



YOUTH COUNCIL

MINUTES

Wednesday, December 8, 2010

11:30 a.m.

Merrimack Valley Workforce Investment Board

439 South Union Street

Lawrence, MA 01843

Youth Council MEMBERS PRESENT:

Howard Allen, Kristine Blum, Lisa Coy, Brad Howell, April Lyskowsky, Steve Noroian, Linda Piergeorge, Megan Shea, Michael Strem, Cal Williams

MVWIB Youth Council MEMBERS ABSENT:

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

MVWIB STAFF PRESENT:

Mary Kivell, Deborah Andrews, Odanis Hernandez, Susan Almono, Ralph Abislaiman

I. Call to Order and Introductions

A quorum being present, Youth Council Chairman Cal Williams called the meeting to order at 11:40 a.m. He wished everyone Happy Holidays and thanked members for their commitment to youth. Introductions were made around the table.

II. Approval of November 10, 2010 Minutes

Cal then called for a motion on the minutes of the November 10, 2010 meeting.

Motion by Howard Allen seconded by Megan Shea to approve the minutes of the November 10, 2010 Youth Council meeting as submitted. Motion passed.

III. Update of Youth RFP and Timeline

Deborah Andrews said that she and Ralph Abislaiman have been talking about the youth program RFP of \$104,000 for group training with a tentative timeline for the RFP release of January and contracting in March. We are looking to work after school with ISY on remediation and job exploration and at the end of the year hook them up with a summer job as the employment piece. We would probably work with juniors and seniors to do MCAS

remediation linked with summer jobs, with some going on to Pathways or Connecting Activities. Deborah said that Ralph's philosophy is to help youth while they are in school and reward them with a summer job.

Ralph said that he would like to preface his remarks by saying this is contingent upon a thorough analysis of youth allocations to date. This year, we have already reached our locally required service to 70% OSY. We are talking about the remaining \$104,000 WIA funds. We utilized the 70% through WIA group programs and youth ITAs. We hope to work with the school system to serve youth we haven't in the past. Most kids in Lawrence, even if not foreign born, are not speaking English in their homes. Ralph said that education is a way out of poverty. Youth are getting mixed signals. If they are poor but are doing well in school, they may not qualify for WIA programs. The focus on WIA opportunities is on young people with the most problematic issues (with the supposition that we can turn them around). Consequently, youth with middle or above average abilities have seen a couple of generations who have seen their schoolmates drop out and receive services. Ralph said that Hispanics are not any less intelligent than any other group but the promotion of education is not as strong and they are not integrated as well as other immigrants. He said that poverty is related to the constant flow of immigration. Ralph also said that 40% of every federal dollar our government is spending will be paid by loans our children will pay. He said that we need to spend money on people who will become taxpayers and refocus to train young people to compete globally.

Mike Strem said that he is big on science and if we can orient toward science young people can get jobs. He said that every group has the same intelligence.

Kristine Blum said that Lynn has a similar population and said that there is so much push on MCAS that not much else is possible. In Lowell, one school is on its third principal with the majority of students Cambodian. Kristine said that the State of New Hampshire has an economic literacy requirement for students but Massachusetts does not. Massachusetts is moving to the Common Core curricula with a financial literacy component that will bring everyday math into the curriculum. Mike Strem wondered what MCAS actually is and Kristine said it is testing in ELA and math with a required number of correct answers. Kristine also said that one school actually brought in specialists to raise grades.

Megan Shea said that MCAS is to measure comprehension and reading skills. Culturally, Hispanics perform less well due to language and cultural barriers. Ralph said that poverty is the issue. He said that the intended procurement timeline is from January to the end of June, with the purpose of employment and public relations to stress education being rewarded.

Lisa Coy asked about recruitment and Megan Shea said that Lawrence High School is pretty much is lockdown with vacations and testing hurdles to overcome. Ralph said that it may be impossible to stick to our tentative timeline, but he hopes to deepen relationships with schools and recruitment will be less of a factor. We could help kids that could go either way - move up vs. fall out. This will require significant coordination with the schools and we are looking at Lawrence, Methuen and Haverhill. Megan wondered if we would RFP for a vendor and Ralph

said that remains to be seen but that it is a worthwhile effort although most money is already spent. Megan also asked if funds were not expended would we have to give them back.

Ralph said that we would e-mail enrollment and WIA youth group expenditure information for the last two years. In the previous two years, \$100,000 was reallocated to other activities at the end of the year and that needs to stop. Ralph said that people have commented that Secretary Oates said that WIA is intended for the hardest to serve but in his conversations with Rosemary Chandler of DCS, who will be coming on the board, she said that leaves out the hard to serve youth that can benefit from services. Many of the youth we are serving now are not responding to services. If the money spent on youth gets them a job they couldn't have without the training, there is clear added value in helping youth improve.

Howard Allen spoke about a program some twenty years ago at Hampshire College during a similar economic downturn. A proposal was sent to select a number of students who were given the directed opportunity that could bridge to education and jobs. Thirty students were enrolled with a 60/40 male to female mix. The rudiments were based on economics and poverty. What we are looking at here is a chance to get some successes. We all know the problems with MCAS. It is supposed to be a measure of learning. The common denominator in all cultures for success and getting out of poverty is education. We also need a buy-in from the high school to identify a cohort of students.

Cal noted that the actual OSY expenditure is 85% this year. Ralph said the state has never contested local barriers, and we chose some from their pre-existing list, which will allow us to serve more young people. We must make sure there is a buy-in from the schools and look at the difficulty of doing the fall RFP, beginning with the February break and scheduled testing. Howard Allen suggested looking at a pilot for flexibility with the overarching goal to launch a full blown program in the fall of 2011. He said that as a board we need to understand the barriers but also look at the reality.

Lisa Coy said that we get funding by being successful, looking at the population and how to meet the goals set forth by funding. If seniors get jobs that is a positive, but if juniors participate we get no credit through WIA.

Megan quoted the population statistics for Lawrence with those over 25 at 41% with no high school diploma.

Discussion then followed on what the criteria or performance measures are and what certifications qualify for WIA funding. The summer employment does not meet the criteria as it is subsidized employment. Megan said that once youth are enrolled in WIA the clock is ticking.

Cal said that if we treat this as a pilot and we can't make a go of it, what will happen to the \$104,000. Ralph said that we can move it to the ITA system which needs to lead to employment. We have had adult ITAs that spent up to \$11,000 for AC&R training and we

have yet to see employment. The economy may not be corrected for some time and we need to adjust our efforts.

Brad Howell said that with the limited funds we can't do system change in the schools. We need to establish collaboration augmenting what already exists. We can leverage what is out there rather than recreate or supplement those initiatives.

Ralph said that is a very good idea but are we want to make an impact on kids that education is valued and not continuing to reward the status quo. Clearly if people succeed in school we are doing something right.

April Lyskowsky then talked about YouthBuild and their success with education, training, and leadership development. The school system is not part of the solution and we should look at something like a bridge program. April also said that they provide stipends to participants and are looking to link the youth to post-secondary education.

Kristine Blum said that Lawrence is a very transient community and, as opposed to Boston's inner city youth who are there indefinitely, the turnover and lack of consistency of both students and educators does not allow for tracking and by the time they are in 11th or 12th grade the boat has sailed.

Howard Allen then spoke about a pilot program where it was mandatory for all students in a graduate program to go to writing lab and after one year exceeded expectations. This pilot program looked to reinforce English learning.

Cal Williams then said that we would look at the pilot program and get the all the particulars.

IV. Updates, new initiatives, and related funding for the next twelve months

Ralph Abislaiman said that the Youth EMT program that was recommended to the board for funding and was approved has not been filled. This program has had serious problems with recruitment and insufficient youth to sustain the program. Some youth did not meet program requirements so those that did were moved to the Adult EMT program. At this point, we would like the Youth Council to recommend to the Planning Committee to de-obligate this contract up to \$58,000. There are invoices from LARE totaling \$1,200 that need to be paid and more may come in depending on what LARE has spent on the program to date. Ralph also said that we need to revisit how we do referrals to programs in this organization.

Cal said that the balance of money would be allocated to Youth ITAs.

Motion by Megan Shea seconded by Howard Allen to recommend to the Planning Committee de-obligating up to \$58,000 from the Youth EMT program. Motion passed.

Megan also said that it is tough to make funding decisions annually when there was only one vendor and have to send the money back if we don't use it. Ralph said that we have not had other vendors recently because the youth were a problem for them to serve. Ralph believes the new barriers will reduce the difficulty.

V. Speaker/mentoring request of Youth Council members

Deborah said that she would send an e-mail to Youth Council members on the Speaker/Mentoring request.

She then spoke about the science and math related MCAS Remediation/Cell Phone work and learning program funded by DESE. When the grant finished, the participants were referred to our Pathways to MCAS Success program. Eleven out of fourteen participants took the MCAS test held on in November, although we don't have the scores yet.

There is a \$15M Massachusetts High School Graduate Initiative for schools where the number of dropouts is forty or more. Lawrence, Haverhill and Methuen, qualify for funding and we will approach them to see if we can be of assistance on this grant.

Deborah also said that she is working on the summer Pathways grant that is due in January. We have designed an MOU for high schools that allows us to share MCAS and contact information for youth who are or have left school. We will begin with Lawrence and offer the partnership to other schools as well.

VI. Adjournment

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

Respectfully submitted,

Mary Kivell

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Recorder