

New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission Meeting

September 17, 2008

Janice H. Levin Building ~ Room 102

Rutgers University Campus

Piscataway, New Jersey

Welcome and Opening Remarks, Dennis M. Bone, Chair, State Employment and Training Commission

Dennis Bone, Chair, opened the meeting, welcoming Commission Members and introducing new members who were recently nominated by the Governor. It is expected that the Senate will confirm new members shortly. The Chair discussed the important work facing the State Employment and Training Commission (SETC) and its committees, especially in light of the challenges facing the workforce system in addressing the changes in the economy leading to escalating job losses. Over the past months, Mr. Bone has been meeting with Cabinet Members and key economic and workforce development stakeholders, including those from the Commission on Higher Education, the Departments of Labor and Workforce Development and Human Services and the Economic Development Authority. During these discussions, the reoccurring themes were the need for accountability within the system and the challenges of ensuring that the system functions more seamlessly.

Department of Labor and Workforce Development Update, David J. Socolow, Commissioner, Department of Labor and Workforce Development

Commissioner Socolow congratulated Mr. Bone on his appointment as Chair of the SETC and expressed his concerns that the workforce system is in a time of great crisis due to the national recession. This is occurring at a time of major rescissions resulting in New Jersey experiencing a decrease of forty percent of its Workforce Investment Act funds. The result of the increasing loss of jobs and fewer resources available to the workforce development system presents significant challenges in addressing the needs of business and laid-off workers.

The Commissioner encourages the SETC, as the State Workforce Investment Board (WIB), to develop statewide policies and provide oversight of the local Workforce Investment Boards that ensures accountability and enhances partnerships toward a more effective system both fiscally and programmatically. He urged all Commission Members to get involved in this effort.

The Commissioner also encouraged everyone to attend the *2008 Governor's Workforce and Economic Development Conference* that will be held on December 1-3, 2008 at Trump Plaza in Atlantic City.

SETC Roles and Responsibilities: A Primer History of the SETC, Henry Plotkin, Executive Director, State Employment and Training Commission

Henry Plotkin provided an overview of the key events in the history of the SETC. He stated that the SETC was designed as a forum for business, education, labor unions, non-profits, concerned citizens and state departments to work together to establish workforce policy. The SETC stands 'in' government to work with all stakeholders, but also 'outside' of government to oversee and evaluate programs and policies. The purpose of the SETC is to assure the availability of a skilled workforce able to meet the demands of the rapidly changing labor market.

The Executive Director then led a discussion on the SETC roles and responsibilities. He began by explaining that the SETC, although it predates WIA, is the State's Workforce Investment Board (WIB) as mandated by WIA regulations, with its membership grandfathered. The SETC works to foster inter-departmental cooperation for planning, decisions, goals, performance and evaluation. He noted that the creation of standards has been the most difficult area. While some standards for One-Stop Career Centers are complete, they need fuller implementation in the future. He also stated that more attention needs to be paid to the Consumer Report Card for performance and evaluation of training vendors and their programs. In that regard, creating a link to wage records would aid in increase accountability. For One-Stop Career Centers, a better system needs to be in place to more accurately reflect the large number of people that use the services there. Currently, the numbers reported reflect on those who receive training, which is only a small fraction of those receiving the multitude of services offered.

New Jersey should be proud of the relationship established between the State and local WIBs. New Jersey has developed a "culture of cooperation" where the state and local partnerships have found common ground to work together - this is not the case in many other states.

The Unified State Plan, a major responsibility of the SETC, will need to be updated when the Workforce Investment Act is reauthorized by the Congress. Mr. Plotkin urged the Commission Members to be involved in this process, as they have in the past.

In planning programs, a county level focus makes sense since the counties pay a large percentage of the costs for the community colleges and technical schools.

However, since labor markets transcend political boundaries, so too must WIB planning – in the case of planning for future workforce needs, Workforce Innovation in Regional Economic Development (WIRED) is the model we should embrace.

Recommendations for the Future

Mr. Plotkin proceeded to provide the Commission Members with his best thinking on the following issues prior to his retirement:

- 1) It is important to work towards strengthening the local WIBs.
- 2) SETC staff numbers are at an all-time low. To help with the burden of work demanded of them, he encourages the use of partnerships with organizations such as the Heldrich Center, the Center for Women and Work, and Rutgers School of Labor and Management.
- 3) While the SETC is “in but not of” the Department of Labor and Workforce Development (LWD), the perception that we are an extension of LWD has sometimes been a hindrance. This perception needs to be changed and the SETC needs a more direct link with the Governor’s office.
- 4) It will be important to be fully prepared for the WIA Reauthorization. The current workforce development system will likely undergo significant changes and SETC should take steps to prepare for this.
- 5) Now that consolidation has been completed, it is important to evaluate the impact of these changes on the system in terms of the effect on administrative efficiencies, service quality and outcomes. For example, literacy in Title II and Workforce Development Partnership are still separate and not consolidated within the Department of Labor and Workforce Development. LWD is now working on their own reorganization and that may help resolve these issues.
- 6) The Consumer Report Card needs a re-examination and strengthening. It must be able to obtain the data it needs from all workforce vendors to be truly useful. The SETC may want to create a small task force to review the Consumer Report Card and make recommendations concerning its future.
- 7) New Jersey needs a new way to help high school drop-outs and those students in transition from high school to college. Attention to this cannot wait until the high school reform is completed, especially since that proposed reform ignored the drop-out problem, which directly affects the workforce. The SETC’s proposed ‘Grade 13’ concept is a good starting point to begin again policy discussions on addressing this problem.

- 8) One-Stop Career Center Chartering needs to be fully implemented.
- 9) The SETC, by law, receives inter-departmental Funding from LWD and the Departments of Education and Human Services to support WIBs that lack sufficient resources for hiring the staff needed to operate effectively. It is important that this process continues, even if at a reduced rate, to help ensure quality staffing for WIBs. New Jersey is the only state that provides this financial assistance.
- 10) Current WIB planning does not reflect actual labor markets and more regional planning is needed. To maximize that New Jersey is the most WIRED state, we should begin, in conjunction with WIRED, to mandate regional WIB planning. It is important to work with local Freeholders so they can understand the logic and necessity of moving beyond county lines for purposes of labor market planning. Like the European Union, local identity can be preserved while participating in a larger planning effort. One-Stops, County Colleges, Technical Schools, Welfare Offices, and others should examine how they can work together and, based on labor market information, find ways to *actually* work together on a larger scale. This should be something that is mandated by the SETC. For this to succeed the best labor market information is needed. Mr. Plotkin suggests including The Conference Board data to enhance the quality of current labor market information utilized by the workforce investment system.
- 11) The future of literacy education is online. There will never be enough money available to teach everyone in a classroom setting. Online education must be given a priority.
- 12) Partnerships now established with the Center for Women and Work, the Heldrich Center, and the Labor Education Center must be kept active.
- 13) The current system is too vendor-driven. Instead of being about raising people up, vendors often become barriers. It is important to meet the needs of people while holding the vendors accountable.
- 14) The SETC is not involved enough with State and Local Elected Officials. Because of that, they often do not understand what it is the SETC does or how they can work with us to improve the workforce. It is important to remember that if the workforce issue is understood correctly, it is never a partisan issue, but rather an effort of attaining the larger public good.
- 15) The SETC does good work. Daily inquires come into the office regarding jobs and training. The SETC staff help assist people in cutting through the bureaucracy to get them the help they need. In the end, it is the workforce system that truly gives them a chance to succeed.

Mr. Plotkin expressed his pleasure to have worked with all the Commission Members and thanked them all for their support and hard work over the years. He believes this is a good time for the Commission to 'reboot.'

Dennis Bone then opened the floor to the Commission Members, many who echoed the sentiments of Mr. Plotkin.

Corrections Education Policy Paper, Lansing Davis, Senior Policy Analyst, State Employment and Training Commission

Lansing Davis gave a presentation on the SETC's draft report entitled *Corrections Education Report and Recommendations*. This report was written in response to the Governor's Public Safety Plan, which as part of this initiative, the SETC was asked to research prison education. The goal of the report is to improve education in an attempt to lower recidivism rates which directly correlate with increased education skill levels.

One of the main recommendations is the creation of a transparent Blue Ribbon Committee which would drive educational policy, including standards and goals with consideration given to mandating education to all those incarcerated. Stronger relationships need to be created with the Department of Corrections and community colleges and technical schools as they strive to create credentialed programs. Distance learning, while noted difficult in the prison system, must be considered an option. It was also reported that while occupational skills are necessary, workplace and social skills must be taught. A discussion followed with input given to the staff by the Commission Members.

SETC Update, Henry Plotkin, Executive Director, State Employment and Training Commission

Henry Plotkin led an update on the SETC staff and current projects. He described a \$10,000 US DOL grant received by the SETC to create or strengthen collaborations between the local Workforce Investment System and Faith-and Community-based Organizations. The SETC held a very successful Webinar on September 11th and created handbooks and guidelines for the local WIBs to use in their scheduled follow-up meetings.

Closing Remarks, Dennis M. Bone, Chair, State Employment and Training Commission

In addition to Mr. Plotkin's retirement as of October 31st, two other SETC staff members took advance of the early retirement package and completed their service with the State on July 31st. Mr. Bone introduced Robin Widing, who will be joining the SETC as of September 29th as Deputy Executive Director. A national search will be conducted to fill the Executive Director position. In the interim, Mr. Bone will name Robin Widing as the Acting Executive Director effective November 1, 2008. A new staff listing and Commission Member listing will be provided to Commission members.

The Chair also stated that he wants the Commission to be active and will be reforming committees. A listing of all committees with a description of their mission and function will be created and distributed to all Commission Members for their consideration for appointment. In the meantime, Mr. Bone is also working on meeting personally with all the local WIB Chairs and will be scheduling three regional meetings.

The next meeting of the Commission Members, on November 25th, will include mandatory ethics training and all Commission members who have not received training should attend. Chairman Bone asked Commission members to submit any other agenda items to him directly.

The meeting ended at 12 Noon with the Commission Members thanking Henry Plotkin for his years of dedicated service with the SETC.

STATE EMPLOYMENT & TRAINING COMMISSION MEETING

SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

MEMBERS or ALTERNATES

Dana Berry	Jody Levinson	Clifford Reisser
Dennis Bone	Rev. Msgr. Bill Linder	Julio Sabater
Michael Cantwell	Joe McNamara	Doris Sims (for Velez)
Celeste Carpiano	Felix Mickens (for Lawson)	David Socolow
Peter Contini	Robert Munyan	JoAnn Trezza
Gail Davis	Harvey Nutter	Randy Trivette (for Davy)
Deborah Heinz (for Doria)	Jane Oates	Carolyn Wade
Joseph Krimko		

ABSENT MEMBERS

Michael Carey	Frank Lehr	Art O'Neal
Nicky Gacos	Brian McAndrew	Linda Stender
Henry Henderson	Matthew McDermott	Charles Wowkanech
Steven Hornik	Lauren Moore	

OTHER ATTENDEES

Andy Baglivo	Joseph Gazzara	Nils Richardson
Dianne Ciesla	Jane Guillard	Luis Rivera
Bernice Davis	Alice Hunnicutt	Dennis Rizzo
Aaron Fichtner	Jennifer Joyce	Tapas Sen
Brian Fitzgibbons	Tony Langan	Lynda Smith
Robert Gamgort	Elizabeth Posillico	Robin Widing
Andrea Karsian	Michelle Richardson	Greg Williams

SETC STAFF

Lansing Davis	Maureen O'Brien-	Deborah O'Kane
Judith Formalarie	Murphy	Henry Plotkin