

LVEDC-Supported Initiative Enhances Middle School Career Exploration in PA

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By Trisha Nardone

LEHIGH VALLEY - Pennsylvania is the top state for preparing middle school students for careers, according to a national study that looked at the level of support and opportunities students are given for early career exploration to set them up for long-term success.

"Students who have a longer career exploration runway are better positioned to make the right decisions along their education journey to put them on a path to life-long economic success and personal fulfillment," according to the study, "Extending the Runway."

As a result of its forward-looking strategies, Pennsylvania was invited to join the Middle School Career Exploration Catalyst Impact and Learning Network, an initiative supported by Lehigh Valley Economic Development Corporation (LVEDC).

This coalition is dedicated to strengthening and accelerating middle school career exploration efforts nationwide. Five states - Pennsylvania, Arizona, Arkansas, Kentucky, and Washington, convened leaders from education, private industry, and intermediary organizations to learn about and advocate for best practices in middle school career exploration.

Karianne Gelinas, LVEDC's Vice President of Regional Partnerships and Talent Strategies, was a member of Pennsylvania's network team, which worked throughout 2025 to share best practices across states and set priorities for Pennsylvania. Next year the coalition will continue this effort by developing plans, creating resources, and piloting programming for middle school career exploration that can be used as models across the nation.

"Helping students understand what careers are available in the Lehigh Valley is a top priority. Early career exploration sets students up for success and strengthens our region," Gelinas said.

The Lehigh Valley has a history of supporting middle school career exploration, most notably through the annual What's So Cool About Manufacturing video contest, which started in the Lehigh Valley in 2013 and has since spread statewide and beyond. The contest aims to expose students to and grow their interest in manufacturing careers.



Students who participate in middle school career exploration report "having a clearer understanding of the purpose of the academic work in high school related to the skills necessary in industry to be successful," said Scott Oste, Secondary Curriculum Supervisor at Northampton Area School District.

"They report again and again that they didn't know what they didn't know about a particular industry or career field. Participating gave them a new profound sense of the opportunities available to them after graduation and felt more confident making decisions in high school about how to best prepare for life after graduation," Oste said.

Pennsylvania has invested heavily in supporting early career exploration, and a number of statewide initiatives contributed to Pennsylvania's top ranking.

"In Pennsylvania, we believe that career exploration is not just a high school conversation. It starts much earlier," said Pennsylvania Acting Secretary of Education Dr. Carrie Rowe. "Through initiatives like the Career Ready PA Coalition and our nation-leading federal K-12 Career Readiness Indicator, we're making sure every learner has meaningful opportunities to connect with their future career pathway."

As Pennsylvania's leadership gains national recognition, the Lehigh Valley is proud to contribute to this momentum by championing meaningful, hands-on career exploration for middle school students. Efforts like the What's So Cool About Manufacturing contest, paired with statewide initia-

tives reinforce a shared

By continuing to invest in early career awareness, the Lehigh Valley is not only supporting student success, it is strengthening the region's long-term workforce, economic vitality, and community well-being.

New Trail Signage Coming to Trails Near Us!

By Adrienne Fors

PLAINFIELD TWSP. - Did you know that the Plainfield Township Trail is part of the 9/11 National Memorial Trail? The trail links the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in NYC, the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial in Arlington, VA and the Flight 93 National Memorial in Shanksville, PA. The trail serves as a tribute to the fallen heroes who perished on September 11, 2001.

Recently, Governor Shapiro and his Administration announced a new statewide initiative to officially mark and establish the Trail's route across the Commonwealth. Soon, signage will be along the routes.

As a partner in conservation and safety with the 9/11 National Memorial Trail Alliance, we are excited to see that the signage will soon be in our area. If you haven't enjoyed the trail yet, we encourage the use of this beautiful trail, right here in Plainfield Township. The trail also connects to the D&L Heritage Trail - a partner in the Lehigh Valley Greenways and THE LINK trail network. |

