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Northern Berkshire Community Coalition

# Coalition news

An update from



April 2025, Volume XXXIX, Number 10

## The Berkshire County Portrait of a Graduate: What Is It and Why Does It Matter?

By Tim Callahan, Ed.D. -Assistant  
Superintendent, North Adams Public Schools

In late January of 2020, a handful of weeks before the world shut down due to the pandemic, a group of educators and leaders from Berkshire County attended a BARR Foundation Convening in Boston for a singular purpose: to reflect on what skills and knowledge our students really needed to have by the time they graduated from our local high schools.

You might wonder, don't we already have a list of necessary skills and knowledge in the Common Core Standards or the Commonwealth's interpretation of those standards in the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education Curriculum Frameworks?

Okay, you might not actually be wondering that, but if you are then you probably have the heart and mind of an educator and you should email me – I'm always interested in meeting prospective new teachers and we may have a job opening I want you to hear about!

Whether you were wondering or not, the truth is those Common Core Standards and Massachusetts Frameworks do exist, thousands of pages worth, and those documents detail the specific skills and content knowledge expected to be mastered from every grade from kindergarten through grade 12. I was curious to see how many of those standards and frameworks would overlap with what the Berkshire County community members would say are the things our students need to know and be able to do.

Our work progressed through the pandemic, as we strove to find out what folks wanted to see from our students by

the time they graduated from high school. We – and by “we” I mean representatives from districts across the county, including North Adams, Hoosac Valley, BART, Pittsfield, and Lee – spent the first two years of the project talking to people, conducting focus groups, administering surveys, brainstorming with colleagues, and finding out what students, teachers, families, employers, college professors, political leaders, and community members expected our graduates to know and be able to do.

We found that six categories emerged as overwhelming favorites. We called these the “six competencies” and they were, by far, the things our Berkshire County stakeholders wanted to see in students. They wanted a high school graduate to be: (1) a communicator, (2) a global citizen, (3) a prepared individual, (4) a lifelong learner, (5) a critical thinker, and (6) a responsible person. During our work in those first two years of the project, we developed indicators and measures for those competencies. We also developed “signature experiences” to try to develop ways for students to improve in some or all of the competencies in ways that stretched them to grow and learn but also engaged them in ownership of their own learning. Some schools emphasized new courses where students designed projects aligned to the competencies, other schools conducted school-wide creative projects using as many competencies as they could, and here at Drury High School we focused on community engagement with the competencies and groups of students created and implemented service learning projects in North Adams to address issues the students identified in their own city.



▲ Students gathered at the Portrait of a Graduate Student Voice Summit

That work was certainly nice, and beneficial to students, but why do the competencies really matter and why should anyone in the community care?

The short answer is this: education in America has gone down a path that was paved with good intentions but has not really prepared our students with what our community wants or needs.

The six Portrait of a Graduate competencies – and recalibrating our own expectations to say “yes, this is what we want from our schools” – are a way to point toward a new, meaningful direction for our learners as they enter the world after high school. And, as it turned out, the competencies didn't overlap with the Common Core Standards or Massachusetts Curriculum Frameworks much at all.

The current state of education in America – standardized-test-focused, with thousands of pages of standards and frameworks for students to master – began in 1965, out of the Civil Rights era, with the “Elementary and Secondary Education Act,” designed to provide federal funding to American schools to support the integration of schools and to support equity of access for all learners.

(Continued on Page 2)



## Our Mission

*“Empowering the Northern Berkshire region to enhance the quality of life through our efforts at connecting, convening, and supporting all facets of the community.”*

In pursuit of this mission, we place particular emphasis on the following:

- Strengthening neighborhoods and community life
- Preventing alcohol/substance abuse and supporting recovery
- Promoting health and wellness
- Helping families to be strong and resilient
- Supporting positive youth development
- Building bridges between residents and service agencies

## Coalition Supporters

### Public Sources

- MA Dept. of Children & Families/EOHHS
- MA Cultural Council
- MA Department of Public Health
- MA Department of Public Health, Bureau of Substance Addiction Services

### Local Support

- Contributions from our many individual supporters

*The Coalition is a member agency of the Northern Berkshire United Way and the Williamstown Community Chest.*



## To submit announcements to the Coalition E-zine:

The **Coalition E-zine** is a weekly e-blast, published every Thursday, with news and announcements from Northern Berkshire agencies and organizations. Submissions must be received by 9:00 am Tuesday morning to be considered for inclusion in that week's issue. All submissions are subject to editing and should be 50 words or less. All events related to Northern Berkshire community public health will be considered for publication. Banner ads are available. For more information, please call 413-663-7588, or to submit an announcement, please email [pzhine@nbccoalition.org](mailto:pzhine@nbccoalition.org).

(Continued from Cover) Ten years late, the “Individuals with Disabilities Education Act” was passed in 1975, ensuring that students with learning disabilities were included in that “all learners” support. Neither of those pieces of federal legislation provided enough support to relieve the tax burden to fund local schools in Massachusetts, but the additional funding from the federal government helped schools expand some of the services offered.

Then in 1983, the United States Commission on Excellence in Education released a bombshell report: “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,” outlining all of the problems with education in America, and how we were falling behind, internationally. The rhetoric you still hear today about how our American schools are lagging behind schools in other countries? That messaging was amplified in 1983, and some of the same arguments and lamentations are still recycled in 2025.

But the governors began to take action by the late 1980s, as without a national curriculum or federal expectations regarding how to improve student learning outcomes to become internationally competitive, the only viable approach was to rally the states together with a common mission: defining what students should know and be able to do (sound familiar?) and figuring out how to measure that knowledge and set of skills in a consistent way from state to state. An “America 2000” plan emerged from the 1989 national governor’s “Education Summit,” and that plan directly led to the steps that would be taken to launch the “No Child Left Behind Act” of 2001.

“No Child Left Behind” radically shifted the focus of education in America. From that moment onward, schools and districts were not only required to prepare students for state-approved standardized tests in English Language Arts, mathematics, and science, but also to be subjected to the state accountability system which designated schools at various levels of “underperforming.” Guess which schools and districts are most often

designated as “underperforming”? If you guessed schools with a high percentage of low income students and students with disabilities, you guessed correctly!

The accountability system disproportionately weighs scores on MCAS tests as the chief measure of a school’s rating – and since those scores can be predicted by looking at the level of community income – the accountability system punishes low income community and offers accolades to communities with higher level of income. Also, the high school version of the test only measures 19% of the 626 content standards students are expected to master in high school. It’s biased, inaccurate, and incomplete – a triple threat! – yet it’s what is used to rank our schools in Massachusetts, and we are still hearing how unprepared our students are across the country.

The Portrait of a Graduate is a way to say, “no thanks” to that biased, inaccurate, and incomplete system. It’s a way to emphasize the six competencies that our community overwhelmingly says matters the most. It’s a way to shift our curriculum and instruction focus from a list of hundreds of standards per content area and say, “instead of all of that, which has not proven to be a successful approach to prepare students for tomorrow, if our students are really skilled at these six competencies, they will have what our colleges and employers say they need to be successful.” It’s a way of stepping outside the madness of the arbitrary and flawed school accountability cycle and taking a stand for what we believe to matter most.

The state accountability system isn’t going away anytime soon, but with community support we can focus our energy on the Portrait of a Graduate competencies and help ensure our students have what they really need for life beyond high school.

## Letter from the Director's Desk

Spring is a time of renewal, and here at nbCC, we're feeling that energy bloom across our programs and community connections. This month, we're especially excited about continuing our forum series, Building Belonging - a powerful opportunity to explore what it truly means to create inclusive, welcoming spaces for all. You can learn more about the forum in this issue.



**Executive Director, Amber Besaw**

We're also ramping up our volunteer efforts, and it's a great time to get involved! Whether you're looking to give back, meet new people, or grow your skills, there's a place for you here. Check out the details inside—we'd love to have you on board. Together, we're building a stronger, more connected Northern Berkshire. Thank you for being part of it.

Warmly,  
Amber

### Building Belonging

A continuing Community Conversation

In partnership with  
**MCLA**  
MASSACHUSETTS COLLEGE OF LIBERAL ARTS

**THURSDAY**  
**4/17**  
**4-6PM**

**FREE & open to the public.**  
**All are welcome!**

Join us for the second conversation about building a sense of belonging in our community and region.

Light refreshments served.

GATHERING AT HOTEL  
DOWNSTREET'S  
COMMON SPACE  
**40 MAIN ST.**

### Northern Berkshire Community Coalition Board of Directors Fiscal Year 2025

**BEN LAMB, President**  
1Berkshire

**THERESA DENETTE, Vice President**  
BFAIR

**BARBARA MALKAS, Treasurer**  
North Adams Public Schools

**MAUREEN BARAN, Clerk**  
Adams Community Bank

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Community Resident

**JEN MEEHAN**  
Resident

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Greylock Federal Credit Union

**PRESTON KELLY**  
Sergeant, NAPD

**SARA LALUMIA**  
Williams College

**MEGAN CHILDERS**  
Williams College



# The Benefits of Volunteering in Your Community

Volunteering is a powerful way to give back to your community while also enriching your own life. Whether you are helping at a local food pantry, mentoring a young person, or participating in a neighborhood cleanup, volunteering strengthens communities and fosters personal growth. Here are some of the many benefits of getting involved in your local community through volunteering.

## 1. Strengthening Community Bonds

One of the most significant benefits of volunteering is the impact it has on your local community. By offering your time and skills, you contribute to the well-being of others, helping to create a stronger, more connected society. When people work together toward a common goal, it fosters a sense of unity and belonging, which is essential for a thriving community.

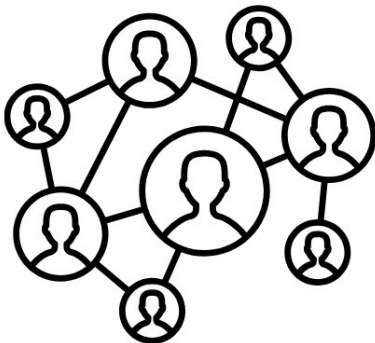
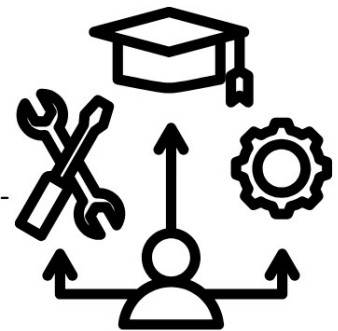


## 2. Improving Mental and Physical Health

Studies have shown that volunteering can lead to improved mental and physical health. Acts of kindness and social interaction can reduce stress, combat depression, and increase happiness. Helping others releases endorphins, often referred to as the “helper’s high.” Additionally, many volunteer opportunities involve physical activity, whether it’s walking around a park for a cleanup or lifting boxes at a food drive, which helps keep you active and engaged.

## 3. Developing New Skills

Volunteering provides an excellent opportunity to learn new skills or enhance existing ones. Whether you are organizing events, managing resources, or teaching others, volunteering can help you develop leadership, communication, and problem-solving skills. Many organizations also offer training, allowing you to gain valuable experience that can be beneficial in both personal and professional settings.



## 4. Expanding Your Social Circle

Getting involved in community service allows you to meet new people and build meaningful relationships. Volunteering introduces you to individuals who share your interests and values, which can lead to lifelong friendships. It’s also a great way to network with professionals in your field, opening doors to career opportunities and collaborations.

## 5. Enhancing Career Prospects

For those looking to advance their careers or change paths, volunteering can be an excellent way to gain hands-on experience. Many employers value community involvement and view volunteering as a demonstration of commitment, initiative, and teamwork. If you're exploring a new field, volunteering can help you test the waters and gain experience before making a career switch.

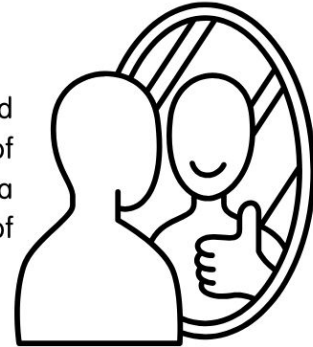


## 6. Making a Lasting Impact

Every volunteer effort, no matter how small, contributes to making a difference. Whether you're feeding the homeless, tutoring children, or advocating for social causes, your actions have a ripple effect that extends far beyond the immediate task. Volunteering empowers individuals to create positive change in the world, leaving a lasting legacy in their communities.

## 7. Finding Personal Fulfillment

There's a deep sense of satisfaction that comes from helping others and seeing the direct impact of your efforts. Volunteering provides a sense of purpose and fulfillment, reminding us that our time and talents can make a real difference. It shifts our focus from personal challenges to the needs of others, fostering gratitude and a broader perspective on life.



## Get Involved Today!

Volunteering is one of the most rewarding ways to give back to your community while also growing as an individual. If you're looking for ways to get involved, consider reaching out to Sara at [skeagle@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:skeagle@nbcccoalition.org) to find out about the different volunteer opportunities at nbCC. Whether you have an hour a week or a few days a month, your contribution matters. Take the first step today and experience the profound benefits of volunteering!

## WOULD YOU LIKE TO BECOME A CONTRIBUTOR TO THE COALITION?

**Contributions can be mailed to: Northern Berkshire Community Coalition  
61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247**

Champion: \$5,000 & above

Advocate: \$2,500 – \$4,999

Leader: \$1,000 – \$2,499

Guardian: \$500 – \$999

Benefactor: \$250 – \$499

Booster: \$100 – \$249

Associate: \$50 – \$99

Supporter: \$1 – \$49



**Donations can also be made online: [nbcccoalition.org](http://nbcccoalition.org)**



## Musings of a Teen Writer

By Lucian Keagle

There may come certain points in life when you'll find yourself seated around a large conference table, strumming your fingers on the laminate wood-like surface and tuning out your boss's rambling to ponder your options for dinner, a meal that seems as far away as your next paycheck. Let me be the first to tell you that not every laminate table is doomed to be a blackhole of interpersonal musings set against a backdrop of mundanity—in fact, let me tell you about an instance in which it is quite the opposite.

Teen Writing Workshop at the Northern Berkshire Community Coalition is a room brimming with brilliant minds coexisting in their natural creative habitat. For a brisk-yet-gloriously-unhurried hour, the room is filled with the clicks of keyboards and the scratching of pens (and the occasional whispered comment followed by bit-back snickering) as these bright, creative people cook up masterpieces in a safe and uplifting environment. That hour is followed by another, where we all have the unique and incredible opportunity for our ears to be gifted with these masterpieces, often by the authors themselves. Not only that, but amidst the poems, short stories, fan fiction, and certain other pieces I'm really not certain how to describe, there comes visual art that elicits immediate gasps and shouts of glee.

TWW is a place where individualism is fostered within community. Participants are encouraged to share their work, where genuinely positive comments become abundant. Plus, if we're particularly lucky, the facilitators of this fine community grace us with the reading of their own work, an event that always entails a plethora of clapping and cheering and excited yammering.

Well, now you've gotten me started on the facilitators, so I suppose now is as good a time as any to include what an incredible pair of people they are. Their constant encouraging feedback doesn't make you feel like a million bucks; it makes you feel like a teddy bear hugged by a pile of stuffed animals, a member of a fluffy family that spends each Wednesday uplifting each other, which is objectively better than a pile of cash (depending on who you ask.) This room would not be filled with this

much boundless joy if it weren't for these two people. I've never known this program without them, but I can't imagine it otherwise. You can't see pink hair, dapper attire, and genuine smiles and not want to spend every week with them.

So, if you've made it this far in my rambling, you should know that TWW is a place where writing, drawing, and even puppet-making come to life in a petri dish of genius and stylish individuality placed in a lab of supportive community. This isn't an escape from the mundanity of the real world; it's a place you go to realize the beauty of it. If you're not in the mood for having your spirits lifted and your mind expanded, then I suppose this isn't for you—but how could you not want to be in a room where a laminate table is covered in snacks and artistic masterpieces? This is the first group of people who welcomed me in after moving across the country. TWW is a true gift to the Berkshires.



# Coalition Events

## First Fridays North Adams: Clean & Green

Friday, April 4, 5:00-9:00 PM, Downtown, North Adams

Join in the First Friday Fun! Visit downtown businesses for specials, sales and check out the new gallery exhibitions of 2025.

## Parenting Journey (12 week program)

Mondays 4/7-6/30, 5:30 - 7:30 PM, nbCC, 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams

This is an 12 week program. Its mission is to create safer, more resilient families by supporting them in developing their inner strengths, life skills, and network of resources they need to succeed.

Parents who have found value in the program are parents who struggle to manage personal and professional obligations, come from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds, have experienced violence or childhood trauma, in recovery, experience mental health issues, or are working to regain custody of their children. Registration required. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or [nkenedy@nbccoalition.org](mailto:nkenedy@nbccoalition.org)

## 24/7 Dads (12 week program)

Tuesdays 4/8-6/24, 5:30 - 7:30 PM, nbCC, 61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams

24/7 Dads program will help fathers explore their role in the their child's life. Fathers will learn about themselves and the role they have with their children. Fathers will also learn how to strengthen their relationship with their children and their children's other parents. Registration required. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or [nkenedy@nbccoalition.org](mailto:nkenedy@nbccoalition.org)

## Monthly Forum: Community Picnic

Thursday, April 10, 4:00 - 6:00 PM, Eagle Street, North Adams (rain location: First Baptist Church NA)

FREE & open to the public. All are welcome!

Join us for a good ole community picnic! We'll be hanging out on Eagle Street (possibly in the pocket park) Join us for a few games, some food, and connection with your friends and neighbors.

Light refreshments served. More Info: 413-663-7588 or [info@nbccoalition.org](mailto:info@nbccoalition.org)

## Learn Through Play: Rain, Rain, Go Away

Saturday, April 12, 10:00 - 11:00 AM, \*\*North Adams Armory, 206 Ashland Street, North Adams

\* This month's event will be held within the Easter Festival at the North Adams Armory. In collaboration with Child Care of the Berkshires. Activities and circle time with sensory activities. Best for ages 0-5 years. No registration required. Contact us at 413-663-7588 or [nkenedy@nbccoalition.org](mailto:nkenedy@nbccoalition.org)

## Building Belonging Conversation #2

Thursday, April 17, 4:00 - 6:00 PM, Hotel Downstreet, 40 Main Street, North Adams

FREE & open to the public. All are welcome!

Join us for a continuing conversation on building belonging in our community. The first conversation focused on recognizing our own biases. This month we move the conversation forward. Light refreshments served. More Info: 413-663-7588 or [info@nbccoalition.org](mailto:info@nbccoalition.org)

## FREE Family Bowling!

Thursday, April 24, 10:00AM - 12:00 PM, King Pins/G.O.A.T. 41 Roberts Drive, North Adams

Join us for some family fun during spring break at the King Pins Bowling Alley (formerly Greylock Bowl) part of the G.O.A.T. Sports Bar building. We will provide popcorn and water, other food available for purchase at the G.O.A.T. NO OUTSIDE FOOD PERMITTED. This event will fill quickly. Registration is required: 413-663-7588 or emailing [nkenedy@nbccoalition.org](mailto:nkenedy@nbccoalition.org)

## nbCC Youth Empowerment Program

Mondays, 5:00-6:30 PM, 61 Main Street, #218, North Adams

Free and open to youth, 6-8th grade, who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. A weekly group to talk about school, emotions, navigating teen years, making friends and more. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 413-663-7588

## Youth Leadership Program

Tuesdays, 5:00 - 7:00PM, 61 Main Street, Rm. 213, North Adams

Free and open to youth ages 14-19 who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. Young people are changing the world and you can too. Make a positive change in yourself and the world around you. Develop leadership skills, discuss what drives you, meet other young leaders and plan projects in your community. Snacks provided; transportation available. Register: call 413-663-7588

## Teen Writing Workshop

Wednesdays, 5:00 - 7:00 PM, held at nbCC, 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams

Free and open to youth ages 13-19 who live in or attend school in North Berkshire. Aspiring writers and poets! Join this incredibly supportive group and get 1-on-1 help with your writing and performance style. Opportunities to perform and be published. Snacks and supplies provided; transportation available. Register: 413-663-7588

## FRC Parenting Together Group \* NEW TIMES

2nd & 4th Wednesdays, 5:30 - 7:30 PM, nbCC, 61 Main St., Suite 218, North Adams

A peer-driven/peer-supported group in a judgement-free, confidential space. Snacks provided. Children welcome.

## Youth Health Collaborative

Thursdays, 5:00pm - 7:00pm, 61 Main Street, Rm. 213, North Adams.

(14-19 Yrs. Old) This program is intended to engage young people in supporting the health of their peers in the region. The aim of this program is to benefit the community by directly engaging young people in the act of bettering their environments. This is the only program with a limit on attendance, as there are only ten spots available!

Participants will receive a stipend for completing this program. **Please call or email to apply:** 413-663-7588 or [bmccarthy@nbccoalition.org](mailto:bmccarthy@nbccoalition.org)

## Grandparents Raising Grandchildren Coffee Time

1st & 3rd Fridays, 10:00 AM - 12:00 PM. UNO Center, 157 River Street, North Adams

This is a group for grandparents who are actively parenting their grandchildren giving them a safe and confidential space to share similar experiences with other grandparents. Coffee and snacks provided.

## IT'S FARMERS MARKET INDOOR SEASON!

North Adams | 1st Sat. of the month 9AM-1PM  
**DOUBLES SNAP UP TO \$30/WEEK & HAS 2 HIP VENDORS. ACCEPTS WIC & SENIOR COUPONS**

Williamstown | 4th Sat. of the month 9AM-1PM  
**DOUBLES SNAP UP TO \$30/WEEK ACCEPTS WIC & SENIOR COUPONS**

## Coalition Staff

### Executive Director

Amber Besaw: [abesaw@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:abesaw@nbcccoalition.org)

### Business & Administrative Staff

Liz Boland: [lboland@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:lboland@nbcccoalition.org)

Sara Keagle: [skeagle@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:skeagle@nbcccoalition.org)

### Communications Coordinator

Suzy Helme: [shelme@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:shelme@nbcccoalition.org)

### Youth Development

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Carrisa Sacherski: [csacherski@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:csacherski@nbcccoalition.org)

### Health & Wellness

### Youth Prevention

Meredith Starr: [mstarr@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:mstarr@nbcccoalition.org)

### Family Resource Center

Nancy Kennedy: [nkennedy@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:nkennedy@nbcccoalition.org)

Gabby Glasier: [gglasier@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:gglasier@nbcccoalition.org)

Andrew Rosenburg: [arosenburg@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:arosenburg@nbcccoalition.org)

Sully Boland: [sboland@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:sboland@nbcccoalition.org)

Kelcey Lee: [klee@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:klee@nbcccoalition.org)

nbCC is  
supported by:



Northern Berkshire  
**UNITED WAY**

**APRIL 10 COMMUNITY PICNIC FORUM**

**4-6PM ON EAGLE ST.**

**Join us on Eagle Street for an afternoon of community, food, games & conversation.**  
FREE & open to the public. We'll provide light snacks from the Eagle St. eateries, but encourage you either bring a picnic dinner or grab a bite from the surrounding businesses.

**MORE INFO: 413-663-7588 | [info@nbcccoalition.org](mailto:info@nbcccoalition.org)**

**nbCC**  
Northern Berkshire Community Coalition  
Community Empowerment • Prevention & Wellness



Northern Berkshire Community Coalition  
61 Main Street, Suite 218, North Adams, MA 01247

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online at [www.nbcccoalition.org](http://www.nbcccoalition.org)

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