

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

**7:30 a.m.  
June 16, 2023**

**Meeting Summary**

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

Ms. Kimberly Baskett  
Ms. Jenny Batista  
Mr. Ryan Breisch  
Ms. Ashley Chambers  
Mr. John DeVere  
Mr. William Dorward  
Mr. Robert Harrop  
Ms. Crystal Houser  
Ms. Peggy Kershner  
Mr. Scott Mengle  
Ms. Debra Millman  
Mr. Richard Olmos  
Ms. Christy Pisker  
Ms. Alexia Pursley  
Ms. Patricia Shermot  
Mr. David Turner  
Mr. Barry Unger

**Members Absent**

Ms. Debra Antol  
Ms. Auria Bradley  
Dr. Karen Campbell  
Ms. Marianne Egolf  
Mr. Michael Fischetti  
Ms. Kristi Gage-Linderman  
Mr. Mark Pinkasavage  
Ms. Karyn Troxell

**Staff and Guests Present**

Mr. Daniel Fogarty	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Amber Columbo	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Megan Noll	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Ms. Patricia Spencer	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Rory Stevenson	Berks County Workforce Development Board Staff
Mr. Robert Kerecz	PA CareerLink <sup>®</sup> Employment Services Team Supervisor
Ms. Helen Konnick	PA CareerLink <sup>®</sup> Berks County Administrator
Mr. David Genaro	Equus Workforce Solutions
Mr. Andre Hardy	Educational Data Systems, Inc.
Ms. Marybeth Williams	Bureau of Workforce Partnership and Operations
Ms. Yanimer Serrano	PA L&I Rapid Response Coordinator
Ms. Heather Berger	County of Berks Information Systems
Mr. Malcom Townes	County of Berks Information Systems

Mr. Fogarty conducted a roll call and confirmed that a quorum was present.

The meeting was called to order by Mr. David Turner, Chairperson, at 7:32 a.m.

Mr. Fogarty announced that the meeting was being streamed for the public via YouTube through the County's website. As a result, the meeting was being recorded for minutes purposes only and the recording will then be deleted. To assist staff with keeping the official minutes, members participating were asked to clearly state their names when making or seconding any motions and when making comments.

Mr. Turner called for a motion to approve the minutes from the March 24, 2023 Board meeting. Mr. Dorward so moved, and Mr. Breisch seconded the motion. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Turner noted that he and eight other Board members have agreed to serve an additional three-year term beginning July 1, 2023 and that all nine members will be formally reappointed by the Berks County Board of Commissioners.

Mr. Turner invited Mr. Fogarty to comment on the Executive Committee's report. Referring to the WIOA Title I Performance Outcomes for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Quarter PY2022 Program Year-to-Date Results, Mr. Fogarty noted that both Statewide and Berks performance data are included in each quarterly report and the desired "green check mark" was received. Since our last quarterly meeting, Ms. Columbo met with our contractors and some discrepancies in data reporting were adjusted accordingly. Final results for the current program year ending June 30, 2023 will not be known until December 2023.

Ms. Noll was invited to comment on the Finance Committee's minutes. She noted that the current PY 2022 Budget V. Expenditures Report shows year-to-date expenditures that are slightly lower than expected across all programs due to open staff positions with our contractors and an open position on the Board staff. The EARN Performance (Bonus) Funds earned \$20,000 in interest over the last calendar year. Mr. Fogarty commented that he hopes to gain approval from the PA Department of Human Services (DHS) before January 2024 to use EARN bonus funds to supplement our declining TANF youth funds thereby allowing for the potential expansion of the numbers of eligible youth placed in valuable work-based learning experiences. Ms. Noll added that the 80% obligation requirement is being met. Mr. Fogarty commented that our annual Title I WIOA funding comes in two increments—July to September and October to June—and it is important to maintain carry over funds sufficient for the first quarter of each program year.

Ms. Noll reported that the Finance Committee recommended approval and the County has agreed to award the EARN program contract to Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) in the amount of \$1,113,155.60 for the first year of the contract beginning July 1, 2023. Mr. Turner asked for a motion to approve the contract award. The motion was made by Ms. Pursley and seconded by Ms. Batista. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

The proposed PY2023 budget was reviewed by Ms. Noll. She stated that we received an approximate 18% increase in the Title I WIOA formula funds allocation and a slight decrease in the TANF youth funding. She added that over the last five years there has been a 37% reduction in TANF funding resulting in reduced contracts for youth. Ms. Baskett commented that the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation (OVR) has increased summer youth funding to Goodwill. Ms.

Noll noted that WDB staff recommended a transfer of \$300,000 from WIOA Dislocated Worker to WIOA Adult, explaining that this transfer would allow for the funds to be used for Adults or Dislocated Workers instead of being restricted to only Dislocated Workers. Mr. Turner asked for a motion to approve the PY2023 Proposed Budget. Mr. DeVere so moved, and Mr. Dorward seconded the motion. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Turner excused himself from the meeting at 8:00 a.m. due to a prior commitment.

Mr. Fogarty invited Ms. Millman to comment on the minutes of the Planning Committee. Ms. Millman thanked Ms. Columbo, Mr. Stevenson and her fellow committee members who worked so hard over the past ten months on the WIOA four-year plan modifications. Mr. Fogarty commented that all deadlines were met including advertisement in the newspaper and on the Board's department page with the opportunity for any public comment to be received from May 9<sup>th</sup> through June 8<sup>th</sup>. There was no public comment received.

Mr. Fogarty asked for a motion to approve the Southeast Pennsylvania Regional Plan Modification which includes updates on goals and grants encompassing the region of Berks and five partner local WDBs in SE PA. Ms. Chambers so moved and Ms. Baskett seconded the motion. All members voted approval. There were no abstentions.

Mr. Fogarty then referred to the Berks Local Plan Modification stating that useful and timely knowledge was included from the continuing and ongoing work of the Board's committees. Our five priorities and goals remain the same, but the modification shows progress made towards each goal over the past two years. Mr. Fogarty added that additional sources of information have become available in producing the modified plan, including the IMAGINE Berks plan under the direction of Ms. Pamela Shupp Menet, Director of Berks County's Department of Community and Economic Development. Also mentioned by Mr. Fogarty as three particularly important sources of new information incorporated in the Modification were (1) the Thomas P. Miller study on employment opportunities for adult residents with disabilities, (2) the ensuing March 2023 Employer Forum, and (3) the WDB Planning Committee's report on Opportunities and Challenges for Limited English Proficiency (LEP) in the workplace delivered to the WDB in June 2022.

A motion was requested by Mr. Fogarty to approve the Berks Local Plan Modification. Mr. Dorward so moved, and the motion was seconded by Mr. Olmos. All members voted their approval. There were no abstentions.

Referring to the Training and Industry Partnership Committee Report, Mr. DeVere commented on the status of the Berks Career & Technology Center's Precision Machining Program (PMT). He noted that the program has been designated probationary in status due to the low enrollment this year, falling below the 20 students per instructor minimum school requirement. With the PMT's current staff of two instructors, enrollment needs to be at or above 40 students. The Committee's actions to help includes recruiting more young professionals who have chosen PMT careers in manufacturing onto the highly successful PA Dream Team-Berks to promote the program through classroom presentations. He added that a lot of math is needed for this program which is a deterrent to many high school students. Mr. Stevenson commented that BCTC stu-

dents found and corrected mistakes in NASA's specifications for a part to be used in the international space station which allowed NASA to make the necessary design corrections.

Mr. DeVere added that of the \$75,000 budget allocated to PY2022 Incumbent Worker Training (IWT)/Registered Apprenticeship (RA) training, \$62,000 of that amount has been expended and that we are on track to expend the entire allocation by June 30, 2023. Mr. DeVere noted that the budget will be increased to \$100,000 for PY2023. Mr. Fogarty thanked Mr. DeVere and Mr. Stevenson for their leadership on the Committee.

Mr. Fogarty next invited Ms. Batista to comment on the Youth Committee Report. Ms. Batista invited Board members to review the success stories included in the report and experience the joy the Committee has received over the positivity of the results of these programs. Ms. Colombo reported on Title I Youth performance goals stating that retention may be below contract goals because some individuals left during the pandemic and despite efforts to contact them, many have not returned to the program. Mr. Fogarty noted that two top goals in Berks County's Plan are the talent pipeline of in-school youth and reconnecting disconnected young adults to employment and education.

Ms. Kershner was invited by Mr. Fogarty to comment on the One Stop Oversight Committee Report. Ms. Kershner mentioned that the lease for the property occupied by the PA CareerLink® Berks County at 1920 Kutztown Road, Suite F, Reading, PA had been held by the County of Berks for ten years. That lease has now been assumed by our contracted operator Educational Data Systems, Inc. (EDSI) effective June 1, 2023. Ms. Kershner next referred to several statistics included in the *By the Numbers* report for the period July 2022 – March 2023: Foot Traffic 16,708; Orientation 796; and Virtual Services remaining an important part of service with 3,454 customers served remotely. Ms. Columbo added that a positive trend is getting foot traffic back to the building to levels prior to the Covid shutdown. Mr. Fogarty commented that a lot of outreach by partners and staff has contributed to the increases in customer service levels. Ms. Kershner added that the Spring Job Fair held May 23 at Alvernia Plex attracted 976 job seekers, 102 employers and 9 community agencies. Mr. Fogarty reported that the Job Fair well exceeded expectations.

Mr. Fogarty opened his COO Update stating that Berks County continues to be a good labor market for job seekers with the seasonally adjusted (SA) unemployment rate in April 2023 having dropped to 3.8%, the lowest in over two decades. The local rate placed Berks between that of Pennsylvania at 4.1% and the U.S. rate of 3.4% in April.

Local plant closings and layoffs in Berks County have picked up to a moderate pace with approximately one medium-size WARN/rapid response engagement per month between September 2022 and May 2023. Fortunately, many dislocated workers appear to be having success in securing employment rather quickly, often with the assistance of the employers that they are separating from.

Mr. Fogarty noted that the latest jobs and employment data in the national picture (April/May 2023) continues to show increased labor market participation among prime age workers (ages 25-54).

Board members were congratulated by Mr. Fogarty for submitting their annual Statements of Financial Interests prior to the May 1, 2023 deadline. Mr. Fogarty thanked Ms. Spencer for assisting WDB members in meeting this important annual responsibility.

A flyer with pictures and affiliations of the fifteen participants of the Dream Team Berks County 2023 was included in the materials emailed to Board members. Mr. Fogarty thanked members of the Board who sponsored young professionals from their companies represented on the Team. The team is recruited, trained and scheduled by the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU) and the Manufacturers Resource Center (MRC) and receives financial support from the United Way of Berks County and the Berks County WDB through a Business Education Partnership (BEP) grant. In the 2022-2023 school year, the team made 82 classroom presentations to 2,002 students at fourteen of eighteen school districts in Berks County. They also participated in career fairs, open houses and community events reaching another 581 students in addition to their day jobs. Ms. Chambers commented that United Way approved another grant last year to support the Dream Team here in Berks County and that was exciting. Ms. Pursley noted that it was a pleasure having a young professional participate from Arkema who contributed to the solution and the “long game” on behalf of our manufacturing employers.

Board members were invited to join the Berks County Business Services Team’s Market Intelligence Briefing on June 28, 2023 from 10:00 a.m. to 11:30 a.m. via MS Teams. The briefing will be led by Ms. Amanda Wilson, Business Services Team Supervisor.

Mr. Fogarty invited Board members to comment on Market Intelligence.

Mr. Unger commented that there has been a drastic increase in employment at his company over the last two to three months. Job advertisements resulted in a flood of applicants. Four new employees were hired in the last few weeks. Two additional employees will start in July. In addition, their new business backlog is better, and apprentices are moving up to higher skills and pay. He added that his company has a core value to support their employees as the business grows.

Mr. Olmos reported that a lot of entry level younger people expect to receive high wages, even to \$30.00 per hour. He added that a non-profit agency simply cannot offer such high wages.

Ms. Batista (referring back to a portion of the Youth Committee report) stated that Albright College’s Total Experience Learning® Early Career Academy helps high school seniors identify an evidence-based career pathway for graduation, aligning employer workforce talent requirements. Young people are redirected from unrealistic expectations regarding salary and positions.

Mr. Fogarty asked Ms. Berger if there were any public comments. There being none, Mr. Fogarty reminded Board members that the next quarterly meeting is scheduled for 7:30 a.m. in person on Friday, September 15, 2023 in Room 100 of the PA CareerLink® Berks County and encouraged members to attend.

He added that when the Board staff moves to a new location, he is hopeful that hybrid meetings will be able to be offered.

Mr. Fogarty also noted that both the Executive and Finance Committee meetings scheduled for September will be held virtually, including a virtual orientation meeting for Ms. Houser, Mr. Breisch and Ms. Baskett who are the newest members appointed to the Board.

On Mr. Turner's behalf, Mr. Fogarty called for a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Batista so moved; Mr. Unger seconded the motion. All voted in favor. There were no abstentions and the meeting adjourned at 8:55 a.m.