

<https://westfaironline.com/145131/junior-achievement-connects-companies-with-future-workforce-via-a-virtual-platform/>



Junior Achievement connects companies with future workforce via a virtual platform

By [Phil Hall](#)
February 12, 2022

Junior Achievement of Greater Fairfield County recently rolled out JA Inspire Virtual 2022, an online workforce development initiative designed to provide local middle and high school students with the chance to explore high-growth, high-demand jobs with local companies.

The initiative, which debuted on Feb. 7 and runs through Aug. 7, enables students to explore virtual company booths, hear from industry professionals and engage with guest speakers and panelists on careers and industries. The nonprofit conducted a similar program in 2021 that attracted students from more than 50 schools and community organizations.

Bernadine Venditto, president of Junior Achievement of Greater Fairfield County, stated the initiative was designed to “provide a meaningful experience, virtually, for students, but it also addresses the career readiness and the need for building a pathway for students to the workforce.”



A student having an online conversation via the JA Virtual initiative. Photo courtesy Junior Achievement.

Venditto noted the participating companies are Junior Achievement partners, with the nonprofit making an extra effort to select firms in “industries that are in high demand,” which are eager to strengthen their workforce pipeline.

“The companies talk about different jobs and what skills are needed for these different jobs,” she said. “The kids enter this virtual experience — it almost seems like a trade show — and they’re able to visit different booths and learn about the career opportunities in these different industries.”

Odyssey Logistics & Technology Corp. in Danbury is the title sponsor for this year’s endeavor and other top sponsors include Webster Bank, Santa Energy, Aquarion Water Co. and KPMG. Fairfield University, M&T Bank and Bigelow Tea Co. are also among the local entities participating in the initiative.

From the educators’ perspective, Venditto added, JA Inspire Virtual “gives students more experiences to connect with the business community and and a pathway to get from where they are to the workforce.”

Venditto is aiming to have 3,000 students participate in JA Inspire Virtual 2022, noting that the nonprofit is eager to spread the word about this endeavor to a wider student audience.

“We primarily work with public schools, but we are certainly open to other schools as well,” she said. “If parents hear about this and parents say, ‘This would be wonderful for my child,’ they can also participate.”

More information on JA Virtual 2022 is online at jagfc.org/event/ja-inspire-virtual-2022/.