



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

February 7, 2023 ♦ 12:00 pm (Zoom) ♦ Meeting Minutes

Rescheduled from January 31st due to technical issues

Attending:

Keith Secrest (Kinetics Industries), **Anthony Carabelli** (Mercer County Office of Economic Development), **Scott Elliott** (PCIL), **Kathy Fiery** (Health Care Association of NJ), **Peg Gould** (MCCC), **Scott Needham** (Princeton Air), **Nancy Thomson** (Child Care Connection), **Taraun Tice-McKnight** (NJ Governor's Office)

Guests: Karen Cinkus (NJ DOLWD), Daniel Correnti (NJ Industry Partnership), Ryan Harris (MCTS), Umesh Naik (NJ DOLWD), Gonzalo Perez (MCCC/JKC), Heather Pyle (MCTS), Jason Timian (NJ DOLWD)

WDB/One Stop Staff: Virgen Velez, John Raines, Iliana Ivanov, Carmen Gates (One Stop Operator – AACCNJ)

Welcome

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

Approval of November 1, 2022 Meeting Minutes

A motion to approve the minutes was made by Scott Needham and seconded by Nancy Thomson. There was no opposition and the motion to approve the minutes was approved.

LMI (Labor Market Information) Presentation - Karen Cinkus, NJDOLWD

Data report highlighted the strengths of the Mercer County workforce.

- Diverse occupations and high-paying jobs
- Location offers a range of roles for commuters and workers
- Stable talent pool
- Job growth has outpaced that of greater NJ

The following top (3) areas have added over 20,000 jobs over the past 11 years:

- Professional & Business Services
- Transportation, Warehousing and Utilities
- Financial Activities

Shrinking labor areas (negative growth) over the past 11 years include:

- Information – telecommunications, software development, data centers, newspapers
- Leisure and Hospitality
- Other Services

The average salary in Mercer County for all occupations is \$71,600, higher than the state average of \$67,120.

*Data was derived from surveying 6,000 employers.

Over the past 90 days, the *most job postings* have been for Software Applications Developers and Registered Nurses & the *industries* with the most job postings have been Pharmaceutical and Medical Manufacturing and Colleges, Universities and Professional Schools.

Job posting activity has remained strong over the past decade and trending upward over the past four years.

The 5-year unemployment rate for Mercer County mirrors that of the state.

Commuting estimates highlight mobility of residents and workers due to central location and variety of transit options.

This data will be helpful when submitting the local plan. The presentation slides will be distributed.

Executive/Oversight Committee Report

There is much preparation occurring in efforts to meet the new upcoming State and Federal mandates. Another focus has been on maintaining consistent attendance and recruiting new members. Goal setting items for the year are being discussed.

New Member Recruitment Update

There are 4-5 individuals that are in the process of being appointed. Taraun Tice-McKnight is a new member at today's meeting. Additional new members are expected to be introduced at the next meeting. The Ad-Hoc committee is cultivating their own list to outreach to more private businesses to meet the 51% requirement.

Soft Skills Presentation – Peg Gould

A 10-Skills modularized *Soft Skills* course has been developed by MCCC/JKC. It will be provided to all ABE (Adult Basic Education), HSE (High School Equivalency) and Advanced ESL (English as a Second Language) students.

- Completion of course will result in a certification, along with a digital badge.
- Modules include recorded live interview with County employers; followed by a podcast with experts in the field (employer or incumbent worker). Mandatory exercises and informal quizzes that students must submit is also part of the curriculum. Students will test in person at the completion of all 10 skills modules to receive the certification. (The modules can be taken in any order)
- This certification is geared towards making both the jobseeker and employer more confident during the interviewing process – and ultimately the job.

Peg Gould is involved with the National Skills Coalition (Washington D.C. based nonprofit advocacy agency). She has been invited to attend workshops that will culminate in her making a presentation on the floor of the U.S. Congress in May, to highlight the importance of adult education and the need for continued adult education.

Committee Reports

Advanced Manufacturing – Scott Needham

The last meeting was held on January 9th.

- MCCC's partnership with the local robotics has garnished interest from Ewing High School students.
- MCCC and the NJ Advanced Manufacturing Extension program is collaborating and developing a partnership; more information to follow
- NJMEP informed at the last meeting of new programs being developed for high school students and other interested individuals - CAD design, 3-D printing and basic skills for tools/mechanics should be available in April
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Disabilities Issues - Scott Elliott

The last meeting held on December 8th.

- On-going discussion on having presentations for employers on the benefits of hiring individuals with disabilities
- NJBIA has a video which will be integrated into the WDB's presentation
- Lesley Jack provided information on transition services at DVRS; more students are beginning to utilize services
- Steve Cook (Arc Mercer) reported that there has been more partnership with AccessLink

Healthcare – Kathy Fiery

The last meeting was held on February 1st.

- There are 29 new CNA instructors as a result of the last training program cycled; no Mercer County resident certified, but we are hopeful some would be willing to travel
- Competency evaluators for the CNAs are being sought after
- MCTS hired a pre-nursing teacher

Literacy – Peg Gould

The last meeting was held on December 1st. There was an announcement that Nancy Thomson is retiring.

- Keith read a letter from the County Executive recognizing her time, dedication and long-term commitment to the Literacy committee and the MC WDB.
- Nancy was very instrumental in the Early Mercer Reads initiative
- The MC One Stop hosted a job fair in the fall, which hosted about 300 employers and jobseekers. Another job fair will tentatively be scheduled for springtime.
- The One Stop reopened for in-person walk-in activities in January, with the exception of Unemployment Services.
- The Latino American Legal Defense and Education Fund (LALDEF) provides English language skills training, as well as other supportive services (citizenship class – free for eligible individuals).
- The MC Consortium (4 providers) offers free non-credit literacy acquisition and high school equivalency training to adults. In meeting the benchmark for the year, fifty-percent or more have already been enrolled.
- The Consortium has received a small supplemental funding stream, in partnership with the American Institute on Research, and the Online Technical Assistance Network, to offer a series of professional development opportunities for Consortium partners and staff.
- The Literacy committee is in the early planning stage of the 16th Early Mercer Reads event.
 - Traditionally, the event had volunteers from the community (private/public agencies and employers) visit child care centers to read books for an hour. The pandemic shifted the event to a virtual platform, where volunteers submitted video recordings that were made available to the child care centers and the public for a 1-month duration.
 - In 2023, we will move towards providing a hybrid format – volunteer readers at physical locations, as well as video library submissions, to serve those centers still not receiving outside visitors.

Peg congratulated and thanked Nancy on behalf of the Literacy committee.

Youth Investment Council – Virgen Velez

The last meeting was held on December 13th.

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

- The application to the State was submitted on February 3rd for funding consideration
- The SYEP would aim to serve 115 youth ages 16-24
- Maximum earning potential of \$3,000 over the 8-week program

A Career Awareness Fair is being planned for late April/early May.

- The targeted population will be current high school seniors who do not have plans to attend college
- MCCC, MCTS, the Trades and other will be in attendance to highlight their offerings
- The fairs will be offered in person and also via Zoom to encourage parents to attend one or the other; time slot will be in the early evening (4 p.m. – 6 p.m.)

A private sector employee is needed to chair the YIC.

WDB Update - Virgen Velez

Two major issues facing the WDB:

1. Local Governance expectations
 - Structural separation of the WDB and operations, as well as staff functions
2. Competitive procurement of the One Stop Operator along with career services
 - Youth services have always been procured
 - The County through MCOTES has provided the career services under workforce development programs i.e. WIOA, WIA, JTP, etc.; the law now requires that these services be competitively procured

The local plan and regional plans are in process.

- Much of the work product will be through the committees

In accordance with DOL policies, current MOU (Memorandum of Understanding) and IFA (Infrastructure Financial Agreement) can be extended between WDB and One Stop Partners.

- The WDB Chair and Acting WDB Director are authorized to sign the extension agreement on behalf of the partners
- In addition to the co-location entities, it also includes all One Stop System partners (Trenton Housing Authority, libraries, etc.)
- Allows time for the development of new agreements that would be effective January 1, 2024

One Stop Updates – Virgen Velez

Unemployment recipients must still make an appointment to be seen at the One Stop.

Occupational training has resumed. Customers are attending orientations and meeting with counselors virtually.

The OS budget was reviewed with the Executive Committee.

- There is a substantial amount of funding that will be returned -primarily from WFNJ
 - Approximately \$300,000 from GA (General Assistance)
 - Approximately \$600,000 from TANF (Temporary Assistance for Needy Families)
- Return of funds is primarily due to cease of mandatory participation due to Covid-19. This should not affect future funding allocations
- Mandatory customer participation resumed as of January, so we expect to continue to serve large numbers as in pre-pandemic times

One Stop Operator Report – Carmen Gates

- Monthly partner meetings have reconvened
- Issues with customer service, service flow and surveys will be further discussed at partners' next meeting
- Other One Stops are being researched to discover best practices and processes
- Covid-19 sensitivity guidelines are still in effect

Announcements

Next meeting will explore items the Board wants to focus on during the year. Members are asked to bring ideas to next meeting.

Daniel Correnti is now leading the NJ Industry Partnership Central Region/Advanced Manufacturing.

Meeting Adjournment

A motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Nancy Thomason and seconded by Scott Needham.

The meeting adjourned at 1:10 p.m.

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