

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

**7:30 a.m.  
September 18, 2020**

**Meeting Summary**

**Members Present (via MS Teams Meeting)**

Ms. Debra Antol  
Ms. Jenny Batista  
Ms. Auria Bradley  
Ms. Ashley Chambers  
Mr. John DeVere  
Mr. William Dorward  
Ms. Marianne Egolf  
Mr. Michael Fischetti  
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman  
Mr. Robert Harrop  
Ms. Carole Homolash  
Ms. Peggy Kershner  
Mr. Thomas McKeon  
Mr. Thomas McNelis  
Mr. Scott Mengle  
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage  
Ms. Jennie Rodriguez-Priest  
Mr. Michael Rowley  
Mr. Russell Showers  
Mr. David Turner  
Mr. Barry Unger  
Dr. Anne Zayaitz

**Members Absent**

Mr. Lewis McCoy  
Mr. James Nichols  
Mr. Pablo Tejada  
Ms. Karyn Troxell

**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
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Ken Mall	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Mr. Brian Lester	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Heather Berger	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 7:34 a.m. Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being streamed for the

public via YouTube through the County website and was being recorded for minutes purposes only and that recording would be deleted. An attendance roll call was taken, and a quorum was present.

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 June 19, 2020 meeting minutes
- Approval of an extension of ResCare's TANF Youth Contract (through March 31, 2021) as recommended by the Youth Committee

There being no objections, the consent agenda was adopted.

Ms. Noll reported that the final PY2019 expenditures were lower than the proposed budgets in all line items due to the pandemic. Even though the expenditures were lower than expected, Ms. Noll reported that the WIOA obligation requirement was still met. The proposed PY2020 revised budget incorporated changes in funds due to adjusted carry-over amounts and an increased budget for the Board Operations Expenses due to the projected 2021 Indirect Cost Plan increase. Ms. Gage-Linderman asked how has COVID impacted the budget. Ms. Noll replied that security costs have increased due to additional security guards at the CareerLink and the WorkKeys® assessments decreased due to lower demand for the service. Mr. DeVere moved to adopt the revised PY2020 budget as presented and recommended by the Finance Committee. Mr. Showers seconded the motion and all members approved.

On behalf of Ms. Gage-Linderman, Mr. Fogarty introduced the Executive Committee report. The Committee recommended a two-year extension of the Chairperson and Vice-Chairperson's terms through December 31, 2022 as provided for in Section 3.01.b. of the WDB's By-Laws. Ms. Gage-Linderman and Mr. Showers accepted the Committee's recommendations. Ms. Antol moved and Dr. Zayaitz seconded the motion. All members approved.

Ms. Moser reported that the final PY2019 WIOA Title I Performance Outcomes came in positive.

Mr. Moser stated that WIOA Performance Negotiations with the State are visited every two years. Pennsylvania has already negotiated with the Federal government and now the State must negotiate with the local workforce development areas. Local areas are not allowed to factor COVID-19 into the negotiations at this time. At the end of 2020-2021, any unusual circumstances in the economy may be factored in as deemed appropriate by the federal and state authorities.

On behalf of Ms. Kershner, One-Stop Oversight Committee Chair, Mr. Moser referred to the By the Numbers report for the period July 2019 through June 2020. He said many of the numbers are mostly cumulative through March or April since the PA CareerLink® Berks County office was closed to the public and staff in mid-March and had opened to appointments only on July 13, 2020. Virtual services started almost immediately following the Governor's order to shut down operations in March. The Resource Room remains closed. There is a process for UC claimants to fill out a form and one staff member is assigned to facilitate that process. Mr. Moser

commented that following the review of the hours that the PA CareerLink® Berks County had been open since its reopening in June, the hours of operation were revised. The current schedule which began the day after Labor Day is Monday, Wednesday and Friday 8:00 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.; Tuesday and Thursday 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. with no Saturday hours being offered at this time. The number of guards have been cut back from five to three. He added that before the pandemic, there was one guard stationed at the front desk since the hours of operation were much shorter.

Two incidents of potential COVID-19 exposure at the CareerLink office have been appropriately addressed by both temporarily closing the office and deep cleaning prior to reopening. Staff were required to quarantine at home in accordance with established best practice protocols.

Job Fair alternatives are being looked at. Dr. Zayaitz commented that virtual job fairs are being utilized by Kutztown and other universities and suggested that Mr. Moser and Ms. Kershner investigate the technologies.

Mr. Fogarty asked Mr. DeVere to comment on the Training and Industry Partnership report. Mr. DeVere reported that the Committee had discussed at length justification for On-the-Job-Training “reverse referrals” which had been restricted in the past two years. Two methods had been utilized to identify and place individuals into OJT subsidized employment (1) PA CareerLink® referral of an eligible jobseeker to the hiring employer and (2) hiring employer’s “reverse referral” of a prospective candidate to PACL. Mr. DeVere noted that sometimes the reverse referral method was not successful because individuals too often did not complete the training plan. Mr. Fogarty commented that waivers continued to be allowed. Mr. Moser stated that significant layoffs have occurred due to the pandemic and the Committee agreed that the reverse referrals access to OJT eligible individuals be opened for the next six months. Each employer’s application will be reviewed individually, and a waiver will be granted to those the WDB deems acceptable.

Mr. DeVere added that progress on the Advanced Manufacturing Skills Gap Study by the Economic Development Corporation (CEDC)—Lancaster County is going very well. The project is scheduled for a January 2021 completion.

Mr. McKeon reported on the Diversity, Equality and Inclusion (DEI) Committee’s report. He said the Committee is very enthused to have Ms. Rodriguez-Priest join the Committee. Her great expertise is appreciated. Ms. Homolash, Mr. Moser and Mr. McKeon will be presenting a session titled “How to Establish a Committee Focused on Individuals with Disabilities” during the October 21-23, 2020 PA Workforce Development Association’s virtual conference. Mr. McKeon said that the Committee is very disappointed that the Annual Symposium will not be held this year due to the pandemic but that the funds will be used to study the impact of COVID-19 on the hiring of individuals with disabilities from both an employer and job seeker perspective. The study is targeted to start in the first quarter of 2021 and will be competitively procured.

Outreach during the month of October (National Disability Employment Awareness Month, NDEAM) will consist of an e-newsletter to be distributed to employers using the CareerLink’s Business Services Team employer distribution list. The newsletter will have links to

agency websites that can provide employers with assistance in locating, employing and retaining individuals with disabilities, as well as links to local success stories.

Mr. Fogarty commented that the Board Committees are all doing great work bringing recommendations to the full Board quarterly.

He stated that the Policy, Planning and Priorities (PPP) Committee, chaired by Mr. Rowley, met via MS Teams in July. Market intelligence and current developments were discussed along with updates on current WDB contracted studies. Mr. Fogarty commented that the Board's new four-year local plan must be written although the guidelines from the State have not yet been published. He added that he hoped the current plan would be extended to allow more time and access to more complete post-pandemic labor market data.

The extensive coverage of the Youth Committee's last meeting was referred to by Mr. Fogarty. He said Ms. Columbo and her Team continue to serve the youth and young adults in our community by very adeptly continuing services through the challenging pandemic isolation period imposed upon our county.

Ms. Jenny Batista was appointed Chairperson of the Youth Committee by Ms. Gage-Linderman effective September 18, 2020 and she will also join the Executive and Finance Committees.

Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Chambers and the United Way of Berks County (UWBC) on their outreach to the community to recruit worksites/participants for the recently implemented Berks Service Corps 2020 initiative. To date, 18 participants have been placed; 9 participants will continue working through mid-November (others returning to college).

Mr. Fogarty reviewed his COO report highlighting the Berks County Local Labor Market Update which is continuing to slowly recover from the initial impact of the COVID-19 pandemic as the seasonally adjusted (SA) local unemployment rate declined to 12.9% in July. Pennsylvania's statewide unemployment rate increased to 13.7% for the month while the U.S. rate for July was 10.2%. He stated that the local labor force now stands at a record level of 225,000; 4.1% higher than a year ago. Non-farm jobs in Berks County rebounded to 180,800 jobs in July. The manufacturing sector added 400 jobs over the last year.

An update on the manufacturing production new hire crisis was provided by Mr. Fogarty. He said the CareerLink's Business Services Team has been inundated by calls for help from local manufacturing employers desperate to fill current job openings and receiving almost no responses to their online job postings. Some manufacturing employers are increasing their entry-level wages, but it remains to be seen how much impact these monetary enticements will have.

Mr. Fogarty reported that Amazon announced in early August that it signed a lease on a large fulfillment center in Upper Bern Township and would be hiring over 1,000 full-time employees starting at \$15 per hour plus benefits. A week later Amazon announced the concurrent opening of a second fulfillment center in Muhlenberg Township which will provide 400 additional new jobs with similar pay and benefits as the larger facility.

Mr. Fogarty added that workforce retention challenges grow as local schools reopen. Many reliable employees were exploring leaves of absences as they were no longer able to commit to working assigned shifts due to the pressing need to help coordinate shifting home and school schedules. Employees across industries are facing similar challenges, but the inability of production and maintenance work to be accomplished remotely is particularly problematic in the manufacturing sector.

In response to these growing concerns, the Greater Reading Chamber Alliance (GRCA) convened a call with the Greater Reading Advanced Manufacturing Industry Partnership on August 12 to explore needs and potential solutions. Over 50 manufacturing employer representatives participated. WDB staff have joined a working group consisting of the GRCA, the United Way of Berks County (UWBC) and the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIUS) to identify the extent of the problem and to offer possible solutions for employers and families.

Deputy Secretary for Workforce Development Sheila Ireland and Ruben Pachay, Director of L&I's Bureau of Workforce Development visited Reading on September 11. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Kershner, Ms. Batista and Ms. Gage-Linderman for making time in their busy schedules to share their insights regarding the many challenges faced by Berks County employers and jobseekers during this unusual time. Highlights of the visit were a tour of the Schmidt Training & Technology Center (STTC), Reading DoubleTree and the R3 construction pre-apprenticeship program at BCPS. The visit ended with an inside look at the PA CareerLink® Berks County where the visitors met with the CareerLink Administrator and a small group of Managers and staff who joined the discussion via Zoom.

Mr. Rowley reported that EDSI (Educational Data Systems, Inc.) made a Zoom presentation of the Employer Best Practice Study to the Executive and PPP Committees and would now share the results of study via PowerPoint slides. Mr. Rowley turned the meeting over to Mr. Ken Mall who commented on the slides titled "Employer Outreach, Retention, and Development Best Practices Study".

Titles of the slides presented:

- Project Scope
- Project Status
  - Talent Survey Highlights
  - Talent Strategy Survey Highlights
  - Talent Strategy Survey
- Berks County Survey Results Compared to Nationwide Benchmark
  - Berks County Talent Survey Results (159 responses)
  - Best Practice Categories
  - Opportunities
- Results by Employer size
  - Employer Size Comparison
- Best Practices Summary
  - Best Practices

- Recommendations
  - Recommendations: Employers
  - Recommendations: Berks WDB Business Services
  - Recommendations: Berks WDB and Partners
- Next Steps
  - Phase III - Generate report and present findings
    - ◆ Finalize recommendations
    - ◆ Complete edits to final report
    - ◆ Schedule and facilitate public rollout of study (mid October)
    - ◆ Work with Berks WDB Business Services staff on strategy to address report findings

On the employee retention side, Mr. Turner asked are you looking at levels of wages? Mr. Mall replied that increased compensation, flexible hours, better benefits and options to work from home could all be part of keeping employees. He added that employers want to keep employees who look to move forward.

Ms. Batista asked if the full report is available. Mr. Mall replied that the slide presentation is available, but the full report is not yet finalized but soon would be.

Mr. Rowley commented that he very much appreciated this report and perhaps it would be a good idea to review it often in the year ahead.

Mr. Harrop commented on the “cannibalization” of employees before COVID and now 2,000 distribution jobs may create more opportunities for churn among entry-level positions.

Mr. Fogarty commented that we are now seeing sudden and unprecedented wage jumps between \$2.00 and \$3.00 per hour for entry-level warehouse and manufacturing positions.

Ms. Gage-Linderman commented that employers are rethinking their offerings and deciding to have more discussion with employees about their needs and priorities.

Mr. McKeon commented that a logistics company at Berks Park in Hamburg is offering \$17.50/hour to start.

Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Heather Berger for her assistance with the MS Teams presentation and the YouTube recording.

Mr. Fogarty, on Ms. Gage-Linderman’s behalf, asked if there was any public comment. There being no public comment, Ms. Gage-Linderman called for a motion to adjourn. Ms. Batista moved to adjourn; Mr. Unger seconded. The meeting was adjourned at 8:59 a.m.

The next quarterly meeting of the Berks County Workforce Development Board is scheduled for 7:30 a.m. on Friday, December 11, 2020.