



WDB Meeting Minutes
September 19, 2025
7:30 A.M. – 9:00 A.M.

Members Present

Kimberly Baskett (Via Phone)
Jenny Batista
Nic Thomas
Cindy Line
Ashley Chambers
Kristina Houck
Ryan Breisch
Karyn Troxell
Crystal Houser
Brian Noecker
Ed Bernitsky
Debra Millman
Dr. Michael Stauffer
Alexia Pursley

Members Absent

Marianne Brown Egolf
Patricia Shermot
Christy Pisker
William Dorward
Michael Fischetti
Barry Unger
Peggy Kershner

WDB Staff Present

Amber Columbo
Megan Noll
Rory Stevenson
Jesenia Santos

Guests Present

Pamela Menet	County of Berks Director of Community & Economic Development
Derek Harris	County of Berks Economic Development Coordinator
David Hunter	County of Berks Executive Director of Planning Commission
Ashley Showers	County of Berks Assistant Director of Planning Commission
Michael Dunne	Equus Workforce Solutions – Regional Director
Nick Shirk	Education Data Systems Inc. Regional Director of Operations
Larry Melf	PA CareerLink® Berks County Operator
Aidelsa Calaman	PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator
Tristin Prostovich	PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Program Director
Gregg Shankle	PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Business Services Consultant
Dilika Tissera	PA CareerLink® Berks County Adult & Dislocated Worker Program Director
Elizabeth Reddinger	PA CareerLink® Berks County EARN Program Director
Amanda Wilson	PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Director
Mike Dopkin	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Assistant Regional Director
Gabriela Martinez	Spotlight PA – Quality of Life Reporter
Christie Brown	Berks County Public Libraries – Assistant Director

This meeting was held in person on September 19, 2025. WDB Chairperson, Ms. Batista called the meeting to order at 7:35 a.m.

Ms. Columbo announced that the meeting was being recorded for minutes' purposes only and would be deleted after their completion. Board members were asked to state their names when commenting, making, or seconding any motion to assist staff in taking the minutes.

Ms. Columbo introduced Kelsey Simpson and Brian Nottingham from TPMA to present findings and recommendations contained in the Berks Workforce 2030 Report. Following the presentation there was an open Question and Answer session.

Ms. Columbo introduced Ed Bernitsky, who is assuming former WDB member Mark Pinkasavage's position as a board member. Mr. Pinkasavage had resigned in June. Mr. Bernitsky is the Training Director for the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) Local 743.

Ms. Batista asked the members if there were any items the board would like to have removed from the consent agenda. Hearing none the board will move to adopt the consent agenda. No objections or abstentions were made.

I. Executive Committee Report

Ms. Batista then invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Budget vs Expenditures report. Ms. Noll reported on the budget and actual expenditure results through June 2025, showing all expenses are within budget. However, there was higher carry-over to PY2025 for WIOA and TANF due to under expenditure of subcontractors' budgets.

Next, Ms. Noll presented a revised PY2025 budget with the following changes: (1) Adjustments for additional WIOA, TANF, and discretionary grants carry-over funds, and (2) Reduction of \$179,235 from WDB Operational Costs due to the elimination of the WDB Assistant Director and Part-Time Records Clerk positions.

Ms. Columbo asked the board members for a recommendation to approve the PY2025 budget. Ryan Breisch motioned for a recommendation, and Ashley Chambers seconded the motion. All board members affirmatively voted their approval with no abstentions.

II. Planning Committee Report

Ms. Millman reported that the planning committee's 4-year local and regional plan will be a source of reference for the next several years. Mr. Stevenson distilled the plan's 135 pages into a 14-page summary to enhance understanding of the plan goals and make sure the board can achieve those goals. Ms. Columbo stated that this is a resourceful document to really capture what is happening, where we are headed, and will help us in two years when the plan is required to be modified.

Mr. Stevenson shared that the research narrative and recommendations presented this morning by TPMA will be essential in helping us focus on the modification process, incorporating relevant Berks Workforce 2030 report information in the required PY2026 multi-year plan updates.

III. Access & Opportunities Committee Report

Ms. Chambers referred the board to the "By the Numbers" report and provided a brief update. All the numbers from PY2024 are up except for Unemployment Compensation (UC) calls, which are down a little bit due to UC staff located within the PA CareerLink® Berks County and scheduling in-person appointments.

We learned about PA CareerLink® Berks County on the move which is taking PA CareerLink® services to community organizations and to different areas of the county so that it reduces the barriers for residents being able to access those services. We look forward to hearing how it goes as they connect with different organizations throughout the county. Lastly, the fall job fair will take place on October 23, 2025, at the Redner's Event Center at the Reading Fightin' Phils Stadium.

IV. Youth Committee Report

Ms. Columbo reported on the Youth Committee in the absence of Trish Shermot and shared that the 3rd Annual “Undecided Career Fair” is scheduled for April 16, 2026, and will be held in the multi-purpose room located at the County of Berks South Campus building. Ms. Columbo has been working with Tristin Prostovich, Terry Hill (BBEC), and Stacey Dunleavy (BCIU); to get the dates secured early enough to inform local school districts so they can prepare for the event. Last year 10 school districts and 54 students were in attendance. The current goal is to increase school district participation and reach and engage over 100 students. School districts that attended last year now have a better understanding of the purpose of this event. If a high school senior does not have a post-graduation secondary education or employment plan by April 1, 2026, the goal is to encourage their attendance.

V. Training & Industry Partnership Committee Report

Ms. Pursley reported on the Training and Industry Partnership Committee and informed the board that applications are open for the PY2025 Incumbent Worker Training Services (IWT) funds. PY2024’s IWT allocation of \$100K had less than 50% of the funds expended. The IWT matching funds is money the WDB targets to eligible employers in the WDB priority sectors of healthcare, manufacturing, and construction, to upskill and retain incumbent workers including registered apprenticeship through related technical instruction training. Ms. Pursley mentioned that Rory Stevenson is an excellent source of information about what training is eligible, how to use funds, and how to navigate the application process.

Ms. Pursley shared that a new Healthcare Dream Team is being initiated by the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) who are looking to recruit three to five young healthcare professional volunteers to resonate with younger (K-12) classrooms and public event audiences, through sharing of their personal education attainment and career experience in career awareness presentations, starting in the spring 2026. Ms. Pursley asked anyone who has connections in the healthcare industry and is cognizant of any highly engaged and motivated young professionals that could be recommended as volunteers for this initiative, to please feel free to reach out to either Stacey Dunleavy (BCIU), Keith Stamm (GRCA), Rory Stevenson, or Ms. Pursley herself, and connections can be facilitated.

The WDB members were advised that the next Greater Reading Healthcare Connection Industry Partnership (IP) meeting is scheduled for Friday, September 26, 2025, at the GRCA training center on Commerce Dr. in Wyomissing. Ms. Pursley reported that the 2025 Annual Greater Reading Manufacturing Summit will be held on October 28, 2025 from 8am until 12PM (noon) at Reading Area Community College’s Miller Center for the Performing Arts. The keynote presentation will be implementing generative AI in manufacturing.

VI. Director of Workforce Report

Ms. Columbo shared her Director of Workforce report by discussing the board meeting schedule for 2026 and the proposal for in-person meetings in June and September. If anyone on the board is willing to host an in-person meeting, please let Ms. Columbo know by the end of October so she can put it on our sunshine act posting with the county. Ms. Columbo announced due to the Juneteenth holiday, the board meeting will take place on Thursday, June 18, 2026.

Next, Ms. Columbo announced a new initiative she wants to implement in 2026 to increase board member engagement and understand what board members do in their day-to-day roles. Ms. Columbo stated she will

strategically pick three to four board members from different sectors and roles. Another feature she would like to implement is to visit each board member within their place of employment to learn more.

Ms. Columbo then provided an update about board staffing and structure. With Dan Fogarty's retirement, the WDB staff are now a team of four with one unfilled position. The vacancy is currently on hold as Ms. Columbo and Ms. Menet work with County leadership to determine the needs of the department in the future.

Following the Director of the Workforce Report, Ms. Columbo opened the market intelligence discussion.

Mr. Breisch shared that the Literacy Council will co-locate into Tec Centro's facility on S 6th St. Mr. Breisch believes this will be a good programmatic move since staff are working very closely with Tec Centro already. Mr. Breisch mentioned they lost daily foot traffic on the move to West Lawn but look forward to seeing that increase once they are moved into the new space.

Mr. Thomas reported that there is good news from the staffing world, as they see things pick up in Q2. Mr. Thomas mentioned Gage Talent and Business Solutions will be having a garden party themed to celebrate their 40th anniversary celebration on October 1, 2025, from 4:30pm-7:30pm.

Dr. Stauffer shared that things have been going exceptionally well at the Berks Career and Technology Centers (BCTC), who have had their highest enrollment to date. The healthcare program, which is the second highest requested program behind cosmetology, has expanded this year and added a fourth instructor. The internal print shop has closed, which wasn't a program fulfilled by students, but it was a service that we offered to the school districts and other businesses throughout the county. That space is now being converted into what will be a state-of-the-art health occupations classroom full of simulation mannequins, electrocardiogram (EKG) machines as well as some pharmaceutical pieces. The center is currently in talks with Tulpehocken Area School District and has purchased a 26-acre property about 10 minutes north of our West Campus location in Leesport and is looking to build a stem agriculture campus. The campus will have classrooms and lab spaces with large animal holding pens and plans to partner with the school district on a veterinary assistant program that ties into the agricultural piece of Berks County. This would be one if not the only training center in the state that would really tie that large animal piece and not just focus on small animals such as primarily dogs and cats. This program will essentially replace the loss of our horticulture program that will be closing at the end of the school year. The veterinary system program will hopefully be up and running in 2027/2028. We have a new director of adult and continuing education, Mr. Phil Harris, who is replacing Ms. Kim Dehart, who retired in June 2025. We are excited and are hoping over the next couple of years that we can really expand some of the opportunities there to fully take advantage of education in the evenings.

VII. **Public Comment** – Ms. Columbo then asked for any comment from the public. There was no public comment presented.

CY2025 Meetings - The next 2025 Berks Workforce Development Board Meeting will be held virtually on **Friday, December 12, 2025 @ 7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.**

Following a motion to adjourn, Ms. Batista announced that the meeting officially adjourned at 9:53 am.