



# CHOICES in EDUCATION

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## COMMUNITY

# Keeping the lights on for afterschool programs

Afterschool programs help students succeed in school and in life and provide invaluable support to communities. As we've seen this year, these programs play an especially important role when students, families, and communities are struggling.

Programs across the country have stepped up in the pandemic, providing virtual educational activities, delivering meals and enrichment kits, helping families bridge the digital divide, connecting people to social services, and continuing in-person care for the children of essential workers and first responders.

Unfortunately, a large majority of afterschool programs that were open in the fall of 2020 report they are straining to meet the needs of the students and families

they have long supported. National surveys of parents and afterschool providers conducted by Edge Research for the Afterschool Alliance, a nonprofit awareness and advocacy group, find that programs and parents are challenged by virtual learning; program budgets are inadequate to address new safety protocols and students' emerging needs; and students from low-income families are now less likely than others to have access to afterschool programs.

To underscore the value of afterschool programs and the need to invest in them, the Afterschool Alliance recently organized the 21st annual "Lights On Afterschool," the only national rally for afterschool. It took place throughout the fall and included local, state,

and national events – many of them virtual this year – showcasing the skills students hone and talents they develop at their afterschool programs. From virtual STEM fairs and art contests to car caravans and letter-writing to isolated nursing home residents, events focused on academics, civic engagement, STEM education, social and emotional wellbeing, bullying prevention, mental and physical health, and more.

"The strength and resilience afterschool programs demonstrated in 2020 was remarkable. Despite scarce resources, programs found ways to help students through what has been, for many families, the hardest of times," says Jodi Grant, executive director of the Afterschool Alliance. "However, there

aren't nearly enough afterschool programs to meet the need, especially now, with so many schools functioning virtually and with school schedules changing without warning. We need to invest much more in afterschool and summer learning programs."

To learn more about the Afterschool Alliance and "Lights On Afterschool," which will next be held on October 28, 2021, visit [afterschoolalliance.org](https://afterschoolalliance.org).

"In normal times, afterschool programs help students succeed by keeping them safe, inspiring them to learn, and by supporting working parents," says Grant. "During a pandemic, the support they provide is even more essential."

*Story courtesy of StatePoint Media*

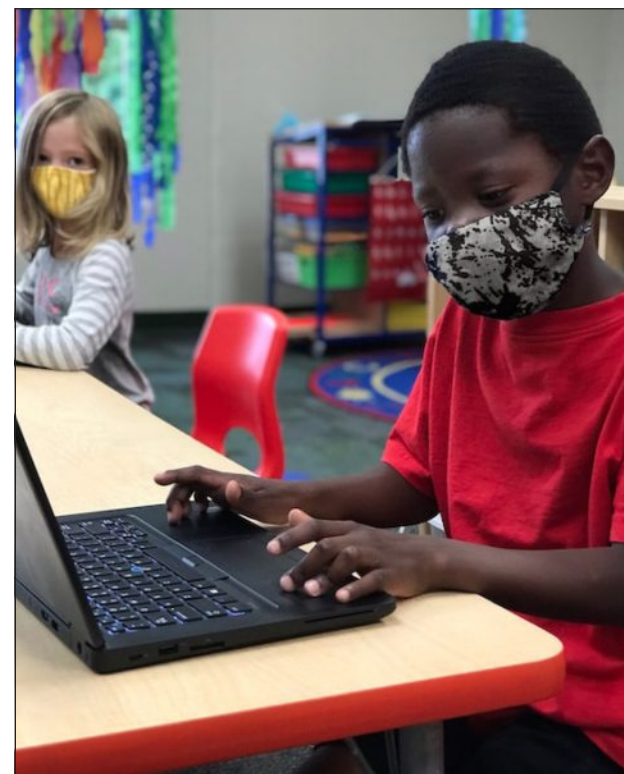


PHOTO COURTESY OF STATEPOINT MEDIA

Afterschool programs play a critical role for students, families, and communities whom may be struggling.

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## EARLY EDUCATION

# What to look for in an infant day care

It can be challenging to raise a baby even in the best of times, but many parents need additional support for the education and care of their young children amid the COVID-19 pandemic. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor, both parents work in nearly two-thirds of families with children. The number of working single parents is even higher.

However, as long as teachers and staff follow rigorous health and safety practices, day care centers are among the safest places for children right now.

"More than ever before, families are struggling with balancing the need to return to consistent routines with concerns about the possible health risks to their children," said Dr. Elanna Yalow, chief aca-

demical officer of KinderCare Learning Centers. "Our rigorous safety protocols give families confidence they can count on our programs when traditional support systems may not be available."

Although the decision to place your baby in someone else's care can be difficult, the benefits of day care can be significant, especially for children who start a program as babies. Consider these important factors when choosing an infant day care.

## Exceeding Recommended Guidelines

Parents will want to make sure their day care center follows Centers for Disease Control and Pre-

vention, American Academy of Pediatrics and local health department guidelines. These include masks and social distancing, restricted access to classrooms, consistent grouping of children, health screenings upon entry, handwashing throughout the day and frequent cleaning and sanitizing. In addition to knowing the steps teachers and staff are taking to keep children safe, ask about staff training and the checks and balances the center has in place to make sure written policies translate into best practices in classrooms.

## Teachers Who See Each Baby as an Individual

Responsive, caring teachers tend to each baby's spe-

cific needs. From the moment you meet them, they'll ask what your baby enjoys, what comforts him or her, what milestones your baby is working on and so forth. The best teachers see each baby as a unique person and work to meet your child wherever he or she is, whether that's watching for signs of tiredness and holding him or her or responding to your baby's babbling and coos as signs of early language development.

## Strong Communication

Trusting someone else to look after your bundle of joy is a tremendous leap of faith for many parents, particularly as safety-conscious providers are limiting access to their classrooms and parents may not be able to go any further than

the front door. That leap is easier if you know you'll receive updates about your child throughout the day. Whether you want videos and photos, phone calls or texts, or short notes about the things your child is doing while you're at work, talk with your potential provider about how often you want updates and what kind of information is most meaningful to you. While it's natural to feel a twinge of nervousness when you get a phone call from your child's day care, you should also be contacted with good news and friendly reminders.

For many parents, the most important thing is that their baby is safe, happy and flourishing in a loving, caring and engaging environment. Once they find this,

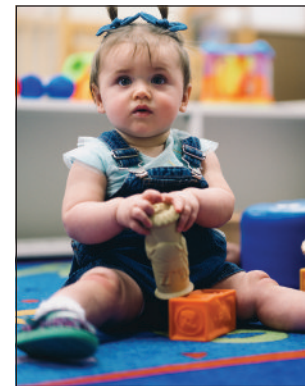


PHOTO COURTESY OF FAMILY FEATURES

As long as teachers and staff follow rigorous health and safety practices, day care centers are among the safest places for children right now.

they can rest assured they made the best decision for their family. Find more information and tips to find the right center at [kinder-care.com](http://kinder-care.com).

*Story courtesy of Family Features*




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## COMMUNITY

# How parents can utilize their local library

The COVID-19 pandemic has been challenging for everyone.

As the world adjusted to lockdowns, school closures and remote working, parents have been faced with especially unique challenges, and many of those challenges were still present a year after lockdowns began.

Finding productive ways for their children to fill their time has been an ongoing issue for parents since the pandemic began.

School-age children may not be going to school for full days, and many virtual learning programs also end around lunchtime.

But a familiar local resource may be just what parents need to keep their kids occupied at home on weekday afternoons.

Local libraries are in-

valuable community resources, and that value has become even more apparent during the pandemic.

Parents can utilize local libraries in various ways, each of which can help fill youngsters' time during those hours when school is not in session.

▪ **Online story time:** In normal times, many libraries host in person story time sessions for young children. Many libraries have been unable to host in person story time since the start of the pandemic. But those same libraries may have transitioned to online story time. For example, the New York Public Library in New York City hosts weekday story times through its website. During such sessions, librarians read books, sing songs and even share lit-

eracy tips. An archive of story times is available at [nypl.org/education/kids/storytime](https://nypl.org/education/kids/storytime), and many local libraries offer similar services.

▪ **Craft sessions:** Some libraries even offer free craft projects to members. Supplies can be picked up at the library on predetermined days of the week, and then families can work on the projects together at home or with other families through Zoom calls hosted by library employees. Parents can inquire with their local libraries to see if such programs are available in their communities.

▪ **Academic support:** Some local libraries even offer academic support, which can be especially valuable in the era of virtual learning when kids

have little one-on-one time with their teachers. Tutoring services may be available via a local library, which also may supply supplemental materials like interactive learning tools that can bring lessons to life.

Local libraries can help families confront the academic and social challenges posed by the pandemic.

*Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*

**Right:** Local libraries are invaluable community resources, and that value has become even more apparent during the pandemic.

PHOTO COURTESY OF METRO CREATIVE CONNECTION



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## RESOURCES



PHOTO COURTESY OF KZENON — ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

With the right tools and mindset, every student can have a strong spring semester.

## Ace the spring semester with the following tools and strategies

Maintaining a passion for school can be tough during the spring semester, particularly during an unusual academic year. Here is a round-up of tools and strategies to help motivate students and facilitate their success:

- **Outside counsel:** Now is a great time for students to meet with their academic advisor or counselor. Doing so can expand a student's knowledge of current and future opportunities and serve as a temperature check on their progress toward degree completion. Plus, talking to someone invested in one's success can provide the push needed to keep up the good work.

- **Advance calculations:** To solve the most challenging equations and embrace the actual theory of mathematical concepts, it's important to be equipped with an easy-to-use graphing calcu-

lator possessing all the latest functions. Boasting an advanced Computer Algebra System (CAS), Casio's fx-CG500 is good example of a reasonably-priced next-generation graphing calculator helping students enrolled in advanced math and science courses. Clear visuals are especially important for distance-learning, and this model's high-resolution, color, touchscreen LCD conveys a Natural Textbook display. Drag-and-drop functionality enables students to quickly and intuitively pull information from one representation into another. Meanwhile, split-screen functionality allows simultaneous viewing of functions and graphs.

- **Mobile hotspot:** A mobile hotspot can be a lifesaver, making remote-learners impervious to internet outages or bandwidth demands from other house-

hold members or roommates, helping ensure that they never miss a lesson or pop quiz.

- **Eliminate a common headache:** Students writing term papers can easily get bogged down in the tiring logistics of creating a bibliography. And while this task is necessary, it's unlikely to further a student's knowledge of a subject. Fortunately, there are apps available that automatically create bibliography entries in the style of a student's needs when they scan a book's barcode. Simplifying this task will free up much needed time and energy for students to research and actually write their papers.

With the right tools and mindset, every student can have a strong spring semester.

*Story courtesy of  
StatePoint Media*

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Reading to children can benefit them in myriad ways and provide a great way for parents to bond with their youngsters.

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## READING

# How kids benefit from being read to

Reading aloud to children is one of the joys of parenting. All children, whether they're infants, toddlers or school-aged, can benefit from being read to, and parents whose youngsters have grown up often look back on story time as some of their favorite moments as moms and dads.

Reading aloud to children is about more than just establishing a bond between parent and child. According to Reading Rockets, a national public media literacy initiative, children as young as infants can benefit from being read to. Infants can look at pictures as their parents point to them and say the names of the various objects within them. By drawing attention to the pictures and associating words with them and real-world objects, parents are helping infants learn the importance of language.

Kids of all ages can benefit from being read to, even after they learn to read on their own. The following are a handful of ways that reading aloud to children can benefit them.

- Reading to children dramatically expands their vo-

cabulary. A 2019 study published in the Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics found that young children whose parents read them five books a day enter kindergarten having heard roughly 1.4 million more words than kids who were never read to. The disparity is even significant when comparing kids who are periodically read to each day with kids who are read five books per day. Children who are read to daily may hear slightly less than 300,000 words prior to entering kindergarten, while those read five books per day will hear more than 1.4 million words.

- Reading to children expands their imaginations. The Northern Virginia Family Services reports that research has shown that children who activate their imaginations through being read to develop higher activity in the area of their brain that's responsible for cultivating mental images and deciphering and comprehending verbal cues. That heightened activity bolsters youngsters' imaginations and instills in them a greater fondness for reading.

- Reading can help kids learn to focus. Parents of young children no doubt know that such youngsters rarely sit still for any significant length of time. However, when being read to, young children, even those who are initially reluctant to engage in story time, will learn to sit still for the duration of the book. That can help them learn to focus, a benefit that will pay dividends when children begin school.

- Reading to children can speak to children's interests or emotional needs. Reading Rockets notes that children's favorite stories may speak to their emotional needs and interests. That's why so many youngsters insist on reading a favorite book over and over again. Though that's often boring for parents, it can benefit youngsters, who will eventually move on to other books.

Reading to children can benefit them in myriad ways and provide a great way for parents to bond with their youngsters.

*Story courtesy of Metro Creative Connection*



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Reading aloud to children is about more than just establishing a bond between parent and child.





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## CAREER GUIDANCE

# Online career fair gives students opportunities to explore future

By Terry Jacoby

For MediaNews Group

We could all use a little inspiration right now — and even some excitement about the future. And while the COVID-19 pandemic continues to have a significant impact on students from learning to career exploration, Junior Achievement of Southeastern Michigan (JASEM) is stepping up to help with an innovative program called “JA Inspire.”

The new virtual opportunity for eighth- through 12th-grade students will take place March 15-June 13, 2021. Through an online portal, students will enter a virtual exhibit hall and check out a wide variety of career opportunities with dozens of local businesses. All it takes is a few simple clicks.

Students will be able to download career information, videos and steps to take to pursue various careers in different industries. Educators, students and their parents can access the portal and information any time, from the comfort and safety of home. And the program is available at no cost to school systems or youths serving community-based organizations, and it's also adaptable for in-class or remote learning. Interested students may register at [jamichigan.org/inspiremi](http://jamichigan.org/inspiremi).

Sydney Lee, 15, who lives in Southfield, is excited about discovering what opportunities might be out there waiting for her.

“I will be participating in the career fair, which is where kids can go and try and figure out what profession they want to be in, so I'm excited to go and learn about different professions and which ones I might be interested in when I grow up,” says Sydney, a sophomore at Birmingham Groves High School. “Right

## FYI

The new virtual opportunity for eighth- through 12th-grade students will take place March 15-June 13. For more information, visit [jamichigan.org](http://jamichigan.org).

now I'm interested in psychology.”

Sydney likes that the career fair will be online because it will be more accessible to more students, and instead of running for just one or two days, it's for three months.

Sydney's brother, Jordan, 13, also plans to participate in the career fair.

“I'm looking forward to exploring the different options of what I might want to do in life,” says Jordan, who is in eighth grade at University of Detroit Jesuit High School.

Sydney and Jordan's father, Jason D. Lee, is the president and CEO of Junior Achievement of Southeastern Michigan and helped organize JA Inspire.

“Students will essentially have a one-stop shop where they can learn about different career pathways available throughout the region,” Lee says. “It's a virtual showcase that we hope will inspire and prepare young people for future success locally with Michigan companies. We want to keep our best and brightest students here.”

Participation in JA Inspire is open to companies and students in Wayne, Oakland, Livingston, Monroe, Washtenaw, Genesee, Lapeer, and St. Clair counties, and North Central Michigan. As many as 20,000 students are expected to participate.

Lee says the online event is urgently needed during COVID-19 because student internships, job shadowing, field trips and other onsite

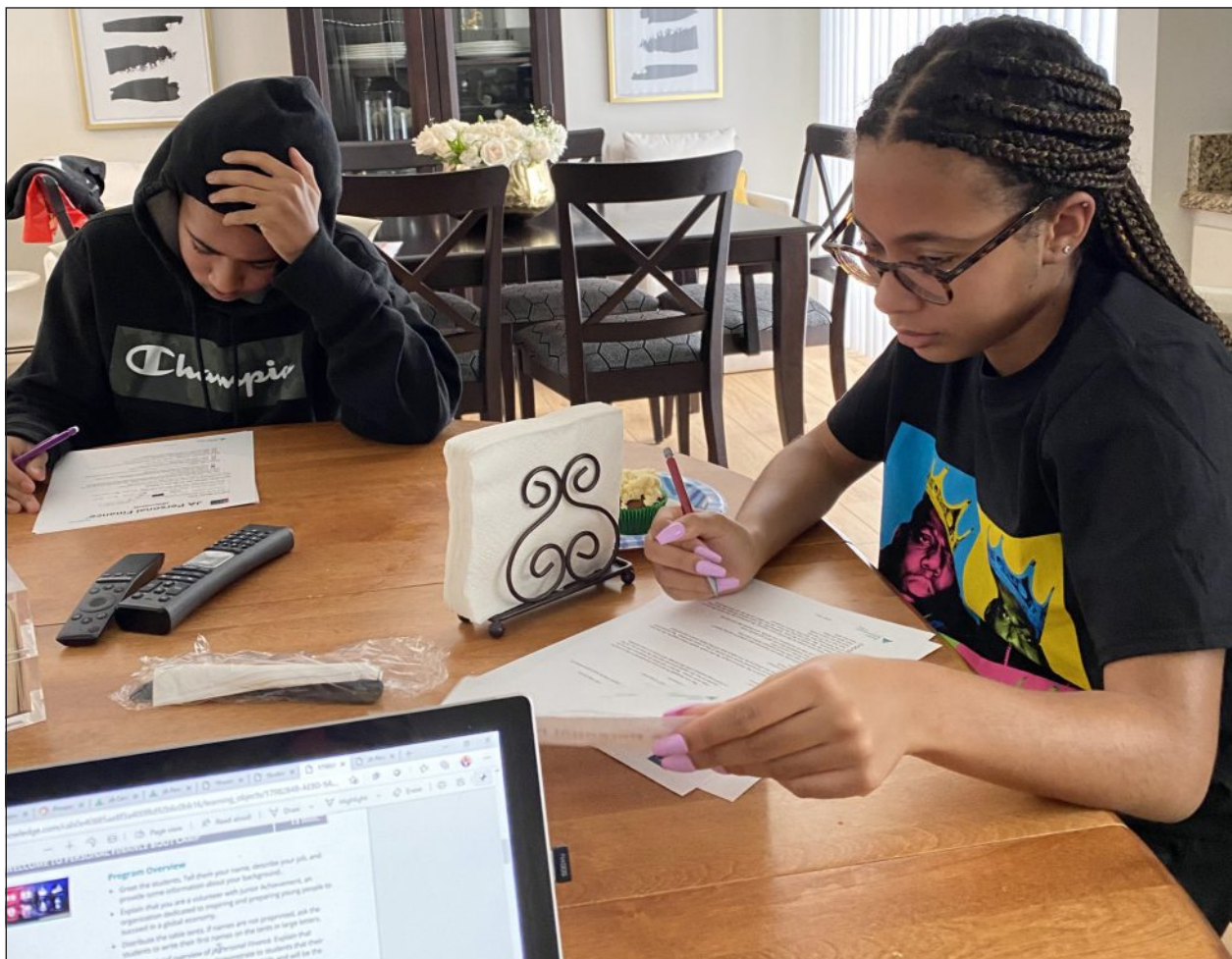


PHOTO COURTESY OF SHAWN LEE OF SHAWN LEE STUDIOS SOUTHFIELD, MI

Jordan Lee, 13, and his sister, Sydney, 15, of Southfield plan to participate in the JA Inspire career fair running March 15-June 13.

**“This is an area of passion for us — around entrepreneurship, supporting the next generation workforce, and equity and diversity in the workplace.”**

— Scott Mullan, JASEM vice chair

workplace learning experiences have largely been suspended due to the pandemic.

Gina Coleman, chief sales officer for MassMutual Great Lakes and JASEM board chair, says the mission at Junior Achievement of Southeastern Michigan is to inspire and prepare young people to succeed in

a global economy.

“That's exactly what JA Inspire is designed to do,” she says. “We encourage as many students, schools and businesses as possible to take advantage of this unique opportunity.”

Junior Achievement is seeking participation from at least 100 businesses showcasing careers, train-

ing resources and post-secondary opportunities in Michigan and nationwide. Companies that have already reserved online booths include title sponsor Delta Dental, AAA, Delta Air Lines, DTE Energy, EY, Henry Ford Health System, McDonalds of Michigan and many others.

“This is an area of passion for us — around entrepreneurship, supporting the next generation workforce, and equity and diversity in the workplace,” said Scott Mullan, JASEM vice chair. “JA Inspire is a way to show all of these students a wide range of opportunities that they're not going to be ex-

posed to on a day-to-day basis and help to influence their future career choices as well as our own recruiting.”

Founded nationally in 1919 and locally in 1949, Junior Achievement is the world's largest organization dedicated to educating students in grades K-12 about financial literacy, work readiness and entrepreneurship, reaching more than 10 million students across the globe. Sponsorship fees for participating businesses start at \$500 and support the operating costs of JA Inspire and JA's work in the region. For more information, visit [jamichigan.org](http://jamichigan.org).



## CAREERS

# Why a tech career might be right for you

If you have an interest in innovation, a passion for helping people and the confidence to let your creativity shine, there are exciting and rewarding career opportunities available to you in technology in almost every industry. From supporting the development of critical vaccines; building the next generation of electric vehicles; creating new and engaging ways to deliver distance learning; keeping air, food and water safe and sustainable; or bringing efficiencies to the delivery of government services, there is a career in tech waiting for you.

Even better, you don't necessarily need to be a computer whiz or math genius to land one of these jobs, as technical skills can often

be taught, but professional and personal skills are often more difficult to find. Those in the know say that a growing number of employers are more interested in creativity, organization, verbal and written communications skills and a willingness to be a team player and less in technical acumen.

"That's true for people joining the labor force for the first time, returning to the workforce, burned out or hitting a ceiling in their current job, or downsized out of a job through no fault of their own," said Todd Thibodeaux, president and CEO of CompTIA, the Computing Technology Industry Association.

It's a field that offers a certain amount of job security, too. The economic and

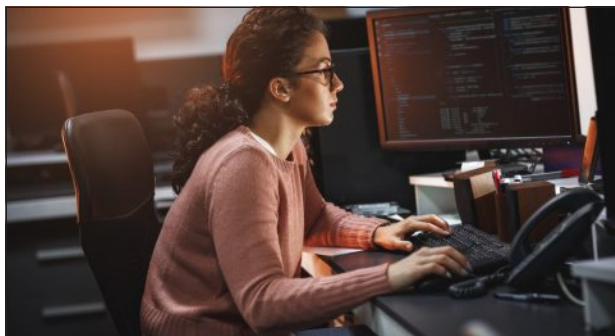


PHOTO COURTESY SOLISIMAGES / ISTOCK VIA GETTY IMAGES PLUS

Employers across the country continue to advertise job openings for tech workers.

employment disruptions brought on by the COVID-19 pandemic have had an impact on tech occupations, though not nearly to the degree that other industries have been affected. The unemployment rate for IT occupations in the U.S. stood at

2.4% in November 2020, below the national unemployment rate of 6.7%.

Employers across the country continue to advertise job openings for tech workers – there were nearly 200,000 listings in November 2020. These openings

were spread across many industries outside the technology sector, including financial services, manufacturing, retail, government, health-care and education. You'll also find great variety in the types of positions companies need to fill. They include application and software developers; tech support professionals, whose roles are increasingly important as more people work and learn from home; network analysts, architects and engineers; cybersecurity pros responsible for securing our data, devices and networks; and project managers tasked with keeping mission-critical projects on track.

There are a number of free resources available to help you learn more about tech careers:

▪ The Future of Tech ([futureoftech.org](https://futureoftech.org)) is a free and growing library of resources to get you up to speed on what's new and next in the world of technology.

▪ Cyberstates ([cyberstates.org](https://cyberstates.org)) is the definitive guide to information on the U.S. technology industry and workforce.

▪ If you're interested in cybersecurity, CyberSeek ([cyberseek.org](https://cyberseek.org)) has detailed information on the U.S. job market, including guidance on career paths and professional certifications.

▪ CompTIA ([comptia.org](https://comptia.org)) offers many tech career planning tools, including salary calculators and job search help.

*Story courtesy of StatePoint Media*

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- ▶ **Information Technology & Informatics** focuses on a broad base of computer-related skills and experiences including programming, data management, networking, mobile systems, ethics, and security. This degree prepares graduates for employment at the intersection of people and technology and is the perfect major for students interested in careers as application developers, business analysts, IT consultants, and network administrators.

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Designed for first year students and transfer students with 30 credit hours or less who major in either Digital Manufacturing Technology or Information Technology & Informatics, the CIT Success Kit includes:

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- **One year room and board scholarship** for a standard double room. The value of the room is \$6,296, and \$3,150 for the meal plan.
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