

The Importance of Career Education and Exploration in Middle School

Research has identified middle school as a time when students can benefit the most from career exploration, a process of building self-awareness, learning about potential careers, and developing a plan for reaching future goals. Career exploration engages middle school students at a time when they are at a higher risk to disengage. Middle school students may also have unrealistic career plans, and know little about the demands of the workplace or how their education choices relate to future careers.

In addition, middle schoolers' brains are receptive to developing the competencies known as employability skills: Critical thinking, adaptability, problem solving, oral and written communications, collaboration, creativity, responsibility, professionalism, ethics and technology use. Employers report that employability skills are critical to the workforce, and many are also positively associated with academic achievement and postsecondary success.

The National Career Development Association recommends that middle school students learn about themselves by developing awareness of their occupational interests, aptitudes and career values; gaining an understanding of the value and concept of work; and making preliminary occupational choices that are open to change. Self-knowledge is a necessary first step toward developing decision-making skills for education and careers, even as goals and interests change over time.

JA Inspire: Preparing Today's Youth for Tomorrow's Careers

JA Inspire is a powerful and exciting initiative that will bring together a coalition of educators and industry leaders to give students hands-on experiences and information about career opportunities, igniting a spark and helping them envision a bright future for themselves. Students will participate in classroom activities that focus on soft skills and career exploration to prepare them for the JA Inspire Career Expo. The curriculum is developed by JA and aligned to New Jersey's key industries, labor trends and job outlook, and NJDOE standards for 21st Century Life and Careers. JA provides all student and educator materials.

At the event, students will connect with representatives from business, government, education, trades, and public service at interactive career stations, ask questions, and participate in hands-on activities that will open their eyes and minds to the world of work. This impactful, positive event not only helps New Jersey youth gain a sense of purpose and map a plan of action as they consider their high school coursework, but helps our businesses build their future workforce.

Our students need to hear the message of how they can be successful in New Jersey's economy. By exposing them to opportunities and connecting them with representatives from fields that align with their interests, JA Inspire helps these young people see that the workforce includes them, that they have a stake in the economy, and that they are vital to our future.

Goals for 2019-2020

Piloted in 2019, JA Inspire will reach 4,500 New Jersey students in the 2019-20 school year in four regionally held events, and will engage over 100 businesses and organizations to participate as career exhibitors.

Following participation in the program, students will be able to:

- Recognize career clusters and potential job positions in the region and state.
- Understand the importance of researching the requirements needed to earn a position.
- Implement job-hunting tools, such as networking, resumes, and interviewing skills.
- Identify the next steps needed for success in their academic and career preparation and acknowledge the importance of decisions made in high school to be better prepared for a successful career path.
- Communicate and interact with industry professionals.
- Have a better understanding of their career interests, skills, and work priorities.

JA Inspire 2019 Exhibitors

Organization	
Artworks Trenton	Allen Stults
Bayada Nurses	ArtsEd NJ
Building and General Construction Laborers	Associated Construction Contractors of NJ
KML Carpenters	AT&T
Coface North America	Bayada Nurses
Deloitte	BCB Bank
New Jersey Department of Transportation	BMS
Eli Lilly	Bricklayers and Allied Craft Workers
Essential Communications	Courier News
ETS	CTBC Bank
Fox Rothschild Law	Dancker
Greater Trenton	Edison Fire
Higher Education Student Assistance Authority	Edison Police
Hibbert	FBI
Horizon BCBSNJ	Fed Ex
Insulators 89	Federal Business Centers
Johnson & Johnson / Janssen	Foley
Laborers Local 77	Geico
LO Federal Services	Heldrich Center/NJ CAN
Mercadien	International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers
Mercer County Community College	Johnson & Johnson
Munich RE	Internatl Union of Operating Engineers Local
NJ Department of Education	Merck
NJ Education Association	Middlesex Cty Utilities Authority
NJM	Middlesex Water
NJ Manufacturers Extension Program	NJIFMA
NJ School Boards Association	NJ Manufacturers Extension Program
Northfield Bank	NJ State Police
PamTen	PNC Bank
Princeton University Press	Quick Chek
PSEG	Raritan Railway
Santander	RWJ Barnibas Health
Siemens	Society of Human Resource Managers
Sodexo/MCTS Culinary	SS Dental
Stark and Stark Law	State Farm
State Employment and Training Commission	State Theatre of NJ
NJ State Police	Turner Construction
TD Bank	US Army
YWCA Robotics Team	Wakefern
Trenton Fire Department	Wilentz, Goldman & Spitzer
Trenton Police Department	
Wells Fargo	
Trenton Water Works	