



YOUTH COUNCIL

MINUTES

Wednesday, February 9, 2011

11:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

439 South Union Street

Lawrence, MA 01843

Youth Council MEMBERS PRESENT:

Howard Allen, Kristine Blum, Irene Chalek, Lisa Coy, Brad Howell, April Lyskowsky, Linda Piergeorge, Heidi Riccio, Megan Shea, Michael Strem, Cal Williams

MVWIB Youth Council MEMBERS ABSENT:

Janet Allison, Tom Casey, Beverly DeSalvo, Ed Fitzgerald, Howard Flagler, Melanie Mericle, Barbara Richards, Vinnie Ouellette, Ed Warnshuis

MVWIB STAFF PRESENT:

Corina Ruiz, Deborah Andrews, Rafael Abislaiman,

Speaker: Joseph Bevilacqua, Chairman, MVWIB

I. Call to Order and Introductions

A quorum being present, Youth Council Chairman Cal Williams called the meeting to order at 11:45 a.m. He thanked everyone for coming and wished them a Happy New Year. Introductions were made around the table.

II. MVWIB Leadership Statement

Cal said that he, Joe, Ralph and Peter Matthews had the opportunity for the last four days to attend the NAWB Conference in Washington, DC. He wanted to share a few things that struck home at the conference. He wants to emphasize to the Board that failure is not an option. The economy is changing forever; and with it, the occupational landscape. These changes are permanent. There is no going back to the old ways. The challenges associated with youth employment are greater than ever. At the same time, the need for an educated and skilled new generation of workers has never been more critical. The Recovery Act set the stage for a renewed focus on youth workforce development policies, strategies, and practices, a focus that continues to evolve. That is why it is important to understand how these changes will

impact our Youth Council and our young customers. Building and executing strategies for these changing times is a must. And once again, failure is not an option. There is a lot of information that was brought back Cal, Joe and the others will share it going forward.

Joe Bevilacqua said that the Youth Council is so important to what we do overall. He said that the day before the NAWB Conference he attended the National Governors' Association Conference where all the State Chairs had the opportunity to talk about initiatives and concerns in his/her respective state. Joe said that he noticed an across-the-nation concern with youth education and youth employment. He stated that there is a growing impatience with the lack of progress the kids are making. There is also a concern that is publicly discussed that some kids are just not applying themselves to the degree that people believe they should.

Joe said that with the limited resources we have for all the programs is a growing interest to help those kids that need a little boost and those kids that want to move forward. This would not be at the expense of others, but maybe by reallocating some of the resources into that pot. Joe said that the information that keeps coming forward is that our kids are falling further behind.

Joe continued by saying that President Obama is talking about the fact that Community Colleges are simply not graduating enough kids. They are coming into the programs to take a course but they don't actually graduate. Certificate programs are becoming a discussed issue as well. With a national industry certificate, an employer would know the level of skills a person has obtained. Knowing the level of skills is important for two reasons. First, the employer would know what job the person can begin with. Second, it is the base level job to the next career ladder.

Joe said that there is a great deal of discussion about the skills gap. Some people believe there is a skills gap while others don't. In one of the presentations at NAWB, Joe heard from an employer who is not able to find people with the skills they need to fill their jobs. The opposing side, the non-employer side, says it is not true. Joe said that we need to listen to the employer because that's where the jobs are. People I have spoken with are discussing the need to recognize that some kids need a boost but simply are not able to get assistance for eligibility reasons.

Ralph and I saw that mostly during the youth summer job program, where youth needed some type of problem background in addition to low-income status to qualify. We were not able to assist others in terms of summer jobs. Yet we know there are kids out there who want to go to school and want to get a job and unfortunately we cannot assist them because they only meet the income eligibility and have no other eligibility barrier.

Joe said that one discussion he has had locally and that he has talked to Cal about, is seeking an opportunity to help those kids that don't have a troubled background. It is not that we care less about those kids that have a troubled background or don't wish them well. But rather in

order to move forward with some of our programs, in order to move these kids forward, we should seek some kind of opportunity to assist them. There is truly a growing concern that this country is not yet prepared for this century. Joe said that Washington has realized that if we continue on the same pathway we are not going to get better. Education continues to be on the forefront of discussion. There is a great deal of concern about what will happen with WIA reauthorization and an equally great concern about the deficit reduction that is going to take place in Washington.

Therefore, even though you may have a great program it may get cut. There is recognition that the deficit is getting too large and cannot be sustained. Joe said that there is a concern surrounding national security because most of the debt bonds are being bought by other countries that may or may not at some point in the future be our friends. The growing number of young people that are not going to graduate or get a GED is becoming greater and greater.

Joe said that when he first got involved with the WIB, we were the super powers of the world and we never thought of anyone coming in and taking our jobs. Today, the reality is that there are a number of other countries that have grown quicker in educational attainment and skills proficiency than we have. One thing we heard in Washington is that the companies that have stayed here in America cannot wait for skilled workers. They are going to hire the people that fit that bill and the problem is that many of these people may be coming from another country.

The other problem that we have is that foreign students that come to America to be educated do not remain here. They reach the level of education that businesses need to sustain their companies and then go back to their home country or to another country. Dr. Mike Strem, WIB member and CEO of Strem Chemicals, said that they also need to get a work Visa to stay, because most of them come with a student Visa. Joe added that if we agree as a local WIB to seek the opportunity to help those kids that are poor, that need a little help and want to go forward, I think it is to everyone's advantage.

Rafael said that Joe is also the co-chair of the State WIB along with Governor Patrick which is why he went not only to the WIB session but also to the Governors' Association meeting.

Megan Shea said that she is often reminded of Andy Sum's presentation at the Youth Summit. He indicated that the youth in Lawrence really are at greater disadvantage because their parents aren't working or are working in a high risk field and we all recall how we got our first jobs; we had a parent that pulled you in and now we people just don't have that connection with the workplace. She said that she is working with the Mayor's youth task force and that they are trying to look at that disconnection. Youth are becoming discouraged because they can't even get into the door.

Joe said that issue came up as well in the conference. He said there is a concern that the older workers are staying longer. One reason is that their pension plans were hurt by the

financial crisis and are not in good shape. In addition, employers are asking them to stay because the employer is guaranteed that the seasoned employee will show up and will have the right attitude for the worksite.

There is a concern that some of these kids that are coming in to work don't want to be at work. There was an eight million job loss between 2007 and 2009 and in order to replace those jobs we need three hundred thousand jobs a month for three years.

Irene Chalek said she would like to know the position levels available at those businesses that cannot wait to hire. She would also like to know if we are being realistic about levels when we talk about low literacy. Mike Strem said that in his business the need is right down the line. It is not necessarily always the scientist or the high level job, but also the low level positions that cannot be filled.

He has scientists, packagers and others. The employer can teach the packagers how to work with chemicals but they cannot teach them how to be scientists. He said it probably varies from segment to segment and business to business. Heidi said that it probably varies depending on the region and she would like to know if we have the data to provide the youth council with employer need information for this region.

Cal told Ralph that we need to start gathering that data and actually take a look at it to see what our employers needs in our region. Joe said that one of the realities we need to be aware of is that those low skill or no skill jobs that were present in the fifties and sixties don't exist anymore. Joe gave the example of Western Electric, where an ex-offender or dropout who wanted to work hard was able to find a job, climb the career ladder and have your son/daughter work there. Those places are now gone. The message from Washington was that someone without a high school degree has no chance in the workforce and the minimum now is going to be an associate degree or certificate. Cal added that other concerns were the CORI check with youngsters that are getting into trouble and passing the drug test.

Irene said we need to know what kind of programs we want to offer in this region. She said that we certainly want to continue to outreach to those low literacy youth but do we really want to design training programs and education programs specifically for them if we don't have a sense of how long it would take to encourage them to buy into the program?

Ralph said the information given on a national level at this meeting was absolutely mind boggling. It was said that nationwide young people 16-24 are experiencing greater unemployment than during the great depression, roughly 80% and among the minority population in the neighborhood of 85%. Among the kids without a high school diploma it's over 90%. It is difficult to ascertain what youth unemployment is because many of them do not have a work history. He said that for college graduates, locally, the highest employment is happening in the hospitality business. They are mostly waiters and waitresses. In this region, the lowest level of unemployment occurs in food services, which includes waiters and waitresses and also food processing, like what happens at the Mediterranean Foods Company.

Ralph stated that a summer job means a lot and that our goal is to try to reinforce the idea that other immigrant groups have had; that education is the way out of poverty. We need to focus some of our money on the youth who are trying to succeed within the education system versus dropping out.

Cal said that in his previous work at UPS, between 1999 and 2000, they were very concerned and in a panic mode looking at all the data regarding the number of employees that were Vietnam and Korean War Veterans. These folks were getting ready to retire and take the skills sets with them, most of them aircraft and maintenance mechanics. At that time most of these older employees were asked to stay. The loss could have been devastating. He said that what we need to start doing is talking to employers and find out what they need and how we can help them.

Heidi Riccio said that she has worked on both sides of the house and feels that a big part of the missing link is the whole mentorship piece. She said employers ask their employees to stay two years into their retirement but are they assigning them a mentee to hold that new person up? Businesses are bottom line focused and they are not looking into the future of workforce development. Heidi said she understands that it takes time and effort to work with these young kids, but there is a long-term benefit that is not being recognized. We have vocational schools whose purpose is to train this workforce, and yet we don't see a huge connect with our local industry utilizing what we have to offer. This applies to our evening school division, programs and retraining workforce.

Linda Piergeorge said that at the WIB Quarterly meeting employers were talking about having entry level people but were having trouble with first line supervisors because entry level people don't have the skills to be able to move up to the supervisory positions. She said that Mass Rehab started an initiative called On the Job Evaluations, where employers are given an incentive to try out someone for a couple of weeks.

Joe said that there's a concern on a national level that after spending so much training money we have not connected people to jobs. Washington is talking about certificate programs where the trainings have to be connected to a job. Some employers are not comfortable with the level of attainment indicated by a diploma. The concern is not only with youth who drop out, but also with kids who are coming out of high school and need a little bit more assistance.

Linda said that for the last couple of years youth are passing the MCAS, obtaining a high school diploma, but testing two points below reading level when taking the assessment test at a local community college. Heidi said this is because we don't link our standards at the high school level to the community colleges and vice versa.

Kristine Blum said that with the Common Core Standards, the Department of Elementary and Secondary Ed is going to align our standards with that of 35 other states. In this state we are lacking in financial education. The state is trying to add more finance into math. Seniors are six months from graduation and still don't know what they want to do afterwards. She said

she works with GE aviation and right now they don't have enough machinists to train for entry level jobs, so they partnered with North Shore Community College where they get students on a track for these jobs. They get a two year associate degree and they are on track to learn the jobs that GE is going to do. Linda said that maybe part of our program can be guidance. Kristine asked if our purpose is to get kids who are off the track enough education so they can get back on track or is our point to try to get as many kids jobs as possible or is there a mixture. Rafael said we are certainly trying to get kids back on track as part of the mix.

Mike Strem asked if we had an analysis of the business landscape in the Merrimack Valley. We have a lot of expertise around the table with respect to education but we need to know what the needs of the businesses are. Joe said we have a lot of that information from the previous blueprints and through the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission. Cal said we need to start looking at the data and come up with an action plan for utilizing the material.

April Lyskowsky said that in previous meetings the Youth Council discussed focusing on out-of-school youth as well as in-school youth. She asked if we were going to give up on them. Joe said that we need to continue to work with those kids but at the same time we need to begin to seek to develop some funding sources to serve those kids that are a step above, those kids that are in school but may need help. He said that we could have developed a summer youth program for those who did not meet all the barriers that were assigned under the law. April said she would like to focus on some of the things they have spoken about in past meetings and find out what our assets are and develop strategies.

Rafael said that we are not denying services to underprivileged kids. We want to focus and continue to focus on kids that are poor. He said that given that we don't have a lot of money, should we try to help the kids that are poor and that will use our program more effectively or should we continue to dedicate our programming to kids that are not only poor but who we have to persuade to get out of bed and come to the programs.

April said that she has good programs that give these kids intensive trainings, but at the end of the day they can't find a job. Cal said that one of the things that other WIB's discussed at the conference was the need to start looking at alternative resources such as non-profits.

Megan said that we should analyze the youth pipeline that was done for the High Performing WIB. That can guide us. Joe said that we have a meeting on Friday with food manufactures to talk about what they need. Heidi said that the Greater Lawrence Technical School (GLTS) currently has food programs. She said that the food industry is the third largest in the world yet people put a stigma on it. She has talked to many large businesses in the area about food service training and they seem to be motivated with the idea at first but never reconnect. She said that GLTS has one of the best culinary programs in the State and we cannot get kids jobs. Youth from GLTS come out with many certifications and she doesn't understand where the road block is. Rafael told Heidi that they will keep her posted on how the meeting goes.

Cal said that the Youth Council is a sub-committee of the WIB and the WIB needs to understand our concerns, directions and what data is needed. Joe said to be prepared for cuts because of the uncertainty of not knowing what is going to be cut. Mike asked if we can go to private foundations for grants. Joe said that is one possibility. Brad said we need to know what our role is and leverage what already exists. Cal reiterated that we are still going to work with out of school youth. That is not going away. He said we just need to find a way to work with all youth and think outside the box to find funding.

III. Approval of December 8, 2010 Minutes

Cal then called a motion on the minutes of the December 8, 2010 meeting.

Motion by Megan Shea seconded by Linda Piergeorge to approve the minutes of the December 8, 2010 Youth Council meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

IV. Common Measures (new WIA required outcomes)

Deborah said that right now WIA has the following established outcome measures; four measures for older youth and three for younger youth. The measures for older youth are entered employment, employment retention, earnings change and credential rate. The measures for younger youth are skill attainment rate, diploma or equivalent attainment; and retention rate. She said many other states are using common measures. Regardless, Massachusetts must report on both the WIA and common measures until FY2012 programs begin. She said that there are three common measures that apply to out-of-school youth. Two of the three apply to in-school youth. It is no longer older and younger youth, now it is in-school and out-of-school youth.

The first common measure is *placement in employment or education* - those who are not in post-secondary education or employment (including the military) at the date of participation. This applies to employment (including military) or post-secondary education and/or advanced training/occupational skills training in the first quarter after the exit quarter.

The second common measure is *attainment of a degree or certificate* of those enrolled in education (at the date of participation or at any point during the program). This applies to a GED, diploma, or certificate by the end of the third quarter after the exit. The certificate has to be recognized by an industry and it has to be recognized as being related to a certain job.

The third common measure is *literacy and numeracy gains*. This one only applies to out-of-school youth who are basic skills deficient and who will increase one or more educational functioning levels.

Deborah then said that Massachusetts has been reporting these gains although we have not been judged on them. We have not done very well on them because we have not been post testing because a GED has been the measure of the outcome. She said that the Merrimack Valley is at 12.1% for literacy and numeracy gains. This does not necessary mean that our youth are not gaining, but that we are not measuring gains. We are at 35% for the placement

in employment or education, which is not out of line compared to other WIB's/ Career Centers. We are at 28% for attainment of a degree or certificate. The State will be transitioning from the original seven to the three common measures. We will attend training in February and March. The transition started in October, 2010, and if someone started a program then, they could be held to both standards. Megan said that these measures have been there for six years and the transition has been put off because the funding has been put off too.

Rafael said that our focus is to provide workforce development and that implies that we provide service to the people that can be developed. If all our focus is on remediation then we would be spinning our wheels. He said it is not even clear at the federal level what the role of workforce development is, because some people argue that our role is remediation, others disagree. Heidi said that some people don't go to college because they can't afford it and instead obtain a certificate. Often these certificates cost more than going to a community college and getting an associate's degree.

Rafael said a few years ago we had a youth training program that was tied in with Raytheon and initially we could not place the youth because of their CORI issues. He said we may have suffered from a disconnect with employers because we sometimes work people that are ineligible for certain types of employment.

Deborah said to let her know if anyone is interested in attending the training. Lisa Coy added that it is important for the Youth Council to understand what we are being measured against. That way, when we use this money and talk about funded programs, we know how we will be measured and whether the programs will be deemed successful and funding continues.

V. Update of Youth RFP and Timeline

Deborah said that they are still working on the RFP and have to rework it because of the changes on the common measures. There will be an update next month.

VI. Other Business

Howard Allen said we have been working on connecting the classroom to the workplace through the Teacher Externship program. Last year we determined that we needed to grow the program and work toward self funding the program. This year we have gone out and engaged the principals and teachers for the program. In addition, we are reaching out and engaging the corporate world. Howard said that Mike Strem is the first employer who has volunteered to donate money for the program. Last year Dr. Strem hosted a teacher extern at his company and he will be doing the same this year. The teacher externs will each create a teaching model based on the experience and use it in the classroom. We are doing this with the high schools and junior high schools within our fifteen cities and towns. Howard passed around flyers about the program.

Linda asked if the teachers are sharing the information with other teachers. Howard said yes and that we are specifically looking for STEM Initiative teachers. He thinks there is a disconnect between education and the workplace because we went from manufacturing to

more technological manufacturing and did not educate our high school students and educators to recognize that transitional change. Howard said we are hoping to have eight externs, hopefully all being funded by companies. Some companies are making a donation to the Teacher Externship Program, some will host a program, and some will do both.

Megan asked if there was any update on summer jobs money. Rafael said that efforts are being made to increase the money.

April said that YouthBuild does a youth recognition day for in-school students and she is looking for ideas on how to best celebrate those students. Kristine said that the Red Sox have free tickets for groups. Howard said the Fisher Cats would be a good option and they are in New Hampshire. Rafael said that maybe a college orientation where they get all the information needed to go into college. Irene suggested bringing them to Northern Essex on March 16th which is hosted by SABES. She explained what college for the night consists of and invited everyone to participate or bring their students. Irene also announced that NECC recently joined an initiative with an organization called Merrimack Valley Sandbox. The MV Sandbox initiative is trying to encourage innovation and entrepreneurship directed at social problems rather than at new technology. She said we should invite them to our next meeting and the contact person is Todd Fry.

VII. Adjournment

Having no further business Megan Shea made a motion to adjourn seconded by Howard Allen. Motion passed.

Respectfully submitted,

Corina Ruiz

Corina Ruiz
Recorder