



Professional Learning Networks Report

End Of Year (2024-25)

Berkshire Educational Resources K12 (BERK12) helps schools succeed across the region with a focus on research towards partnerships, collaborative projects, professional development, and networking and advocacy. In fulfillment of this mission BERK12 sponsors several educator Professional Learning Networks (PLNs).

The Professional Learning Networks were established over a decade ago by the Berkshire County Superintendent's Roundtable, and have been expanded and are currently managed by BERK12. PLNs are year-round multidisciplinary learning communities organized by educational role type, created to provide professional development activities for specialists in the County, especially for those in the smaller, rural districts. These groups meet in person and virtually throughout the school year and serve as a clearinghouse to exchange ideas, share information, solve common problems, serve as peer-mentors, engage in training, and advance content and job specific knowledge and skills. The groups also generate ideas and proposals – such as follow-up course work - and serve as network/liaison to other organizations/agencies such as DESE and DPH. Many of the networks offer on-going professional development opportunities to its members during the school year, including targeted workshops associated with the November county-wide professional development day.

PLN leaders are paid a stipend through BERK12 to coordinate activities and each group receives a small allocation towards meetings and activities. PLN leaders create a plan for each school year, organize meetings and activities, maintain a network list, disseminate information, and coordinate progress reporting with the BERK12 PLN Facilitator. The following PLNs were active during the 2024-2025 school year:

ARTS (Music, Visual and Performing Arts)
PHYSICAL EDUCATION
STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Math)
SCHOOL NURSES
FOREIGN LANGUAGE
ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS
HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES/CIVICS
SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

Below is a brief summary of PLN efforts in the the 2024-2025 school year:

STEM. Led by PPS educator Judy Callahan, the STEM PLN offered several workshops on the November 4th Professional Development Day including offerings from the Tamarack Hollow Nature Center, Pleasant Valley Wildlife Sanctuary, and Hancock Shaker Village. Other workshops included Open Science Education for Middle School, Engaging Students in Climate Change, Resources for Open Education Science Instruction, and Cad is Rad. This Spring, the network co-sponsored a workshop on Climate Change for teachers with Cooler Communities. Special thanks to Judy for leading this PLN for the last few years. Judy is stepping down as leader and we are currently looking for someone to take her place.

SCHOOL NURSES. Led by CBRSD Nurse Leader Joan Roy, the NURSES PLN serves as a conduit for distributing information from the DPH and the CDC to nurses in all Berkshire County districts. In November 2024, at the annual PD Day, the Network sponsored a full day of activities at Kripalu Center for Health and Wellness in Stockbridge. The goal of the workshop was to learn and practice evidence based skills for stress reduction and self care. This Spring, a Zoom meeting was offered regarding measles and what steps could be taken in case of an outbreak in the county. In addition, working with Berkshire AHEC, Joan organized a course on Mental Health First Aid, and an event on vaping.

HISTORY/SOCIAL STUDIES/CIVICS. Lesley Herzberg, Executive Director of the Berkshire County Historical Society at Arrowhead, leads this PLN. In November, Lesley organized an offering at the Red Lion Inn in Stockbridge that introduced participants to educational resources for teaching about the 250th anniversary of the American Revolution. In addition, a presentation from the Massachusetts Historical Society was held this Spring introducing their programs around National History Day to county teachers. Lesley is coordinating activities related to the 250th anniversary of the American revolution in Berkshire County so future activities will center around this topic.

SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS. Courtney Bopp is the School Psychologist for the Hoosac Valley Regional School District. She leads this PLN. The PLN met monthly during the school year, with psychologists from all Berkshire County districts attending. Case studies, best practices and current topics/information were shared by participants. At the November PD Day, the group met and discussed new assessment tools and procedural changes due to the new political landscape (MCAS changes, ICE involvement, etc.). A goal for the new school year will be to support new school psychologists throughout the county.

FOREIGN LANGUAGE. Amy Bainbridge-Jordan leads the Foreign Language Network. Associated with BOLT, (Berkshire Organization of Language Teachers), Amy worked hard this year to revitalize this Network. In October, the group held a workshop entitled "Comprehensive Novels from Start to Finish". This practical all day workshop enabled teachers to select their own novel and start prepping it for student use. In November, as part of the county wide PD Day, the group met and spent the day brainstorming solutions to classroom issues, ideas for teaching and problem solutions. Later in the month, another offering was held entitled "How to get your students to read during FVR".

ARTS. Providing professional development for visual arts, music and performing arts specialists, the ARTS PLN was led by SBRSD Art teacher Stephanie Graham. An extraordinary educator, Stephanie has provided great leadership to this PLN for several years, but chose to step down in this role this Spring. Two County specialists have stepped up to take her place, however. Amanda Hartledge, a visual art teacher from NAPS, and Joanne Nelson, a music teacher from Lee Public Schools, are now leading the PLN. Highlights from this past year included another successful Arts Integration Workshop on November 4th at the Linde Center at Tanglewood where over 100 educators participated, an art trip to New York City in February, Arts Curriculum Feedback sessions in North and South County in January, dissemination of the DESE Study on the new Arts Curriculum, and participation in Art Week Berkshire in May. In addition, through a connection with the Linde Center, performances and workshops were offered to the Lenox Public Schools in November and NAPS in March.

ENGLISH LANGUAGE LEARNERS. The ELL PLN joins with the Berkshire English Language Teachers (BELT) group each year to provide PD activities to its members. Led by Elizabeth Whitman from NAPS, notable achievements for this past year included maintaining a membership of over 30 professionals county wide, sharing curriculum by grade level, increasing participation of county instructors, meeting five times/year plus the November PD Day, partnering with BASIC (Berkshire Alliance to Support the Immigrant Community) by sharing concerns and collaborating on resources, and collaborating on implementation of the new SLIFE guidelines. With a robust group of professionals, this past year's focus was on curriculum development by grade level. Some members joined the OLA (Office of Language Acquisition) pilot program, and the group also examined programs to address the needs of newcomers and SLIFE (Students with Limited or Interrupted Formal Education).

PHYSICAL EDUCATION. The Physical Education PLN joined with USTA's Western Massachusetts Tennis Association to offer a very successful workshop on November 4th. Held at Bousquet Sport in Pittsfield, the day consisted of touring the new tennis, pickleball and workout areas, instruction on tennis in the schools in the AM and pickleball in the PM. In addition, the teachers had an opportunity to utilize fitness equipment and discuss plans for additional professional development activities. Over 50 PE teachers attended this workshop which was well received by all. Plans for next fall's PD Day are being formalized and the group hopes to return to Bousquet again. PLN Leader Maureen Kennedy from Lenox will be stepping down next year but Kim Madden, a PE teacher for the PPS, has agreed to lead the group.

For more information, to learn more, or to get involved with a PLN, contact Bill Ballen - BERK12 PD Coordinator @ ballenw770@gmail.com or drop BERK12 a note at info@Berk12.org.