created a new semester-long School to Career course, on topics related to self-assessment, career awareness, career search, college search, financial aid, social-emotional adjustment, goal setting, and decision-making. Materials were tailored to include individual projects based on student interests and work-based placements when available.



## Creation of the HSSIIEP Program

From these challenges, DESE proposed an internship program that would recruit high school students interested in careers in education and place them in paid internships in support of local teachers. The High School Students Internships in Education (HSSIIEP) program became an exciting focal point of the work of the CA network in FY2021.

By springtime, many schools were carefully re-opening or introducing hybrid models to blend in-person and remote learning, and student interns provided valuable assistance to classroom teachers while receiving professional development to prepare them for education careers.

HSSIIEP students participated in weekly seminars and created presentations about their experiences.

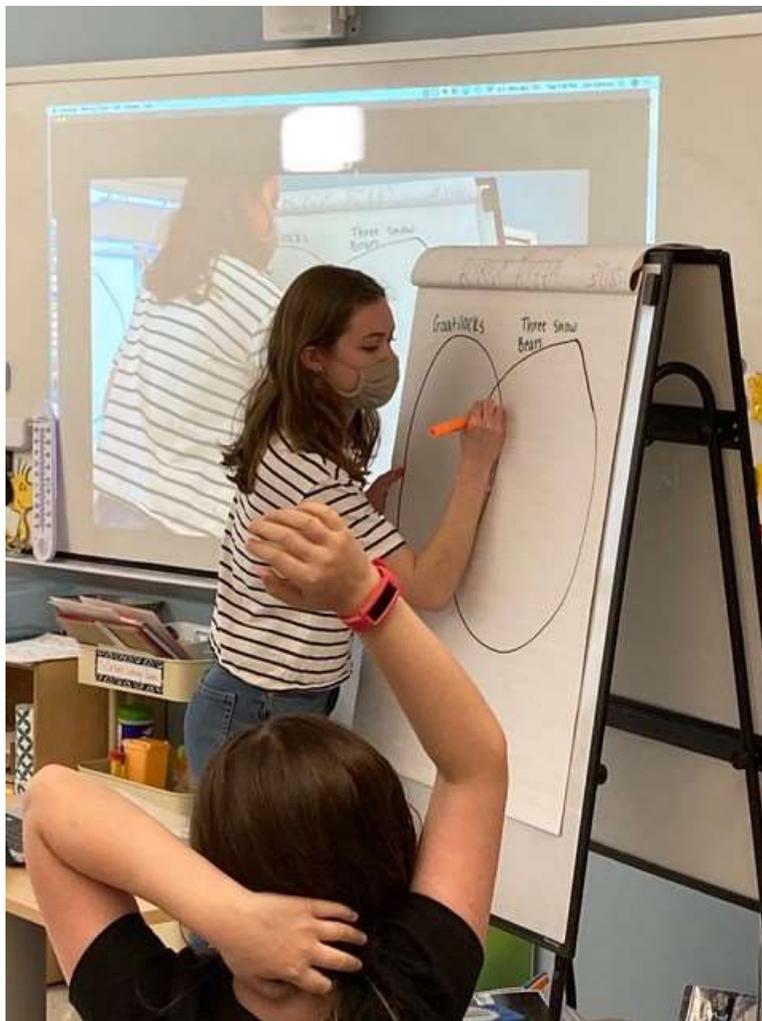
The program received positive feedback from staff and participants:

"This program has enabled us to benefit from the energy and curiosity of a high school senior as she supports our youngest learners each day, while at the same time giving us the opportunity to cultivate passion in a potential future educator. Win-win!"  
~ Principal Sal Frieri, Munger Hill Elementary

"This experience through HSSIIEP has given me an incredible amount of knowledge regarding education at the Middle School level. Not long ago I myself was sitting in these middle school seats and had no concept of what it takes to make a classroom experience positive and engaging. Just today alone with the start of the hybrid learning many things went well, but many things needed an immediate fix and the staff at STEM took care of every issue so quickly to keep the students involved and engaged in their education experience. Amazing what I am discovering."  
~ Jowayne Cargail, HSST Intern at STEM Middle School/6th Grade Math

"The individual working in our school has taken this position very seriously. She is upbeat and happy to work with any student. She is willing to help out whenever is needed. We are fortunate to have her in our building."  
~ Stacy Burgess, Principal, Abner Gibbs

"This program is an outstanding opportunity for our high school students. It is giving them real and relevant experience in the field of education that will help them to make an educated decision on their future college major and career choice."



~ Chuck Jendrysik Principal of Westfield High School

"Thank you for everything each of you do for us interns, this experience has been life-changing."

~ Gary Mandia, Student

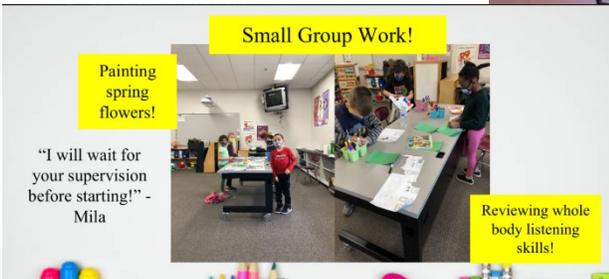


First day all students are welcomed back into Oak Street Elementary. No more cohorts or google meets!

"It is so nice to see all my friends finally in the same room!!" - Mrs. Perro



excited to welcome you all back & we hope to see you soon!



Painting spring flowers!

"I will wait for your supervision before starting!" - Mila

Reviewing whole body listening skills!



## Creating Connections to Regional Blueprint Industries and Emerging Career Areas

An overarching goal of the CA program is to provide all students in Massachusetts with a continuum of career development education experiences, from career awareness to career exploration to career immersion. At each stage of the continuum, the experiences open doors for youth to learn about, explore and try out career opportunities in areas that they might not otherwise be able to access. The experiences connect youth with key industries and career areas, and include [Innovation Pathways](#), particularly focusing on those that have been identified as important to the region by the regional workforce development blueprints.



During the FY2021 school year, areas of focus included the manufacturing month events (spotlighted below), the HSSIIEP program that connected students to careers in education, and an ongoing focus on connecting students with STEM industries statewide. Regional focus on manufacturing, biotech, pharmaceuticals, marine industries (also called the Blue Economy), environment and agriculture, green jobs and more provided regional flavor to this work.



During FY2021, approximately 40% of work experiences have been in STEM or blueprint industries or in education careers through HSSIIEP. Read more about the blueprint industries at <https://www.mass.gov/service-details/view-your-regions-blueprint>



## Connecting with Local Industries



The CA model creates a variety of channels for students and teachers to connect with local business and industry. This year CA staff adapted the practice to a virtual setting.

**Highlight:** The Berkshire region held a “Virtual Career Week” featuring STEM, healthcare, human services, hospitality/arts/communications careers, building trades, advanced manufacturing, education and public service and general skill building workshops to highlight the contributions of local business and community partners.

**Teacher externships:** The Teacher Externship Program supported by CA is a partnership between DESE, Fitchburg State University (FSU), and the MassHire boards. Teacher externships are designed for academic and technical teachers. Each MassHire Workforce Board

had the opportunity to place educators in a variety of employer sites experiencing the skill gaps identified via the Commonwealth's "[Regional Blueprint](#)" process, which addresses labor market needs across MA. Teachers participated in the externship for 50 hours. FSU delivered professional development to support and orient teachers in reflecting and making meaning of their externship experience and in developing lesson plans.

**Capstone projects:** Capstone projects provide an opportunity for students to explore a project in-depth, focusing on a career, community, academic or personal interest. In many cases, a business or industry connection provides the context for a capstone project. Schools with Innovation Pathways, as well as many other schools, offer internships and capstone projects as culminating experiences for Grade 12 students. During the past year, capstone projects were an especially suitable way for students to connect with a project of interest.

For example, this year at Uxbridge High School, a student project, completed as a Capstone in the Manufacturing Innovation Pathway, was selected as a prototype for global deployment by the company. Each unit manufactured will have a notation on it that it was developed in partnership with Uxbridge High School Innovation Pathway students.

**Training Opportunities:** CA collaborates with industry partners to provide connections for high school students to industry-focused training.

In the Berkshires, through the Berkshire Innovation Center, students participate in the



Berkshire E-Talent Accelerator (BETA). The BETA program draws on the expertise of Berkshire Innovation Center members, with a curriculum that exposes high school students to STEM career opportunities in the Berkshires, immerses them in fundamentals critical to these career paths, and introduces them to some of the advanced equipment available at the Innovation Center.

In Boston, through the Boston PIC, CA staff created vacation week training programs this year to provide skills in Microsoft Office and other key software tools. Through feedback from local employers, PIC staff learned that employers have observed that students have extensive experience with Google office software and would benefit from more exposure to Microsoft Office, in preparation for their internships and first work experiences.

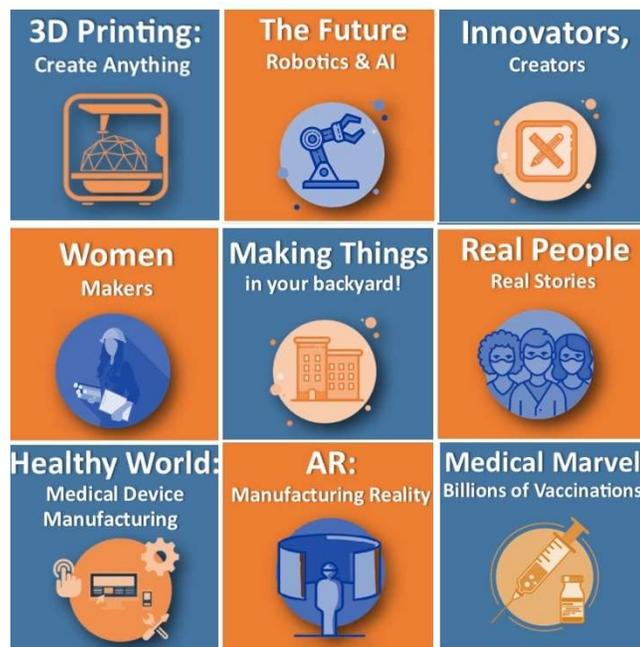
**Spotlight: Manufacturing the Future**

In the first annual MAKE IT IN MASSACHUSETTS: Manufacturing the Future Event, MassHire Workforce Boards across the state provided an opportunity for students to experience how manufacturing is cutting edge in Massachusetts.

This month-long virtual event was supported by DESE with project leadership and coordination from the North Central MassHire Workforce Board Connecting Activities staff.



Students navigated the Make It in Massachusetts website to explore topics of interest, choosing from topics such as 3D printing, robotics, or vaccine development.



## Commitment to Equity

Creating equitable opportunities that result in access to rigorous academic coursework and high quality career development education experiences is fundamental to the work of CA. Further, the CA network has a tradition of creating professional development materials and shaping data collection and reporting systems to drive equity.

The network continues the work to drive equity by using an equity and advocacy lens when developing, implementing, and evaluating programs and experiences. Evaluating current academic and career development education experiences and asking the right questions, the CA community continues to address the inequities that exist when accessing programming.

CA leaders do this by continuously reflecting upon the partner and member schools in the CA network to assess the gaps in our services. We determine regional CA needs by looking at regional percentages of high needs, economically disadvantaged, and other key student populations. We strive to include alternative schools and are working towards partnering with more alternative schools in the future.

Sometimes the work of building equity is explicitly highlighted in a project, such as in programs that promote STEM careers for girls and women or in programs promoting non-traditional career paths in CVTE program selection. Sometimes the work is implicitly reflected in the goals of the employer partners who provide career development and work-based learning opportunities. From a nonprofit community leadership program to a local police department to the office of a corporate headquarters, many of our employer partners are interested in helping to build an **inclusive and diverse talent pipeline** for their career fields. Sometimes this work is a natural outgrowth of our **system-building work**, as we provide career days, workshops, career-related field trips, guest speaker series, internship opportunities, summer jobs, capstone and service learning and other career development opportunities for all of the students in each school. Sometimes the work of building equity and fostering inclusion is in the background, as we carefully consider the program design of each program, making sure that any barriers to participation are addressed. Some of this work is built into **professional development** and in our sharing of **resources and best practices**, as we work together to look thoughtfully at all aspects of program design, outreach, marketing, workshop curriculum and more.

In FY2021, for students in the HSSIIEP program, the seminars, led by the nonprofit organization Educators Rising, provided an opportunity to develop professional-level knowledge of how values of equity and inclusion are applied to classroom teaching. Students studied the concepts of equity, equality, inclusion, and outreach, and learned to recognize different forms of bias and deficit thinking.

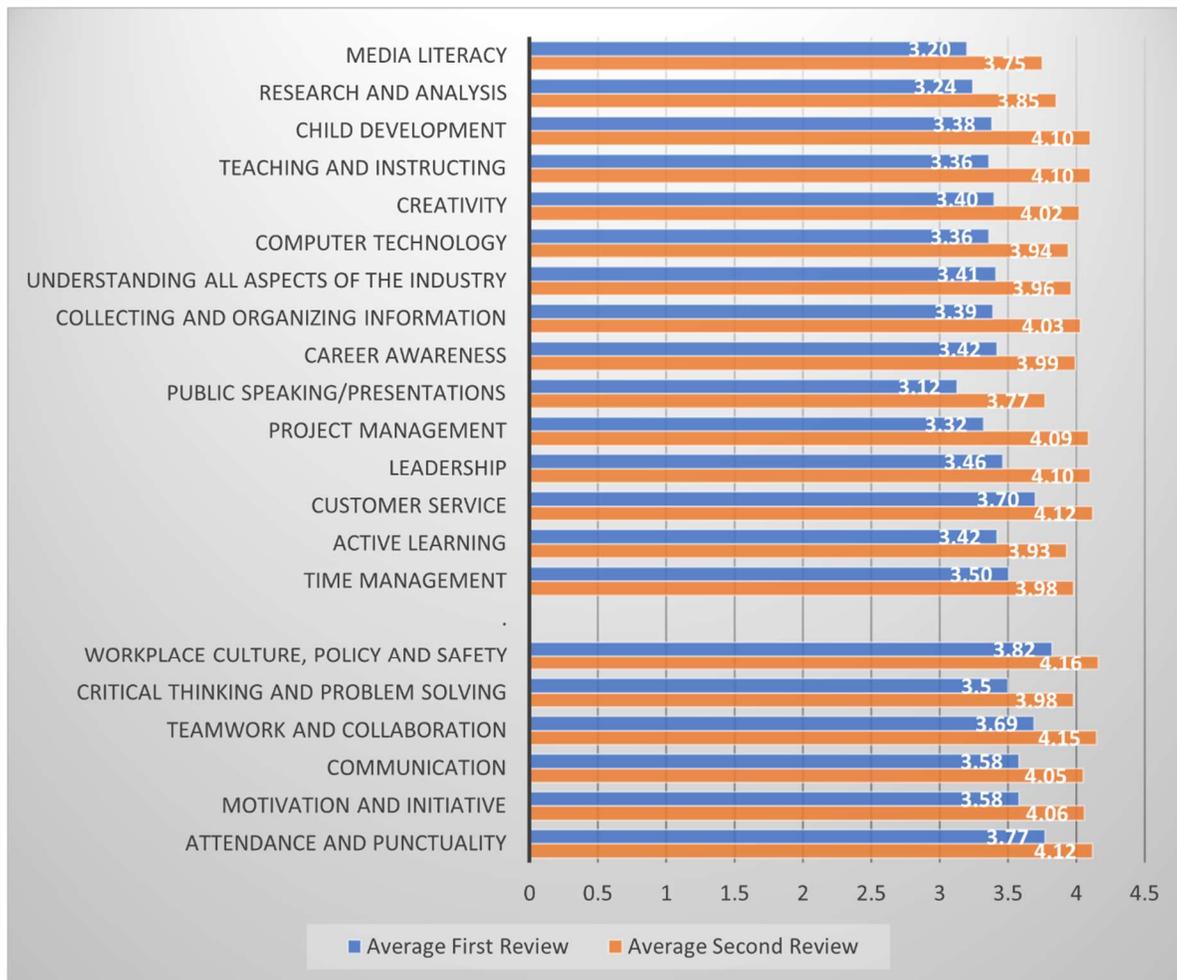
**Skill Development: Building skills that apply in all settings, in challenging times and easier times**

Skill development is a central focus of the Connecting Activities program. Through career development education activities and work-based learning experiences, students explore and build an array of skills, learning to see how career, academic, civic engagement, and social-emotional skills are interconnected.

In Massachusetts, work experiences are typically structured through the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan, an easy-to-use format that provides a job description, list of career skills, and initial and end-of-internship reviews. An analysis of skill gain is a regular feature of our program evaluation, using summary data from these reviews.

**Work-Based Learning Plan Skill Gain Analysis**

**Employability Skills and Most-Commonly-Chosen WBLP Career Skills  
For Connecting Activities Work Experiences, July 2020 – June 2021**

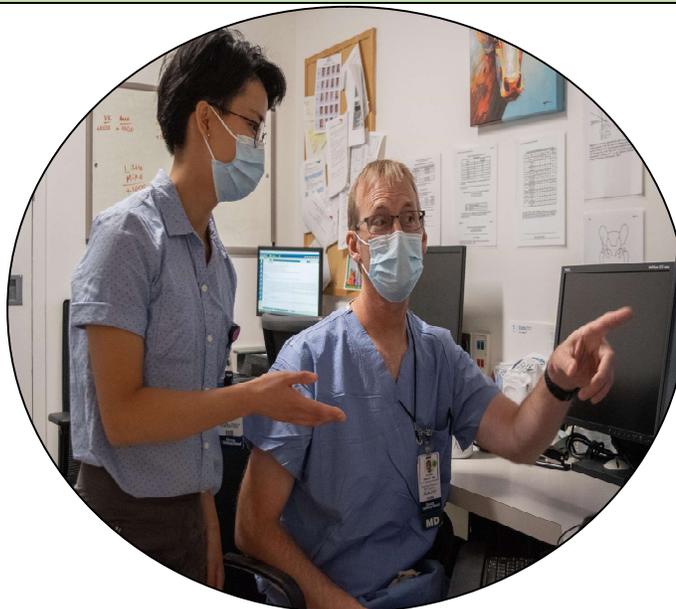


## Skills for a Pandemic Year

As we started FY2021, as a network we reflected on the skills that would be important in the pandemic, reflecting on those career and life skills that are important across all domains, in personal, classroom, community and career settings.

In FY2021, the most commonly highlighted skills in Work-Based Learning Plans included essential lifelong skills such as these five most commonly highlighted skills:

- Active Learning
- Time Management
- Collecting and Organizing Information
- Career Awareness
- Creativity



Project management skills and computer technology skills were emphasized more than in typical years, with increasing emphasis on projects that can be designed and managed via virtual platforms. There was also greater emphasis on career development and communication skills, with greater opportunities for students to engage with a variety of industry professionals via virtual meetings, and for using these opportunities to build career awareness and industry knowledge.

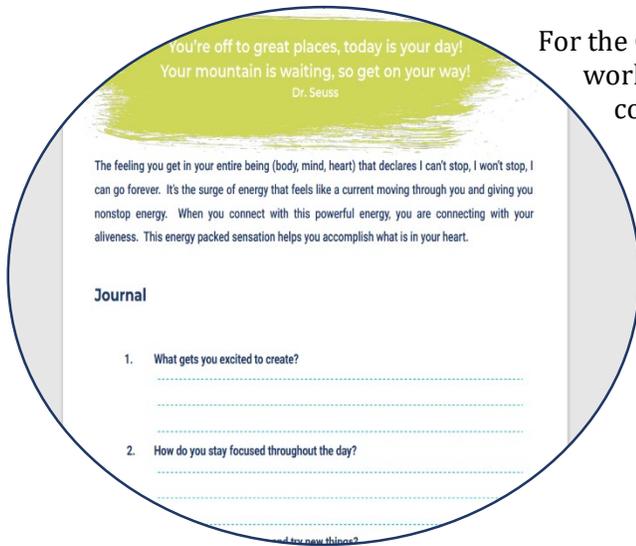
Workplace safety is a key skill built into each Work-Based Learning Plan, with an emphasis on the communication and critical thinking skills that are complements to understanding and maintaining workplace health and safety. Industry-specific skills such as child development, early childhood literacy, environmental literacy, media literacy and health literacy were also important skills highlighted in the Work-Based Learning Plans.



## Spotlight: Social-Emotional Skills

The Connecting Activities network serves as a resource for connecting school partners with a variety of skill building opportunities, exploring the range of career skills, academic skills, civic engagement skills and social-emotional skills that are important for students' future success.

A highlight of the Cape and Islands programming during FY2021 was a virtual presentation by speaker Rebekah Gregory, who lost a leg in the Boston Marathon bombing, and who has used this experience as a foundation for teaching and speaking about resilience and life skills.



For the Greater New Bedford CA program, a highlight was the workshop series by Kristin Asadourian, a leadership coach and founder of Living Become ([livingbecome.com](http://livingbecome.com)). Kristin shared a social-emotional learning toolkit with the Greater New Bedford CA program. The program focused on strategies for youth, using the acronym BECOME: for bold, energized, compassionate, open-hearted, mindful, and empowered. Find this toolkit and additional information at [massconnecting.org/sel](http://massconnecting.org/sel)

## Spotlight: Financial Literacy Skills

Financial literacy skill-building experiences were transformed into virtual settings, with virtual Credit for Life fairs, guest speakers, workshops and other events offered throughout the year. Teachers and Connecting Activities staff collaborated, often with community partners and students, to create new workshop series and course materials focusing on financial literacy and other key career and life skills. Examples include:

Bristol County – BayCoast Bank coordinated virtual Credit for Life Fair events for schools across the Bristol County region.

Brookline High School – Students used the online curriculum [moneyexperience.com](http://moneyexperience.com) to explore financial literacy skills.

Cape and Islands – students worked with the MassHire board and a consultant to support the creation of a new financial literacy toolkit for use in classrooms.

Monson High School – A guest speaker from the Monson Savings Bank spoke about financial literacy skills.

Mount Greylock – Seniors participated in a series of life skills workshops centered around life skills such as self defense, healthy eating habits, social-emotional wellness, and financial literacy.

Palmer High School – School staff created new seventh and eighth grade courses, for a 10-week, daily, 80-minute block course schedule. The courses will teach career awareness, assessment and exploration. Topics include academic preparation, personality and self-assessment, financial literacy, and communication; with all material prepared to be presented in both hybrid and remote format.

### Moving Forward: How Employers and Community Partners Can Get Involved

Every key industry in Massachusetts is emerging from the pandemic with new insights into their industry staffing and training needs for the years ahead. In this environment of economic change and growth, there are many opportunities for employer and community partners to collaborate with the Connecting Activities network to:

- ➔ Support students in their career development through workshops, guest speaker presentations, industry awareness events, mentoring programs, hands-on internships and industry-training programs;
- ➔ Support schools in the design, development and implementation of Career/Vocational Technical Education, Innovation Pathway and Early College programs;
- ➔ Offer work experience opportunities for youth through Connecting Activities, YouthWorks, and other youth programming;
- ➔ Through this work: help to build a strong, diverse, well-prepared local talent pipeline into all of the state’s key industry sectors.

As we move into FY2022 and beyond, CA network staff are working to reach out to employer and community partners, reactivating programming that was put on hold during the height of the pandemic, building on new opportunities that were created in response to the pandemic, and continuing to build partnerships with leaders in all of Massachusetts key industry sectors, with community organizations, and across all Massachusetts school districts to support students in their career development.

If your company or community organization is interested in getting involved with Connecting Activities, please contact your regional MassHire board, listed on the following page, or contact Dr. Kerry Akashian at the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education at [kerry.akashian@mass.gov](mailto:kerry.akashian@mass.gov)

## Massachusetts Workforce Boards

<p><b>Berkshire</b>            MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board            Heather Boulger, Executive Director            66 Allen Street            Pittsfield, MA 01201            (413) 442-7177            heather@masshireberkshire.com            masshireberkshire.com</p>	<p><b>Central Massachusetts</b>            MassHire Central Region Workforce Board            Jeffrey Turgeon, Executive Director            340 Main Street, Suite 400            Worcester, MA 01608-1712            (508) 799-1509            turgeonj@masshirecentral.com            masshirecentral.com</p>	<p><b>Merrimack Valley</b>            MassHire Merrimack Valley Workforce Board            Abel Vargas, Interim Executive Director            255 Essex Street, 4th Floor            Lawrence, MA 01840            (978) 682-7099            avargas@masshiremvwb.org            masshiremvwb.org</p>
<p><b>Boston</b>            MassHire Boston Workforce Board            Neil Sullivan, Executive Director            2 Oliver Street, 7th Floor            Boston, MA 02109            (617) 488-1300            neil.sullivan@bostonpic.org            masshireboston.org</p>	<p><b>Franklin and Hampshire</b>            MassHire Franklin Hampshire Workforce Board            Patricia Crosby, Executive Director            One Arch Place            Greenfield, MA 01301            (413) 773-1835            director@masshirefhw.org            masshirefhw.org</p>	<p><b>Metro North</b>            MassHire Metro North Workforce Board            Chris Albrizio-Lee, Chief Executive Officer            186 Alewife Brook Parkway, Suite 216            Cambridge, MA 02138            (617) 864-1500            sschwartz@masshiremetronorth.org            masshiremetronorth.org</p>
<p><b>Bristol</b>            MassHire Bristol Workforce Board            Thomas Perreira, Executive Director            One Government Center, 5th Floor            Fall River, MA 02722            (508) 675-1165            tperreira@bristoljobs.org            http://www.bristolwib.org/</p>	<p><b>Greater Lowell</b>            MassHire Greater Lowell Workforce Board            Peter Farkas, Executive Director            107 Merrimack Street            Lowell, MA 01852            (978) 937-9816            Peter.Farkas@glwdb.org            masshiregreaterlowell.com</p>	<p><b>Metro South/West</b>            MassHire Metro South/West            Greg Bunn, Executive Director            420 Lakeside Avenue, 3rd Floor            Marlborough, MA 01752            (508) 281-6910            gbunn@MassHireMSW.com            MassHireMSW.com</p>
<p><b>Greater Brockton</b>            MassHire Greater Brockton Workforce Board            Sheila Sullivan-Jardim, Executive Director            34 School Street            Brockton, MA 02301            (508) 584-3234 Ext. 13            ssjardim@bawib.org            masshiregbwb.org</p>	<p><b>Greater New Bedford</b>            MassHire Greater New Bedford Workforce Board            Jim Oliveira, Executive Director            1213 Purchase Street, 2nd Floor            New Bedford, MA 02740-6694            (508) 979-1504            jim@masshiregreaternewbedford.com            masshiregreaternewbedford.com</p>	<p><b>North Central</b>            MassHire North Central Workforce Board            Jeff Roberge, Executive Director            1355 Central Street            Leominster, MA 01453            (978) 534-1023            jroberge@masshirenorthcentralwb.com            masshirenorthcentralwb.com</p>
<p><b>Cape Cod and Islands</b>            MassHire Cape and Islands Workforce Board            Kara Galvin, Executive Director            426 North Street, Suite 9            Hyannis, MA 02601            (508) 775-5900            kara@masshire-capeandislandswb.com            masshire-capeandislandswb.com</p>	<p><b>Hampden</b>            MassHire Hampden County Workforce Board            David Cruise, Executive Director            1441 Main Street, 1st Floor            Springfield, Massachusetts 01103            (413) 787-1547            dcruise@rebhc.org            masshirehcwb.com</p>	<p><b>North Shore</b>            MassHire North Shore Workforce Board            Mary Sarris, Executive Director            70 Washington Street, Suite 314            Salem, MA 01970            (978) 741-3805            info@masshire-northshorewb.com            masshire-northshorewb.com</p>
		<p><b>South Shore</b>            MassHire South Shore Workforce Board            Dean Rizzo, Executive Director            15 Cottage Avenue, Suite 302            Quincy, MA 02169            (617) 328-7001            drizzo@southshorewdb.org            masshiresouthshorewb.com</p>