

HEATHER BOULGER | INSIDE THE JOB MARKET

Sharpen your pencils — and your career plans: Make the most of the season ahead

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Hundreds of courses, workshops and classes are available through local colleges and educational institutions, including Berkshire Community College, above, MCLA, Williams College, McCann Tech, and Pittsfield Public Schools.

THE BERKSHIRE EAGLE

Summer may be winding down, but there's still plenty of time to prepare for what comes next. With back-to-school season just around the corner, August is the perfect time to think about education, career goals and the opportunities that can help you take the next step.

Here are a few fun and interesting back-to-school statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau and the National Retail Federation:

- Did you know that 2 billion pencils are made each year, and the average pencil can write about 70 miles?
- 7,860 people are employed in education in Berkshire County — 12.9 percent of the workforce, making education the county's third-largest employment sector.
- Berkshire County has 46 public schools serving 16,215 students.

- The average household spends about \$858 on K-12 back-to-school shopping and \$1,325 on back-to-college expenses.
- There are 4,688 colleges in the United States, including four in Berkshire County.
- More than half — 52.1 percent — of college students work while attending school, with about 20 percent working full time.
- Education pays. The average salary is approximately \$87,000 for someone with a bachelor's degree, compared with \$47,000 for someone with a high school diploma or equivalent and \$38,000 for someone with less than a ninth-grade education. Completing high school can add more than \$250,000 to lifetime earnings, with even greater earning potential for those who continue on to an associate's degree.
- And finally, blue was voted the favorite crayon color. What's yours?

New Season, New Opportunity

Don't worry — summer isn't over yet! But August is an ideal time to start planning for the season ahead. It's not just recent high school graduates who are preparing for a transition.

Whether you're heading off to college, entering the workforce for the first time, considering a career change, or simply looking to strengthen your skills, the start of a new academic year can be a great time for a fresh start.

Adults throughout Berkshire County can take advantage of a wide range of education and training opportunities designed to improve skills, explore new careers, and increase employability. From basic education and English-language instruction to college courses, professional development, and career training, there are countless ways to keep learning and growing.

There's a Class for That

Hundreds of courses, workshops and classes are available through local colleges and educational institutions. Visit MCLA, Berkshire Community College, Williams College, McCann Tech, and Pittsfield Public Schools to explore the many possibilities.

Not sure where to begin? The MassHire Berkshire Career Center can connect you with a career counselor, provide job-search strategies, assist with resume development, help you explore career pathways, and offer workshops to prepare you for your next career opportunity.

It's Never Too Late to Learn

If you need to earn your high school credential or HiSET/GED, improve your English-language skills, or strengthen your foundation for further education and employment, Berkshire County has organizations ready to help. The Pittsfield Adult Learning Center, Berkshire Community College's ESOL program, Northern Berkshire Adult Education, Literacy Volunteers of Berkshire County, and the Berkshire County Sheriff's Office all provide supportive learning environments designed to help residents build skills, confidence, and a stronger future.

Training for Today's Careers

Lifelong learning isn't just about earning a credential. It's also about developing the skills employers need today. Numerous Berkshire County programs are dedicated to career advancement and workforce development. Grant-funded training opportunities can help residents begin career pathways in healthcare, advanced manufacturing, the trades, education, technology, and hospitality, among other fields. Visit MassHire Berkshire Career Center to explore available training and career opportunities.

Where Are the Jobs?

College-bound students, job seekers, and career changers often ask the same question: What occupations are in demand? According to the state's JobQuest job

postings, there are approximately 2,456 job opportunities in Berkshire County. About 45 percent are technical and highly skilled positions, while the remaining 55 percent are entry-level, part-time, or seasonal opportunities.

Conversations with local employers also point to opportunities in health care, sales, administration, STEM, management, transportation and education.

To explore current openings and learn more about career opportunities, visit [Massachusetts JobQuest](#).

Sharpen Your Skills for What's Next

Adult education in Berkshire County offers something for everyone — whether you want to improve your basic skills, earn a credential, learn English, explore a new career, gain industry-specific training, or simply continue learning.

As the seasons change, consider making this fall a season of renewal, self-improvement, and opportunity. Take advantage of the many resources available right here in Berkshire County, set a goal, and take that first step.

So sharpen your pencils, dust off your notebooks, and get ready for a new season. Your next opportunity could be just one class, one training program, or one career conversation away.

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