



## County of Mercer Workforce Development Board

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Virgen Velez  
Acting Director

Brian M. Hughes  
County Executive

Keith Secrest  
Chairperson

### WDB Literacy Committee ♦ Interim Chairperson: Keith Secrest

October 4, 2023 ♦ 9:00 a.m. (Zoom) ♦ Meeting Minutes

#### In Attendance

**Ray Agiliata** (MCCC/JKC), **Gabrielle Capoferri** (Homefront), **Lamees Jimenez** (Homefront), **Cecy Jimenez-Weeast** (Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund), **Jill Marcus** (MCCC/JKC), **Lorena Morales** (Latin American Legal Defense and Education Fund), **Keith Secrest** (WDB Chair)

*WDB /One Stop Staff:* Virgen Velez

#### Welcome & Introductions

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

#### Review and Approval of June 7, 2023 Meeting Minutes

Approval of minutes tabled due to not having a quorum of voting members.

#### Early Mercer Reads 2023 Outcomes

- Virgen provided background of initiative
  - Annual April event that commenced in 2010
  - Brought volunteers (private and public sector employees) to child care centers in Mercer County to read books for an hour to pre-school to instill in them a love of reading
  - Event pivoted to virtual format in years 2021 & 2022 due to pandemic
    - Volunteers submitted recorded book videos which were available to child care centers for a month
  - This year, there were 26 videos uploaded to the EMR library that were viewed 296 times
  - In 2024, we might have to revert to in-person readings because publishers will no longer grant permission for books to be read for recording purposes

#### Programs Update

##### *WLL (Workforce Learning Link)*

- Administered through the OS to offer self-paced literacy instruction to individuals looking to obtain their HS equivalency, gain literacy skills to better prepare to seek employment, or increase their reading/math levels to meet occupational training requirements – minimum of 9.0 reading/math levels based on specific training
- In PY '22 (7/1/22 – 6/30/23), forty-four individuals were served
  - Six entered occupational training; two gained employment

## *Title II Consortium -Jill Marcus*

- The 2024 fiscal plan was submitted in June and the State approved funding
  - ESL classes (Beginner/Intermediate/Advanced) are offered 4x yearly; 10-week sessions
  - Also offered is GED instruction, Language Arts, Math, Science, and Social Studies; these are scheduled 6x yearly for 7-week sessions
- Integrated Education and Training (IET) is also available to offer ESL and GED students opportunities to gain employment
  - The following IETs are being developed: Career Prep, OSHA-10, Entrepreneurship, Financial Literacy, Health Career
- The Career Institute (CTI) offers OS customers training options
- The Consortium Partners include the YWCA of Princeton, Literacy NJ, and Mercer Street Friends
- Last year, MCCC serviced 167 GED students and 340 ESL students
  - The goal is to serve more students; additional ESL instructors have been hired (1 full-time/2 part-time)
  - Saturday classes will tentatively be offered beginning in January
  - Most of the demand is currently for evening classes; still hiring for ESL instructors for evening hours
  - Student recruitment is purely word of mouth; no advertisement is done;
    - Jill will send Virgen the flyer with information for distribution
    - Classes fill up very quickly
    - The next ESL session starts 1/16/23, with testing starting week of 1/8/23
- ESL self-paced instruction is also available in the Link
  - Virgen will reach out to Consortium partners for referrals

The Consortium is in its 3<sup>rd</sup> year of the 5-year plan.

Keith stated that getting information to employers about ESL classes for their employees would be very helpful.

## *WDB Local Plan Goals (2023-2026)*

\*Document was emailed to Members

- All WDB committees focus on services that will enable customers to gain employment
- We need to continually strive for increased and better communication and coordination among agencies offering similar and complementary services
- Committee meetings should be more relevant and offer members takeaways
- Mercer County is part of the *Central Jersey Partners* which includes Middlesex, Monmouth and Ocean counties
  - Share best practices
  - Host joint events
- Market services to employers – OJT (On-the-Job training) and internships
- Transitional employment provides 100% reimbursement (during the training period) of employee wages; an incentive for employers to consider applicants who may not immediately meet their requirements
- Promote incumbent worker training

The Mercer Institute offers courses to companies for their employees on a fee-for-service option.

It was suggested focusing on the employer side of the goals at the next meeting.

## **Member Recruitment**

Refer any potential members (preferably) private-sector.

- The Board has to be comprised of 51% private sector members
- All members have to be approved by the County's Board of Commissioners

## **Announcements/Events/Discussion**

- One Stop Job & Career Fair (10/25/23)
  - To be held at the Cure Arena from 3:30 p.m. – 6:30 p.m.
  - In addition to employers, MCCC, MCTS, Trades representatives and training providers will attend
    - Community Agencies, such as the County Energy Assistance Program will also offer resources information
- Job-seeker flyers will be distributed via email
- MCCC has a standard email address that should be used regarding ESL and GED questions: [cet@mcc.edu](mailto:cet@mcc.edu)
- LALDEF recently opened ESL evening classes; 90 registered and there are 50 on the waiting lists
- Homefront Hire Expectations is seeking funding opportunities to offer ESL classes
  - Students will register for GED instruction, but will not follow through, despite incentives, flexible schedules, virtual format, etc.

## **Adjournment**

- Meeting adjourned at 10:24 a.m.

**PY '23 Meeting Dates:** *1<sup>st</sup> Wednesday bi-monthly ♦ 9:30 a.m.*

**December 6, 2023**

**February 7, 2024**

**April 3, 2024**

**June 5, 2024**

NOTE: subsequent to the meeting a decision was made by the Executive Committee to schedule the meetings on a quarterly basis – with additional meetings as necessary.