



New Jersey State Employment and Training Commission

Vacant, Chairman

Mikie Sherrill, Governor

**Draft SETC Commission Meeting Minutes
Wednesday, March 18th, 2026
10am – 12pm
Teams Platform**

I. Welcome & Introductions - SETC Joan Desmarais Deputy Executive Director

Ms. Joan Desmarais called the meeting to order at 10:06 am and welcomed members and guests. In accordance with the Open Public Meetings Act of 1978, notice of this meeting was submitted to the Secretary of State's office and was posted on the SETC website. The roll call was taken and the SETC had a quorum.

Approval of December 17th, 2025, meeting minutes were approved by Dr. Danielle Jubanyik and John Gaglione. Joan, welcome and thanks Commissioner Jarvis, for joining in to make a few remarks.

Commissioner Jarvis opened thanks to all for their dedication to public service and briefly discussed AI and its impact and change to the economy. Focusing on workforce development is a priority and how AI will serve as a tool to make things faster and help with our training and upskilling the workforce. Commissioner Jarvis also asked does anyone have suggestions or knows of anyone with interest to Chair the SETC to let us know.

Joan also discussed that she and Mr. Roberto Soberanis, Senior Advisor with NJDOL attended the National Governors Association in the winter for a Workforce Development policy meeting. It was very well attended and there were 40 states there. The biggest topic included workforce development priorities. Each Governor went over their presentation and how they are shaping their workforce.

In addition, workforce Pell implementation was also reviewed, and the link is posted with proposed rules, and it has been put out for public comment. Public comments are due by April 8th, 2026. Again, the link here takes you to that if you'd like to make a public comment, I'd like to remind the Members that SETC is working actively on the workforce, Pell Implementation, Interagency Group here at NJDOL which is moving along quickly. Economist and doctor Mr. Robert Wescott spoke about the economic and workforce landscape across the United States, and certainly even the globe, as we've had a lot of disruptions recently.

In addition, we had a great presentation about rural health and how those economies and those rural areas can be transformed by using care to career and workforce. They closed out the meeting with having USDOL Deputy Secretary Merritt Lacco present the Trump

administration's workforce priorities, focusing on the America's talent strategy and discussed building the workforce for the golden age.

These four pillars are also going to be discussed which we're about to go over, including industry driven strategies, mobility, integrated systems, accountability, flexibility and innovation.

In addition, I want to bring everyone up on the two-year local plan modifications for our 17 local areas. Most of the boards have had their local plans approved by their board.

Middlesex will be happening in April, Camden by the end of the month.

Essex currently has their local plan posted for public comment, and once that completes their local board. For Hudson in Newark, there's no update required at this time.

They're off cycles, so their two-year plans will probably have to be updated next year. So there's just not on with every all the others.

For the regional plan modifications, they are due back to the SETC by March 27th.

Following submission, there'll be a 30 day public comment period as well.

The plan will be posted in each local area for local comment.

After incorporating the feedback, they will get their local area boards to approve the regional plans.

In accordance with law, the three regions that are identified in our state plan and those are the regions that we follow for North, Central and South.

I want to thank the local board directors, Paul Grizella from Greater Raritan, Christian Estevez from Mercer and Christie DeLeonardo from Cumberland, Salem, Cape May.

They took the lead in each region for coordinating these regional plans and getting them done, so we expect to have that wrapped up shortly. Our two year state plan modification is due.

This is the TEGP issued by the federal government, it was issued on January 26th.

The two year modification of the 2024-2026 New Jersey State Plan will be submitted on to the portal tomorrow and will be simultaneously put out for public comment through our public notice and posted on our SETC website.

Obviously, once we get our public comment back and United States Department of Labor, gives us the approval, we will bring it in front of the SETC Commission to vote and accept it for final approval.

Obviously, the state plan as you guys know is a very large document and is in excess of 400 pages.

One more update with the WIB certification cycle, our WIB certification cycle for all 17 local areas is going to be July 1st, 2026, through June 30th, 2028, as required by law, all 17 areas will have to be certified for their two-year period beginning in July. Their due date for materials due back to SETC is May 15th.

We are providing technical assistance currently and working closely with NJDOL and the monitoring team.

Also, the Office of Internal Audit can assure coordination, and appropriate Technical Support is provided to our 17 areas. Our web certification is outlined in WIOA Section 107 and includes just for as a reminder, a review of board composition and structure strategic planning efforts, including overseeing local and Reg.

Planning their performance metrics, fiscal and administrative integrity.

Local partnerships and collaboration, service delivery, compliance and governance.

Innovation and best practices and evidence of continuous improvement and most importantly, ensuring that their performance and their fiscal integrity is met and reviewed from all the groups I just mentioned. In addition to final approval for certification through the SETC.

If anyone has any questions about those items, please let me know.

Joan then introduced Mr. Roberto Soberanis, Senior NJDOL Advisor and he briefly discussed some of our recent communications with the US Department of Labor relating to Workforce policy alignment which is happening as the Department of Education and what we've been seeing a lot of cross and intersections with Department of Education, Department of Labor in last year the federal government is looking to advance a unified workforce vision through America's talent strategy. There's been a strong emphasis on reindustrialization and bringing manufacturing back. There is a lot of emphasis on skilled trades on non-degree pathways.

There is also a huge emphasis on the talent strategy on AI and other emerging technologies. There would be employer driven workforce solutions and systems.

Also, the Office of Research and Innovation was mentioned, regarding high skilled workforce pipelines and employee preparedness.

Finally, while at the NGA Conference last week we heard from their Deputy City Secretary, from the Employment and Training Administration, he reiterated at the Conference of five strategic Pillars also known as the core federal framework. The one size fits all models and are being moved away from and the apprenticeship and trades are being pushed.

II. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services Overview - Dr. Felicia Hopson, Director New Jersey Department of Labor & Workforce Development

Dr. Felicia Hopson introduced herself and the her division where she oversees the Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services.

Our division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is to enable all individuals who are eligible for services to achieve employment outcomes consistent with their strengths, priorities, needs, abilities and capabilities.

Our primary goal is to help everyone who has a disability find fair and equitable employment.

What is DVRS? Our division is we sit within the Department of Labor, and we help people with individuals prepare and obtain and maintain competitive employment.

It's very important that we focus on the competitive aspect of employment at the federal level, DVRS is monitored currently by the Department of Education. The landscape of employment of four people with disabilities has been changing.

In April of 2012, New Jersey became an employment 1st state to promote competitive integrative employment as the primary option for individuals with significant disability.

It's a comprehensive workforce development program serving people with disabilities and the employer community and DVRS staff are disability employment experts.

We provide a talent pipeline to employers and DVRS provides a full array of workforce work based learning opportunities and employment related services to assist people with disabilities in support of their chosen career pathways.

Who should be referred to?

DVRS, serves all eligible people with disabilities who want to work in a competitive, integrated employment setting. This includes adults 18 years and older, out of school youth that can range from ages 16 to 24 and students in high school ranging from 8 from the ages of 14 and older.

DVRS promotes and advocates for inclusive employment and we're committed to creating and supporting career pathways for DBRS consumers.

Step one is the referral individuals of age may refer themselves to DVRS, minors, or others under guardianship may be referred by their parent or guardian.

Referrals can be made by hospitals, service providers, state or county agencies, or others.

Referrals can also be made and completed on our DVRS DOL website or by contacting one of our 18 local offices. All our referral information is confidential.

Our referral form can be submitted, and we can you can send it over to us. We can take it over the phone. You can e-mail it, fax it, but all the information is confidential.

And most importantly, an individual can refer themselves to us.

Step 2 in our process is the application process. When the referral is made, the individual will be contacted by one of our local offices.

So it does not matter where you live in the state once we receive your referral.

Depending on where you live in the state, you will be contacted by wherever your closest office is. Dr. Felicia Hopson went further into the process and learned how to make an appointment.

Once an appointment is made, there is a conversation and discussion to talk about goals, college, and employment history. They also talk about the four steps to eligibility which includes a thorough evaluation of the cognitive or mental emotional impairment that poses a substantial barrier to employment and requires vocational rehabilitation services in order to prepare, secure and maintain consistent strength, resources and priorities for them to be able to have an informed choice.

For their employment, we want to make sure that our consumers are able to make the decisions for themselves as to where they want to be and what they want to do with their lives.

Diagnostic evaluations are used to determine an individual's diagnosis. Once that determination happens, the consumer will tell us what their vocational goal is, and we then help the consumer identify those goals.

And how we can get them there so we can help them obtain and maintain employment. This is extremely important and the entire.

What services can DVRS provide? The core service provided to DVRS consumers is vocational counseling and guidance. This is one of our core services and most important service that is happening throughout the entire journey with our consumer. Because this happens from day one throughout the entire life cycle when our consumers are with us. Many services are at no cost to the consumer. We do receive federal monies from our federal regulator and because it's at no cost, we are heavily regulated by the federal government for example, some of the services that we offer, career assessment and benefit counseling, work readiness, skills work, best, work based learning, self-advocacy skills, financial support for post-secondary education, job coaching, mental and physical restoration services, assistive technology, workplace accommodations, exhilarates tools and equipment needed for job.

DVRS support and specialized services assessment and job development replacement activities are offered along with trial work experience, so we will allow a consumer to do something on a trial basis to see if it's a good fit for them.

This is extremely important when we have someone who has more, more of a significant disability, community based work experiences.

There's also tons and tons of information on our website and we keep our website up to date with the most recent information because we can't tell everybody everything all the time.

All the programs that we offer are on our website.

In closing, Dr. Felicia Hopson provided office locations across the state and where to apply.

III. “Future Ready Initiative” - Maria Heidkamp, Chief Innovation and Policy Officer New Jersey Council for County Colleges & Catherine Frugé Starghill, Esq., Vice President and Chief Workforce Innovation Officer for the New Jersey Council of County Colleges (NJCCC)

Ms. Starghill opened the discussion regarding the Alumina Foundation. In the past, the Department of Labor has worked with the Alumina Foundation to adopt or to have the state adopt a credential attainment goal. In the past the credential attainment goal was 65% of all New Jersey residents obtaining a credential or degree by 2025. In addition, the Alumina Foundation focuses on economic mobility which enhances skills across the nation. New Jersey adopted that 65% by 2025 credential attainment goal the Alumina Foundation has instituted a new national initiative which they call “Future Ready States”. The Council of County Colleges was selected as the state's entity to build a coalition across social justice, higher education and labor union industries.

At the beginning of the fiscal year, so around July 2025 and we've met with the Alumina Foundation, which provides technical assistance to work with the Council of County Colleges and its coalition members we presently have.

Of about 35 organizations that are partnering in our “Future Ready New Jersey” coalition and they include the Chambers of Commerce, four year colleges and universities, labor unions, organizations like Junior Achievement and the Latino Action Foundation along with the Mental Health Association of New Jersey.

Currently, Alumina Foundation has a new credential attainment goal across the nation of 75% by the year 2040. The whole initiative and coalition is really about equity, equity, prosperity and making our state future ready with regards to our present, our residents abilities.

The Sector collaboration of organizations is necessary to create the environment for broad based prosperity, this is the credential attainment goal that Alumina Foundation, has encouraged all states to adopt and we see this as an extension really of the state's previous credential attainment.

We believe it will take all of us to obtain the 75% of residents having credentials of value by the year 2040 and are looking now at the New Jersey attainment by education type. 41% of New Jersey residents do not have any post high school credential.

We also see there are also a lot of disparity between the demographics or the populations and these different types of credentials like the bachelor's Associate certificate and postgraduate.

There are significant gaps in educational attainment in New Jersey as it relates to race and ethnicity.

Asian and Pacific Islanders, of course, having the highest attainment, followed by white, then black, then Hispanic.

We would like to even these numbers and would like to expand equitable access to education and workforce training.

The top occupations with the most projected employment growth are nurse practitioner being having the highest projected growth and medical type occupations being close second with physician assistants, physical therapists, all of these occupations. We need to create policies and strategies and ecosystems which provide equitable access. With regards to K through 12 as well as post-secondary, in daily education and workforce development we should be in the top three. There's no reason why Washington or Massachusetts should be ahead of us.

I've talked about the connection between post, secondary attainment to economic mobility and prosperity but we really have to focus on how we emphasize high quality and stackable

credentials in a changing economy, thankfully the workforce pale was approved and enacted into law, which creates that criteria, which is why we're so excited in our sector. Community colleges for this opportunity for workforce pill, but also we have to figure out where the state, how we foster access and success for all New Jerseyans and we have to do that together.

The consortium of Community Colleges for Workforce and Economic Development has partnered with Junior Achievement in the state for career awareness for middle schoolers and high schoolers.

We have also kicked off the coalition in January, on January 15th.

All of these organizations were talking to one another about how they could connect which will benefit the residents of the state with regards to supports and direct connections to credentials of value. In closing, the New Jersey blue print where the coalition is working to identify the data necessary, the policies necessary and the actions, we would love for your organizations that you're representing here at the SETC to reach out to join our coalition because we believe it will take all of us, this is not just about workforce development including higher education and others as one ecosystem in the state where individuals have the necessary support.

IV. Public Comment –

Fernandel Almonor asked, when you're sort of factoring in these credentials of value, are you factoring in these variables and projections? That can radically change what's considered a credential value. Because I can see that from a short-term lens, CDL driving would absolutely be beneficial. But for longer lens and we're not even talking about extremely long left.

In 90 years, that could be transformed and I can see it. You're not factoring in the long-term analysis. How can that potentially have very negative consequences for people during this pathway thinking they're sustainable?

So my question to you is, are you factoring in those variables and determining that?

And if so, at a high level. What does that analysis look like?

Catherine Starghill responded that, certainly, we are looking to partner with the Department of Labor regarding determinations of what are credentials of value. The Alumina Foundation simply defines them as any credential that will lead to earnings that are at least 15% more than a High School graduate with would obtain. The Council of County Colleges actually got some legislation passed in the last hours of Governor Murphy's administration. One is asking the Labor Department to create an industry valued credential list.

And that list will be based on the latest and greatest information from the Bureau of Labor Statistics and other sources.

We're not exactly certain that the department plans to in fact create this list an updated annually, but it is in law and we came up with that in part because of this Alumina Foundation initiative, the Future Ready New Jersey coalition, and the Future Ready states we need that as well for workforce pale now. We're hoping to rely on the experts at the Department of Labor really to access both federal and state and regional data they have at their access to determine what those credentials are. The Alumina Foundation is very basic, and it is any credential that leads to earnings.

That is 15% or more of the earnings that an individual with a high school diploma alone would earn.

Nichelle Santos asked, my question is how we aggregate and manage all the data from all the organizations you mentioned, several from unions to Department of Labor to the Council of Community Colleges. Also, Economic Development Authority is also involved in collecting their data and do we know what's the economic measuring? The economic impact of preparing folks for workforce development?

Catherine Starghill responded, the Department of Labor can tap into the statewide data system, which is our statewide longitudinal data system that provides wage information as well as employment retention information because it taps into motor vehicle records, it taps into taxation records and other records along with the Department of Labor and then it's able to extract. All the student outcome data so they'll get the completion like the course completion from the training providers and then they're able to tap into the longitudinal data system to get the wage information to determine if wages increase after completion of training and education.

Then it uses that information to generate what is called the Consumer Report card. Available again through the eligible training provider list with NJDOL so that anyone looking can select the training provider.

And then there's a federal system called Swiss, which gathers the wage and retention employment retention data for New Jersey residents who actually work in neighboring states.

Bob Wise asked, given that there were best practices in the last iteration, will there be reviews of those best practices that can apply to the new goals for 2040? And will there be perhaps continuing barriers of those we had that didn't allow us to achieve the last goals that we'll carry forward?

As preventive of our ability to achieve as a preventative to the new goals?

Catherine Starghill responded, yes, all the education and training provider partners must be part of the mix, we all must work together. We are at the stage of really creating a blueprint for how we can all work together at the beginning stages and I think I barely mentioned that what we are getting the coalition out of the Alumina Foundation during this iteration of the initiative which is technical assistance from a national technical assistance provider.

Ours is the business and Higher Education Forum and they are helping us create this blueprint that will outline exactly what New Jersey needs. With regards to strategy, policy and action, and how all of our coalition members fit into that and then, you know, hopefully the administration will see some value in that blueprint and you know, decide to fund this and not this so that we can like states like Alabama and Texas, Virginia, others build infrastructure to accomplish the credential attainment goal.

V. Closing Remarks – Joan Desmarais, SETC Deputy Executive Director

Joan closed out the meeting at asked for a motion to adjourn. Joan thanked all the presenters and thanked everyone for attending. We will see everyone at our next SETC Commission meeting on Wednesday, June 17th, 2026.

**SETC Commission Meeting on Wednesday, June 17th, 2026
(TEAMS Online Platform)**

Attendees Members /Alternates

Bob Wise
Hosea Johnson
Christine Idland [DCF]
Stefani Thachick [OSHE]
Teri Duda
Sally Nadler
John Sarno
Jacqueline Suarez
Stephen Cha
Charyl Yarbrough
Commissioner Kevin Jarvis DOL

Dr. Jubanyik, Danielle [DOL]
Roberto Soberanis [DOL]
John Gagliano
Joan Desmarais
Carlye Lamarca
Shari Brown
Jamee Adams
Eddie Roberts

Tonya Coston
Mary Meyers
Barbara Weir

Erin Darvalics

Sean Hendricks
Jody Hirata
Jawana Hardwick

Francis Kuhn

Karen Rodriguez
Karen Cinkus
Michelle Cinkus
Barbara Tracey
Vanessa Madrid
Khushi Avichal

Dr. Felicia Hopson
Jobi Odeneye
Catherine Carroll
Catherine Starghill
Beth Rodgers
Yolanda Taylor
Lauren Washington
Ivonne Delcarpio-Zaki
Kidiecia Brack
Lesha Armour
Lauridsen
David Spector
Gabriela Campbell
Rob Wells
Rosabeatriz Mosley
Christy DiLeonardo

Jennifer Gonzalez
Sherie Jenkins
Nimit Shah
Shakirah Plumb
Fernandel Almonor

Andrea Levandowski

Craig Morris

