



Learning 2025
**LEARNER-CENTERED
 FUTURE-DRIVEN
 EDUCATION**



LEARNING 2025 LIGHTHOUSE DEMONSTRATION SYSTEM

AASA Learning 2025

Lighthouse Demonstration System Vignette

New Hope-Solebury School District (Pa.)

Recognized Fall 2024

Focus Area: Future-Ready Learners

The New Hope-Solebury School District is a small suburban district located on the Delaware River between Philadelphia and New York City. It educates 1,300 students in a K-12 education program. While much of the community represents high socio-economic status, the current student population is 10% economically disadvantaged and 15% receive special education services.

The district has been consistently recognized as a high achieving school district with 95% of students matriculating into college or careers. Its high school and middle school are currently ranked fifteenth in Pennsylvania by US News and World Report. The Pennsylvania School Board Association has recognized New Hope-Solebury as a great Pennsylvania School; it was also recognized by AASA as a School System to watch in the 2023-24 school year.

The major focus of the district is on preparing future-ready learners. In the 2019-20 school year, the district embarked on a vision-driven comprehensive review of its programs and practices to ensure its system was fully equipped to prepare future-ready learners. One hundred stakeholders from the school district were assembled, including community members, parents and guardians, students, faculty, staff, and administrators to develop a comprehensive plan.



Graduates
 Entering
 College or
 Careers

#15

Middle & High
 Schools
 in Pa.



Recognition
 as Great
 Pa. School

A series of focus groups and open discussions sought to determine if the district was responsive to the projected needs of students as they approach higher education and the modern workforce. This process involved developing a vision, mission, and shared values for the school district to frame the goals action plans, and strategies to drive progress.

Additionally, the team created the district's Portrait of a Graduate to provide a visual representation and foundation for its efforts to cultivate well-rounded and future-ready learners, highlighting characteristics and skills for students to develop throughout their K-12 experience.

These characteristics include:

- integrity
- creativity
- resilience
- curiosity
- confidence
- global responsibility
- social and emotional intelligence
- critical thinking
- communication
- collaboration



By articulating necessary future-ready skills, teachers were able to incorporate these concepts into their daily classroom activities and lessons. Skills were designed to reflect the competencies and characteristics required for students to be successful in the transition to an ever-changing work environment.

Actualizing the Commitment to Future Readiness

With its Comprehensive Plan in 2019, the district embarked on a strategic journey to become an exemplary of innovation and future-thinking educational models. The plan identifies several guiding objectives, including the expansion of differentiated instruction, supporting the social-emotional needs of all learners, fostering career and college readiness, and promoting community engagement.

Each objective has an accompanying set of action plans, but they collectively support an overarching mission to reinforce the success of the 21st century student. The most tangible example of this mission is the district's groundbreaking Career Pathways Program, designed to help students tailor their educational experiences to their interests and aspirations and to provide a sequential process of career exploration opportunities to better inform their decision-making.

Key Steps in the Career Pathways Program

The district's Career Pathways Program follows a sequence of experiences that increase in specificity as student progress from 9th grade to 12th grade, beginning to narrow down their fields of interest. The program's sequence includes:

1. **BASE: Beginning Academic Search and Exploration—(9th Grade)**—Students in the ninth grade participate in a required career exploration course that serves as the foundation of their pathway journey. Students explore three pathways in anticipation of scheduling their courses during their sophomore year:

- Arts and Humanities
- Business and Communications
- Health Sciences, STEAM, and Innovation

2. **TREK: Targeted Resources Expanding Knowledge—(10th Grade)**—Once a pathway is declared, students TREK through a series of pathway-specific panel discussions, guest presentations, and external site visits throughout their sophomore and junior years.

3. **RISE: Relevant Initial Shadow Experience—(11th Grade)**—In their junior year, students have the opportunity to engage in the RISE Program, which allows them to complete a series of meetings to focus on workplace etiquette, professionalism and networking in preparation for their job shadowing experience. They then have the chance to shadow a professional from their chosen field for 20 hours.

4. **APEX: Active Personal Educational eXperience—(12th Grade)**—The Career Pathways program culminates in students' senior year with the APEX project—a student-driven, 60-hour internship project giving them authentic, real-world career experience. Since 2020, the entire senior class has been engaged in this program since its inception.

In addition to career coursework and hands-on learning experiences, Career Pathways is further supported by newly developed programs and opportunities designed to enhance student preparation for career seeking.

These include resume-writing workshops beginning in middle school, mock interview experiences, and an annual career fair designed to introduce students to new career possibilities within each pathway.

Additional Systemic Changes

Many other future-ready programs are available to district students. These include multiple opportunities for students to participate in a range of pre-college programs facilitated by local and national universities. Also, the district has expanded its work with the Regional Career and Technical Center to broaden and enhance its programming. The district superintendent has been actively involved in this transformation.

Similarly, the district's BRIDGE Program provides an inclusionary learning environment for all district students. This program enrolls students with intellectual and developmental disabilities ages 18-21 to assist them with the critical transition from school to independent adult life, including career exploration.

The district has partnered with businesses, nonprofits, and industries to offer job experiences that are correlated with each student's abilities and provide the opportunity to develop work-transferable job skills. According to district leaders, "This has been an incredibly successful program and has resulted in valuable learning experiences for our students."

To further support the implementation of the Career Pathways Program, the district undertook systemic changes to both its schedule and its operations. The high school schedule now has an innovative "block-and-learn" format to allow for further career exploration plus a 'Lunch and Learn' period. This is a period in which students have the ability self-direct their time for additional study and assignments, recreation and emotional-wellness activities, and to participate in career exploration experiences.

In addition to supporting student performance in the classroom, the 'Lunch and Learn' period has provided students growth around time management skills, opportunities to destress, learn from industry professionals, and building meaningful connections with peers.

Benefits of Being Future Ready

According to district leaders, by embedding career exploration, a whole child approach, and personalized learning into the district's educational framework, "We equip students to make informed decisions, harness their strengths, and view their future as a dynamic and evolving journey."

In addition, multiple structural changes have evolved as a result of the district's focus on future-ready learners, including:

- 1 Course offerings have expanded to focus on future-ready learning, including at the middle school level STEAM, VEX Robotics, a ground-breaking financial literacy course, study skills, and language exploration to provide students opportunities to explore their interests and develop critical skills.
- 2 Innovative initiatives have been implemented in order to foster a collaborative approach to embrace new practices to prepare students for the future, including an Artificial Intelligence Think Tank collaborative, and the district's Leadership Academy program.
- 3 The future-ready programs available through the district solidly involve research and collaboration. As program review reveals needed changes and modifications, cross-institutional partners work with district staff to generate ideas and make suggestions for change.
- 4 The whole child remains a consistent part of the culture and framework of the district's numerous programs which are now in place to support students' social and emotional development and foster a welcoming, inclusive environment for all learners.
- 5 Future-Ready program redesign has helped to personalize the curriculum and provide opportunities for students to engage in multi-disciplinary experiences. One example includes students' senior APEX project, a highly personalized learning experience based on student exploration of their career interests.

According to district leaders: "Our commitment is to embrace transformative change and fostering innovative thinking in our thoughtful implementation and collaborative efforts. As both a team and community, we will continue to empower all learners for a world of possibilities."