



**Meeting Minutes**

NJ Law Center-McCarter English Room  
New Brunswick, NJ  
Wednesday, April 4, 2018

**Attendance:**

**Hal Beder**-Acting Chair, **Gary Altman**-Acting Executive Director-SETC, **Barry Semple**-Co-Chair, **Kate Butler**-Department of Community Affairs, **Renee Ingram**-Department of Human Services, **Joanne Hala**-United Way, **Brigette Satchell**-Rowan College at Gloucester County, **Julio Sabater**-Workforce Advantage, **Elaine Zundl**-Center for Women and Work, **Yarrow Willman-Cole**-Center for Women and Work, **Joyce Campbell**-Trenton Soup Kitchen, **Kareim Oliphant**- SETC, **JoAnn Brooks**-SETC

**Welcome, Introduction and Minutes**

Acting Chair Hal Beder opened the meeting at 10:00 and asked members and guests around the table to introduce themselves. He asked for a motion to approve the December 6, 2017 meeting minutes and March 7, 2018 conference call minutes, which were provided in the meeting packets. A motion was made by Co-Chair Barry Semple and a unanimous voice vote was approved by the members.

**Updates**

SETC Acting Executive Director informed members that LWD has a new Assistant Commissioner, Workforce Development, Hugh Bailey. Mr. Altman stated that he will be meeting with Mr. Bailey in the coming week to discuss the different functions of the SETC and how they relate to Mr. Bailey's Workforce Development area. Mr. Altman will also address the importance of involvement and interaction by Assistant Commissioner Bailey and his staff such as attending meetings and events as well as the importance of reporting. Mr. Altman shared some topics that he plans to discuss with Mr. Bailey, one is to look at resources as more than just funding but also to use resources being shared by the Title's I and II workgroup and braid/integrate these resources into literacy related programs and future literacy plans. Another topic he would like to address is the TABE exam and its function and purpose. He noted that some workforce directors are



expressing concerns that the amount of time spent in testing and the in-depth questions on the test are causing them to lose people during this process. A member expressed concern in the noticeable drop in enrollment into certain programs, especially in terms of the long lists of people needing services that are being turned away. Program demands are uneven and often depend on the population being served. Mr. Altman asked members to let him know if there are any other topics they would like him to address with Assistant Commissioner Bailey.

Mr. Altman told the group that the 2018 Plan Modification has been submitted with some language changes and only 9 comments at this time, as compared to the 35 comments received in 2016.

Mr. Altman introduced Kareim Oliphant, a new staff member with SETC who has been with LWD for a few years, previously working with Commissioner Aaron Fichtner. Mr. Oliphant provided an update on the Title II program on behalf of Danielle Jubanyik of LWD Adult Education & Literacy Services, who was not able to attend this meeting. Mr. Oliphant told members that the Literacy NGO, a 3-year grant now in its second year, is currently in review with LWD leadership, and will be released to grantees by the middle of the month. He also stated that Ms. Jubanyik is in negotiations with the office of Career Technical and Adult Education regarding performance targets, and should be completed in the next few weeks as they review the proposed targets for the program. He explained that there has recently been approval to hire an education program development specialist to fill the central regional coordinator position. In the interim, Danielle will be assisting/monitoring the central region. Mr. Oliphant also told the group there was a presentation given to LWD Adult Education & Literacy Services staff by Linda Taylor of the Comprehensive Adult Student Systems, who is the director of assessment development in literacy. Take-away points from that presentation will be provided at a later meeting. Also, Danielle will try to have Ms. Taylor present to a larger audience such as SCALES if there is an interest.

**Report: NJ High School Equivalency Test. More Test Options, Less Opportunity**

Acting Executive Director Altman introduced presenters Elaine Zundl, Research Director of Rutgers's Center for Women and Work and Joyce Campbell from the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen.



Ms. Zundl began by stating that in 2014, New Jersey ranked high in terms of education with over 35 percent of its workforce having completed four years of college or more. However, at that time, 256,000 adult workers did not have a high school diploma or

GED, and 7.3% of them were unemployed. For most jobs, the High School Equivalency (HSE) diploma, previously known as a GED, is the bare minimum credential required to get a job.

In January, 2014 New Jersey began offering three for-profit test provider options to receive a state-issued high school diploma:

- GED; The General Education Development Testing Service
- HiSET; Educational Testing Service
- TASC; McGraw Hill

These tests are available online only and vary in cost, content, scoring and location of the test sites which has created a substantial difficulty for test takers to access and complete the test.

The NJ Department of Education (DOE) posts a data set on their website that tracks test takers over time to see their progress in completion and scores. An analysis was made using information from the DOE data to understand the impact of these testing changes. By 2016, the number of test takers had declined by 70%. Ms. Zundl presented two comparisons of passing rates which is more difficult to assess, but indicates a decrease under the new system. She stated that, no matter what comparison is used, the bottom line is that the number of those receiving GEDs in the state of New Jersey has declined sharply – from 18,619 in 2012-2013 to 9,333 in 2015-2016. This is a decline of 50 percent.

Ms. Zundl said that the barriers for low-income adult learners in accessing education and training opportunities include childcare, irregular work schedules and transportation. They may now encounter additional barriers such as:

- Test locations and language requirements
- Cost of the battery of tests
- Sufficient computer skills and preparation to understand and take the test

New Jersey is taking steps to help this population have better access to High School Equivalency (HSE) tests. In 2013, tests were available in 32 locations, today there are 52 test locations, more are located in the densely populated urban areas. However, not all of these locations offer all three tests or both English and Spanish languages. Ms. Zundl offered some recommendations to fill these gaps:

- More information about test options on the web, especially State agency sites
- Additional test centers-located near public transportation
- More research and evaluation on high school equivalency data



- NJ requires a higher passing score than other states-adopt the same as other states to make NJ more equitable for test takers
- Add test cost options; scholarships, subsidies
- Conduct additional research to better understand the impact of these changes

Ms. Zundl offered to answer questions and discussion began on the need for better demographics. A question was raised whether the test centers could provide the demographics needed to be able to analyze options to better serve test takers based on

their location, level of education and income. One member explained that the test centers cannot offer that data because the test takers register through DOE so that is where the data is located. Ms. Zundl explained that before the tests became privatized there was a yearly report published. There hasn't been a comprehensive report on the test services since then. There was some discussion of the possibility of outreach to promote the exams, but members agreed that most agencies are not able to handle the cost. It was suggested that outreach could be offered through DOE.

Acting Chair Beder and members thanked Ms. Zundl for her great presentation.

Joyce Campbell of the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK) spoke to the group.

She explained that TASK is far more than a soup kitchen. It has existed since 1982 and in 1992 they began to offer self-sufficiency services – adult education was the first of the programs they began to offer. She told the group that they have struggled significantly with the HSE test for many years and that her data matches the report by the Center for Women and Work. They rely on volunteers to tutor their students on an average of 5600 hours per year which is valued at \$145,000. Their signature event of the year has always been their High School Equivalency Graduation, but last year there was not enough students graduating to have a ceremony. TASK uses the HiSET test because it is more fairly designed for participants, but because NJ requires a higher score, many students do not receive their diplomas and most do not return to test again for a higher score. The tests should be designed according to needs of the student such as high school diploma vs college readiness.

A member shared copies of an Aztec Software's Continuum of Learning brochure that provides the current effective resources to provide instructors and students with personalized learning plans that would be beneficial in preparing for exams. Acting Chair Beder told members about the Coalition on Adult Basic Education (COABE) and suggested viewing the website for very valuable information.



### **Going Forward**

Co-Chair Semple referenced a report done years ago from a grant to Montclair University regarding adult literacy and employment. He made a recommendation that, with the change in administration and the changes taking place, there should be an updated report done on the current status of adult literacy and high school completion in New Jersey. Acting Chair Beder responded by stating that an agency with research capability would be necessary to develop the report for the SETC to share with the Commissioner's office, Governor's office and State Departments in order to influence policy change. Ms. Zundl told the group that the Center for Women and Work have been doing much outreach by making the report public on their website, through news interviews and the public relations office at Rutgers has been promoting the report. She said that the Center will be celebrating their 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary at an event in the fall, details will be available soon. She also stated that she would like to stay in touch with this group for sharing of information. Acting Chair Altman told her that we would include her in notices of future meetings.

There was some concern of the adult literacy portion of the Plan Modification and the changes needed to it. Acting Executive Director Altman explained that the USDOL gave a deadline that was hard to meet because New Jersey had a change in Governor which meant changes in staffing and planning. The plan that was submitted contained only the federal requirements. Once administrative staffing is finally in place and we hear back from the USDOL, (within 90 days) we can begin to discuss additional modifications.

### **Closing**

Mr. Beder asked for a motion to adjourn the meeting. The motion was provided by Mr. Semple and approved by all members.

The meeting adjourned at 11:35.

The next SCALES meeting is scheduled for July 11, 2018

