

## WIOA Youth Workgroup

March 27<sup>th</sup>

### Meeting Notes

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**Members in Attendance:** Christine Abramowitz (Regional Employment Board of Hampden County), Katy Gentile (The Career Place), Mary Giordano (Lawrence Adult Learning Resource Center), Pricilla Golding (Metro North Regional Employment Board), David Hoff (Institute for Community Inclusion), Susan Lange (Commonwealth Corporation), Tricia Lucier (Employment and Training Resources), John Oliveria (Mass Commission for the Blind), Vicky Palantzas (Brockton Area Workforce Investment Board), Mary Sarris (North Shore Workforce Investment Board), Larry Smith (Jobs and Community Service), Olivia Steele (Adult Community Learning Services), Shailah Stewart (Department of Elementary and Secondary Education)

**Non-Members in Attendance:** Sharon McLaughlin (North Central Career Center), John Niles (Commonwealth Corp.), Sacha Stadhard (Department of Career Services), Susan Quinones (Massachusetts Workforce Professionals Association), Eddie Zhang (Department of Career Services)

#### DISCUSSION TOPICS:

##### WIOA Youth Workgroup Goals and Expectations

Sacha Stadhard gave an overview of the context in which the WIOA Youth Workgroup has been established. The WIOA Youth Workgroup is a workgroup of the WIOA Steering Committee that has been set-up to engage stakeholders from the workforce system to discuss strategies, policies, operational guidance, and system collaborations needed for the implementation of the WIOA youth provisions. Policy and operational recommendations from the WIOA Youth Workgroup will be reported back to the WIOA Steering Committee which will then be communicated to the Massachusetts Workforce Investment Board for ratification.

Goals and expectations of the WIOA Youth Workgroup will be to:

- Provide policy recommendations to improve outcomes for youth
- Identify workforce system collaborations to support disconnected youth and youth with disabilities
- Recommend operational guidance for implementation of the WIOA youth provisions

The WIOA Youth Workgroup will meet monthly to discuss the implications of the WIOA youth provisions for Massachusetts' workforce system as well as to develop and build on existing systems alignment.

##### Career Pathways in WIOA Youth

John Niles gave an over of Career Pathways in WIOA. WIOA places an emphasis on career pathways for the purpose of providing youth including youth with disabilities with workforce investment activities, education, and supportive services to enter or retain employment. Local Boards must lead efforts in the local area to develop and implement career pathways.

John highlighted the Alliance for Quality Career Pathways' CLASP career pathways model. The essential features of the CLASP model are well-connected and transparent, education, training, support services, and credentials within specific sectors or cross-sectors; multiple entry points for well-prepared youth as well as lower-skilled youth; multiple exit points at higher skill levels that lead to credentials and result in sustainable employment.

The CLASP model focuses on attainment of post-secondary credentials. Christine Abramowitz noted that WIOA does not require youth to attain a credential as a result of participation in WIOA youth funded activities. The WIOA performance indicator for a Credential Attainment includes a secondary diploma or its equivalent and youth do not need to have a post-secondary credential to receive a positive outcome. Local areas will be held accountable to the Credential Attainment performance indicator in WIOA and not the definition of Career Pathway which includes enabling a youth to attain a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and at least 1 recognized post-secondary credential.

### **Group Discussion on Career Pathways**

There was a general discussion about career pathways and types of career pathways that are appropriate for the WIOA youth population. The group conferred that career pathways models are intended to keep youth in the program longer and can result in more expensive programming. As WIOA places an emphasis on career pathways for youth resulting in longer program models with increased services, there may be a shift to serve less youth with more support services.

Shailah Stewart suggested that the group look at the target population of youth in need of services and determine the type of career pathways models that will work for this population. Shailah noted that career pathways models should be designed with the broadest transferable skills. Career pathways models should help to prepare youth with foundation skills as well as build on career explorations – the signaling success curriculum could be used. Contextualized learning and foundation skills should be delivered in any career pathway model. Ana suggested that career pathways models have multiple work experiences and allow for job shadowing.

Mary Sarris suggested that Labor Market Information be used to design career pathways models in the local area. Staff should be trained how to use Labor Market Information so they can help youth make informed choices about career pathways. Staff should help youth define industry sectors and clusters for sustainable careers. Mary also suggested that the approach to offering youth career pathway models is to give youth a clear picture of what they can achieve if they stick with the program; this might be a possible retention tool for youth.

There was a discussion on whether the local areas will be limited in the career pathways that they offer to youth. Local Boards are not limited but should build career pathways models that are reasonable and realistic and based on Labor Market Information from the local area.

## **WIOA Youth Target Population**

The group conversed about the target population of youth WIOA proposes to serve. Larry Smith noted that the youth served should be the youth most in need. It was noted that WIOA allows out-of-school youth up to age 24 to be served and this opens up the opportunity to serve an older youth populations who already have a secondary credential and are in need of post-secondary education and training. There was concern expressed about the decreased requirement for specific out-of-school youth to prove low-income status. Low-income is not a requirement to meet eligibility for most categories of out-of-school youth.

Members of the group expressed that a majority of the youth they serve have very low-skill levels and may not be ready to participate in a career exploration program like the CLASP model. Members also expressed that out-of-school youth often face many barriers and are in need of support services before they are ready for a career pathway. It was suggested that “Bridge” models that lead to career pathways may be more appropriate for youth who are not ready to participate in a career pathway program

## **Best Practice Models of Career Pathways**

Jobs for the Future: Pathways to Prosperity and Career Vocational Tech Education pathways program were recommended as two existing career pathways models that the group might discuss as potential best practices models for the local areas.

Job for the Future: Pathways to Prosperity is a national career pathways program linking high school, work, and community college to increase the number of youth who complete high school and attain post-secondary credentials. More information about the program can be found here:

<http://www.iff.org/initiatives/pathways-prosperity-network>

The Department of Elementary and Secondary Education supports the Career Vocation Technical Education pathways program. More information about the program can be found here: <http://www.doe.mass.edu/cte/>

## **System Collaborations**

Adult Education and Literacy Title II of WIOA places an emphasis on career pathways to assist adults in attaining a secondary diploma and to transition to post-secondary education and training. The eligibility requirements to participate in Adult Education and Literacy Title II of WIOA are similar to the eligibility requirements for out-of-school youth in Title I of WIOA. Youth in both WIOA Titles I and II must be 16 years of age and not enrolled in school. There is an overlap of the population of youth served in WIOA Titles I and II and this overlap can result in referrals of youth to the Adult Basic Education system to receive services.

Adult Career Pathway Models with the Adult Basic Education system have been implemented statewide and have contextualized learning imbedded in their career pathway models. One of the new program service elements in WIOA is to: *Offer education concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupational cluster.* There may be an opportunity to link WIOA youth to program service elements as a result of participation in Adult Career Pathway Models.

John Oliveria noted that the youth served by his organization are in need of support services. Vocational Counselors work with youth to provide support services before they participate in training. Vocational Rehabilitation is mandated to set aside 15% of funds for transition services for youth. Local vocational rehabilitation offices must undertake pre-employment transition activities and must engage the local workforce development system. There is an opportunity to braid resources by providing support services to youth first and then to refer youth to programs in the local areas to receive education and training services.

David Hoff noted that strong partnerships are needed to serve youth with disabilities. David noted it is important to see these linkages addressed in the State Plan. David also noted more information is needed on how the regional plan will roll out.

### **Brainstorm Session on Continued Pathway Development**

Susan Lange led a brainstorming session and asked the group what resonated from the discussion of career pathways as well as to identify additional information needed for career pathways development for WIOA youth.

The consensus of the group was that long-term program models with increased support services are necessary for the development career pathways.

The group expressed that they would like to see sharable guidance about design elements of a career pathways system. The group would like to learn more about career pathways models and Bridge models that are successful. It was suggested that best practices and technical assistance be imbedded with the rolling-out of WIOA. There was also a suggestion to look at other resources and funds available to support WIOA youth including On-The-Job-Training. The group also wanted more information on how to connect with the Community College Transformation Agenda.

The group that agreed that follow up is needed on career pathway models that are appropriate for WIOA youth but that the group should move forward with discussion of the other provisions such as the 75 percent out-of-school youth requirement and the 20 work experience requirement. It was also requested that the members of the work group provide input on the agenda items.

### **Next Meeting**

The next WIOA Youth Workgroup will be held at the Employment and Training Resource Center in Framingham on April 24<sup>th</sup> from 10:00 am – 12:00 pm.