



Blackstone Valley Superintendents' Consortium Receives \$450,000 from American Student Assistance to Increase Access to Workforce Training Opportunities and Long-Term Economic Mobility for Underserved High School Students

BOSTON – July 22, 2021 – The Blackstone Valley Superintendents' Consortium (BVSC) -- which consists of the school districts of Bellingham, Blackstone-Millville, Douglas, Grafton, Hopedale, Mendon-Upton, Milford, Millbury, Northbridge, Sutton, Uxbridge, and Blackstone Valley Technical School -- announced today the organization received a \$450,000 grant from American Student Assistance® (ASA), a national nonprofit that helps to foster student understanding of postsecondary education and career pathways. This support enables the BVSC to take an innovative approach to inter-district collaboration for workforce training. Beginning in the 2021-2022 school year, students from across the 12 districts in Central Mass. will have access to alternative pathways to jobs and certifications, opportunities for hands-on learning, and real-world workforce experiences. During the first-year, students will have the opportunity to enroll in computer science courses, such as cybersecurity, programming, and web development, as well as welding and advanced manufacturing classes.

On average, across the districts, more than 40 percent of students are categorized as high needs, and 23 percent are considered economically disadvantaged, as reported by the Departments of Secondary and Elementary Education. At the same time, developing courses with associated work-based opportunities in small school districts is a major challenge due to cost and the limited number of students in each district interested in particular industry areas. Currently, Blackstone Valley Technical High School is unable to accept all of the Blackstone Valley students who have a desire to pursue work-based learning.

“Thanks to this generous grant from ASA, our Blackstone Valley School districts will be able to combine resources, funding, and materials to offer work-based courses and placements to prepare our students for industry positions directly upon graduation from high school,” said Superintendent Karen Crebase, Hopedale Public Schools. “Through the creation of this strategic plan that builds on the foundation of existing career development programs across our high schools in the region, we can offer our students the exposure, skill building, and opportunities necessary to prepare our graduates for the workforce.”

American Student Assistance has a proven track record of providing impactful grant funding in Mass. Since 2018, ASA has awarded districts in Mass. up to \$100,000 in funding to support innovations in career exploration in middle school. Seven of 12 districts in the BVSC have received these middle school

grants from ASA, including Miscoe Hill Middle School in Mendon-Upton and Uxbridge High School. Detailed case studies featuring Uxbridge High School and Miscoe Hill Middle School can be found [here](#).

“The Blackstone Valley Superintendents recognize the need for work-based learning opportunities for its students. ASA is honored to collaborate with the consortium to empower young people to explore their options and get hands-on experience that can translate into practical and affordable plans for long-term economic mobility,” said ASA Vice President of Strategy & Innovation Alisa Wilke.

The main goals for the BVSC grant include:

- Developing non-traditional, work-based high school courses/curricula that occur outside of the school day that are based upon local industry needs and are open to all Blackstone Valley students for high school credit;
- Connecting students taking non-traditional work-based courses to real work through internships and field trips;
- Focusing on alternative pathways for students that are not likely to go to college;
- Developing support systems for students entering a transitional year and support students moving out of high school by assisting them in navigating pathways that get them into jobs; and
- Creating ongoing dialogue and collaboration between businesses and the schools.

About Blackstone Valley Superintendents’ Consortium

The Blackstone Valley Superintendents’ Consortium meets regularly to share resources, discuss professional issues, collaborate on new initiatives, and maintain professional dialogue in order to develop and provide strong educational environments for our students. We are working to lead, not only Massachusetts, but the nation with this innovative approach to inter-district collaboration in the area of workforce training. Our consortium recognizes the need to support all students and our collaboration in this area will enhance and improve the education we currently offer to our students.

About American Student Assistance® (ASA)

American Student Assistance® (ASA) is a national nonprofit committed to helping kids know themselves, know their options, and make informed choices to achieve their education and career goals. ASA® has a 60-year legacy of working directly with students to increase their access to higher education through loans and financial education. ASA has turned its experience into impactful solutions for students in grades 6-12 to help them pursue their dreams. To learn more about ASA, visit www.asa.org/about-us.

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