



## County of Mercer Workforce Development Board

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Virgen Velez  
Acting Director

Brian M. Hughes  
County Executive

Keith Secrest  
Chairperson

### WDB General Board Meeting ♦ Chairperson: Keith Secrest

April 25, 2023 ♦ 12:00 pm (Zoom) ♦ Meeting Minutes

#### Attending:

**Members:** Keith Secrest (Kinetics), Mary Gay Abbott-Young (Rescue Mission), Anthony Carabelli (Mercer County Economic Development), Matthew Carey (MCTS), Scott Elliott (PCIL), Kathy Fiery (Health Care Association of NJ), Peg Gould (MCCC), Katherine Kish (Einstein's Alley), Lesley Jack (NJ DVRS), Veronica Jones (NJ DOL Employment Services), Scott Needham (Princeton Air), Dawn Paquette (NJM Insurance Group), Dr. Deborah Preston (MCCC), Melissa Tenzer (Dress for Success), Taraun Tice-McKnight (Business), Pete Tindall (Homasote), Latoya Wilson (WCR Consultancy)

**Guests:** Shan Bercaw (MCCC), Ana Catanzaro (Capital Health System); Carmen Gates (African American Chamber of Commerce, OSO), Iliana Ivanov (NJ DOL Business Services) Umesh Naik (NJ DOLWD Business Services)

**Staff:** Virgen Velez, Acting WDB Director

#### Welcome

Chair Keith Secrest opened the meeting and welcomed the group. Introductions were made.

#### Approval of February 7, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Peg Gould made the motion to approve the minutes of the February 7, 2023 meeting; Scott Needham seconded the motion. There were no oppositions and the motion to approve the minutes was approved.

#### Mercer County Small Business Grant Program – Anthony Carabelli

- Launched February 1<sup>st</sup> with over \$3.5million in available funds
- Currently 82 grant awardees (over \$1 million awarded)
  - County businesses (established prior to 2019) with 20 or less employees that gross less than \$3 million annually; under \$5 million threshold for restaurants
- 92 businesses are in the approval process
- Applications still being accepted; only for-profit businesses are eligible to apply
- Over 95% of the businesses have been awarded the maximum \$10,000 funding amount

## **MCTS 5-year Strategic Plan – Matthew Carey, Superintendent**

- NJ School Boards are the facilitators
- Plans from all aspects are localized into one strategic plan to give school districts a road for future action plans
- Process started in December 2022
  - A Steering Committee was created with stakeholders (employees) within the district – parents and students are also volunteering their time
  - Sub-groups of 50 maximum were made
  - NJ School Boards Association provided an overview of what the process will look like
  - Meeting schedules were given; consistency is key. Meetings are 1.5 hour long
  - Strengths and challenges of the district are discussed
  - A google survey was sent out; over 100 responses received
  - “Buckets” were developed in order to develop goals and objectives (5-8)
    - As a result, a draft strategic plan will be formulated and taken to the school teams and NJ School Boards Association for tweaking
    - Plan will be presented to the Board of Education in June
  - Actions plans will be developed around the strategic plan
    - Plan will be responsive to changes as needed

Keith Secrest is participating in the process; gave positive feedback.

An electric vehicle is being delivered to the Sypek Center on April 26<sup>th</sup> to be involved in the Auto Shop curriculum.

Electric solar paneling is also being installed to be managed by the HVAC department.

Virtual Reality is also being offered at the school.

## **Executive/Oversight Committee Report**

- The Local Plan has been the focus of meetings.
- A job fair is forthcoming.
- A round table for electric vehicles is being pursued
- Budgets are in good shape.
- Membership attendance has improved. Union representation is still needed.

## **New Member Recruitment Update**

Lilian Mauro (Small Business Development Corporation) was approved; awaiting swearing-in date. A few others are pending approval by the Board of Commissioners.

Union members will be approached to join the Board. It was suggested that Wayne D’Angelo be contacted for assistance. Any interested candidates can be referred to the Ad-Hoc Membership Committee for follow-up.

## Committee Reports

### *Advanced Manufacturing – Scott Needham*

The last meeting was held on March 13<sup>th</sup>.

- It was shared at the last meeting that a survey of 82 high school students showed that advanced manufacturing came in last when asked what sector of engineering they were interested in. Image awareness is still needed to attract students to the field
- “Manufacturing State” event will be held at the Trenton War Memorial building on May 4<sup>th</sup>; great event that allows employers and government entities to network – great time to solicit members for Board and committees
- On May 3<sup>rd</sup>, the Central NJ Partnership (Regional manufacturing consortium) will be hosting a summit at the Sypek Center

Princeton Air is donating working equipment to Sypek Center.

Keith discussed organizing manufacturers, recycling centers, car dealerships, and repair shops along with the One Stop and training schools into a Round-table to discuss the electric vehicle sector. 1<sup>st</sup> meeting target date is mid-May.

### *Disabilities - (Scott Elliott)*

The last meeting was held on December February 9<sup>th</sup>.

- Job fair will be hosted by the OS on May 24<sup>th</sup>
- Lesley Jack provided a DVRS update; school referrals have increased
- Anthony Carabelli (County Economic Development) provided an update on improvements to the Route 130 Connection
- Reed Thomas (MC Human Services – Disability & Aging) provided an update
- Project Search will be discussed in more detail at future committee meeting
- Discussion was held regarding assisting youth with disabilities while in the SYEP (Summer Youth Employment Program); a meeting will be set for PCIL, DVRS and the OS

### *Literacy – Peg Gould*

The last meeting was held on April 5<sup>th</sup>.

- Recruitment flyers for the Early Mercer Reads initiative will be forthcoming
  - Decision for virtual and/or in-person readers needs to be discussed further
- HSE expectations has been altered
  - In NJ as of June 1, 2023 the General Equivalency Diploma (GED) exam will be the only accepted credential in lieu of the high school diploma

### *Health Care – Kathy Fiery*

The last meeting was held on March 15<sup>th</sup>.

- Meeting attendance is consistent.
- \$55,000 in scholarships (CARES funding) was awarded by MCCC to encourage enrollment in health care studies
- Requirements to become a CNA instructor has changed, leading to an increase in attendance for instructor training programs; now aligned with CMS requirements
- A new Evaluator training was held in March
- Still a challenge to hire staff for long-term care facilities
  - Largely due to the vaccination requirements still in effect for employees
  - Masking requirements had to be reinstated for long-term care facilities

*Youth Investment Council – Latoya Wilson*

The last meeting was held on April 11<sup>th</sup>.

The committee is focusing in on the SYEP (Summer Youth Employment Program).

- The SYEP with \$380,000 in funding awarded by the NJ DOLWD will serve 115 youth ages 16-24
- Maximum earning potential of \$3,000 over the 8-week program; \$15/hour
- Some businesses have already registered to serve as worksites
- Soft skills training will be provided
- A virtual event with breakout sessions is being discussed to encourage youth to enter these sectors - STEM, advanced manufacturing and other sectors will hopefully be represented. Parents will be encouraged to attend to assist youth in making informed decisions
- Career Information needs to be funneled to middle schools
- Social media appears to be the preferred vehicle to deliver event information to students and parents

*WDB Regional and Local Plans Update - Virgen Velez*

- The Regional partners consist of Mercer, Ocean, Middlesex and Monmouth. A link was provided to access the plan.
- The Executive Summary of the Local Plan was emailed to members.
- Board needs to authorize the Executive Committee to approve the plan and make it public for a 30-day comment period before it is submitted to the NJ DOLWD
- The plan will be active through 2026 with required modifications in 2024
- Much of the work product was achieved through the committees
- The completed plan will be available on the WDB website

Reach out to Virgen for any specific component you may want more clarification on.

*Keith asked for a motion to authorize the Executive Committee to approve the plan. Peg Gould made the motion; Melissa Tenzer seconded the motion. The motion carried.*

Virgen commended Keith for his leadership.

*One Stop Update – Virgen Velez*

Flyers will be sent regarding the Youth Career Awareness Virtual Fair and the Spring Job Fair.

- The Job Fair will be held on May 24<sup>th</sup> at the Cure Arena from 3:30 p.m. – 6 p.m. A list of available positions (versus just company names) will be provided to attendees

Early Mercer Reads will be a hybrid event this year, with kickoff on June 1<sup>st</sup>.

Members were encouraged to read the One Stop Services Report to become more aware of the services and activities of the One Stop.

Keith encouraged members to serve as worksites in the SYEP.

*One Stop Operator Report – Carmen Gates*

The African American Chamber of Commerce is actively promoting the SYEP. Four members have already signed up to host youth.

The monthly partner meetings are very important for continued collaboration. They will resume mid-May.

They will be offering employability skills instruction to job seekers. Best Practices are being observed of other One Stops in NJ to bring back to Mercer County.

**Announcements**

None.

**Meeting Adjournment**

A motion to adjourn meeting was made by Scott Needham; seconded by Anthony Carabelli. The meeting adjourned at 1:24 p.m.

**NEXT MEETING:            July 25, 2023 (12:00 p.m. – 1:30 p.m.)**