

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

**7:30 a.m.
September 17, 2021**

Meeting Summary

Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)

Ms. Debra Antol
Ms. Jenny Batista
Ms. Auria Bradley
Dr. Karen Campbell
Ms. Ashley Chambers
Mr. John DeVere
Mr. William Dorward
Mr. Michael Fischetti
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman
Ms. Carole Homolash
Mr. Thomas McNelis
Ms. Debra Millman
Mr. James Nichols
Mr. Rick Olmos
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage
Mr. Jennie Rodriguez-Priest
Ms. Karyn Troxell

Members Absent

Ms. Marianne Egolf
Mr. Robert Harrop
Ms. Peggy Kershner
Mr. Scott Mengle
Mr. Michael Rowley
Mr. Russell Showers
Mr. David Turner
Mr. Barry Unger

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 Hardy	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Yvelisse Gonzalez	Office of Vocational Rehabilitation
Mr. Thomas McKeon	Former Director of Berks IDA
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 7:35 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.

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 June 18, 2021 WDB Meeting
- Approval of Proposed Berks County WDB Work-Based Training Policy Revision to include Pre-Apprenticeship Policy as Recommended by the Training & Industry Partnership Committee
- Approval of Name Change to Planning Committee and Updated Committee Charge as Recommended by the Executive Committee and the Policy, Planning and Priorities (PPP) Committee
- Approval of Purpose Statement for WDB Ad Hoc Task Force on Adult English Language Proficiency and Numeracy as Recommended by the Executive Committee and the PPP Committee

As no members requested any items to be moved, on behalf of the Chair, Mr. Fogarty moved to adopt the consent agenda and 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. Actual Report, Ms. Noll stated that final expenditures were lower for the year than expected across all programs including Board costs and CareerLink shared costs due to pandemic restrictions throughout the year. Although Summer/In School Youth appears to be overspent, the figure is still within the calendar year budget.

Ms. Noll commented on the PY2021 Revised Budget Proposal dated 8/25/2021 which incorporated changes in funds due to adjusted carry-over amounts and a decreased budget for the Board Operations due to changes in staff salaries and County fringe rates.

Mr. Fogarty said that when the original PY2021 budget was approved in June, there were unknowns affecting the budget. However, we can now confirm that we are well positioned with adequate financial resources for the remainder of the program year.

Mr. DeVere moved to approve the PY2021 Revised Budget Proposal. Mr. Dorward seconded the motion and all voted their approval.

Mr. Fogarty commented that he was very pleased with the performance of the staff's successful efforts to obtain a new Statewide Activity grant in the amount of \$84,997 to complete funding for the Youth Re-Entry program (R3 Prep) through the full PY2021 program year.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that a lot of ground was covered during the latest Executive Committee meeting. She welcomed Mr. Rick Olmos to the Board and re-introduced Dr. Karen Campbell and Debra Millman, Esquire. Mr. Olmos stated that he has been in Reading for 2-1/2 years and is the VP Operations and COO of Centro Hispano Daniel Torres. Dr. Campbell shared that she has been on the faculty of Albright for 32 years and for 4 years as Provost. Ms. Millman commented that she has been on staff of the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance for many years and is currently President of the Greater Berks Development Fund. Mr. Fogarty added that Mr. Olmos and Dr. Campbell have joined the Youth Committee while Ms. Millman continues to serve on the Planning Committee as a Board member having previously served as an off-Board member. Ms. Gage-Linderman also took the opportunity to say a goodbye and a thank you to Ms. Homolash who is retiring from the Commonwealth's employ at OVR after 34 years of service. Ms. Homolash said that both she and Tom McKeon together led the initiative for the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee and added that she so appreciated the Board meetings over the last six years and learning how some of the pieces of the statewide workforce development system came together.

Ms. Gage-Linderman invited Mr. Moser to offer the year-end PY2020 Performance Metrics update. Mr. Moser noted that the ongoing pandemic negatively impacted the number of customers served by all three of the Title I programs and the resulting performance outcomes as reported throughout PY2020. WDBs were not allowed by L&I or the federal USDOL to consider the potential impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in negotiations for this past year or for PY2021. The results will reportedly be adjusted by a Statistical Adjustment Model by the end of calendar year 2021. The average indicator score for the 4th quarter employment rate was 89.9% and the 2nd quarter median earnings was 88.7%, both percentages just slightly below the target threshold. Referring to the Executive Committee meeting minutes, Mr. Fogarty added that there is a geographical and demographic divide between the fourteen (mostly lightly populated) local WDBs who appear to have met their required average targets and ten overwhelmingly densely populated areas that did not.

In Ms. Kershner's absence, Mr. Moser commented on the One Stop Oversight Committee Report. The PA CareerLink[®] Berks County has been fully open since early July (2021). Due to County policy, masks are required to be worn by staff and all who enter the building. There were 36 employer recruitment events since June held in both the parking lot and indoor spaces which were attended by 450 job seekers in total.

Mr. Moser said that the Committee participated in the first annual Berks County Workforce Development Board Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) training presented by the PA Office of Equal Employment Opportunity on July 27, 2021. It was proposed that selected Board Committees take part in the EEO training on an annual basis going forward.

A statewide PA CareerLink[®] Day was unexpectedly announced by the PA DOL&I Communication's Office to be held on August 12, 2021. Mr. Moser commended Ms. Amole

and the CareerLink team for putting the successful event together in a very short time. Parking lot and indoor employer recruitments were held. Sweet Street Desserts brought their food truck for the parking lot recruitment (handing out delicious brownies). East Penn Manufacturing also held a parking lot recruitment. Indoor recruitments were held by Shuman Development Company, DAK Americas/Alpek Polyester and Subway. State Secretary of Labor and Industry Jennifer Berrier attended the event. A Community Resource Fair was held in Rooms 100 & 102 staffed by BCAP, RACC, BCPS, Pathstone, OVR, Literacy Council of Berks County, Early Learning Resource Center, and YMCA. Mr. Olmos asked how the event was promoted. Mr. Moser replied that social media and phone calls were successfully utilized.

Mr. Moser referred to the *By the Numbers* report for Program Year 2020 (July 2020 through June 2021) which had been distributed. Mr. Moser said that the Business Services Team did a great job contacting employers when the lobby and resource room were re-opened. Ms. Homolash inquired about the use of on-the-job training. There were 8 new work-based training contracts averaging \$4,803 listed in the report. Mr. Fogarty replied that when the market is this competitive, there is less interest from employers in work-based training contracts as the employers are often rather impatient to have new recruits immediately fill vacancies.

Mr. DeVere commented on the Training and Industry Partnership Committee's report. He reported that the Manufacturers Resource Center, utilizing funds secured under the 2020 Berks Business Education Partnership (BEP) Grant, has created a PA Dream Team Berks consisting of a group of nine very young and very diverse persons who have volunteered to be trained to go out into Berks County schools and the community and relate their individual manufacturing career pathing experiences to students both virtually and in person.

A Save the Date flyer for the October 27, 2021 Manufacturing Summit presented by GRCA and the Greater Reading Advanced Manufacturing Next Gen Industry Partnership, and hosted by RACC, was distributed to the Board with the meeting materials.

Mr. DeVere reviewed the WIOA Title I Incumbent Worker Training/Registered Apprenticeship Funding for PY2020. He added that worker training was a bit difficult to schedule during the pandemic, but that another \$75,000 in matching funds have been budgeted by the WDB for PY2021 which began July 1, 2021.

Mr. McNelis was invited to comment on the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Committee report. He said that 131 people started the survey sent out by Thomas P. Miller Associates, but only 50% of the employers finished it. The employers may have been reluctant to answer some of the questions. The committee is still looking at a final publication of the study in November.

He noted that October is National Disability Employment Awareness Month (NDEAM) declared by the United States Congress in 1988 to raise awareness of the employment needs and contributions of individuals with all types of disabilities.

Mr. McNelis thanked Ms. Homolash and Mr. McKeon for bringing this effort to fruition and expressed his appreciation for all they have contributed.

Ms. Batista commented on several key points from the meeting of the Youth Committee held August 26, 2021. A combined total of 62 CTC students (24 at Berks Career & Technology Center and 38 at Reading Muhlenberg Career & Technology Center) completed internships provided by over 50 employers this summer. Each successful completer received a \$500 stipend in addition to their wage. Mr. Phil Harris of BCTC and Ms. Lisa Hughes of RMCTC attended the Youth Committee meeting on August 26 and commended Ms. Columbo and Ms. Prostovich of the PACL Young Adult Team for their facilitation and financial support for five TANF eligible participants. Many of the students professed better-defined career preferences as a result of their participation in the program.

The Berks Service Corps (BSC) 2021 served 17 young adults, 18-24 years of age, providing a work experience/internship opportunity to the Berks county Non-Profit sector. Participants learned how to give back to the community and shared their experiences on August 27 at a graduation event. Mr. Fogarty commented that Ms. Hoa Pham, Director, Bureau of Employment Programs, Department of Human Services, along with one of her staff members, attended the Berks Service Corps 2021 “graduation” program on August 27, 2021. The interns shared their experience in the form of a presentation to members of the Workforce Development Board and key stakeholders in the community including Berks County Commissioner Michael Rivera. The presentations not only highlighted what participants learned but will also give them a continued networking opportunity that will carry with them throughout their careers. Director Pham sent an email with a “homework assignment” to participants to set themselves a reminder on their calendars for every 3 months to connect with an adult who can see them continue to grow.

Ms. Batista next referred to the “save the date” flyer for the Career Ready Berks “How Internships Work” event on October 29, 2021 at RACC’s Schmidt Training & Technology Center. This event is funded under the extended 2020 Berks BEP Grant. Registration details were included on the flyer.

Ms. Batista thanked Mr. Stevenson, Ms. Prostovich and her team, and Ms. Chambers and United Way for their committee meeting participation.

In Mr. Rowley’s absence, Mr. Fogarty referred to items in the Policy, Planning & Priorities Committee report (the name change to Planning Committee was approved on the consent agenda earlier in the meeting). Also, plans are in place for a new Ad Hoc Task Force on Adult English Language Proficiency and Numeracy, the purpose statement also having been approved on the Consent Agenda previously in the meeting.

Mr. Fogarty reported that he and Ms. Millman were invited by Commissioner Michael Rivera to serve on the County’s Business Continuity and Economic Development Advisory Committee. This committee is one of three such committees formed by the Berks County Board of Commissioners to advise County leadership on best uses for the County’s federal American Rescue Plan (ARP) in response to the impact of the pandemic.

The COO Report in the form of a comprehensive power point presentation was reviewed by Mr. Fogarty. The titles of the slide presentation are as follows:

1. Planning Committee & COO Report offering WDB members the opportunity to:
 - a. Review the state of the Berks County local labor market as we begin our new program year 2021;
 - b. Compare our local labor market with national trends; and
 - c. Discuss the WDB's key strategies for pandemic recovery as outlined on our new 4-year local plan (eff. 7/1/2021).
2. Recovery 2.0—A Historical Look
3. Reading Metropolitan Statistical Area (MSA) July 2021
4. Average Weekly Wages Have Grown Through the Pandemic
5. The National Landscape (July/August 2021)
6. Local Population and Labor Force
7. Berks County's "Silver Tsunami"
8. 4-Year Strategies
9. Employer Best Practices Study 2020 (WDB Strategy – October 2019)
10. WDB Discussion: Employer Strategies?
11. October Employer Events

Referring to an article which appeared recently in the Reading Eagle, titled *Employees are quitting, sometimes without other offers; What can companies do to retain staff?* Mr. Fogarty asked for market intelligence comments from Board members. Are we facing the "Great Attrition" or the "Great Attraction"?

Ms. Troxell emphatically replied: "A great attrition!". Referring to her human resources position at Penske, she said she always attempts to reach a sweet spot of retention. She said her competition for workers has expanded to employers in other industry sectors, including retail and even fast-food restaurants. Many companies offer sign-on bonuses creating an immediate gratification incentive for people to take new jobs. Even if the jobs are not kept, there is no longer much stigma in moving frequently from company to company. Penske offers safety and attendance bonuses, but there are still struggles and challenges to retain workers. She added that HR professionals are needed at the planning table, more so now than ever.

Ms. Gage-Linderman reiterated everything Ms. Troxell shared. She said the same issues are seen by her company.

Mr. Fogarty asked Ms. Gage-Linderman if she has seen increased foot traffic of job seekers due to unemployment benefits ending. She replied that some increase may have been noted, but so many persons have barriers and staffing agencies are seeing dips in hiring.

Ms. Batista commented that Ms. Troxell offered great points. She said supervisors and leaders must be trained to support retention strategies. The situation offers a great opportunity to help leaders to communicate with workers. She said the L&H employees 89 persons locally. She added that the same problems exist whether there are 89 employees at L&H or 3,000 employed by Penske.

Ms. Homolash said the conversation was very interesting. She noted that at OVR training is provided to supervisors and then followed up. She said people make choices to move to different jobs. Throwing dollars and benefits isn't working.

Mr. Olmos said that sometimes an employee's supervisor doesn't speak Spanish, or a particular company does not offer ESL, so employees with limited English language skills may stay in their current positions rather than advance.

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, December 10, 2021 at 7:30 a.m. and will be held as a virtual meeting.

The meeting was adjourned by Ms. Gage-Linderman at 9:00 a.m.