

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

**7:30 a.m.
June 18, 2021**

Meeting Summary

Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Ms. Debra Antol
Ms. Jenny Batista
Ms. Auria Bradley
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Mr. John DeVere
Ms. Marianne Egolf
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Mr. Robert Harrop
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Mr. Thomas McNelis
Mr. Scott Mengle
Ms. Debra Millman
Mr. James Nichols
Mr. Michael Rowley
Mr. Russell Showers
Mr. David Turner
Mr. Barry Unger

Members Absent

Dr. Karen Campbell
Mr. William Dorward
Ms. Carole Homolash
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Ms. Jennie Rodriguez-Priest
Mr. Pablo Tejada
Ms. Karyn Troxell

Staff and Guests Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. John Moser	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. Helen Amole	PA CareerLink® Berks County Administrator
Ms. Amber Columbo	PA CareerLink® Berks County Youth Program Director
Mr. Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink® Berks County Employment Services Supervisor
Ms. Marybeth Ferguson	Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations (BWPO)
Mr. Larry Melf	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Mr. Andre Townes	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Heather Berger	County of Berks Information Systems Staff
Mr. Malcolm Townes	County of Berks Information Systems Staff

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 7:33 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 and Mr. Townes for their assistance in the live streaming through the County's website.

Mr. Fogarty introduced the Consent Agenda items on behalf of the Chair and asked if any item should be moved for later discussion prior to the vote:

- Approval of Minutes of March 19, 2021 WDB Meeting
- Approval of 4-Year SE PA Regional Plan and 4-Year Local Plans as Revised
- Approval of DEI (Diversity, Equity and Inclusion) Committee Charge (DEI Committee Recommendation)
- Approval of TANF Youth Contracts (Youth Committee Recommendation)
 - Goodwill \$104,781.00 (2/1/21 thru 12/31/22) with 1 renewal year (1/1/23-12/31/23)
 - Equus: \$570,937.00 (4/1/21 thru 12/31/22) with 1 renewal year (1/1/23-12/31/23)
- Approval of \$75,000 in Title I Adult funds for Layoff Aversion/Incumbent Worker Matching Funds for PY2021 (Training & IP Committee Recommendation)
- Approval of a one-year extension of PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Contract with EDSI for PY2021 in the amount of \$382,516 (One Stop Oversight Committee Recommendation)

As no members requested any items to be moved, on behalf of the Chair, Mr. Fogarty announced WDB approval of all Consent Agenda items.

Ms. Gage-Linderman introduced the Finance Committee Report and asked Ms. Noll to comment. Regarding the PY2020 Budget vs. Expenditures Review, Ms. Noll stated that year-to-date expenditures are lower than expected across all programs including Board costs and CareerLink shared costs due to pandemic restrictions throughout the year.

Ms. Noll commented on the PY2021 Proposed Budget. She said the CareerLink shared expenditures may increase or decrease due to staffing levels. Direct charge services include WorkKeys, Patch, Language Interpretation Services, WIN Software and classroom carpeting.

Mr. Fogarty said that an exciting opportunity opened to use a regional economic development grant from the State to establish a two-year Southeast Coordinator position to assist all the SE PA Counties. He said each of the six counties in Southeastern Pennsylvania has its own Workforce Development Board but share industry sectors and statistics. A Memorandum of Understanding will be developed to encourage regional cooperation. \$25,000 is included in the proposed budget for the Southeastern Regional Manufacturing IP Coordinator position.

Mr. Rowley asked if the \$2.5M carry over could be spent. Mr. Fogarty reminded members that less than 25% of our annual Title I Adult and Dislocated Worker funds are received initially in our “first increment”. Ms. Noll said that PY2020 expenditures are on target if contract awards are completed. Therefore, Mr. Rowley said, the money is not there to spend; it is obligated money.

Mr. DeVere moved to approve the Proposed Initial PY2021 Budget. Mr. Harrop seconded the motion and all members voted in favor.

Mr. Fogarty invited Mr. Moser to comment on the PY2020 WIOA Performance Outcomes for the 3rd Quarter Year-to-Date results. Mr. Moser noted that the pandemic has negatively impacted the number of customers served by the Title I programs as well as the performance results through the third quarter of PY2020. He explained that the low level of performance in the Measurable Skills Gain category for the Title I Youth program is most likely a data reporting issue which he will explore further with the program contractor and the state.

Referring to the second chart, Berks County Median Earnings, prepared by Mr. Melf, the figures focused on quarters instead of dates. Earnings were affected by COVID-19 and the shutdown of the economy. Mr. Moser added that he is confident that there will be an uptick in the figures when folks go back to work and that uptick will most likely be seen in the fourth quarter.

Mr. Turner suggested that if more people could be sent to training services a higher number would result.

Mr. Fogarty added that Berks is not alone in struggling to meet unrealistically high-performance targets in 2021. Almost half of the Boards in Pennsylvania are not getting the ✓ in the Average Indicator Score. Boards were not allowed to factor in expected pandemic impacts in negotiating performance goals.

Mr. McNelis was invited to comment on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee report. Mr. McNelis thanked the Board for approving the revised Committee charge included in the Consent Agenda. The charge is included below for information:

While respecting all aspects of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion, the primary goal and focus of the DEI committee is to support the efforts of employers to recruit, retain and advance employees with disabilities. The committee will pursue this goal by providing employers with educational opportunities, resources and information; by collaborating with other regional organizations; and by recommending specific projects and events designed to facilitate understanding of the barriers to employment faced by individuals with disabilities and/or to promote employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. The committee will focus on the actions employers can take to enhance their ability to achieve goals related to recruitment, retention and advancement of persons with disabilities in the workforce.

Our study of the impact of the pandemic on workers with disabilities conducted by Thomas P. Miller & Associates (TPMA) is expected to begin in the next few weeks with a broad survey followed by stakeholder focus groups. It is expected that preliminary findings will be shared with the committee during the September 1 DEI committee meeting. A Spanish version of

the survey is available. Mr. McNelis shared that the email to survey participants will be forwarded from the Business Services Team.

Mr. Fogarty commented that persons with disabilities have historically not been represented well in employment and the pandemic has negatively affected employment.

Mr. Turner moved to formally approve the grant award to Thomas P. Miller and Associates in the amount of \$58,254.80. Ms. Batista second the motion and all voted their approval.

Mr. DeVere was invited to review the Training and Industry Partnership (IP) committee report. Ms. Kershner was recused from participating in the discussion and the subsequent vote on the action item.

Following are highlights of the report commented on by Mr. DeVere.

There is a need to develop a policy regarding the pre-apprenticeship funding eligibility under the current WDB Work-Based Training Policy. The Training & IP Committee would endeavor to complete such a policy within the first six months of PY2021 by forming a subcommittee of volunteers to do so.

The Committee reviewed the Berks WDB 2021 High Priority Occupation (HPO) list. Mr. Fogarty complimented Mr. Stevenson for his mentoring other local Workforce Development Boards in the process this year.

\$60,971 (of the WDB allocated \$75,000 in WIOA Title I funds) has been obligated for Incumbent Worker Training/Registered Apprenticeship Training. Requests for funds applications continue to be received.

Mr. DeVere commented that the construction industry is booming. Mr. Fogarty added that manufacturers have been having difficulty in filling jobs. Mr. DeVere stated that there is also a critical shortage in healthcare workers, specifically nurses.

On Ms. Gage-Linderman's behalf, Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve a \$250,089.00 Community-based Pre-Apprenticeship Grant to Berks Connections Pretrial Services (BCPS) for their "R3" program effective June 1, 2021. Ms. Batista moved to approve the award; Mr. Mengle seconded the motion, and all voted their approval.

Ms. Kershner was asked by the Chair to comment on the One-Stop Oversight Committee Report. She said the Committee has been having ongoing and great discussions on COVID protocol at the PA CareerLink® Berks County operations. Mr. Moser shared the dates: a "soft" opening on June 28; open doors and the resource room on July 6. Health screening and masks will not be required. Physical improvements in advance of the reopening will have been completed.

Mr. Moser commented that the Business Services Team has been conducting parking lot employer recruitments for several weeks. The Team purchased the tent used for the recruitments. He added that outreach activities to potential job seekers will be ongoing by the Business Ser-

vices Team including radio ads, WFMZ commercials, newspaper ads and by early July billboards.

The Chair asked for a motion to approve the Adult and Dislocated Worker Grant to EDSI in the amount of \$1,314,991 for a two-year period with a one-year renewal option and the CareerLink Operator Grant to EDSI in the amount of \$298,350 for a three-year grant with four one-year renewal options. Both grants are effective 7/1/21. Mr. McNelis moved and Ms. Antol seconded the motion. All members voted in favor except for Ms. Kershner who previously recused herself from the discussion and the vote.

Mr. Fogarty introduced Ms. Batista who reviewed the Youth Committee's activity.

Referring to updates in the Youth Committee report, Ms. Batista reported on program activity in the WIOA Work Experience program, Connecting Young Adults with Employment (TANF) Year-Round, Summer Work Experience Opportunity and Berks Service Corps 2021.

The BCPS/PACL (Berks Connections Pretrial Services/PA CareerLink) Young Adult R-3 Prep program has 14 enrollments to date with 2 exits.

This year's "What's So Cool About Manufacturing" middle school video competition was virtual and 17 of the 23 Berks school districts participated. The annual awards ceremony was held via a virtual event in April 2021.

Reading Muhlenberg Career and Technology Center held their career camps June 14-18 for interested 8th grade students.

Ms. Chambers commented on the May 26, 2021 *Reading Eagle* newspaper article on the Berks Service Corps UW program. She said 2021 is the second year 18-24 year old persons have been successfully connected to non-profits in the community.

Ms. Batista said the quote for the year ahead will be "reach one, teach one".

Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Rodriguez-Priest for a very special contribution to the work of the WDB. She translated and presented key details of the WDB's local plan on a local Spanish radio broadcast which Commissioner Michael Rivera and his Executive Assistant Barbara Lopez hosted during the first week of April.

Mr. Fogarty also thanked Mr. Rowley and members of the Policy, Planning and Priorities Committee for their diligence in the year-long planning efforts to the Board's four-year plan.

Referring to the COO report, Mr. Fogarty commented that the Berks County WDB continues to champion some of the best technical career pathways in the Commonwealth, such as the proven "2+2+2" Technical Academy pathways.

By April 2021, the local seasonally adjusted (SA) local unemployment rate stood at 7.0% which remains higher than the U.S. rate of 6.1% in April but below Pennsylvania's statewide un-

employment rate of 7.4% for the month. A chart of Berks County's labor force included in the report showed sizeable adjustments due to the pandemic period.

Mr. Fogarty explained that a question from potential employees seems to be trending now: "Why should I work for your company?" There used to be a significant penalty for quitting a job. That is no longer the case.

Mr. Fogarty thanked Board members as all completed and returned their 2020 Statements of Financial Interests ahead of the State's May 1 deadline.

Ms. Gage-Linderman opened the floor for market intelligence discussion.

Ms. Batista said there seems to be a lot of fraud in unemployment claims. Mr. Fogarty confirmed that has been a significant problem for the past year in most states.

Ms. Gage-Linderman thought that revisiting hiring strategies would be helpful and that employers are trying to stay ahead of the curve.

Mr. Fogarty commented that many employers are offering sign-on bonuses and flexible schedules to attract employees.

Mr. Rowley said that money is important, but the culture of an organization is also important. He said that people must want to work at a place. It's a cultural thing and an interesting conversation for a future meeting.

Ms. Berger was asked if there was any public comment to which she answered there was not. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Berger for her assistance with the meeting presentation.

The next quarterly meeting of the Board is scheduled for Friday, September 17, 2021 at 7:30 a.m. and will held as a hybrid meeting, both virtually and in person.

A motion to adjourn was made by Ms. Batista and seconded by Mr. Turner. The meeting was adjourned by Ms. Gage-Linderman at 8:59 a.m.