

PA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION

COMMENTS AND IDEAS ON WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT INITIATIVES



WRITTEN TESTIMONY OF

**PENNSYLVANIA WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
ASSOCIATION**

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WORKforce
PA Workforce Development Association
The Voice of Pennsylvania Workforce Development

ABOUT US

PA Workforce Development Association (PWDA) serves as the voice of the Pennsylvania workforce investment system and a clearinghouse for workforce development information statewide. PWDA develops and provides workforce professional training to local workforce investment boards (WIBs) while continuing proactive advocacy efforts on behalf of the workforce development system.

INDUSTRY PARTNERSHIPS

Industry Partnerships (IPs) represent strategic partnerships among industry, workforce development, education and labor. Pennsylvania fostered industry partnerships and sector strategies to identify and address common workforce development issues among the key industries in regional economies. These partnerships have and can be used to a greater extent to upgrade incumbent worker skills that move employees up the career ladder, thus creating entry-level jobs. Industry partnerships remain a worthwhile investment of state funding and should be continued as part of the Commonwealth's job growth strategy. Local WIBs should continue their role in establishing and managing these partnerships. State policy should continue to encourage a strong preference for "consortia-based" training, as well as insisting on industry-driven selection of training providers and a "firewall" separating training providers from that process. State policy should also require the companies in IPs to develop a comprehensive training plan with the Local WIB. Although IP training has primarily targeted incumbent workers in the past, there is no reason why IPs could not be part of a strategic initiative to create jobs and develop industry-driven training aimed at apprenticeships and new hires.

APPRENTICESHIPS

Empirical evidence has shown the efficacy of apprenticeship programs in job placement and retention across the country. The state should take the lead in bringing together stakeholders such as community colleges, employers and training providers to craft proposals for federal grants that will open up new career pathways for apprentices and expand high-performing apprenticeship programs. Pennsylvania should also offer financial incentives to businesses that sponsor apprenticeship programs. Recently, there has been an effort to build apprenticeships around advancement through credential attainment instead of simply time spent on the job. PWDA believes that efforts to better coordinate and support successful apprenticeship programs will strengthen the state's workforce significantly. State policy should also encourage apprenticeships which are open to both represented and non-union workforces.

GOVERNOR'S MANUFACTURING ADVISORY COUNCIL (GMAC)

Much work was put into coordinating the GMAC in 2012, but there were not many action steps taken after the report was released. Manufacturing continues to be a major area of focus in further developing the state's workforce, and there are a number of initiatives that could be directly tied to manufacturing. Industry partnerships, school-to-work programs, community college grant coordination, and an endorsement of the industrial maintenance and machine training that is taking place around the state could all be a part of an effort to strengthen the workforce through a focus on manufacturing skills. We recommend better utilizing this Advisory Council, linking it to the workforce development system and industry partnerships, and aligning policies with some of its key findings. We also recommend further developing a close relationship between the Council (and its staff), the Manufacturing IPs, existing apprenticeships and the Center for Workforce Information and Analysis.

CAREER PATHWAYS

Most of the local workforce investment boards (WIBs) use "Career Pathways" or a variation of it. We recommend building an initiative around supporting Career Pathways for adults and youth that focus on jobs that are linked across industry clusters. Regional high priority occupations should give direction to educational institutions that are interested in providing education and training for customers of the workforce development system. Within this

framework there is an opportunity to further perfect the high priority occupation structure and process. This might include an educational effort to better familiarize employers with occupational coding systems, especially O*Net, and to describe our high priority jobs in broader terms, such as high priority “job families” and “skill sets”. State policy should encourage or require postsecondary institutions to consult with local WIBs on strategic planning and the creation of programs that respond to industry demand and lead to industry-recognized credentials.

TAACCCT GRANT

This is a multi-million dollar grant that the community colleges in the Commonwealth have received from the U.S. Department of Labor. The focus of this grant money is on placement outcomes, making TAACCCT a potentially effective tool for job placement. A more concerted effort to push the colleges to leverage these dollars in the direction that the Commonwealth needs would be very productive. The colleges have funding for advanced manufacturing and health care training. For the most part, the colleges have made little attempt to connect this program with Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funding or Industry Partnership funding. We believe that a concerted effort to connect community colleges with WIBs under the TAACCCT grant would produce better outcomes with no additional funding.

BETTER INTEGRATION OF EXISTING PROGRAMS

PA CareerLinks® truly should be “one-stop centers” for both jobseekers and employers. State policy should focus on promoting the integration of key employment and training programs and related services that are essential to both employer and jobseeker customers of the system. A recent example is the EARN “welfare to work” program that is slowly being integrated with PA CareerLink® services. Similarly, there is interest in integrating ex-offender programs under the Department of Corrections into the PA CareerLinks®. Under the new federal workforce bill (WIOA, the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act), there will be an emphasis on partners sharing the one-stop infrastructure costs, which may drive better cooperation in this area. We should take full advantage of the valuable customer storefront and multiple partners that these centers provide.

MAKING PA A WORKKEYS® STATE

WorkKeys® testing ensures that individuals demonstrate skill levels in key areas that employers are seeking. We recommend making Pennsylvania a WorkKeys® state whereby the state would endorse the program, and PA CareerLinks® could offer to employers workers who have achieved the widely recognized National Career Readiness Certificate™. This would be a big step to addressing the concerns of employers for skilled workers and a way to address the skills gap in a meaningful way. Most local workforce areas already use WorkKeys®, so the financial impact would be minimal.

COMPETITIVE GRANTS

PWDA supports competitive grants funded from the Unemployment Compensation Re-employment Fund. The point of connection for unemployed individuals should be through PA CareerLinks®, where many related and supplemental services are being offered that would complement these initiatives. PWDA strongly recommends that the state develop a more transparent process around administering competitive grants to the local workforce system.

BUSINESS ENGAGEMENT

It is vital to get businesses more engaged with the public workforce system. To that end, the Commonwealth and local workforce development system should work together to provide the best possible services to Pennsylvania employers through professional, well-trained PA CareerLink® staff, timely labor market information, marketing of services, a user-friendly job-posting system for employers, and shared job placement data that provides the ability to demonstrate results.

SHORT-TERM TRAINING AND ELIGIBLE PROVIDER LIST

With one adjustment to the state rules regarding the Eligible Training Provider list, the Commonwealth could legitimately show a dramatic increase in skills training to address the skills shortages that are prevalent in many sectors. This could easily be accomplished by waiving the state requirement that all eligible training providers for WIA training be licensed by the PA Department of Education. This requirement eliminates training provided by industry associations, industries themselves, and other private training providers that are not formal educational institutions. One simple example would be training for forklift operators, which is only provided by industry and requires the use of this equipment. Many of the local WIBs are already doing short-term, skill-based training designed by industry for specific job needs. With this one change, the Commonwealth could triple the amount of training that it offers and reports to the federal government. This would enable individuals to move into short-term, industry-supported occupational skills training that has a higher job placement success rate and shorter turn-around time.

STATE WIA SET-ASIDE

With the increase in the state set-aside of federal WIA funds from 5% to 15% under the new federal workforce bill (WIOA), we would like to see this funding used for programs that benefit and complement the work of the local workforce system, whether for additional local funding, competitive grants, or priorities that support the primary goals of engaging employers and matching skilled workers to available job opportunities. A full restoration of the 15% set-aside should be accompanied with a discussion on the policy for its use. We believe that the initiatives addressed in this document would be **effective uses for the state** set-aside funds.

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