



WDB Meeting Minutes (Hybrid)
September 20, 2024
7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.

Members Present

Kimberly Baskett (In Person)
Jenny Batista (In Person)
Ryan Breisch (In Person)
Dr. Karen Campbell (In Person)
Ashley Chambers (In Person)
William Dorward (MS Teams)
Dayana Groff (MS Teams)
Kristina Houck (MS Teams)
Crystal Houser (MS Teams)
Peggy Kershner (In Person)
Cindy Line (In Person)
Debra Millman (MS Teams)
Brian Noecker (In Person)
Mark Pinkasavage (In Person)
Dr. Michael Stauffer (MS Teams)
Alexia Pursley (In Person)
Patricia Shermot (In Person)
Nic Thomas (In Person)
Karyn Troxell (In Person)

Members Absent

Marianne Brown Egolf
Michael Fischetti
Christy Pisker
Barry Unger

WDB Staff Present

Daniel Fogarty
Amber Columbo
Megan Noll
Rory Stevenson
Alycia Arters

Guests Present

Derek Harris	County of Berks Economic Development Coordinator
Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Berks County Employment Services Team Supervisor
David Dopkin	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Assistant Regional Director
David Genaro	Equus Workforce Solutions – Regional Director
Tristin Prostovich	PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Program Supervisor
Larry Melf	PA CareerLink® Berks County Operator
MaryBeth Williams	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Regional Director
Amanda Wilson	PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Supervisor
Nathaniel Beckham	PA Department of Labor & Industry
Melissa Lewis	County of Berks IT
Carl Long	County of Berks IT

Nicholas Shirk	PA CareerLink® Berks County Site Administrator
Ruben Pachay	PA Department of Labor & Industry
Yanimer Serrano	PA Department of Labor & Industry – Rapid Response
Loretta Lininger	PA Statewide Workforce System Project (Title II Adult Education)

This meeting was held in a hybrid format, with in-person attendance available at the County of Berks South Campus location and virtually through Microsoft Teams on September 20, 2024. Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present. WDB Vice-chairperson, Ms. Jenny Batista called the meeting to order at 7:32 a.m.

Ms. Batista informed the members that in this hybrid environment, she has asked Mr. Fogarty to help her facilitate the meeting. Mr. Fogarty 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 or making or seconding any motion to assist staff in taking the minutes.

Mr. Fogarty welcomed a special guest, Loretta Lininger is a colleague of WDB member, Ryan Breisch. Loretta is with the statewide Workforce Development System Liaison Project connecting Adult Education programs with the workforce development system across the Commonwealth.

I. Executive Committee Report

Ms. Batista introduced our new board members as follows; Ms. Cindy Line – Reading Area Community College (Title II), Mr. Brian Noecker – East Penn Manufacturing and Mr. Nic Thomas – Gage Personnel.

Mr. Fogarty asked if there were any questions on the June 21, 2024, board meeting minutes. There were none. Mr. Fogarty then asked for a motion to approve the minutes, Mr. Ryan Breisch voiced a motion to approve, and Dr. Karen Campbell seconded. The vote taken was unanimous in the affirmative and there was no further discussion or abstentions.

Mr. Fogarty facilitated the election of officers for January 1, 2025 – December 31, 2026. Today we are electing a Chair and Vice-Chair, with a reminder the WDB Chair must be from the Business community. Patricia Shermot nominated Jenny Batista as a qualified candidate for the Chair term. Mr. Fogarty asked if there were any other nominations for the Chair term, there were none. Dr. Karen Campbell seconded Ms. Shermot's motion to nominate Jenny Batista for the Chair term, effective January 1, 2025. The vote taken was unanimous in the affirmative and there were no abstentions. Peggy Kershner moved to nominate Karen Troxell as a qualified candidate for the Vice-Chair term. Mr. Fogarty asked if there were any other nominations for Vice-Chair, there were none. Ashley Chambers seconded the nomination of Karen Troxell for the Vice-Chair term, effective January 1, 2025. The vote taken was unanimous in the affirmative and there were no abstentions.

Mr. Fogarty informed the board that we have two other elected positions, Board Secretary, currently held by Mr. Fogarty, and Board Treasurer, currently held by Ms. Noll. There are no plans for re-electing these two positions at this time, as we are asking our County Solicitor to review the Board officer requirements pending an update to our local by-laws. Should we need

an election for either or both of these officers, such election can occur at the December 13, 2024, board meeting.

Mr. Fogarty reviewed the PY 2023 4th Quarter WIOA Title I Performance Outcomes, where the WDB failed to receive the desired “green check mark” signifying successful attainment of negotiated results for the program year. Ms. Columbo continues to work with the contractors and PA Department of Labor & Industry (L&I) to resolve any discrepancies.

Mr. Fogarty next reviewed the PY2024 and PY2025 negotiated goals for our next two program years while noting that Ms. Columbo did excellent work negotiating acceptable goals for the two years. Ms. Columbo informed the board that the goal is to push our contractors to strive for continuous improvement of customer service within the one-stop. Ms. Columbo also informed the board that our local contract goals are in line with, or close to, the negotiated goals. Mr. Thomas inquired if we are getting better numbers, and the State wants higher numbers, does this have to do with helping other areas across the Commonwealth? Ms. Columbo responded that, yes, it’s a balancing act to help the commonwealth overall. Ms. Houser then stated that, from the perspective of the State, there is one Workforce system across the commonwealth to which each local area contributes. Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve the negotiated goals. Ms. Troxell made a motion to approve, and Ms. Baskett seconded. The vote taken was unanimous in the affirmative and there were no abstentions.

II. Finance Committee Report

Ms. Batista invited Ms. Noll to comment on the Finance Committee’s report. Referring to the PY 2023 Final Budget vs. Expenditure Report through June 2024, Ms. Noll reported that expenditures at year end were lower than anticipated for most programs creating a larger carry-over available at the beginning of PY 2024.

Ms. Noll proposed a revision to the PY 2024 budget that includes the following changes: (1) an increase of \$100,0000 for On-The Job Training (OJT) due to the negotiated contract goals, (2) an increase of \$91,861 for the year-round TANF Youth services contract due to unplanned carry-over, (3) an addition of a \$20,000 grant award to host a PA CareerLink® Awareness Day, (4) an addition of \$161,201 to hire two community outreach coordinators under the Operator contract, and (5) an increase of \$101,097 to discretionary grant awards due to higher carry-over.

Mark Pinkasavage moved to approve the PY 2024 revised budget as presented, and Nic Thomas seconded the motion. All members approved the PY 2024 revised budget, with one abstention from Peggy Kershner.

III. One Stop Oversight Committee Report

Ms. Kershner informed the board of the upcoming Fall Job Fair being held on Monday October 14, 2024, at the Double Tree from 1:00PM to 5:00PM.

Ms. Columbo briefed members on the Business Services Team (BST) Statement of Work, currently in the renewal year. Mr. Fogarty reminded the board that, if your business might have any interest in submitting a proposal, you should abstain from the vote of approval. Ashley Chambers made a motion to approve the Business Services Statement of Work for the new Request for Proposals (RFP) with services to begin July 1, 2025. The motion was seconded by

Kim Baskett, and the vote taken was unanimous in the affirmative to approve with no abstentions.

Ms. Kershner referred the board to the PY 2023 4th Quarter 'By the Numbers' Report and briefly reviewed the report overall, There has been an increase on most of the numbers from PY2023 to PY2024 as shown on the report. Mr. Fogarty mentioned that the measures are indeed quite positive, and we are pleased that the ongoing outreach efforts conducted by our contractors has helped to help drive the increased foot traffic.

Next, Ms. Columbo informed the board of the potential move of the PA CareerLink® building location next year. Identifying alternate locations for the one-stop was part of last year's Operator RFP which resulted in our current contract with EDSI which began on July 1, 2024. Nick Shirk, our new PA CareerLink® Site Administrator, has been doing an excellent job with exploring appropriate options and has brought forward an attractive opportunity in Wyomissing on Berkshire Blvd. Ms. Columbo reported that we do not yet know for sure if this a preferable location and we will need further discussions before we are ready to make a final decision on the move. Ms. Noll mentioned to the board that a new location would have a significant cost increase to the partner budget.

Ms. Baskett noted that the Fall Job Fair is being on a State holiday, and suggested there could be some missed employer and partner participation as a result. In addition, being a regular school day, perhaps some high schools could bus older students to the to the job fair. Mr. Fogarty explained that the chosen date was primarily driven by extremely limited availability of the venue this Fall, with only one other date in early September that was not favorable. Mr. Fogarty stated that we decided to try Columbus Day, as it is not normally a holiday for most private employers, and that some high school seniors might be able to attend who otherwise would be in school. The results will be evaluated following the Job Fair to determine if the scheduling "plusses" outweighed the "minuses" for future planning.

V. Youth Committee Report

Ms. Columbo referred the board to a second Statement of Work for Title I Youth services, currently in the renewal year. The Statement of Work will be included in an RFP to be issued for selection of a contractor with a start date of July 1, 2025. Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve the Title I Youth Statement of work, and a vote was motioned by Peggy Kershner and seconded by Dr. Karen Campbell. The vote taken was unanimous in the affirmative to approve with no abstentions.

Ms. Columbo mentioned there are a lot of updates in the youth report but wanted to draw attention to our Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program with a goal of 50 paid work experiences for the summer, which was reached by our contractor. Our focus is on expanding the program outside of summer and have targeted year-round work experience opportunities for students for entry-level or career pathway placements. We have also set an overall goal for local high school workshop expansion to more than 9 of the 18 school districts.

Ms. Batista asked if this is a goal sent by TANF, Ms. Columbo explained that the WDB establishes annual contractor goals that align with our available TANF funding and how the

program purposes the funds to serve eligible youth. Ms. Columbo explained that, as part of our latest TANF-Youth RFP, proposers were asked how they could serve more of the school districts with these workshops. In addition, Ms. Columbo reported on the feedback from a recent survey that went out to the school district internship coordinators to better connect our PA CareerLink® Young Adult program with youth who are in need of our programming.

Ms. Baskett informed the board that, this year, OVR doubled the funding for the summer employment programs available through OVR. Paid work experience is a valuable program to help students bridge from high school. Ms. Baskett informed the board that her local district office expects be flat funded next year and asked what OVR can do to help encourage the state to find more funding for more deserving students to be employed over the summer. Ms. Columbo responded that the WDB's TANF Youth funds are decreasing, however, this common interest could affect a possible partnership with OVR and Title I WIOA programming to help close the funding gap. Ms. Columbo reminded members that our last TANF Youth RFP was limited to a single contract, rather than two contracts as in the past, due to the dwindling funding stream. Ms. Baskett is willing to talk to anyone who is interested in learning more about the many impressive success stories and on how such public funding has made a tremendous impact in Berks County.

Mr. Stevenson provided the update for our Business Education Partnership (BEP) Grants as follows:

- As of the BEP V grant conclusion in August, all four of our grant partners have successfully completed their projects.
- Annual Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC) "What's So Cool about Manufacturing®" middle school video contest has become popular and now has a waitlist for employers to join!
- Dream Team Berks – volunteer group, connected with over 4500 students in more than 90 classrooms to make them aware of the personal and professional benefits related to careers in manufacturing.
- Both the Berks and Reading/Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center's (BCTC, RMCTC) annual Career Camps were highly successful, meeting their enrollment goals.
- Berks County Intermediate Unit has completed development of the alternative employment-related Math Curriculum to be targeted to high school seniors with no post-secondary education plans and expectations of entering the labor force following graduation. The new applied math curriculum is a result of employer provided feedback and it is ready to be distributed to the 18 school districts upon request.

Mr. Stevenson concluded by advising the members that a BEP VI grant proposal was successfully submitted in July, with the Berks WDB awarded its full request for the next round of BEP funding for the period of September 1, 2024, through June 30, 2026. The WDB is again partnering with both Career and Technology Centers for their annual 6-8 grade Career Camps and with MRC for its "What's So Cool about Manufacturing®" middle school video contest and PA Dream Team Berks K-12 career awareness activity in the 2024/25 and 2025/26 school years.

VI. Training and Industry Partnership (T&IP) Report

Ms. Pursley conducted the report out of the August 15 T&IP committee meeting as follows:

- The committee reviewed the revised Berks WDB Industry Sector Priorities (2024-2029) and Employment Retention/Layoff Aversion (ER/LA) Strategy approved by the full board in June 2024.
- As a result of the WDB approval of the revised Industry Sector Priorities and ER/LA Strategy, healthcare-related support occupations have been added to the Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) funding plan as eligible for Title I matching funds reimbursement.
- With the removal of Logistics/Transportation from the WDB Industry Sector Priorities, training that had been considered eligible for Registered Apprenticeship (RA) Title I matching funds reimbursement has been discontinued with the exception of Heavy & Tractor Trailer Drivers (CDL), Industrial Truck & Tractor Operator, and Mechanic & Diesel Engine Specialist that, based on other sector employer feedback that employ these occupations, will remain as ancillary training to these appropriate sectors. In addition, non-apprenticed CDL training has also been added as ancillary to the IWT funding plan.
- Final PY23 IWT/RA obligations/expenditures were shared. Full expenditure failed to meet expectations and the committee was reminded that a reduced budget of \$100K has been approved for PY24.
- The approved PY24 High Priority Occupations list for the Berks Workforce Development Area was shared with the committee.
- Industry Sector Updates:
 - Healthcare –
 - The next Greater Reading Healthcare Connections Industry Partnership (IP) meeting is scheduled for September 26.
 - The CNA→LPN apprenticeship project that had partnered with Reading Area Community College (RACC) under an L&I grant has been suspended. At the request of RACC administration and with WDB staff agreement, it has been determined that, due to RACC's inability to secure a qualified program coordinator, the apprenticeship program development and an application for registered status was unlikely to be realized in the remaining grant period of performance. The PA DOL&I Apprenticeship & Training Office will be advised and next steps regarding targeted grant funds will be ascertained.
 - Final outcomes of PSU-Berks participation in the Project RECONNECT grant project was shared with the committee. Two local students, who had “stopped out” due to financial challenges, were re-enrolled and completed their respective nursing and Life Sciences programs.
 - Construction –
 - The committee has been advised that employment/apprenticeships is growing, and biddable construction projects continue to be on the rise.
 - Manufacturing –
 - The next GRCA Advanced Mfg. IP will take place on September 10 and will be an in-person event at Brentwood Industries with a facility tour.

- The committee was advised that application for WEDnet PA training funds has been delayed due to administrative changes at the State level.
- Local Education Agency Program Updates –
 - BCTC enrollment is at an all-time high with enrollment in all program clusters strong. Precision Machining Technology has been removed from probation status and is now growing a waitlist.
 - PSU -Berks filled this year's Practical Nursing cohort and are taking applications for next year. Healthcare and manufacturing related evening programs are leading the way in Continuing Ed enrollments.
 - The committee was advised of new RACC construction and campus facility renovation projects.

VII. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee Report

Ms. Chambers informed the board the DEI minutes are included in the packet. In addition, Ms. Chambers informed the committee that a hard copy of the *Building an Inclusive Workforce* guide was included and encouraged to be shared within their own business and other business partners as a hiring resource.

VII. Planning Committee Report

Ms. Millman informed the board that the Planning Committee has been quite busy with two full meetings since June which focused on developing five goals for our upcoming four-year plan. Ms. Millman also noted that, unfortunately, the original RFP for the Post Pandemic Talent Demographic study did not result in a contractor being selected, and a new RFP has been issued. Mr. Fogarty mentioned that while we were disappointed, in the end, the initial RFP did not result in a proposer whom the Committee found to be capable. We now look forward to better results from the reissued RFP.

Mr. Fogarty reviewed five proposed goals for the upcoming 4-Year plan as they have been reviewed by the Planning and Youth committees who are recommending their adoption. He also reminded members that they previously approved our revised industry sector priorities in June 2024. Following an overview of the proposed goals, Ms. Troxell moved that the WDB adopt the goals and Dr. Campbell seconded the motion. With no other discussion, the members unanimously approved and adopted the goals. There were no abstentions,

VIII. COO Report

Mr. Fogarty, WDB COO, presented his COO report.

- Our latest Berks County Workforce Development Board communication piece highlighted our PA CareerLink® Berks County awareness day celebration on September 11, 2024. This was a well-attended event with East Penn Manufacturing, the County of Berks / Berks Heim, and SunSweet featured employers and 444 job seekers in attendance. Ms. Columbo thanked the Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) for the additional funding to hold this year's event, our attendance was doubled in 2024 from 2023. Ms. Columbo will ask our one-stop Operator how they might manage similar, but smaller scale events, on a quarterly basis to continuously build community awareness about services within the one-stop.

- Mr. Fogarty noted the amazing stability of our local seasonally adjusted local unemployment rate which has remained historically low, between 3.4% - 3.5% for the past 18 months. Yet, we can turnout 1,750 people at a semi-annual job fair demonstrating unequivocally that Berks County residents want to work in good jobs offered by local employers! This past week we received our much-anticipated report from the PA Center for Workforce Information & Analysis (CWIA) of “prime working age” (25-54) adults and “working age” (25-64) adults in Berks County. The data from 2023, show that both very important LFPRs have fully now recovered from 2019 and remain notably above those for the Commonwealth of PA!

Labor Force Participation Rates				
	Ages 25-54		Ages 25-64	
	Berks County	Pennsylvania	Berks County	Pennsylvania
2018	90.4%	87.1%	86.6%	82.9%
2019	90.4%	87.4%	87.0%	83.1%
2020	X	X	X	X
2021	86.8%	86.8%	83.0%	82.8%
2022	90.2%	88.1%	85.8%	83.8%
2023	90.5%	88.6%	86.9%	84.4%

IX. Market Intelligence Discussion

Following the COO Report, Mr. Fogarty opened the market intelligence discussion.

Mr. Pinkasavage relayed a conversation he had this week with a local construction contractor who is worried about having sufficient skilled labor available for a number of large projects coming on line over the next few months, including two of the largest construction projects we have ever seen. These two jobs alone may require 200 local electricians out of the IBEW’s total 500 members!

Mr. Thomas from Gage Personnel informed the board that local hiring demand from local clients has fluctuated a bit in 2024, as quarter 1 was slower, quarter 2 was very strong and, in quarter 3 over the summer, we saw things slow down with production demand slowing and growing uncertainty due to an election year. These factors will keep us on a little bit of a pause for the remainder of 2024.

Ryan Breisch shared that they continue to see growing interest from local employers for English as a second language (ESL) education in the workplace. The WDB’s task force report and its recommendations from 2023 continue to be relevant to the opportunities and challenges at hand. Mr. Thomas inquired about the average length of time for a typical ESL course. Mr. Breisch responded that it takes about 60 hours of instruction for participants to achieve measurable gains, or about 12 weeks for each course level. Besides many local residents whose primary language is Spanish, Mr. Breisch reported an increasing number of French Creole speakers in need of ESL support here in Berks County. Ms. Batista confirmed that this is a very important opportunity for workforce development and that we all need to continue to boost local

awareness of the many resources available in this area. Ms. Troxell noted that this is increasingly an area of focus at Penske establishments across the nation.

X. Public Comment – Mr. Fogarty then asked for any comment from the public. There was no public comment presented.

CY2024 Meetings - The next 2024 Berks Workforce Development Board Meeting will be held virtually via MS Teams on **Friday, December 13, 2024 @ 7:30A.M. – 9:00A.M.**

Following a motion to adjourn, Ms. Batista announced that the meeting officially adjourned at 9:01 am.