

Connecticut Learns and Works Conference

Friday, May 9, 2025

Water's Edge Resort & Spa | 1525 Boston Post Rd, Westbrook, CT 06498



Program Guide

A conference for educators, counselors, employment and training specialists, and business persons interested in career and workforce development issues

Tentative Schedule *(subject to change)*

Theme: Navigating the Changing Landscapes of Work and Exploring New Opportunities

7:30 – 8:10 a.m.

Registration and Full Breakfast

8:15 – 8:30 a.m.

Welcome and Opening Remarks: Dante Bartolomeo, CT DOL Commissioner

8:30 – 9:45 a.m.

Keynote: Dr. David Ferreira, Provost at Charter Oak State College

9:45 – 10:00 a.m. Break

Employment opportunities at Defense industry supply chain companies (Workshop #1)

Location: Salon A

Workshop

Current Labor Market Information (Workshop #2)

Location: Salon C

Session 1

Youth Challenges - Mimi Haley (Workshop #3)

Location: Grand Ballroom

10:00 – 10:50 a.m.

Financing Options for Postsecondary Education (Workshop #4)

Location: Stannard Room

Neurodiversity in the Workplace (Workshop #5)

Location: Salon A

Workshop

Autism and Work (Workshop #6)

Location: Salon C

Session 2

Equity & Innovation: The Role of Inclusive AI in the Future of Work (Workshop #7)

Location: Grand Ballroom

11:00 – 11:50 a.m.

Coping Skills to Build Resilience in Times of Uncertainty (Workshop #8)

Location: Stannard Room

12:00 – 1:00 p.m. Lunch

New Career Clusters (Workshop #9)

Location: Salon A

Workshop

Current Labor Market Information (Workshop #10)

Location: Salon C

Session 3

Equity & Innovation: The Role of Inclusive AI in the Future of Work (Workshop #11)

Location: Grand Ballroom

1:00 – 1:50 p.m.

Coping Skills to Build Resilience in Times of Uncertainty (Workshop #12)

Location: Stannard Room

Employment opportunities at Defense industry supply chain companies (Workshop #13)

Location: Salon A

Workshop

Healthcare (Workshop #14)

Location: Salon C

Session 4

Youth Challenges - Mimi Haley (Workshop #15)

Location: Grand Ballroom

2:00 – 2:50 p.m.

Financing Options for Postsecondary Education (Workshop #16)

Location: Stannard Room

Keynote Speaker: Dr. David Ferreira, Provost at Charter Oak State College

AI has quickly evolved into an essential force transforming industries such as healthcare, education, finance, and especially our daily lives. Join us for an engaging, interactive discussion titled "AI Implications for the Workforce and Training Providers," featuring dynamic scenario challenges and spirited debates about AI's impact on education, the workplace, and society at large. You'll leave informed, inspired, and perhaps a little uneasy—but ultimately prepared to responsibly embrace AI's transformative potential. AI isn't just arriving; it's already fundamentally reshaping the labor market!

Dr. David Ferreira, Provost at Charter Oak State College since June 2021, leads academic innovation and quality at the institution. He has successfully expanded workforce development initiatives and academic programs through the strategic use of an industry-driven curriculum and stackable credentials. Dr. Ferreira's expertise in higher education leadership and his commitment to integrating cutting-edge technology into learning environments make him a thought leader in AI applications for business and education.

Workshop Descriptions

Employment opportunities at Defense industry supply chain companies (Workshop #1 & #13) Location: Salon A

Training opportunities for High school graduates, Under Employed, and Unemployed workers/ Electric Boat training / Apprenticeship programs/ Transportation / Housing

Presenters: William Barber— Willie currently leads education & outreach initiatives for General Dynamics Electric Boat across the region. He has experiences in public school education & non-profits. General Dynamics Electric Boat supports exposure and education-related programming from elementary schools through adult education. Willie helped lead our outreach and programming efforts and leads our strategic partnerships that align curriculum, instruction and programming with local school districts to industry standards. He serves as a board member on Rhode Island Department of Education CTE Board of Trustees.

Sean Morrone - Sean is the Manager of Supply Chain & Workforce Development at General Dynamics Electric Boat. Sean leads the effort for EB to partner with the Navy and EB's Supply Chain organization to ensure the Maritime Industrial Base (MIB) has the workforce it needs to deliver one COLUMBIA and two VIRGINAs per year (1+2). Sean and his team also collaborate with key stakeholders through the states of CT & RI to continue to bolster the workforce development programs in our region as well as working to package and deploy those same efforts throughout the country.

Tim Fox – Timothy is the Director of Operations for SENEDIA – The Alliance for Defense Tech, Talent, and Innovation and project manager for the New England Submarine Shipbuilding Partnership, a Department of Defense funded trades and industrial skills workforce development initiative supporting the New England submarine industrial base. He is a Massachusetts Maritime Academy graduate and U.S. Navy veteran. Tim's career experience includes roles in both operations and management across the maritime and defense sector.

New Career Clusters (Workshop #2 & #10) - Location: Salon C

The National Career Clusters Framework provides structural alignment and a common language to bridge education and work, empowering each learner to explore, decide and prepare for dynamic and evolving careers.

Presenters: Sean McKeown - CTSDE

Kyllie Freeman - CTSDE

Matthew Krzyzek - DOL

Youth Challenges (Workshop #3 & #15) - Location: Grand Ballroom

Specific challenges for youth populations (focus on youth homelessness, justice-involved, rural, and/or foster care youth)

Presenter: Dr. Mary Ann (Mimi) Haley is the Executive Director of the National Youth Employment Coalition (NYEC). Prior to joining NYEC, Dr. Haley served as Deputy Director/Interim CEO of the CT Coalition to End Homelessness. Over her career, she has designed and led projects in areas such as reentry, juvenile justice, foster care youth, flexible funding, childcare assistance, youth leadership, and housing interventions. She is also a recovering academic, having published and taught in the field of political economic development and currently serves as the chair of the CT Governor's Office of Workforce Strategies DEIA Youth Subcommittee.

Financing your Post-Secondary Education and Training (Workshop #4 & #12) - Location: Stannard Room

This workshop will focus on the various ways in which students finance their post-secondary education or training programs. The panel will include professionals from CT higher education financial aid, financial literacy, and alumni relations offices, as well as representatives from CHESLA and Workplace.org. Panelists will discuss the alternate avenues students can take (free tuition programs, grants, scholarships, dual enrollment, etc.) and effective financial planning strategies that can potentially reduce or eliminate student loan debt altogether.

Presenters:

Josh Hurlock, Deputy Director CHESLA

Keri Lupichino, CCSU Financial Aid

Irene Martin, Director, CT State Financial Aid Services

Kelly Perrotti, CCSU Financial Literacy Office

Diana Reid, Director of Development and Alumni Relations

Cathy Robinson-Patton, Vice President of Youth Services Division, Workplace CareerHub

Sean McKeown – CTSDE (Moderator)

Julie Greene, CT State Manchester Career Services (Co-Moderator)

Understanding the Value of Neurodiversity (Workshop #5) - Location: Salon A

Through this workshop, participants will explore the concepts and language related to neurodiversity. Through a neurodiverse lens, they will consider the opportunities and challenges in the increasing range of options students have upon leaving high school and strategies for setting people up for success.

Presenter: Karen Bellnier is the Director of Digital Innovation at Mitchell College. She has been a leader in online learning and instructional design since 2008. With master's degrees in developmental psychology and instructional design, and currently pursuing a doctorate in education, Karen is dedicated to advancing digital innovation and creating accessible, flexible educational opportunities.

Workshop Description continues...

Equity & Innovation: The Role of Inclusive AI in the Future of Work (Workshop #7 & #11) - Location: Grand Ballroom

The presentation will focus on AI's growing role in workforce development (including the skills and education needed), the challenges of AI bias and why inclusion matters (including the impact of exclusion in AI decision-making processes), practical strategies for ensuring equity in AI, and Future Outlook—Preparing for an AI-Driven Workforce.

Presenter: Dr. Chaka Felder-McEntire —a professional development consultant and an education administrator with expertise in leadership, motivation, trauma informed practices, counseling, and college & career readiness. A certified Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion trainer, she provides training and coaching to the public and private industries to “repurpose for success”. Dr. Felder-McEntire is also the founder of Higher Heights Youth Empowerment Programs, Inc. and the CT College Access organizations.

Autism and Work (Workshop #6) - Location: Salon C

ASD and Strategies for Success: Participants will receive a brief overview of what Autism Spectrum Disorder is and strategies to use with students to promote a successful transition to life after high school. Presenters will review strategies for post-secondary training programs and employment as well as resources available through the State of CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS).

Presenters:

Amy Huysman - Amy is the Southern Region Supervisor for the CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) newly formed Youth Services Unit. She has many years of experience in Vocational Rehabilitation, working with youth, young adults, and adult consumers. She holds an M.A. in Education and B.S. in Rehabilitation Counseling from UConn.

Maureen Woronecki - Maureen is a Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor. Additionally, she is also a consultant on the ASD Committee to ensure effective services for participants on the autism spectrum.

Jessica Corneau - A Certified Rehabilitation Counselor, Jessica is a Regional Director with BRS (part of Aging and Disability Services) and holds an M.A. in Rehabilitation Counseling from Assumption University in Worcester and has taught as an adjunct faculty. In addition to overseeing the southern region of BRS, Jessica has a lead role in ensuring effective services for participants on the autism spectrum as the chair of the ASD Committee.

Carly Duffy - Carly is a project coordinator with the State Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, ADS. She has a Master's degree in Psychology from Southern Connecticut State University. Her education and experience give her a great understanding of disabilities and employment expectations in the current job market.

Current Labor Market— Opportunities in an Uncertain Time (Workshop #9) - Location: Salon A

The workshop will discuss update on the U.S. and CT economy and labor market, industry and occupational projections, and some of the free online tools available from the Department of Labor for job search and career planning.

Presenter: Patrick Flaherty— Patrick J. Flaherty is the Director of Research at the CT Department of Labor. He received his Bachelor's Degree in Social Studies from Harvard University and his Master's Degree in Economics from the University of Connecticut. He is also an Adjunct Faculty at UConn, where he is teaching Principles of Microeconomics at UConn/Hartford.

Coping Skills to Build Resilience in Times of Uncertainty (Workshop #8 & 16) - Location: Stannard Room

In times of uncertainty many of us will face transitions – some planned and some unplanned. This interactive workshop will explore various coping skills to facilitate the transition process and build resilience. What coping skills are commonly recommended? Can one be more effective than another depending on specific situations? We hope that participants will gain new insights from two perspectives: for individuals going through the transition experience and for practitioners to bring new concepts to their clients and thereby expand effective client discussions.

Presenter: Dr. Richard Montanaro, Post University

Richard is on the adjunct faculty for Post University, has a consulting firm that deals with HR issues and career transition, has done extensive training for business and industry, and is very knowledgeable in the field of coping skills.

Staff from the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL), the State Department of Education (CSDE), and the Connecticut Career Resource Network (CCRN), wish to thank all the presenters for their participation. They would also like to recognize the planning committee members who were instrumental in the development of this conference:

Patrick Flaherty	Office of Research, CTDOL
Jessy George	CCRN, Office of Research, CTDOL
Muhammodu Giwa	Communications, CTDOL
Julie Greene	Manchester Community College
Dustin Nord	CBIA
Linda Kobylarz	CCA/CCCD Post University
Kathy Marioni	Director, Business Engagement CTDOL
Charles Goorhigian	Montville Job Center, CTDOL
Keith Sevigny	Goodwin University
Michael Shavel	Bridgeport Job Center, CTDOL
Heide Sulewski	Hartford Job Center, CTDOL
Sean McKeown	Education Consultant and CTE Unit Coordinator, SDE