

**BERKS COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
(WDB)**

**7:30 a.m.
June 17, 2022**

Meeting Summary

Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Ms. Jenny Batista
Ms. Auria Bradley
Dr. Karen Campbell
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Mr. John DeVere
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Ms. Yvelisse Gonzalez
Mr. Robert Harrop
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Mr. Thomas McNelis
Mr. Scott Mengle
Mr. James Nichols
Mr. Richard Olmos
Ms. Alexia Pursley
Mr. Michael Rowley
Mr. Barry Unger

Members Absent

Ms. Debra Antol
Mr. William Dorward
Ms. Marianne Egolf
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Ms. Debra Millman
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Ms. Karyn Troxell
Mr. David Turner

Staff and Guests Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

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| Mr. Daniel Fogarty | Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff |
| Ms. Megan Noll | Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff |
| Ms. Matika Palmer | Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff |
| Ms. Patricia Spencer | Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff |
| Mr. Rory Stevenson | Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff |
| Ms. Amber Columbo | PA CareerLink® Berks County Young Adult Program Director |
| Mr. Angel Figueroa | I-Lead Adult Education Center |
| Ms. Darleen Garcia | Berks Latino Workforce Development Corp. |
| Mr. David Genaro | Equus Workforce Solutions |
| Ms. Helen Konnick | PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator |
| Mr. Andre Hardy | Educational Data Systems, Inc. |
| Mr. Robert Kerecz | PA CareerLink® Berks County ES Team Supervisor |
| Mr. Larry Melf | Educational Data Systems, Inc. |
| Mr. Hector Torres | I-Lead Adult Education Center |
| Dr. Anna Weitz | Retired RACC President, Co-Chairperson Ad Hoc Taskforce |
| Ms. Marybeth Williams | Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO) |
| Dr. Anne Zayaitz | Retired Kutztown University Provost |
| Ms. Heather Berger | County of Berks Information Systems |
| Mr. Malcolm Townes | County of Berks Information Systems |

All Board members and guests participated in the meeting via the Microsoft Teams virtual meeting or teleconference call-in option. The meeting was called to order by Ms. Gage-Linderman at 7:35 a.m. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being streamed for the public via YouTube through the County's website and was being recorded for minutes purposes only and that the recording would be deleted. An attendance roll call was taken, and a quorum was present. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Berger for her assistance in the live streaming through the County's website.

There was no consent agenda for this meeting and all action items will be addressed at the appropriate place on the published agenda.

Ms. Gage-Linderman called for a motion to approve the March 18, 2022 Meeting Minutes. Mr. Olmos so moved; Ms. Batista seconded the motion, and all members approved the Minutes as distributed. There were no abstentions.

Introducing the Executive Committee Report, Ms. Gage-Linderman welcomed Ms. Yvelisse Gonzalez, Acting District Administrator, Office of Vocational Rehabilitation for Berks and Schuylkill Counties, to the Board. Ms. Gonzalez was appointed by the County Commissioners on May 1.

Ms. Gage-Linderman also welcomed Ms. Alexis Pursley to her first meeting as a Board member.

Ms. Gage-Linderman noted that Mr. Russell Showers, who served as Vice-Chair, resigned from the Board in April 2022 due to a career change. Ms. Gage-Linderman stated that Ms. Jenny Batista has agreed to serve as Vice-Chairperson. The Executive Committee unanimously supported Ms. Batista's nomination. Ms. Gage-Linderman stated that the office of Vice-Chairperson is not required to be filled by a business representative and asked if anyone in the Board's membership wished to be considered. No one responded and on calling for the vote, the Board unanimously approved Ms. Batista's nomination to serve as Vice-Chair through December 31, 2022. There were no abstentions. Elections for two-year terms for the Chair and Vice-Chair positions beginning January 1, 2023 will be scheduled for the September 16, 2022 Board meeting. Mr. Fogarty noted that the Chair's position is required to be held by a business representative as prescribed by the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

Our new WDB Assistant Director – Performance, Contracting and Policy, Ms. Amber Columbo, will join the WDB staff on June 29, 2022. Ms. Columbo spent the past 14 years with the Youth Program at the PA CareerLink® Berks County.

It was noted that eight members of the Board have agreed to serve an additional three-year term beginning July 1, 2022. Required nomination letters have been forwarded to the County Commissioners for the reappointment process. Mr. Rowley, after nearly 17 years of service to the WDB and the former WIB (Workforce Investment Board), decided not to continue as a WDB member when his current term ends on June 30, 2022. Mr. Rowley stated that the time is right. He is now semi-retired from his position at Herbein and to be available "most of the time" is not

good enough. Mr. Rowley stated, “the talent that sits on the Board is fantastic”. Ms. Gage-Linderman thanked Mr. Rowley for his dedicated service and wished him and his family all the best.

Mr. Fogarty briefed the Board on a proposed Resolution recognizing the Distribution Center of the Boscov’s Department Store, LLC as a “best practice employer for employee retention and development”. Mr. Fogarty noted that following the October 2020 publication of the WDB’s *Employer Outreach – Retention and Development Best Practices Study*, the Business Services Team of the PA CareerLink® Berks County was tasked by the WDB to assist local employers across industry sectors in implementing best practice strategies and to identify local employers moving forward with implementation of such necessary and promising changes. The proposed resolution detailed how Boscov’s local Distribution Center has been a leader in making such improvements. Mr. DeVere moved to adopt the Resolution and Mr. Harrop seconded the motion. On calling for the vote, all members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Ms. Noll presented the Finance Committee report stating that the PY2021 Budget vs. Actual figures are slightly lower than planned across all programs, but contract modifications have been recommended by the contractors and approved by the WDB management staff for unanticipated needs. She noted that our 80% obligation rates will be met for all applicable WIOA Title I funded programs at the end of PY2021.

Ms. Noll noted that the PY2022 Proposed Budget includes a recommendation for two new contracts: Business Services to EDSI in the amount of \$404,693 and WIOA Youth to Equus in the amount of \$720,000.

A motion was made by Dr. Campbell to approve the Title I Young Adult Grant Award in the amount of \$720,000 to Equus. The motion was seconded by Mr. McNelis and on calling for the vote, all members voted in favor. There were no abstentions.

Ms. Noll commented that a transfer of \$277,777 from WIOA Dislocated Worker funds to WIOA Adult is recommended due to the decrease in demand from dislocated workers in Berks, and an increase in the adult population for training. Mr. DeVere moved to adopt the PY22 Proposed Budget. Ms. Batista seconded the motion. On calling for the vote, all members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

On behalf of Ms. Kershner, Mr. Fogarty noted that an action item was included in the One-Stop Oversight Committee’s Report: approval of the Business Services Team (BST) Grant award to Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) for the first year of their contract in the amount of \$404,693. Ms. Kershner moved to award the contract and Ms. Bradley seconded the motion. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Ms. Kershner mentioned that Mr. Chuck Newberry, Human Resources Generalist for Trinity Solar, recently joined the One-Stop Oversight Committee as a non-Board member.

Ms. Kershner noted that the PA CareerLink® Berks County's job fair held April 19, 2022 at the Abraham Lincoln Hotel was a huge success, having been attended by 90 employers and 552 job seekers.

The PA CareerLink® Berks County *By the Numbers* report for the period of July 2021 through March 2022 indicated "foot traffic" of 13,051 with 373 orientations. Virtual services continue and were offered to 2,600 persons during the nine months covered by the report.

Mr. DeVere commented on some highlights of the very inclusive and positive May 26, 2022 meeting of the Training and Industry Partnership Committee.

Berks Priority Industry Sector Updates: In Healthcare, Tower Health is experiencing a record increase in hiring and the number of open positions that have remained unfilled is decreasing. The nursing talent pool has been boosted with the addition of 100 new graduates and experienced personnel retention numbers are showing positive trends. As reported by Mr. Pinkasavage to the Committee, new construction is "booming" in the region. The Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) is reenergizing the Berks County Manufacturing Next Generation Industry Partnership (NGIP). Mr. Stevenson noted that this year's annual Manufacturers Resource Center's (MRC) *What's So Cool About Manufacturing* contest was a great success with more than 1,000 attendees at the awards ceremony. He added that the PA Dream Team Berks County has now expanded to thirteen young representatives who have been trained to represent career opportunities in manufacturing.

Mr. DeVere noted that as of June 9, 2022, 75% of the \$75,000 matching funds allocated for Incumbent Worker Training (IWT) and Registered Apprenticeship (RA) training have been obligated or reimbursed to date.

Mr. Fogarty commented on the Youth Committee Report stating that there has been a lot of activity in TANF and Title I programs and our partnerships continue to grow. Ongoing programs include Connecting Young Adults to Employment (CYAE), High School Equivalency & Counseling, Young Adult Program Driver Education/License Assistance, Berks Service Corps 2022 and Berks Connections Pretrial Services (BCPS)/PACL Young Adult (YA) "R3 Prep" project. On Ms. Batista's behalf, Mr. Fogarty commended Ms. Columbo and Ms. Prostovich (Equus) for their leadership of the programs. He added that as Ms. Columbo settles into her role at the Board, her expertise will contribute to the continued success of our programs for disconnected young adults.

Mr. Rowley noted that with two more weeks to go as Chair of the Planning Committee, he was delighted to invite Dr. Weitz and Mr. Fogarty, Co-Chairs of the Ad Hoc Taskforce, to brief the Board on the *Ad Hoc Taskforce Report on Adult English Language Proficiency and Numeracy* which was completed and distributed to the Board on June 8, 2022. Mr. Fogarty introduced the following members of the Taskforce who joined the online meeting: Dr. Anna Weitz, Mr. Hector Torres, Dr. Anne Zayaitz, Ms. Darleen Garcia, and WDB members Ms. Auria Bradley, Ms. Ashley Chambers, and Mr. Robert Harrop. Mr. Fogarty also mentioned Mr. Angel Figueroa's, Mr. Rick Olmos' and Mr. Marcelino Colón's contribution in coordinating two of the listening sessions in Spanish in the community. Mr. Fogarty commented that a complete list of

our Taskforce Members is listed in Appendix A to the report. Before turning the briefing over to Dr. Weitz, Mr. Fogarty recognized Ms. Darleen Garcia's as part of the report's writing team, along with Dr. Weitz and Mr. Stevenson. He also mentioned that Ms. Garcia's last day at Tec Centro was recent since she was offered a position at her former employer in New York City and would be relocating to be close to her family there.

Following are the slides shown during the presentation:

- **Today's Topics**
 - I. Review of "Problem"/Opportunity to be Addressed
 - II. Structure of Report
 - III. Project Timeline
 - IV. Conclusions & Recommendations
 - A. Role of the WDB
 - B. Next Steps

- **Problem/Opportunity to be Addressed**
 - Employers have more open positions that candidates despite increasing wages and recruitment efforts
 - New Hire "Churn" and Retention Challenges (consistently and markedly higher than other areas in PA)
 - Low English Language Proficiency is a significant barrier to "upskilling" incumbent workers and job-seekers
 - Low Adult Numeracy is also a significant barrier; however, employers see English proficiency as more urgent need/opportunity

- **Structure of Report**
 - I. Executive Summary
 - II. Berks County At A Glance
 - III. Methodology
 - IV. Discoveries
 - V. Conclusions and Recommendations
 - VI. Appendices
 - a. A – Ad Hoc Taskforce Timeline and Members
 - b. B–E – Summary of Listening Session

- **Project Timeline**
 - July 1, 2021 – New Local WIOA 4-Year Plan Takes Effect
 - September 17, 2021 – WDB Approves Planning Committee Recommendation to Form Ad Hoc Task Force
 - October 21, 2021 – Ad Hoc Task Force Begins Work
 - December 2021 – February 2022 Employer Listening Sessions via MS Teams
 - March – April 2022 - Community Listening Sessions
 - May 17, 2022 – Writing Team Completes Draft Report
 - May 20, 2022 – Review Report with Planning Committee to Comment

- June 17, 2022 – Final Report Presented to full WDB for Acceptance

- **Conclusions & Recommendations**

- A. Requisite Strategies
- B. Unique Role of the WDB/Next Steps
 1. Planning & Policy (Role of the WDB Planning Committee)
 2. Increased Funding
 3. Convening
 4. Education and Outreach (especially to Employers)

Dr. Weitz commented that it was a delight to be part of this team for such an exciting project. She noted that the team started out with a hypothesis of the difficulty many adult residents of Berks County experience in getting good jobs due to having limited English skills. Having all available demographic data in hand, the team reached out to employers and people in the community for input. Dr. Weitz urged people to read the comments received from participants in the listening sessions and said she feels very confident that major labor shortages can be addressed if everyone pulls together. She added that this is a call to action. We are fortunate to have access to a wonderful pool of residents who are willing to work. In fact, most of the residents we heard from are in the workforce but often underemployed due to having limited English language skills.

The project was started with a focus on English Language Proficiency and Numeracy on people's job opportunities. However, the Taskforce quickly learned that by far the greater and most urgent barrier to employment was English Language deficiencies and the Taskforce proceeded accordingly.

Dr. Weitz next described the listening sessions held via Microsoft Teams with manufacturing, construction and utilities, healthcare and social assistance and hospitality employers. She also referred to the community members' listening sessions she attended at Reading Area Community College's (RACC's) Miller Center facilitated by Auria Bradley and Ryan Breisch. She commented that it was an absolutely wonderful session listening to individuals sharing their aspirations and their desire to financially support their families. Their sincerity was marvelous. Our second community listening session was held in Spanish at the Berks Latino Workforce Development Corporation organized by Darleen Garcia in partnership with Centro Hispano. A third session was held at St. Peter the Apostle Church and organized by Angel Figueroa (I-LEAD) and Isamac Torres-Figueroa. The majority of adults participating in all three sessions were already working but were interested in advancing and want better opportunities which will require improving their English language skills.

Dr. Weitz stressed that continued discussions are required to encourage employers to provide training programs to employees. English Language Proficiency is a social determinate of health and well-being. Dr. Weitz stressed, "*this is ESL with a purpose*" to work with partners for specific programs tied to employment. She added that the Workforce Development Board is well positioned to lead. Public-private partnerships are necessary. She added that we will be out there in the community talking about this important workforce and economic initiative in Berks County.

Mr. Fogarty invited the three members of the Board who served on the Taskforce to comment.

Ms. Chambers reiterated Dr. Weitz's comments and asked people to look at promising practices of employers.

Mr. Harrop shared three points. There is a lot of great information in the report. There are things in the report that haven't been thought of before. During the outreach, the community was invited to share ideas on what is needed to be addressed and was very valuable.

Ms. Bradley noted that she and her husband attended the second session and took notes on what was required to be followed up on. Ms. Bradley commented that the Taskforce focused on what was needed in the community and that has created a platform for action in the community.

Mr. Rowley noted Dr. Weitz's excitement was awesome and that everybody on the taskforce engaged as a team. As Chair of the Planning Committee, he thanked everyone who served on the Taskforce.

Ms. Batista commented that growing up in a Spanish speaking household she had personal experience in receiving help from others which assisted her in excelling in her life. She said she was impressed with the quality of the report.

Ms. Gonzalez expressed some concerns with the lack of Spanish-speaking staff to assist their OVR customers. She added that OVR needs more bilingual staff with specialized degrees.

Mr. Olmos stated that over 56% of the population in the City of Reading speaks Spanish and suggested that companies start programs enabling their staff to learn Spanish, especially for those in management and supervisory positions. Mr. Fogarty commented that nearly 60% of the staff at the PA CareerLink® Berks County are bilingual in Spanish and English.

A motion was made by Mr. Rowley and seconded by Mr. DeVere to accept the Ad Hoc Taskforce Report as presented. All members voted approval. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Fogarty referred to his June 2022 COO Update reflecting on "the good, the bad and the ugly" in the Berks County Local and U.S. Labor Markets for April/May 2022. Some key points from the Update:

The Good 😊

- Berks County Manufacturing Employment (NSA) = 30,300 in April 2022. Manufacturing remains our largest sector by employment. +1,100 manufacturing jobs from a year ago.
- Berks County unemployed residents (SA) in April 2022 = 10,100 compared to 15,100 one year ago, and 10,000 pre-pandemic in February 2020.

- Berks County Unemployment Rate (SA) in April 2022 = 4.8% vs: 7.1% one year ago, 4.6% in February 2020 (full employment immediately before the pandemic) and 3.9% in February 2019.

The Bad and the Ugly 😞

- Berks County Manufacturing Employment in April 2022
 - ↓1,700 from February 2020 (-5.3%)
 - Potentially losing “market share” to Transportation/Warehousing and Utilities
 - Open positions (WDB estimates 2,500-3,500 open positions in local manufacturing)
- Berks County labor force ↓= 209,100 in April 2022 vs. 218,400 pre-pandemic
- U.S. Labor Market Trends
 - US not just at “full” but at “maximum” employment
 - Not going away quickly due to continuing “headwinds” (per Atlanta Federal Reserve)
 - ◆ “We ain’t getting any younger” (“Silver Tsunami”)
 - ◆ Labor force participation – retirement 50%
 - ◆ But: prime working age 25-54 fully recovered to CY2019
 - Foreign Worker Gap
- Berks County “New Hire” Churn” continued throughout 2021

Ms. Gage-Linderman asked for Market Intelligence discussion.

Dr. Campbell reported that the Albright Science Research Institute (SRI) was awarded one of 42 State PA Smart Advancing Grants aimed at supporting educational opportunities for K-12 students in computer science, technology, engineering and math. Albright was the only Berks County recipient for this specific round of grant awards and will receive \$499,400 to administer this initiative.

There was no public comment.

Ms. Gage-Linderman reminded the Board that the next quarterly meeting will be held at 7:30 a.m. on Friday, September 16, 2022.

A motion was made by Ms. Gage-Linderman and seconded by Ms. Batista to adjourn the meeting. All members voted approval. There were no abstentions. The meeting adjourned at 8:54 a.m.