

Heather Boulger | Inside the Job Market: Summer is winding down while education, training are ramping up

- By Heather Boulger Sep 4, 2021



Ten young adults completed a six-week summer program for Summer Youth Works 2021, gaining valuable work skills. The program provided safe work-and-learning and community service activities, and the youths also participated in weekly field trips.

PHOTO PROVIDED BY BERKSHIRE WORKFORCE BOARD

Like Memorial Day and the Fourth of July, Labor Day is a summer holiday associated with backyard barbecues, pool parties, parades and other warm-weather fun. Of course, it also signals the end of the season and the beginning of awesome autumn activities, like leaf peeping, visiting pumpkin patches and planting fall gardens.

With summer winding down and Labor Day almost here, the Berkshire Workforce Board has gathered some seasonal fun facts to entertain and educate you.

Teenage unemployment rate lowest since 1953

The Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the unemployment rate for teenagers (ages 16 to 19) was 9.6 percent in July. The last time the unemployment rate for teenagers was lower than 9.6 percent was in November 1953, when it was 8.6 percent.

This is good sign that our young people are taking many of our vacant hospitality and retail jobs and helping the economy grow.

North County Youth Works

One Berkshire Workforce Board program that is helping teens gain employability skills is the seventh North County Summer Youth Works Program. Funded by the First Congregational Church of Williamstown and MountainOne, 10 amazing young adults completed a six-week summer program gaining valuable work skills.

This summer program provided safe work-and-learning and community service activities, including employability skills and cultural awareness training at Hoosac Valley High School; planting and harvesting the Drury High School gardens for donations to the Berkshire Food Project with Jen Munoz, Growing Healthy Garden program director; and Environmental and Social Justice training with Leslie Svilkos and Aretha Whitehead from Greenagers.

Youths also participated in weekly field trips to engage in community service learning throughout the region at April Hill Farm/Greenagers, The Brien Center, the Berkshire County Jail and House of Correction's Aquaponics Lab, UNO Community Center and Many Forks Farm.

The North County Summer 2021 Youth Works participants are Cambria Church, Maryn Cappiello, Musa Thompson, Emma Meczywor, Mallory Mazzeo, Molly McLear, Faith Domenichini, Austin Alfonso, Abby Bird and Ryan Czupryna.

For their final projects, the youth participants developed public service announcements for Greenagers, the North Adams Growing Healthy Garden program and the House of Correction's Aquaponics Lab.

Back-to-school shopping

Sharpen your pencils: It's already time to go back to school, and the National Retail Federation notes that consumers plan to spend record amounts this year. After months of Zoom learning and an expeditious vaccination campaign, many families are looking ahead to in-person classes and will be opening up their wallets in preparation.

After a year of casual dress during schooling from home, students and parents are ready to say goodbye to lounge clothes and hello to snazzy new first-day-of-school outfits. Half (49 percent) of parents with school-age children say their kids are most excited to shop for apparel this year, up from 42 percent last year.

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Families with children in elementary through high school plan to spend an average of \$848.90 on school items, which is \$59 more than last year. Total back-to-school spending is expected to reach a record \$37.1 billion, up from \$33.9 billion last year and an all-time high in the survey's history.

College students and their families plan to spend an average of \$1,200.32 on college or university items, an increase of \$141 over last year. Over half (\$80) of this increase is due to increased spending on electronics and dorm furnishings.

Total back-to-college spending is expected to reach a record \$71 billion, up from \$67.7 billion in 2020.

While families are planning to spend more on K-12 students in every category, electronics and clothing saw the biggest increases. Back-to-school shoppers plan to spend \$21 more, on average,

on electronics this year, compared with 2020, and \$19 more on clothes. Of those planning to purchase electronics, half (49 percent) plan to buy a laptop, followed by a calculator (32 percent) and a tablet (31 percent).

While online shopping remains a top destination for back-to-school shopping, families are much more comfortable shopping in stores this year than last year, during the peak of the pandemic. The most popular destinations for K-12 shoppers are online (48 percent), department stores (48 percent), discount stores (44 percent), clothing stores (41 percent), office supplies stores (27 percent) and electronics stores (27 percent).

Retailers are ready. Even if some students aren't quite ready to return to the classroom, retailers are ready to welcome customers. The back-to-school shopping sales started with Prime Day in June and the Fourth of July, and retailers are ready to cater to consumers looking to buy school supplies.

Labor Day marks back-to-school time

Did you know that Labor Day is America's third-favorite holiday (behind Christmas/Hanukkah and Memorial Day)?

Today's Labor Day is all about beaches, barbecues, ballgames and being outdoors.

This year, for example, 25 percent of Americans plan to get out of town for Labor Day weekend, while 40 percent plan to barbecue. In fact, 818 hot dogs are eaten every second between Memorial Day and Labor Day.

Thousands of people will pack college football stadiums, and the average Labor Day weekend shopper will spend \$58 in the process.

It's back-to-school season, but kids might not be the only ones returning to the classroom this fall.

As employers demand an increasing range of skills in their employees, many professionals are continuing their training to bolster their range of marketable skills and credentials, to get specifics for a new job, for a promotion, or to retain their current position.

Now more than ever, the public workforce system can deliver critical support to job seekers and businesses across the Berkshires.

All MassHire Berkshire Workforce Board and Career Center services were available virtually and starting Aug. 4 were open by appointment only. They continue to assist hundreds of job seekers and companies weekly with their employment needs.

Visit [MassHireBerkshireCC.com](https://www.masshireberkshirecc.com) or call 413-499-2220 to learn about myriad opportunities to help find your next job and to find your next employee. All of its services are free, and it is only a call or click away to help. Let us help you get back to work.

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