

# Opening the School House Doors:

## *A Cost Study of Community-based Learning Options*

By Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy

### Overview

Schools are being asked to do more than ever before to prepare all students for success in the twenty-first century. They are expected to bring all students to proficiency, close persistent achievement gaps, develop social and emotional competence, produce engaged citizens, and support inquisitive and creative learners—all while successfully transitioning students to college and careers. Educators have responded impressively to these varied and interconnected goals, but the traditional school structure is not designed to adequately address such diverse needs.

There is increasing evidence that schools don't have to go it alone, however. *Community-based learning*—structured learning activities that take place in partnership with the community—can help students explore interests that fall outside of the traditional school curriculum. Through service projects, internships, and other community-based programming, students interact with content in meaningful ways, acquire and apply real-world skills, hone their interests and aspirations, and develop confidence as learners. As students venture outside the school building, they gain a new perspective on their education and their futures. For them, the term “college and career ready” becomes a tangible set of knowledge, skills, and capabilities that lead to sustainable academic and career success.

### Community-based Learning Opportunities in Massachusetts

Massachusetts is no stranger to educational innovation, and many districts and schools have turned to their local community to augment and enhance academic and enrichment opportunities. At the secondary school level, in particular, community-based learning may help students make decisions that can have significant impact on their futures. Providing real world opportunities to apply academic learning in practical ways allows students to explore educational and career options and acquire the knowledge and skills before committing—either deliberately or by default—to a particular route after high school.

In 2013, the Massachusetts Board of Elementary and Secondary Education (BESE) and the Massachusetts Board of Higher Education (BHE) adopted a common definition of college and career readiness. This definition stipulates that students who are college and career ready “demonstrate the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are necessary to successfully complete entry level, credit-bearing college



ROADMAP TO  
Expanding Opportunity  
Evidence on What Works in Education

The promise of a high-quality education leading to opportunity and shared prosperity for all children is a deeply held value in Massachusetts. Despite a record of prominent successes, however, our Commonwealth has struggled to provide students from all backgrounds the supports necessary for long-term life success. To confront this challenge, the Massachusetts Budget and Policy Center and the Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy are undertaking this shared research project: the *Roadmap for Expanding Opportunity: Evidence on What Works in Education*.

This series of reports builds on progress initiated with the Education Reform Act of 1993, addressing critical areas in which progress has stalled. Ultimately, this project will provide a roadmap for bringing education reform into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Reports will examine promising evidence-based strategies for supporting all children in achieving college, career, and life success. In particular, analyses will be grounded in a recognition that learning must extend beyond traditional school structures and offerings.

Reports will offer strategies for adapting a broad evidence base to local contexts, including cost analyses to assess the level of resources required to support district and statewide innovation. Ultimately, these briefs are designed to provide education leaders and practitioners with building blocks for driving future educational reforms across the Commonwealth.

courses, participate in certificate or workplace training programs, and enter economically viable career pathways.”<sup>A</sup> In order to reach that level of readiness, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (ESE) recommends that students complete the Massachusetts High School Program of Studies (MassCore), which articulates the academic coursework and non-academic learning opportunities that best prepare students for their postsecondary endeavors. To meet the demands of the highly skilled 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce, MassCore requirements cover all academic disciplines *and* include applied learning opportunities and career exploration.

With standards for college and career readiness codified in the form of MassCore requirements, districts and schools across the Commonwealth have been working to expand their academic offerings in ways that ensure more students can master challenging content in order to succeed beyond high school. However, even the most dynamic and engaging educators can be constrained by the walls of their classrooms. Sending students out into the community enables schools to further differentiate learning experiences to address diverse needs, and interests, among students, and provides students with the opportunity to solve real-world problems and/or address actual workforce needs. For example, over 15,500 Massachusetts public high school students participate each year in community-based learning opportunities through the Connecting Activities initiative, which supports internships and/or employment experiences by bringing together schools and districts with the business community via the 16 local workforce investment boards.

Further, the potential benefits of community-based learning have academic and non-academic applications for students. Participation can lead to higher rates of school attendance, lower dropout rates, and decreased involvement in risky behaviors.<sup>1</sup> Community-based learning can help to build students’ social capital within their neighborhoods and expand their network of supportive adults. These non-academic benefits tend to impact students’ decisions to stay-in school, as well as their career aspirations.<sup>2</sup>

Credit-bearing community-based learning opportunities are an important subset of the types of experiences offered through school-community partnerships. Credit-bearing offerings are integrated into the district and/or school curriculum and designed to meet specified student learning objectives that provide credits towards a high school diploma. In order to achieve alignment between classroom and community learning, educators and their partners must maintain an ongoing dialogue and establish protocols and processes for collaborating to meet desired outcomes. Further, educators and community organizations often establish formal structures for partnership that ensure consistency across students’ learning environments with regard to issues ranging from attendance policy to skills assessment.

While there are many community- and partnership-based learning models throughout the Commonwealth, in this report we focus on programs that integrate classroom instruction and community-based learning into credit-bearing opportunities that occur within or outside of the school day. These models were chosen for a number of reasons. First, credit-bearing community-based learning options exemplify the types of out-of-the-box thinking and student-centered program designs that have the potential to truly engage and inspire students, while imparting practical knowledge and skills. Next, credit-bearing community-based opportunities are distinct from enrichment activities in that educators and community partners need to consider implementation issues such as aligning community learning with district curricula, developing assessment practices that account for differentiated student learning objectives in these programs, and addressing practical concerns such as student transportation. Finally, the literature base does not often differentiate the characteristics and practices of credit-bearing programming, making this study’s examination of credit-bearing practices in Massachusetts public school districts all the more important to inform the expansion of community-based learning.

Credit-bearing models were identified from the following three program types frequently implemented in Massachusetts districts:

- Partnership-based academic expansion, where students receive academic instruction in courses that fulfill local graduation requirements (i.e., district-defined requirements) from community partners in community settings;

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<sup>A</sup> Massachusetts Definition of College and Career Readiness:  
<http://www.mass.edu/library/documents/2013College&CareerReadinessDefinition.pdf>

- Service-learning, where students complete a community service project in conjunction with school-based coursework; and
- Work-based learning, where students participate in paid or unpaid internships/employment as part of career preparation and exploration courses.

## Study Methods

To highlight the meaningful contributions community partners can make to student learning, the Rennie Center for Education Policy & Research identified and analyzed a subset of the research-based models underway in districts across the Commonwealth. By documenting effective practice, the Rennie Center team hopes to support the development of innovative strategies that expand the definition of public education to include communities as learning laboratories, preparing students for lifelong learning and success.

In this study, the Rennie Center team conducted the following research activities:

- ***A promising practice scan.*** The team conducted a scan of recent literature on community-based learning to identify research-based, effective practices in developing community-based partnerships to support student learning opportunities.
- ***Qualitative analysis of exemplary practices.*** The team identified three different district programs—focusing on practices that promote student-centered, credit-bearing learning experiences that transcend school walls. We documented the structures that schools and/or districts use to administer these programs, and the practices that characterize how community partners have been successfully integrated into student learning.
- ***A cost analysis of program components.*** Rennie Center researchers compiled cost estimates for replicating program strategies across Massachusetts public school districts.

***Case Study Sample.*** In Massachusetts, there exists a broad array of educational options conducted in collaboration with community partners, occurring both as in-school and out-of-school programs. In an effort to represent the broad base of offerings, all programs selected for this study offered students:

- ***Out-of-school learning options.*** Direct interactions with partners in community settings help students increase acquisition and application of real-world problem-solving skills and knowledge,<sup>3</sup> and improve engagement in their own learning objectives with increased self-confidence.<sup>4</sup>
- ***Opportunities to earn credit.*** Credit-bearing community-based learning options that lead to earned academic credit connects learning to tangible applications while activating diverse learning styles among students not as engaged in traditional classroom environments.<sup>5</sup>

Based on these criteria, and in consultation with program staff at ESE and community organizations, the Rennie Center team selected three models—one program from each of three program types identified in the previous section—to be included in the research conducted for this paper. For a full overview of each selected program, please refer to the one-page descriptions in Appendix A.

- As part of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) Arts Expansion Initiative, the ***Institute of Contemporary Art*** (ICA) has partnered with BPS schools to provide credit-bearing learning opportunities in the performing and visual arts.

- The *Community Service Learning (CSL) program at Whitman-Hanson Regional High School* offers credit-bearing internships based on service-learning projects for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students, while also supporting 9<sup>th</sup> grade students with transitional support as they begin their high school experiences.
- *Newburyport High School*'s work-based learning program connects students to credit-bearing learning opportunities with local employers based on students' professional goals and interests.

**Analytic Approach.** The Rennie Center team analyzed both program and cost data. In the findings section below, we distill research-based program practices to recommend components and practices that have the potential to help districts develop robust relationships with community partners that can produce credit-bearing opportunities for students. Finally, the team created detailed cost profiles to describe the resources—including personnel and other costs—associated with each relevant program component.

## Effective Practices from the Literature and Program Review

The discussion below provides specific examples from selected sites to illustrate how effective programs put research-based recommendations into practice. For example, across all sites, student choice drives the types of credit-bearing community-based learning offered. Further, building these options into school/district-community partnerships requires sustained time and commitment from both parties to tackle challenges like integrating real-world experiences with academic coursework content, as well as planning for more holistic assessment of student skills.

**Effective programs are shaped by student interest in, and ownership of, learning experiences.** <sup>6</sup> To be a successful venture for secondary school students, community-based learning options need to offer students choice over their learning experiences.<sup>7</sup> Research notes that programs that are most effective also offer flexibility that is responsive to students' learning interests,<sup>8</sup> as well as their schedules outside of school.<sup>9</sup> All three programs selected for this study developed community-based offerings based on student interest. Guidance counselors at Newburyport High School administer an "interest inventory" with high school students as early as 9<sup>th</sup> grade to begin to identify possible career interest areas. For students who opt to enroll in Newburyport's internship program as juniors or seniors, staff use data from this, and a follow-up skills inventory to identify—and/or develop—a work-based learning placement aligned with these interests and skills. To sustain a high level of student engagement, community-based learning options often build in leadership opportunities for advanced students.<sup>10</sup> For example, the service-learning program at Whitman-Hanson High School offers students the option to serve on an advisory board that oversees program development and evaluation. School leaders who manage the program observe that leadership positions like these are critical for engaging students who may feel that their interests are not reflected in the traditional school model. Similarly, the ICA program has developed a tiered progression of opportunities for students to have a voice in program development and management. Teens can join the Teen Arts Council, for example where participants learn important business skills necessary to be successful in the arts industry.

**High quality learning opportunities are connected to the social and economic fabric of the community.** <sup>11</sup> Effective community-based learning experiences are innovatively designed to connect programming to students' lives and interests outside of school.<sup>12</sup> The robust learning opportunities offered in the sites selected for this paper focus on developing connections between career and community for students. At the ICA, staff are attempting to build a community of artists for students. Boston Public School high school students who enroll in the ICA filmmaking program, aptly named FastForward, have the opportunity to interview film professionals, whether producers, screenwriters, or directors, and join relevant career networks. Simply by joining the course, youth have the opportunity to interact with other youth across the city who are making films, often about experiences in their own communities. Research has found that experiences—like these—that are embedded in the local community, help engage students who may be at-risk of dropping out of school,<sup>13</sup> while also teaching important social skills that are critical for future success.<sup>14</sup>

***Student learning is nurtured in supportive relationships with adults and peers.***<sup>15</sup> Caring relationships with adults and peers go a long way towards creating the kind of reassuring environment that contributes to regular student attendance and participation in community-based learning experiences.<sup>16</sup> Such relationships often pave the way towards mentoring opportunities that are critical for helping students to plan for college or career options following graduation.<sup>17</sup> Supportive relationships are central to students' experiences at all study sites. Educators in the ICA program, for example, spend significant amounts of time cultivating relationships, finding ways to create “personal touch points with students,” including meeting with students at their school or regularly calling students, family members, and teachers. Similarly, guidance counselors in Newburyport provide one-on-one support for students in the internship program, helping to teach employability skills that often are not a part of traditional instruction. Students also often form strong working relationships with the Newburyport High School staff member they work with as part of “in-house” internship opportunities; for many students, an adult who will hold them responsible for completing work, and offer both praise and constructive criticism is an important aspect of what makes these experiences successful for students.

***School-based personnel and community partners collaboratively plan and deliver learning experiences.***<sup>18</sup> Research on out-of-school credit-bearing options posits that these opportunities need to be a product of collaboration between school-based staff and community partners, including the business community. As an initial step, it is important for teachers to meet regularly to ensure that all learning experiences meet the level of rigor necessary for a credit-bearing course.<sup>19</sup> In partnerships that have matured, school-based staff and community partners use a common language around student learning goals; each partner has an articulated set of roles and responsibilities. All study sites cultivate close working relationships between school-based personnel (e.g., classroom teachers, administrators, and guidance counselors) and community partners. In Newburyport, school-based guidance counselors act as liaisons between students and potential employers, helping to link students with learning opportunities that complement their interests while meeting the needs of a local business. All students complete a Work-Based Learning Plan<sup>B</sup>; these plans are then used to develop and guide students' internship experiences, identifying key skills on which students plan to work while employed. Meanwhile, program coordinators at the ICA and educators at Charlestown High School meet regularly with a larger set of community art partners and high school representatives as part of the BPS Arts Expansion High School Strategies Working Group. This group discusses both successes and challenges of engaging students in current program offerings which provide high school arts credits to students participating in community-based courses.

***All parties use innovative methods to assess student learning and growth.***<sup>20</sup> Given the student-centered nature of community-based programming and the diverse set of skills students can gain, rich assessment of student work is critical and must be linked to student-specific learning goals.<sup>21</sup> Assessment practices like these are common across all study sites. For example, the Newburyport internship program uses students' Work-Based Learning Plans as both a planning and assessment tool. Work-Based Learning Plans address a myriad of skills, including general employability (or “foundation”) skills such as attendance and punctuality, motivation and taking initiative, and communication and interpersonal skills, as well as industry-specific skills that may include problem solving, critical thinking, and decision-making. A student's supervising teacher and employer complete the Work-Based Learning Plan at the midway and end points of the semester, and these plans are reviewed closely by a school guidance counselor who uses the information to inform regular one-on-one and group meetings.<sup>C</sup> These conversations are meant to reflect the skill attainment and objectives set in place as part of initial planning conversations between the student, school staff, and employer. Similarly, students in the Whitman-Hanson service-learning program are assessed on multiple dimensions both at the school and at the job site. Whitman-Hanson students create a Work-Based Learning Plan specifically geared to their service learning project, and complete a similar self-assessment that challenges them to reflect critically on their performance and to identify areas for improvement. Employers then evaluate students' progress based on their plan and their completed self-assessment.

<sup>B</sup> Developed by the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, the Work-Based Learning Plan is designed to connect classroom-based experiences and workplace learning and drive productivity and learning at employment opportunities. Available as an online tool, the plan is part of a larger set of tools available to districts and schools implementing work-based learning programming.

<sup>C, 4</sup> To note, the resources devoted to these assessment practices are included in the cost analysis as part of the Community-based Programming component of the program models.

Meanwhile, school-based personnel evaluate student performance by combining traditional measures, such as attendance, MCAS scores, and course grades, with a thorough review of students' plans.<sup>D</sup>

## Program Costs

All three of the programs highlighted here incorporate common research-based elements—student choice about learning experiences, active engagement of educators in planning for student learning experiences, and innovative assessment practice—regardless of whether they are programs operated by schools or by community-based organizations (in this instance, the ICA). All of these common programmatic elements require an investment of educator and partner time to develop, sustain, and improve community-based learning options. With this in mind, the Rennie Center team developed cost estimates associated with each of the selected models to address two key questions for policymakers and district leaders:

- What does it cost to provide credit-bearing community-based learning opportunities in Massachusetts?
- What accounts for the differences in costs across program models?

The descriptive profiles of the selected programs taken together with per participant cost estimates provide a range of options and associated costs for programs that integrate classroom instruction and community-based learning into credit-bearing opportunities. A resource cost model approach was used to estimate the program costs associated with each of the three selected models; the Rennie Center team identified the “ingredients,” or resources, used by each of the programs to deliver the research-based components of their community-based learning opportunities (e.g., staff who coordinate efforts with work-based or service-learning placements). Identified resources were organized into five program components common to each of the three models:

- Assessing Student Interest
- School & Community-Based Programming
- Supporting Student Relationships
- Instructional Materials & Supplies
- Program Administration & Collaboration Activities

These five components provide a common framework for organizing resources across the three models. Within each of the program components, we identified specific activities common to the highlighted programs. For example, academic services in Newburyport's work-based internship programs include initial in-class preparation for the internship, and either after school and weekend internships at an off-site placement, or after school in-house placements supervised daily by teachers at the high school for a full semester. Activities like these comprise the “package” of resources provided by each model included in the study. A dollar value was assigned to each resource according to their unit prices, or market price. Resource values were then annualized so that the resulting cost estimates reflect the total annual cost. In this study, the vast majority of the resources used were for personnel. To create comparable estimates for personnel, the team utilized statewide average salaries in Massachusetts using the most recent data available for counselors, teachers, and school principals, the three types of staff most closely involved in the programs of interest. Although in practice the community-based program is not staffed by teachers and principals, the use of the respective salary data reflects a decision to present personnel costs that are comparable across program models. As described above, programs were selected based on their alignment with the research and their opportunities to provide credit-bearing out-of-classroom learning opportunities for students. All of the programs operate as a partnership between schools and community-based partners, although Newburyport's work-based internship program also has a substantial component that is operated by the school, and the costs to the school are included as part of the overall program costs.

Two of the selected programs are managed by the school, while the third is led by the community-based partner. It is important to note that cost estimates reflect the costs borne by the lead partner only, and as such, do not reflect

total resource costs for each of the models. For example for the school-led programs, only the resources and corresponding costs associated with program components provided by the school were identified. Costs for each of the work-based placements are additional to what is provided here, but they are not costs borne by the school. An April 2014 report from ESE's Office of College and Career Readiness<sup>E</sup> provides some insight into the additional resources that are supporting these types of programs by agencies and organizations outside of the schools. For example, the report indicates that during FY13, the state appropriated \$2.87 million for Connecting Activities which is an initiative that allocates funds through a competitive process to 16 local workforce investment boards (WIBs) across the state, for partnerships with school districts and other local stakeholders in order to provide work-based learning and career development services to students. As part of this initiative, employers invested an additional \$11.9 million in wages to support internships for 9,832 students. This represents roughly \$1,500 in additional spending per student participating in Connecting Activities, although the costs are likely to be even higher due to the amount of time being donated by employers and other stakeholders.

Similarly, for the community-led program, the resource cost estimates provided below include only the resources provided by the ICA. The costs associated with each of the participating schools are additional to what is included in the estimates. In this case, the additional costs to the schools, however, are likely to be quite small. Although the cost will vary depending on each participating school's approach to the partnership, based on interviews completed with ICA staff as well as with one of the participating schools, the school-based resources that are contributed to the program typically includes two to three percent time for a teacher of record to work with the ICA on recruiting students, and to participate in brief weekly calls to check on student progress and participation. For a small investment on the part of the school, a community partnership can expand the types of opportunities that can be offered to students. Even if the schools picked up the full program costs, it is unlikely that they would be able to replicate the types of experiences that are provided by this particular partnership.

For each model, the value of identified resources were added together to estimate both the costs of the five program components, as well as total cost to the lead partner. The resulting cost estimates reflect the value of all the resources used by a given model to deliver activities by the lead partner. This allows comparisons across sites both in terms of the types of research-based services provided and their corresponding costs. The specific resources included in the cost estimates for each program component are included in Table 1.

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<sup>E</sup> Connecting Activities: Preparing Students for Success After High School

**Table 1: Program Components included in resource cost estimates**

Program Components	Newburyport Work-Based Internships	Whitman-Hanson Service Learning	ICA Teen New Media Program
Assessing Student Interest	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Interest, skills and work importance inventories with 9<sup>th</sup> graders</li> <li>10<sup>th</sup> grade informational interviewing and service-learning projects</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Grade 9: Multiple Intelligence and Career for the Future Workshops</li> <li>Grade 10: Do What you Are Career and Interest Inventory Workshops</li> <li>Grade 11: One-on-one interviews for students registering for 12<sup>th</sup> grade internship course</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>2 hours per semester per school (5 schools total)</li> </ul>
School and Community-Based Programming	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In-class instruction for three class sessions, including development of Work-Based Learning Plan and coaching on workplace behavior &amp; attire</li> <li>After school and weekend internships: 4-5 hours per week (both in-school and off-site placements)</li> <li>In-house placements supervised by teachers one hour per day in a 6 period, 7 day rotating schedule</li> </ul>	<p><u>12<sup>th</sup> grade internship program</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Daily classroom meeting for first week of term, including development of Work-Based Learning Plan and coaching on work place behavior &amp; attire</li> <li>Weekly class time one period per week for 12 weeks</li> <li>40-50 hours per trimester at off-site job placement</li> </ul> <p><u>9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> grade after school program</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>45 hours per trimester after school provided by 8 teachers and 8 paraprofessionals</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Weekly classes after school semester for a total of 40 hours with a teaching artist per class per semester</li> </ul>
Supporting Student Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>One-on-one support for students during internship</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Periodic check-ins on work experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Supporting Student Relationships</li> </ul>
Instructional Materials & Supplies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>N/A</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Equipment specific to each class such as cameras, ink and paper, microphones, lighting equipment, consumable supplies, digital media storage, website access</li> </ul>
Program Administration & Collaboration Activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>.40 FTE for program administrator (counselor) who coordinates program. Activities include, identification of internship sites for 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders; coordination with work-based supervisor on student interests, skills and needs; monthly meetings with local business leaders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>.50 FTE for program administrator. Activities include: meeting with students, parents, businesses, and community partners; identifying potential partners; visiting job sites once per term; and working with staff on curriculum and assessment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>.50 FTE for program coordinator to coordinate with teachers of record at partner schools, and administer the overall program</li> <li>40 hours per year for program director for partner development work, and supervision</li> </ul>
Number of student participants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>85 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders, including 20 in-house placements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>200 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>47 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders</li> </ul>

Table 2 below provides total program costs for the lead partner per participant for comparable components across the three programs selected for the study. For the 2013-14 academic year, costs ranged from \$712 to \$5,920 with the service learning program in Whitman-Hanson being the least costly program and the work-based learning program in Newburyport the most costly. Per participant costs for the ICA's Teen New Media Program fell in the middle at \$2,599. As discussed in more detail below, these costs are driven by the intensity of program activities (e.g., number of internship hours), the number and mix of program-based staff (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators), as well as the number of students who participate.

**Table 2: Per Participant Resource Cost Estimates (2013-14 School Year)**

<i>Program Components</i>	<b>Newburyport Work-Based Internships</b>	<b>Whitman-Hanson Service Learning</b>	<b>ICA Teen New Media Program</b>
Assessing Student Interest	\$34	\$35	\$31
School & Community-Based Programming	\$5,384	\$245	\$1,252
Supporting Student Relationships	\$167	\$72	\$20
Instructional Materials & Supplies	0	0	\$255
Program Administration & Collaboration Activities	\$335	\$360	\$1,041
2013-14 Per Participant Resource Cost	\$5,920	\$712	\$2,599
2013-14 Number of Student Participants	85	200	47

As shown in Table 3, the distribution of resources across program models differs along with the specifics of each program. In both Newburyport and the ICA's Teen New Media Program, the largest share of program costs across the five components is dedicated to School & Community Based Programming. The vast majority of costs in Newburyport (91%) and nearly half the program costs for the ICA program (48%) are devoted to this category. More than a third (34%) of program costs in Whitman-Hanson are dedicated here. This distribution reflects the common goal held by each of the programs to integrate academic learning into the community-based setting. The larger proportion of costs associated with the programs in Newburyport and at the ICA reflect that both sites offer programming for participants in-house, while the Whitman-Hanson service learning is largely driven by out-of-school opportunities. More specifically, the substantial costs in Newburyport reflect that about one-third of the participating students complete their internships in-house at the high school and are supervised by high school teachers and that students participate for a full semester. This differs from the other programs where supervision costs are borne by the community-based partner and participants are engaged for a total of about 40-50 hours.

**Table 3: Distribution of Total Program Costs by Program Component (2013-14 School Year)**

Program Components	Newburyport Work-Based Internships	Whitman-Hanson Service Learning	ICA Teen New Media Program
Assessing Student Interest	0.6%	4.9%	1.2%
Community-Based Programming	91.0%	34.4%	48.2%
Supporting Student Relationships	2.8%	10.1%	0.8%
Instructional Materials & Supplies	0	0	9.8%
Program Administration & Collaboration Activities	5.7%	50.6%	40.1%

The other program component with a large share of work-based resources is Program Administration & Collaboration Activities, ranging from a low of \$335 in Whitman-Hanson to a high of \$1,041 for the ICA. It makes sense that this category would comprise a large share of program costs since in each case the program operator is responsible for overall administration and oversight of the program, including the identification and development of community and business partners. The cost per participant is driven primarily by the number of program participants (200 in Whitman-Hanson, 85 in Newburyport, and 47 for the ICA).

The share of costs for each of the other program components varies considerably, depending on the key characteristics of each of the programs. For example, 3 percent of the costs of the work-based internship program in Newburyport and 10 percent of the total costs in Whitman-Hanson goes towards supporting student relationships. Both programs include time for one-on-one support for program participants during their internships. In the ICA program, students must have access to appropriate equipment such as cameras, ink and paper, microphones, lighting equipment, turntables, needles and vinyl records which allow them to actively participate in the new media courses that comprise the program highlighted here. Nearly 10 percent of the total cost of this program last year was devoted to materials and supplies. Doubtless the off-site placements in Newburyport and Whitman-Hanson had some costs for materials and supplies, but there were no costs to the schools for this category.

## Policy Considerations

### For State Policymakers

***Clarify what credit-bearing learning opportunities are permissible under current state law and regulations.*** While many districts and schools have embraced one or more community-based learning models, others are limited by their understanding of what is and is not allowed to count toward graduation requirements. Many would-be community partners are even less familiar with the laws pertaining to public education, and may find it more difficult to navigate their way to the answers they seek. Given that state laws and regulations actually impose very few limits on community-based learning, a clear and consistent message should be broadcast to the field of educators and community organizations at every opportunity, especially in the context of forums on effective practice and other venues for disseminating information about community-based learning models. For example, ESE sponsors two statewide Connecting Activities conferences per year to support practitioners in their efforts to develop, implement, and sustain effective career development education programs. Further, tangible examples of existing community-based learning opportunities in districts will help to illustrate the extent of possible program types and models. In addition, ESE could publish and publicize data about student

participation in these types of learning experiences<sup>F</sup> to illustrate the current scope of programming across the Commonwealth, which may compel additional districts and schools to explore their options for expanding these types of opportunities. As a result, a greater number of students would be able to engage in and benefit from community-based learning.

***Promote the use of existing resources and supports to expand credit-bearing learning opportunities beyond school buildings.*** With all of the community-based learning programs that are thriving across the Commonwealth, as well as all of the knowledge, resources, and supports available through ESE and its staff, no school or district should have to develop a community-based learning program from scratch. ESE staff possess a wealth of information and expertise about community-based learning opportunities, and are continuously making connections with educators and community organizations who are bringing these models to life. ESE therefore is able to harness this knowledge and experience, and disseminate it back out to the field, providing practical guidance about how to cost-effectively expand experiential, service-learning, and work-based learning opportunities through the use of community partners and existing resources to schools and districts that have limited internal capacity to offer the breadth of opportunities described above. ESE should continue to promote efficiencies and help practitioners build upon the existing infrastructure for community-based learning. The Contextual Learning Portal is an example of a resource for schools, districts, and community organizations to share experiential and/or community-based projects and lessons. ESE should make every effort to see to it that all educators are familiar with and able to access the Contextual Learning Portal, as well as any other resources that facilitate dissemination of promising and/or effective practice related to community-based learning.

***Use Connecting Activities as a model for building sustainable community-based learning opportunities.*** The Connecting Activities initiative is an exemplar for building a sustainable model for district-/school-community partnerships, both in terms of the program itself and the way in which ESE and its partners leverage resources to maximize support for work-based learning opportunities. For example, this multi-sector partnership does not rely heavily on dedicated district or school funding, which likely has enabled it to persist through changing and often competing educational priorities since the program was established in 1998.<sup>G</sup> Further, the Connecting Activities initiative has amassed numerous tools, resources, and dissemination venues that can serve as models for other types of community-based learning opportunities. ESE should continue to highlight the practices that cut across various types of learning experiences, and encourage the application and/or adaptation of Connecting Activities resources and tools to other community-based learning models.

## For Districts and Schools

***Develop protocols to guide the establishment of community-based partnerships that expand credit-bearing learning opportunities for students.*** In order to provide academic credit for work completed outside of the school building, educators must have effective means for communicating with community partners about their expectations for the student experience, including course requirements and supervision of student activities. For example, a school may wish to conduct mandatory training sessions for partners that could cover a range of topics from how the experience fits into the curriculum to how to provide constructive feedback to students. Before developing or expanding community-based learning opportunities, school and/or district leaders should establish a set of standards with which partners must be willing to comply. For example, in a work-based learning experience, one such standard may be using the Work-Based Learning Plan to evaluate students' acquisition of key employment skills. Any partnership protocols should include opportunities for school leaders,

<sup>F</sup> For example, the ICCR Task Force made the following recommendation: "In order to ensure the Commonwealth is able to track student participation in these career development experiences and accurately report on statewide MassCore completion rates, ESE should also identify a mechanism that all schools and districts can use to record student participation."

<sup>G</sup> In 2014, state funding for the program was \$2.75 million; Connecting Activities funding is awarded to all 16 Workforce Investment Board regions, and is used to support staff—both in schools and partnering community organizations—who recruit employers and prepare students for successful work-based learning experiences.

teachers, students, and partners to provide feedback about their experiences. Finally, schools must feel confident that their students are venturing into safe, nurturing learning environments when they leave the school building. As such, supervisors working one-on-one with students should undergo CORI checks per M.G.L. c. 71, § 38R.

***Create vertically-aligned community-based learning opportunities that build upon and enhance the existing curriculum.*** In an effort to expand credit-bearing, community-based learning opportunities and improve students' learning experiences, many districts have begun to more systematically organize these educational offerings. For example, teachers might choose to work with community partners on a defined, discrete project in a classroom-based course beginning in late elementary or middle school; project-based learning—that is aligned with curriculum—is often available in 8<sup>th</sup> or 9<sup>th</sup> grade; and more independent, student-centered work-based learning options often characterize high school. This kind of vertical alignment allows educators to build a strong connection between academic curriculum and community-based learning, and supports more purposeful conversations between community partners and educators about learning opportunities<sup>22</sup>—both of which research points to as an effective strategies for students' success with learning experiences that blend in-school and out-of-school learning.<sup>2324</sup>

***Join the Connecting Activities School Network.*** Connecting Activities is ESE's initiative to connect schools with business in their communities through the 16 local workforce investment boards (WIBs) to support structured work-based learning opportunities for Massachusetts students. In addition to brokering relationships between schools and employers, Connecting Activities serves as a network of stakeholders committed to promoting meaningful career development education. Membership includes access to free resources that allow schools to maximize the efficacy of work-based learning experiences in order to best prepare students for postsecondary success. Currently, approximately half of the Commonwealth's 385 high schools are members of Connecting Activities.

## For Community Partners

***Work with schools to understand how you can best support student learning objectives.*** While many businesses and community organizations have a singular mission, schools increasingly are called upon to provide a range of academic and non-academic opportunities and supports in an effort to equip students for college and career success. Further, schools often seek to differentiate experiences for students to meet their individual needs. However, myriad constraints often make it difficult for schools to offer both comprehensive and individualized programming. Community organizations and businesses, on the other hand, are often ideally suited to help schools reconcile these conflicting educational approaches. Through thoughtful, structured partnerships, community organizations and businesses can establish reciprocal relationships with schools that further the missions of all entities, while optimizing the experience for students. For example, community partners should actively seek to understand how the experiences they provide fit into the curriculum, and should work with partnering schools to identify desired outcomes for students. Further, community partners should invest in the development of students through performance evaluations and mentorship. Ultimately, community partners are poised to play a role in shaping the future lives of their neighbors, supporters, and possibly even employees, and should approach the opportunity in thoughtful, purposeful ways.

## Appendix A: Brief Program Profile of Selected Community-based Programs

### Newbury Public Schools Work-Based Learning Program

#### *District context*

Newburyport Public Schools (NPS) serves more than 2,300 students, with roughly 750 students enrolled at the high school level. Demographic characteristics at Newburyport High School (NHS) compare closely with district-wide student population: approximately 93% of students are white, while roughly 2% of students identify as Hispanic, African American or Asian, respectively. Additionally, similar to the district profile, approximately 9% of students at the high school come from low-income households, and nearly 20% of students are determined to have high learning needs.

#### *Program model*

The work-based learning program at NHS connects students to credit-bearing learning opportunities with local employers based on students' professional goals and interests. In their freshman year, students complete a Work-Based Learning Plan according to the state model. As sophomores, students then complete additional interest inventories that include an informational interview with local employers. Students can then opt into a community-based service learning opportunity that allows them to further refine their interests. Through this process, students identify key skill competencies that they want to develop, and their supervisors help them to target specific areas of academic and/or professional growth. If it is determined to meet student learning goals, students are able to enroll in the NHS internship program in their junior and senior year. Guidance counselors work with the local Chamber of Commerce and Education Business Coalition to locate work-based learning opportunities that align with students learning plans. Internships are conducted with local community partners, including businesses, and "on-site" at the high school, during the after-school time, on weekends, or over the summer.

#### *Program characteristics*

**Program goals:** The NHS work-based learning program provides students with rich academic supports in order to help identify post-secondary interests and career opportunities. Through close partnerships with area employers, students receive work-based learning opportunities that challenge them to apply academic knowledge to common social and/or economic problems and to develop the employability skills necessary for post-secondary success.

**Students served:** In the 2013-2014 school year, the internship program served approximately 85 students. All students opt into the program, based on their post-secondary interests and academic learning goals.

**Academic services and operations:** Students in the NHS internship program receive employability training in the context of an academic enrichment class as well as robust support from school guidance counselors. This coursework provides practice in developing the skills necessary to apply for a job, such as writing a resume and cover letter or conducting an in-person interview, and students also develop and refine their Work-Based Learning Plans. The course concludes with a research paper that challenges students to think critically about their post-secondary interests and to identify areas of growth. Students also meet regularly with their guidance counselor for one-on-one support in developing so-called "soft skills," such as appropriate dress for an interview. All students complete an assignment sheet with their guidance counselor at the beginning of the semester outlining personal learning goals; counselors then use this document to ensure that students' experiences align with their growth interests.

**Post-secondary transition:** The NHS internship program supports students' transition to post-secondary opportunities by providing rich opportunities for professional growth. NHS teachers and guidance counselors work with students to ensure that they graduate with a well-defined career plan and a robust set of employability skills. Additionally, NHS staff leverage long-standing partnerships with local business to offer school-based enrichment programs, and employers work with teachers to align work-based learning with academic

coursework.

## Whitman-Hanson Regional School District Community Service Learning

### *District context*

Whitman-Hanson Regional School District (WHRSD) serves more than 4,000 students, with roughly 1,100 students enrolled at the regional high school. Demographic characteristics at Whitman-Hanson Regional High School compare closely with district-wide student population: approximately 93% of students are white, while roughly 2% of students identify as Hispanic, African American or Asian, respectively. Additionally, similar to the district profile, 20% of students at the high school come from low-income households, and nearly 30% of students are determined to have high learning needs.

### *Program model*

The Community Service Learning (CSL) program at Whitman-Hanson Regional High School offers credit-bearing internships for 12<sup>th</sup> grade students while also supporting course-based service learning projects connected to an after-school course focused on local socio-economic issues. The CSL/Partners in Business Internship Program connects high school seniors to internship opportunities that address human needs, education, public safety, violence awareness, and political activism. Rising 9<sup>th</sup> grade students also participate in a month-long program during the summer prior to enrolling at the high school, where students engage in credit-bearing interdisciplinary service learning. Across both programs, WHPS partners with a wide array of community-based organizations, including the local chapter of Habitat for Humanity, the Food Pantry of Whitman, and the Soup Kitchen in Brockton.

### *Program characteristics*

**Program goals:** All service learning opportunities at Whitman-Hanson Regional High School are designed to connect academic learning to social issues affecting the local community. All internships have career and service components that aim to teach students employability skills, while challenging students to apply academic knowledge to address pressing social issues.

**Students served:** In the 2013-2014 school year, 200 students enrolled in the 12<sup>th</sup> grade internship program, while the 9<sup>th</sup> grade transition program served about 100 students, or roughly 15% of the incoming freshman class. Recruitment for the 9<sup>th</sup> grade program typically targets students who may need additional support to transition successfully to high school; the 12<sup>th</sup> grade program serves students based on their post-secondary interests.

**Academic services and operations:** WHRSD staff coordinate two types of partnerships with local community-based organizations. First, students can engage in “off-site” service-learning, working directly with community partners where they operate; these student learning opportunities are coordinated closely by the high school’s Internship teacher. Next, community-based partners can also offer service-learning opportunities “in-house” at the high school, leading after-school or summer learning projects. WHRSD staff work closely with the local Chamber of Commerce as well as the regional Workforce Investment Board to find reliable community partners. All internships are unpaid opportunities that require a commitment of at least four hours per week for one semester, or roughly 40 hours total. Academic coursework challenges students to reflect critically on their internship experiences, and their relevance to broader social issues. Academic courses also offer robust enrichment in so-called “soft skills,” such as time management and the ability to work productively as part of a team.

**Post-secondary transition:** As a guide to their internship experience, students create Work-based Learning

Plans that outline learning goals. These then serve as a contract between students and employers, ensuring that students achieve their learning goals while meeting the needs of the community partners. Employers use the learning plans to guide student assessment at key transition points throughout the semester. Lastly, students have opportunities to participate in career fairs and less formal “meet-and-greet” sessions where employers visit the high school to discuss post-secondary career opportunities.

**Program Website:** [http://web.whrsd.org/faculty/clancy\\_georgia/csl/CSLnew/index.html](http://web.whrsd.org/faculty/clancy_georgia/csl/CSLnew/index.html)

## Institute of Contemporary Art Boston Public Schools Arts Expansion Initiative

### *District context*

The state’s biggest and most diverse public school district, Boston Public Schools (BPS) serves a student population of roughly 54,300, more than 5% of the state’s total public K-12 enrollment. Typical of large, urban districts, the percentages of low-income, high-needs students in BPS far exceed averages across the state. While 38% of Massachusetts students come from low-income households, over 77% of students from BPS are low-income. Additionally, nearly 50% of BPS students speak a first language other than English, and 85% of students are determined to have high learning needs. The most diverse district in the state, over 40% of BPS students are Hispanic, 34% are African American, over 13% are white, roughly 9% are Asian, and 2% of students identify as multiracial.

### *Program model*

As part of the Boston Public Schools (BPS) Arts Expansion Initiative, the Institute for Contemporary Arts (ICA) has partnered with BPS schools to provide credit-bearing learning opportunities in the performing and visual arts. The Arts Expansion Initiative is a multi-year effort to expand quality arts education equitably in schools across the district. A 2009 survey revealed that only 67% of BPS K-8 students district-wide were getting arts education at least once a week, and only one quarter of high school students had access to any arts learning opportunities during the school day. Further, direct arts instruction opportunities were not systematically aligned or arranged throughout the district. The BPS Arts Expansion Initiative was created to achieve a more coherent and sustainable approach to high-quality arts education. Through public-private partnerships, the program expands direct access to arts instruction, strengthens BPS central office capacity, and coordinates partnerships between schools and community organizations. BPS has worked closely with local foundations, arts organizations, higher education institutions, and the Mayor's Office to achieve its goals in arts education; EdVestors has served as the convener and managing partner for the Initiative. Students in the ICA program receive .25 credits per semester, or 25 to 30 hours of credit, towards completing their arts requirement.

### *Program characteristics*

**Program goals:** The ICA program aims to provide students with a positive experience in the museum while creating learning opportunities not typically available during the traditional school day. Students receive robust academic and career support in a variety of mediums, including photojournalism, film-making, and DJ’ing.

**Students served:** Students are recruited to the ICA program according to their interest in visual and performing arts. While most students are upperclassman, program enrollment is diverse by virtually every other measure, serving a wide-ranging population of students in general education, special education, English language learners, as well as those enrolled in alternative education coursework. Currently, the program draws students most heavily from partnerships with YouthBoston, Excel High School in South Boston, English High School in Jamaica Plain, Charlestown High School, and East Boston High School.

**Academic services and operations:** Learning opportunities are organized into three tiers: Beginner, Intermediate, and Advanced instruction. At the Beginner level, students take courses twice per week that are oriented towards helping them to use arts-related technology, such as digital cameras or DJ equipment. Meanwhile, at the

Intermediate level, students begin credit-bearing coursework that meets once per week to create an original work of art. Advanced students create portfolios of their work and begin to explore post-secondary opportunities in the arts industry or at arts-oriented institutes of higher education. Each year culminates in a Teen Convening, where ICA students present their work to the public. All courses meet during the after-school time, and the ICA provides flexibility to students who are not able to attend weekly courses.

**Post-secondary transition:** Advanced students receive a diverse array of supports to help develop post-secondary transition plans. Specific supports vary according to each particular artistic medium or industry. For example, students in the photo program have opportunities to meet with admissions counselors at the Massachusetts College of Art and Design, and aspiring film-makers have opportunities to join relevant professional networks. Across all artistic media, the ICA creates opportunities for students to meet and interview professionals in their field.

**Program Website:** <http://www.bpsarts.org/bps-arts-expansion-initiative/>

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