

UNION COUNTY WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD
YOUTHCOMMITTEE
SCOTT KUCHINSKY, CHAIRMAN
MEETING MINUTES: Wednesday, October 6th, 2021 10:00AM

Committee Members

1. Scott Kuchinsky - Committee Chair, Plainfield Public Library
2. Susana Mateo, Elizabeth Board of Education
3. Perle Almeida, American Job Center
4. Crystal A'Hearn CTE Elizabeth Board of Education
5. Robert Croom, American Job Center
6. Juanita Vargas, United Way of Greater Union County
7. Jas Verem, International Rescue Committee (IRC)
8. LaChelle Thomas HACE (Elizabeth Housing Authority)
9. Zelda Spence-Wallace, Plainfield Board of Education
10. Salvador Garcia, MAS Development Group
11. James Horne, United Way of Greater Union County
12. Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean, CTE Roselle Board of Education
13. Nasrene Mondol, American Job Center
14. Donald Stewart, Elizabeth Board of Education
15. Jasmine Lee, Simon Youth Academy
16. Victoria McCormick, Job Corps
17. Kim Best-Parris, Youth Forward
18. Jackie Santiago, Youth Forward

UCWDB Staff

Meredith Barracato

Meeting Summary

I. Welcome and Introductions:

Chairman Kuchinsky welcomed everyone to the meeting and thanked the new committee members from the various school districts for attending. He asked the group to enter all attendees' names in the meeting chat box.

II. Review and approval of August 18th, 2021 Committee Meeting minutes:

A motion was made by Crystal A'Hearn and seconded by Jas Verem. Motion carried.

III. Labor Market Information:

Meredith Barracato reviewed slides that focused on the Union County labor market from August 2021 (see presentation) and the fastest growing and declining jobs. Meredith Barracato also reviewed additional information on certifications in demand, cities with the most job openings, unemployment claims reports, and information on software and programming skills in greatest demand.

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IV. Review of the Strategic Plan Sub-Strategies:

Chairman Kuchinsky opened the discussion about the various sub-strategies and asked committee members to provide feedback on the current list since there are more opportunities to enhance the strategic plan in youth programming.

SS-36 Adopt the WIOA legislation's increased flexibility in eligibility, especially in serving youth considering that 14 diverse populations were recognized and designated under WIOA as facing challenges and barriers in obtaining employment and living-wage jobs that lead to self-sufficiency and economic prosperity.

SS-37 Look to co-enrollment to stretch funding while offering increased diverse educational and occupational services.

SS-38 Provide local planning, policy guidance, followed by staff training, to AJC Career Coaches in order to comply with necessary system adaptations required to expanded services using WIOA provisions for core programs.

SS-40 Considering the success of the Workforce System in addressing its customers' training and employment needs, the System will increase its outreach efforts with state and regional agencies to resolve obstacles faced by its trainees around transportation, housing, and child care.

Chairman Kuchinsky began the conversation by discussing some challenges shared with him by Union County College (UCC) Director, Isaias Rivera, and their previous attempt for a youth soft skills class.

Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean asked how the UCWDB see its relationship with the school district CTE (Career Technical Education) programs. Chairman Kuchinsky mentioned that after a student is done with the CTE program's services, there should be a direct connection between the schools to an outside service provider that can assist the youth so they cannot fall through the cracks. He added that there is the possibility of doing some of the program simultaneously but the process will need to be mapped out.

Meredith Barracato added that understanding what is needed from the school district and what information is needed for WIOA programming is vital to making the program work. There needs to be a deeper dive into seeing what information is collected from the schools and what additional information is needed to be WIOA eligible.

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Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean explained the CTE in which students participate in a series of courses that align with a career path. In Roselle, students are offered computer science and health occupations. If a student decides that a college is not for them, they can refer students to these workforce programs. Students who struggle in a traditional setting can work with these programs and become better prepared.

Crystal A'Hearn mentioned that the information mentioned under WIOA falls in line with the Perkins V regulations. A path to post-secondary institution or industry-valued credentials (IVC). Some of the obstacles she faces are how to get the students trained, what companies work with them, and what IVC the schools can offer students.

Crystal gave an example of the problems she faces with her youth focusing on an industry-focused career such as CDL because her students are not old enough to drive so that becomes a barrier. She has to jump through many hoops because the Department of Education (DOE), Health, and Labor don't talk to each other.

Chairman Kuchinsky asked committee members who work for the school districts if the DOE allows students who receive their General Educational Development (GED) to count those numbers as part of the graduation rate. Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean mentioned that students who decide to take the GED path are excluded from the graduation rate in her school district. Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean suggested a partnership should be formed in which the program targets the youth on the verge of dropping out and provides them additional services so they can stay in school.

Juanita Vargas mentioned that in the past, they have worked with the Elizabeth School district to provide services to in-school youth and target youth that are at risk of not being promoted and were able to get stackable credentials. They complimented the work they were doing, which included work experience. However, the criteria for WIOA will eliminate some youth from receiving services. United Way of Greater Union County (UWGUC) created a parental release form that allowed them to share youth information to determine eligibility. Chairman Kuchinsky said every school district should follow that model because it eliminates many problems facing the eligibility process. The school provided UWGUC copies of the student's working papers and lunch forms which smoothed the process, but the eligibility process is still problematic. It's essential to have a point person to ensure a seamless transfer process.

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James Horne mentioned it's important to understand the available services at the AJC and how to determine when the youth is available to receive those services.

Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide regarding Union County College soft skills training. Soft Skills training is only available to WIOA eligible youth. Chairman Kuchinsky added that if the committee would consider a youth soft skills training, then the recommendation would be to have it solely for youth participants and not mix with more work experienced adult clients.

Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean asked what the criteria form WIOA youth. Kim Best-Parris from the Youth Forward program provided the eligibility process in school and out of school youth. Kim Best-Parris mentioned for Out that School youth could not be enrolled in a school program not younger than 16 and older than 24. Meredith Barracato will share a link to the Youth Forward website listing the information with all partners. <https://ucnj.org/union-county-youth-workforce-development-operations-program/>

Juanita Vargas asked how the committee can support many Out of School Youth (OSY) that needs English as a Second Language (ESL) services. Juanita Vargas mentioned that UCC has an ESL program, but there is a long waiting list. She is concerned that they are losing youth because they are not providing services in Spanish. Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean added an English Language Learners (ELL) program for In-School Youth (ISY) where instruction is provided in a bilingual setting. She said her school district had supported these clients through the Title III program. Jas Verem asked Evenide Fanfan-Vilcean to share that information regarding the ESL program because he has been having some challenges obtaining services for his clients.

Juanita Vargas asked if there is a comprehensive list for schools to hand off to students as they exit programs if they are not on track to graduating. This list would connect them to alternative programs such as Youth Corp or Simon Youth Academy. Susana Mateo mentioned in her experience there is no list of programs offered to students on the verge of dropping out. She added that most of the suggestions made by guidance counselors to students come from the counselor's knowledge and connections with the alternative programs. She shared that school districts are now focusing on social/emotional behaviors due to the pandemic.

Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide that provides information on the various alternative schools that are enrolled in the committee and programs the UCWDB will be conducting outreach to.

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Juanita Vargas raised concerns over the low literacy levels and educational deficiencies for the OSY. She feels many youth are reading at a fifth-grade level, but the training materials are at an eighth-grade reading level. Chairman Kuchinsky mentioned that some individuals had trouble with doing math, including simple multiplication. The need is to address the students to educational deficiencies before they can be sent to training. Juanita Vargas added that OSY who are between the ages of 19-21 need to have more work experience opportunities and occupational training. Chairman Kuchinsky mentioned that resource costs would need to be increased due to the additional needed services and staff time involved for the youth clients.

Meredith Barracato reviewed a slide that demonstrated the graduation rate for Union County. Chairman Kuchinsky asked to prioritize the cities with the low graduation rate and asked committee members to provide additional feedback. James Horne suggested looking at the Union County Community Needs assessment listed as cities with high needs. A link to the Union County Needs Assessment was provided to the committee for review.

<https://ucnj.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/Comprehensive-Community-Needs-Assessment-for-Union-County-New-Jersey.pdf>

The following are the recommendations that the Committee suggested for consideration to the strategic plan sub-strategies;

- Identify school staff that will be trained on WIOA programs and eligibility requirements.
- Understand the enrollment process for the schools as well as WIOA programs. Identify commonalities and differences.
- Establish what levels of interactions can take place between the school districts and WIOA providers.
- Identify what levels of information can be transferred between the schools ISY and OSY and WIOA providers.
- Map out what the co-enrollment process looks like for youth clients.
- Create procedures on how to transfer youth from school programs to occupations training programs.
- Formalize an exit packet for a student leaving the school program.
- Identify mechanisms to address the educational deficiencies of OSY to successfully participate in occupational training.
- Create a connection between training providers and schools to guide the students to understand occupation requirements
- Determine what programs can be done simultaneously for ISY and OSY.

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- Creation of youth-centered soft skills training course.
- Identify additional ESL providers within the county to address the language barriers for out-of-school.
- Identify what happens to ISY and OSY ESL students after they exit the ESL program.
- Develop meaningful work experiences for OSY between the ages of 18-21.
- Identify apprenticeships and on-the-job training opportunities for the youth.
- Identify supportive services to help youth with mental health/social, emotional health concerns.
- Creation of a list of alternative schools available to students who are at risk of not graduating.

V. Program Updates: Due to time constraints no program updates were completed.

VI. Meeting Schedule 2021:

- a. Wednesday November 17th, 2021 10:00am

VII. COMMITTEE ADJOURNMENT