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Annual Report

Connecting Activities

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

MASSCONNECTING.ORG

BY THE NUMBERS

REGION HIGHLIGHTS

PIVOT POINTS

Welcome

On behalf of the Connecting Activities network, I am delighted to present the annual report for FY2020, a year characterized by the creativity and resiliency of our network of staff and our school, workplace, and community partners.

We know that investing in the youth of Massachusetts today, can reap benefits to countless people, institutions, and communities for decades to come. Over the past year, the 16 MassHire Workforce Boards worked to increase career development education experiences for students and educators through Connecting Activities. The CA network has worked to increase the number of students who have benefited from quality internships that include STEM-focused opportunities to grow the MA workforce. They have also placed educators in teacher externships to give them the opportunity to enhance their classroom practices by having exposure to a variety of work settings.



In FY2020, our network pivoted to ensure that career development education opportunities did not cease during the pandemic. This took creative thinking and persistence. I am consistently impressed by the CA network and their efforts to strengthen the future economy by proposing innovative solutions to complex problems in unprecedented times.

I am excited to share with stakeholders the work of CA, the programs that they have developed, and the gains that students have made through their work.

Please enjoy the annual report and feel free to share it with colleagues who may be interested in joining us in this work.

Sincerely,

Dr. Kerry Akashian, Career Development Education Lead

Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education

Connecting Activities FY2020 Annual Report

What is Connecting Activities?

Connecting Activities (CA), Fund Code 428, line item 7027-0019, is a critical strategy for MA's effort to ensure that all students are college and career ready and able to participate civically. It 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. CA provides the infrastructure for schools and partners to connect locally, regionally, and statewide and responds to the desire for strong college and career planning experiences. Through the network, educators can exchange ideas and practices by accessing a wide range of tools, resources, and experiences that support students. Also, CA leaders work to broker unsubsidized jobs for in school youth. CA is also one of seven strategies outlined to help combat unemployment, underemployment, and the skills gap in MA.

<https://www.doe.mass.edu/bese/docs/FY202012/2012-06/item1.html>. To learn more, visit:
<http://www.massconnecting.org/>

By the Numbers

FY2020 Connecting Activities

10,443 students participated in work-based learning experiences through CA

3,957 employer sites hosted work-based learning experiences through CA

The 10,443 placements represent **85%** of last year's total, which is a favorable outcome given the onset of the pandemic in March.

Employer-paid wages for placements with work-based learning plans and/or classroom and workshop instruction represented an investment of **\$12,869,462** in work-based learning.

3,200 employers participated in career development activities with their local schools by promoting career awareness and exploration through career fairs, hosting guest speaker series, providing company tours and field trips, hosting teacher externship programs, and leading workshops and industry events.

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

40 schools in the CA network launched Innovation Pathway programs.

WORK-BASED LEARNING

In FY2020, through Connecting Activities, over 10,443 students participated in work-based learning with 3,957 employers.

Work-based learning (WBL) is an instructional strategy designed to help students gain work experience, build essential employment skills, and explore career options. WBL opportunities can include internships, summer jobs, after-school work experiences, workshops, career pathway courses, and more. The role of mentors and supervisors is crucial to student success during WBL.

EDUCATION

Palmer High School student and mentor selected as outstanding student-mentor team

PALMER – Karen Anti, School-to-Career Facilitator at Palmer High School, recently announced her Outstanding Student Mentor Team: senior Cassandra Florence and Animal Control Officer Sydney Plante.

Florence did her Work-Based Learning/Internship experience at the Palmer Animal Control Department under the mentorship of Plante.

Florence's interest in animal care began at home, since she has many animals such as goats, rabbits, and dogs.

"I've been caring for animals my whole life and when the opportunity came up to intern with Sydney, it was something I did not want to miss out on," said Florence.

Her mother, Chrissy Florence, is a health inspector with the Palmer Board of Health and has worked with Plante many times. When Florence's mother asked Plante if she was looking for an intern, she was told that Florence was welcome to work there.


While interning, Florence said she worked with all sorts of animals and at times would go on call to transport animals to their forever homes.

"One time in particular I got to work very closely with the Palmer Police Department – a pit bull had gotten loose and together, we tracked her down and brought her home safely," said Florence. Florence also said at the pound she cleaned, administered medications, and worked on training with the dogs there.

"One thing I learned about this career field is you have to be confident and vocal," said Florence. "Many times, you have to call the shots when it comes to the health of an animal in our care – you can't be indecisive because you have to do what is best for the animal."

Florence said she learned a lot from Plante during the internship.

One of the skills Plante said Flo-



Palmer High School Student Cassandra Florence (Left) with mentor Animal Control Officer Sydney Plante.

Palmer High School senior, Cassandra Florence and Animal Control Officer Sydney Plante, were selected as an outstanding student-mentor team.

Karen Anti, School to Career Facilitator, remarked, "Under Ms. Plante's guidance, Cassandra gained tremendous exposure to the field, gained confidence, and solidified her plans for college and career..."

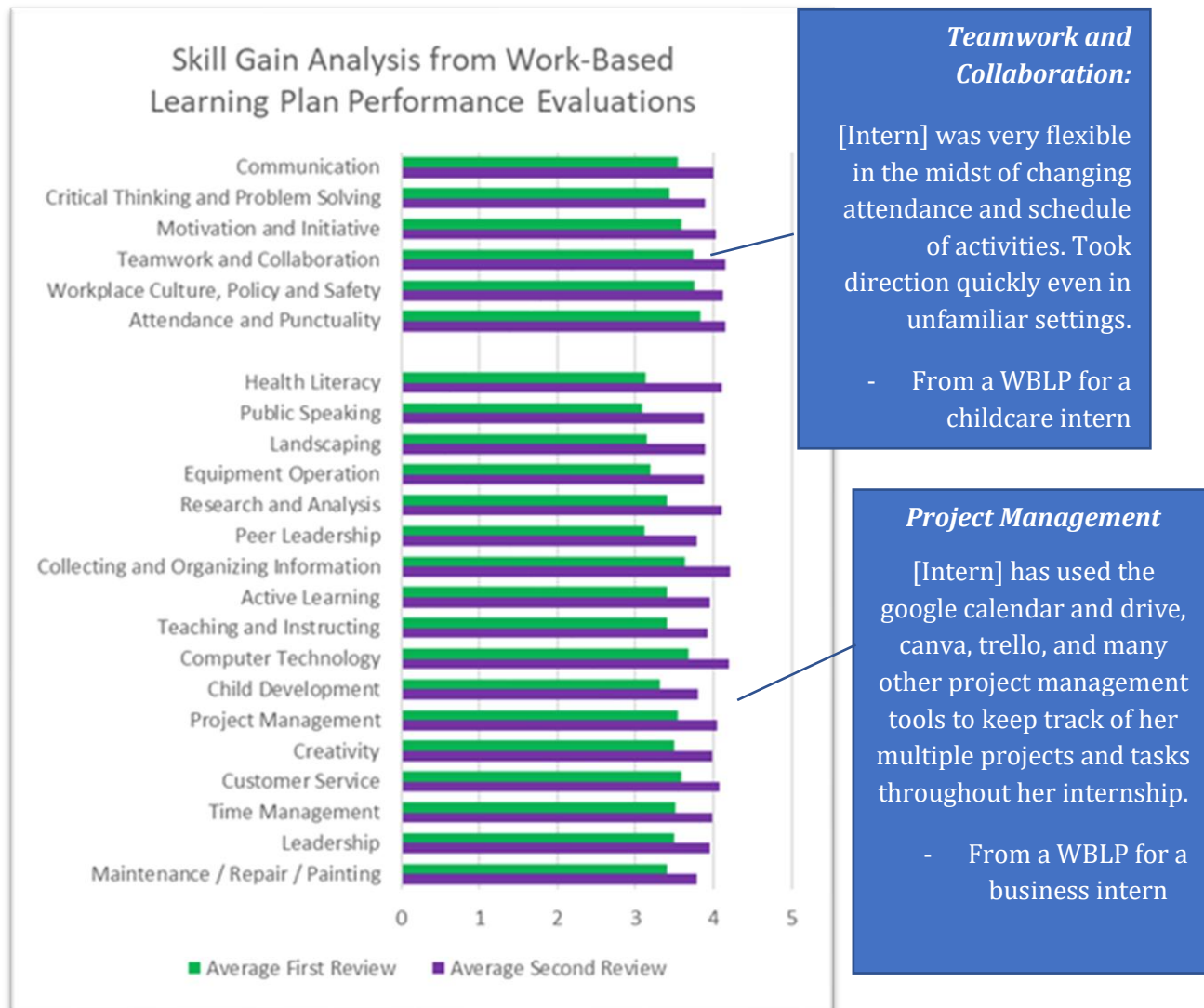
"One thing I learned about this career field is that you have to be confident and vocal," said Florence. "... you can't be indecisive because you have to do what is best for the animal."

- Cassandra Florence, Palmer High School Intern

DOCUMENTING WORK-BASED LEARNING SKILL GAINS

Connecting Activities work-based learning experiences are structured by the Massachusetts Work-Based Learning Plan, which provides a job description and a set of key skills that participants will focus on during their work experiences. Performance reviews, conducted as a baseline early in the work experience, and again at the end of the experience, document skill gain and areas for growth with respect to the skills.

Skill Gain Reports, available from the Connecting Activities Massachusetts Career Ready database, provide skill gain data based on the performance reviews in Work-Based Learning Plans. The reports show the skills that are typically highlighted in the WBLP and include six essential skills that set the foundation for workplace success, plus three to five career-specific skills that are selected based on the worksite placement (shown in the second section of the graph). As shown in the graph below, students demonstrate skill gain across a wide variety of skills, both in broad, transferable skills and in career-specific skills.



WORK-BASED LEARNING IN STEM FIELDS

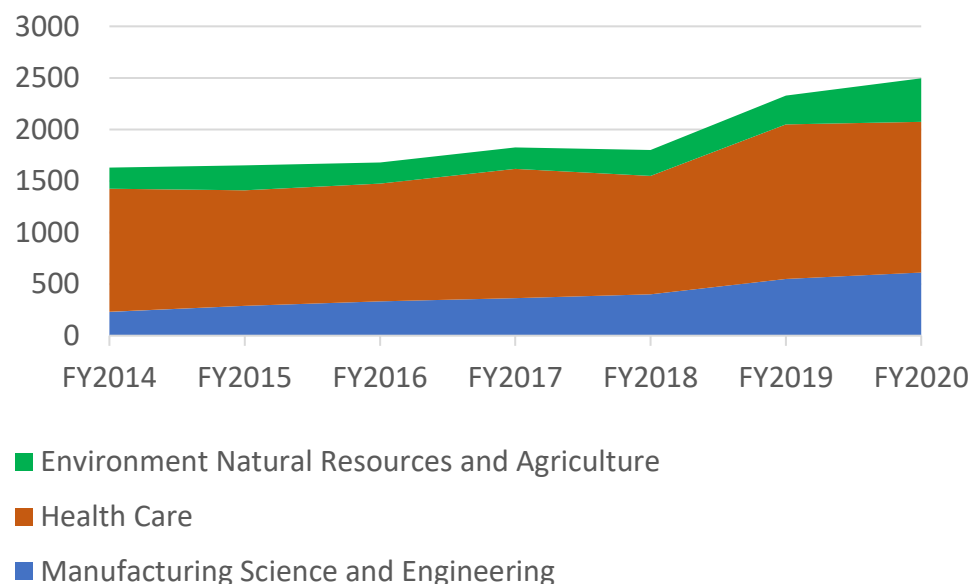
The CA network continues to develop opportunities for students to explore STEM-related fields and regional blueprint industries have opened doors for more STEM-focused work experiences. In FY2020, 2,446 internships were in STEM industries, showing a steady year-by-year increase in CA opportunities in STEM fields.

CA seeks to open doors for students to be exposed to career fields that they might not otherwise have been able to explore. A review of STEM placements in FY2020 shows an exciting mix of STEM-related opportunities. FY2020 STEM placements included opportunities in Advanced Manufacturing, Software Development, Research Labs, Marine Biology Labs, Finance, Information Management, Horticulture, Construction Project Management, Website Development, Engineering, STEM Education, Health and Wellness and more.

Students preparing to graduate from an Advanced Manufacturing program at Fitchburg High School were looking forward to a Manufacturing Job Fair, scheduled for May 2020. When it became clear that an in-person event would not be possible, participating employers agreed to present virtually. In the [video](#) pictured here, Anthony Wilson, reMAke 4.0 Program Coordinator, introduces the virtual manufacturing job fair for program graduates.



Number of Work-Based Learning Placements
In STEM Industry Clusters FY202014 – FY2020



CONNECTING WITH REGIONAL BLUEPRINT INDUSTRIES

CA connects students with a variety of key and emerging industries identified in regional economic blueprints that include STEM-related fields like Advanced Manufacturing, and industries important in each region like construction, transportation, finance, hospitality, food systems and the arts.



Lieutenant Governor, Karen Polito visited Mashpee Middle High School and Cape Cod Community College in September of 2019 and had the opportunity to speak with students and teachers on the impact of innovation and technology on education, the variety of courses offered at MMHS, and the career pathways that they represent. She also had the opportunity to speak with several members of the robotics team including STEM Teacher of the Year, Amanda Hough. At Cape Cod Community College, the Lt. Gov spent time with President Cox and attended a robotics competition.

Employer members of the Greater Lowell MassHire Workforce Board, representing a range of local industry sectors, created a [video](#) to support youth who would be attending the planned April 2020 Job Fair. While the job fair was postponed, the video became an online teaching tool for students in the region and beyond.



EMPLOYER PARTICIPATION IN CAREER DEVELOPMENT ACTIVITIES

In FY2020, 3,200 employers participated in career development activities with their local schools by promoting career awareness and exploration through career fairs, hosting guest speaker series, providing company tours and field trips, hosting teacher externship programs, and leading workshops and industry events.

The collaboration between the Berkshire region workforce board and local company Interprint, Inc. provides examples of some of the ways that employers can connect with schools to enhance career development opportunities. Interprint, Inc. developed a three-part plan with the MassHire Berkshire workforce board to help address the company's current and future workforce needs by:

- Building awareness of career opportunities through workplace tours for high school students
- bringing local educators into Interprint to participate in a day-long training session with the goal of helping teachers to enter career information into classroom curriculum
- working with the region's post-secondary partners in developing specialized training programs that will serve as a workforce feeder for the company



Teachers were invited to Interprint, Inc. for a day to learn about what drives the world of décor printing by touring all departments in the company to learn its history, worldwide product information (furniture and flooring décor), design trends, printing technologies, and current and future workforce needs and career opportunities. Participants took part in hands on activities including a 'draw down', which is a test to match the ink color for printing. Following the conclusion of the IP Tech session, participants developed projects and lessons to relay this valuable information to their students and explain the opportunities that are available for well-paying employment with a strong career pathway and growth opportunities in a Berkshire County employer. Currently, Interprint has a large need for printer technicians that encompasses on-the-job-training and solid career pathway opportunities.

TEACHER EXTERNSHIPS

In FY2020, 48 teachers completed teacher externships through DESE's Teacher Externship Program. Through teacher externships, teachers work on projects with a host employer during the summer and then, inspired by this experience, create unit plans and projects by integrating industry knowledge and career awareness. Many of the externship experiences mark the beginning of longer-term connections between an employer and a school. Lesson plans and units developed through the externship program are posted on the Contextual Learning Portal at <http://resources21.org>

Externship Experience -- Aquaponics

A year after completing a Summer 2019 Externship, George Protopopescu, from Minuteman Regional Vocational Technical High School writes:

"I am happy to report that I am still working with the institution from last year's externship program (Cat Cove Lab, Salem State Univ.) and I am implementing all of the concepts and methods I picked up from them. Please see the attached pictures from our new working aquaponic system based on the experience from last year. Furthermore, I was invited by scientists at the lab to participate in a program, which, if funded, will provide an opportunity for educators to learn about aquaponics (workshop) and create a pathway for these educators to bring aquaponics into their classroom (assistance with set up) and use these systems as learning tools."

Mr. Protopopescu completed a second externship in Summer 2020, creating additional new linkages for the school and for his classroom.

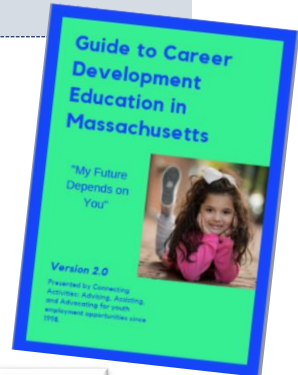


COMMUNITY OF PRACTICE

The Connecting Activities network is organized statewide, through the **sixteen** MassHire workforce boards, with partnerships with almost **200** high schools, and with the leadership of a variety of local partnership organizations. The network, coordinated by DESE, creates a community of practice, sharing tools, resources and best practice ideas to support work-based learning and career development education.

In the spring of FY2020, the CA network released an updated version of the [Career Development Education Guide, Version 2.0](#), sharing best practices in career development education. Through leadership meetings, professional development materials, and other program resources, the network is able to share examples of a wide range of career development activities from across MA.

The guide is one avenue that the network utilizes to share best practices.



Above, statewide CA staff working together at a Connecting Activities Leadership Meeting in March of 2020, at what was, for now, the last in-person meeting. The professional network is now convening regularly via video conference. Below, Malden Summer Youth Employment Program staff meet outdoors, sitting on a new plaza in Malden Center, planning for the summer program.



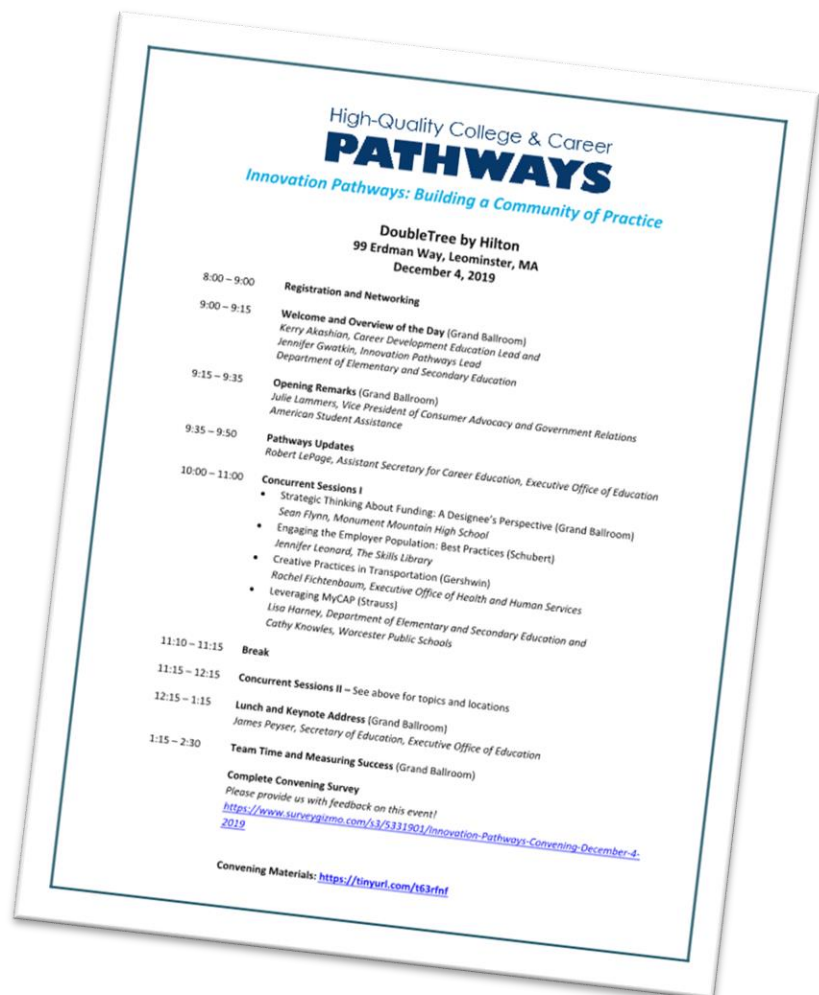
CREATING PATHWAYS

The communities of practice model brings together the CA, Innovation Pathways, Early College and Career/Vocational Technical Education initiatives to share tools, resources, best practices and professional development. By the end of FY2020, 40 schools in the CA network have launched Innovation Pathways and 33 schools in the CA network have launched Early College pathways.

On December 4, 2019, practitioners met for the “Innovation Pathways: Building a Community of Practice” convening, sharing information about topics that include employer engagement, transportation options for students for career-related activities and equity issues in transportation, MyCAP college and career planning, and other topics.

Following the convening, the Innovation Pathway initiative continued building a toolkit of materials to support the work, linking the materials with CA resources.

Students in Innovation Pathways are offered the opportunity to complete an internship or capstone project related to the industry theme of their pathway. As this initiative continues to expand, schools are creating partnerships with local business and community partners and developing the opportunities. The programs are designed to be interconnected with the CA, sharing database tools, professional development materials and other staff and resources. In the spring of FY2020, schools created on-site and virtual internship opportunities and projects for students in Innovation Pathways with creativity in finding interesting and safe settings for students to continue their career development education in their chosen pathways.



RESILIENT RESPONSE TO PANDEMIC

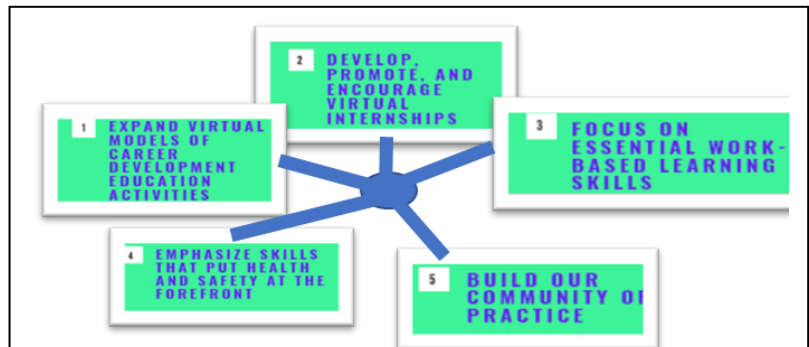
Along with CA school and employer partners, the CA network responded to the public health crisis in March 2020 by quickly adapting our work to the new environment. In the last four months of the program year, CA leads recorded career development activities serving over 1,700 students with 130 employers, representing the strong support of school and employer partners for the work.

As the pandemic began, the Connecting Activities network began meeting virtually for bi-weekly leadership meetings. The discussions in the meetings have helped to shape the CA approach to the pandemic.

The CA network adapted routines to prepare for different delivery models for upcoming summer jobs programs, helped students to complete online applications, and coached students as they prepared for video and phone interviews. CA staff helped student interns to complete end-of-semester projects for spring internships that were cut short by business and school closures.

CA staff worked with employer and community partners to adapt planned spring events to virtual formats. Staff in various regions launched newsletters to keep in touch with students and adapted workshops to be able to provide content through online formats.

Regular check-ins with students became part of new routines as staff focused on checking in with students as they coped with changes in school and work schedules and challenging situations with families dealing with the stress of a rapidly



Our “Connecting Activities Models During the Pandemic” materials provided early leadership toward a resilient response to the changing economic landscape.



“... students and adults together learned more than just how to operate in Zoom. We learned how to get work and learning done in a virtual environment – how to work together, how to mentor, how to supervise, how to share information, and how to make presentations. These new skills will prove extremely relevant in the future, as students engage in remote and hybrid coursework in high school and college and obtain remote internships and paid employment in the future.”

- Boston PIC Report

changing situation.

RESPONDING TO LOCAL NEEDS

Two similar stories from the Cape and Islands region and Central Massachusetts illustrate the value of being open to varying models of career development experiences.

In June 2020, sixty-five students from seven Worcester public high schools were hired to produce personal protective equipment at Brownmed Inc's temporary production facility in Worcester over the summer. Sparked by a phone call in June from Brownmed President, Kyla Gardner to Karen Mylhaver at Mass Manufacturing Extension Partnership, the public-private partnership took less than 30 days to coordinate. It includes MassMEP, WPS, Brownmed and Chacharone Properties.



Worcester Public School students are making an essential and active contribution to the fight against COVID-19 by producing shields for healthcare providers. Plus, they're building professional skills, earning money, and working with other students in the city."

- Drew Weymouth, Worcester Public Schools Director of Innovation Pathway Programs

In response to the need for face shields, in April 2020, Michael Looney, Director of Career and Technical Education for Mashpee Public Schools, approached Cape Cod Makers with a proposal to use the Cape Cod Maker network to produce visors for face shields for use by health care workers. Looney reasoned that there were many people throughout Cape Cod who purchased a 3D printer for a home hobby, and the 3D printers could be used to make visors, the one part of the face shield that isn't readily available.



Looney's team, which includes teachers from the Bourne Public Schools and Cape Cod Community College, started with a design by Budmen Industries, a New York-based company that makes the Buildini 3D printer.

"We modified the design to be more effective using commonly found materials in our local supply stores," he said. "We kept tweaking and did about 16 different design changes to make it the best we could. Then we got approval from Cape Cod Hospital to put it into production."

Monomoy Regional Middle School in Chatham has also joined the Cape Cod Makers effort. Under the direction of STEM teacher, Matt Barnes, students are using 3D printers to produce the face shields.

From Cape Cod Health, <https://www.capecodhealth.org/medical-services/infectious-disease/face-shields-from-3d-printers-cape-volunteers-step-up/>

MOVING FORWARD

The challenges of the past year have helped to define a foundation for the work of the CA moving forward. The network continues to connect with employer and community partners to create career development and work-based learning experiences for students. Also, the network is applying the lessons of this unprecedented time toward shaping future work.

A focus on equity in creating career development opportunities is more important than ever. The work of the CA network is intrinsically focused on equity, as it seeks to open doors to career opportunities for all students. The nation's renewed focus on racial justice issues has also inspired a renewed focus on issues of diversity, equity, and inclusion for the network. Employer partners are eager for support in helping to create diverse talent pipelines for local and regional industries. School partners across MA are eager to find ways to build career development activities into new remote and hybrid school schedules.

The disparate impact of the pandemic, school closures, and economic disruptions on communities of color and low-income families has provided another impetus for renewed focus on equity work. The CA work focuses on making sure that students can thrive in remote and hybrid learning settings and that all students have the social and technological supports needed to participate in a wide range of opportunities.

You are invited to stay connected to our work during this challenging and exciting time. Please contact Dr. Kerry Akashian at kerry.akashian@mass.gov and see regional CA contacts at <http://massconnecting.org>.

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