



APPROVED
MAY 1, 2025

**Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Board
Special Populations Committee
Meeting Minutes
January 30, 2025, via Zoom at 11:00 a.m.**

Members Attending	Members Absent	Staff & Guests Attending
Corey Johns	Jordan Osbourne	Marla Rye
Christopher West	James Harper	Andrea Dillard
Freda Herndon		Ginger Fussell
George “Bo” Callis		Meagan Dobbins
Mary Lear		Alyssa Spaulding
Nathan Garrett		Kim Rye
Selina Moore		

The Northern Middle Tennessee Workforce Special Populations Committee met via Zoom on January 30, 2025, at 11:00 a.m.

With a quorum confirmed, Freda Herndon called the meeting to order. Chris West moved to approve the minutes, and Mary Lear seconded. With no further discussion, the minutes were unanimously approved.

Career Service Provider Update

Andrea Dillard delivered the CSP performance update. For Q2, MAC narrowly failed to meet their enrollment goals, likely due to the holidays. She has met with MAC, and they are now up to date in January. They have exceeded their cumulative goals in every category except out-of-school youths, at 44% of the 50% goal. They are slightly behind on Q2 exits, but Meagan Dobbins has been working with them to clear out older cases. Exiting them slowly over several quarters is preferable for performance management. EDSI has exceeded their enrollment goals for Adult/DW and youth. They are slightly behind on exits. They have met or exceeded their cumulative goals.

She then reminded the Committee about the pilot projects in the region. For Clarksville, the Board took over as the CSP in October 2024. For their first quarter, they have met or exceeded every goal except youth. For Sumner, the state is in charge of service delivery. For their first quarter, they did not meet their goals. Andrea has been meeting with state leadership every Friday to discuss what needs to be done to improve enrollments and move forward. Chris West congratulated the Clarksville project for their performance and asked if they could give Gallatin

insight. Andrea replied that she believes a significant challenge Sumner faces is staffing. It is a comprehensive center, but one of the region's lowest-staffed AJCs. Additionally, some staff are either entirely new to WIOA or new to the position. Marla added that 3 TDLWD employees were working on the pilot projects in the beginning. Two are no longer there; the other has been pulled onto another project. Freda Herndon asked if the foot traffic had changed in Sumner. Andrea replied that she believes traffic has picked up. It seems to her that Sumner is enrolling to Wagner Peyser, as instructed by the state, but they are not being coenrolled into Title I. Corey Johns asked whether the state or board was responsible for hiring. Andrea answered that hiring was a dual effort, but the state made the final decision. Nathan Garrett then asked if there was anything that partners could do to add value and help with numbers. She replied that they could look at TCAT students and assess them for WIOA eligibility. Freda said that board staff could contact Adult Education to see if co-enrollment opportunities existed. Nathan Garrett expressed interest in introducing staff to the TCAT Portland Campus, and Marla thanked him. Freda Herndon asked about the timeline for evaluating the two pilots with the upcoming new program year. When would decisions for the new RFP be made? Marla answered that she made excellent points that would be answered in the CSP Procurement Update.

Target Populations

The Board was recently awarded a rural healthcare grant. NM will partner with Volunteer State Community College to take advanced EMTs in Cheatham, Robertson, Dickson, and Stewart County and upskill them to paramedics. Marla will be working with EMT agencies in the counties to have interested individuals sign a contract stating that they will receive free tuition and support services while working for their local agencies, similar to an apprenticeship program. Several other organizations within the NM region also received this grant, many of which will partner directly with Northern Middle. She added that another rural healthcare grant is currently accepting applications.

Northern Middle was also awarded a Reentry Opportunities and Workforce Development grant. It primarily targeted the Memphis area but has recently expanded to Davidson County. The Office of Reentry reached out and asked NM to be a part of it. It is too early to know the grant's scope, but since reentry is a large portion of the labor force participation rate, Marla thought it would be advantageous to partner with them. She hopes to know more about the scope of the contract in the March-April timeframe. Nathan Garrett asked to be kept in touch. TCAT has tried to do training classes in the Davidson County system in the past, but they transitioned online during COVID, making it complicated.

Marla then asked Freda Herndon to give an update about the Adult Education diploma report. Q2 ended December 31, 2025, and Workforce Essentials is back to the number one spot in the state for diploma attainment. This was primarily thanks to the flexibility of piecing together the TABE, Hi-Set, and GED tests to help students attain their diplomas with new pathways. It has helped those with different learning styles or less formal education find success. The state did issue a 43% diploma goal increase for the year, which has been a challenge. They are trying a new model at the new Davidson County AJC by dividing staff into ESL or Hi-Set instructors. This

will hopefully allow staff to focus on one specific area of instruction and provide a higher level of service to the student instead of shifting around. Freda hoped that this strategy change will pay off in the long run. Marla added that the state has a goal of 7000 diplomas, but are only at 2321 through 50% of the year. She then asked Freda about the non-grantees on the report. Freda answered that they are entities not funded by the state and have never been tracked. They do this so that state and federal guidelines are not a hinderance.

CSP Procurement Update

Marla delivered the CSP procurement update. EDSI and MAC have been the contracted service providers for 4.5 years. State procurement guidelines only allow a contract to be extended for 5 years without procurement, meaning a contract must be made by July 1, 2025. Considering their performance over time and the fact that they are behind on the participant cost rate for the fiscal year, it is apparent that there are improvements to be made in the service delivery model. Before making any procurement decisions, she would like to talk with County Mayors, Chambers of Commerce, and economic development agencies with workforce components to determine what they would like to see different in the AJs. She will use that information to craft an RFP to bring the focus back to local service delivery. When NM was the CSP, staff were chamber members or involved in community events. She believes that subcontracting services has led to a loss of “local” presence within the community. Several other areas are beginning to deliver their programs, and Marla thinks that works well in rural communities. However, urban areas need a broader strategy. Thomas P. Miller and Associates were contracted to do an independent procurement during the last procurement, but NM staff were troubled with their commitment and approach. John Zobl offered during the Finance Committee meeting that the RFP be in-house, which is allowable.

Marla then opened the floor to comment. Corey Johns asked if there was an outline for the local-level assessment to guide the conversations. She replied that there was no simplistic guide to the expectations and performance for the AJC, but she had several big-picture points. Chris West added that looking at Clarksville’s performance shows that the Board’s past experience as a CSP is a good indicator to get the entire area down the right path, even if it is a totally different climate. Freda Herndon asked if Marla had any sense of what the budget for next year might look like, as it may impact the RFP. Ginger Fussell explained that there was some carryover and additional grants, bringing last year’s allocation to approximately \$8 million. As a precaution, she plans for a 10% reduction each year. Typically, they receive an estimate in March, with the official announcement in May. Marla noted that, through the CSPs, expenditures are behind the expected timeline. However, she reassured that there is no risk of losing the funds, as allocations have a two-year spending window, and they always prioritize using the funds within that period. While they will meet this requirement again this year, she expects a larger carryover than usual unless spending picks up in Q3 and Q4. That said, she does not view this as a negative, especially given the uncertainty surrounding the federal government and the new administration. Freda Herndon asked what urban counties, aside from Davidson, she is considering having a different delivery model. Marla answered that there is no one-size-fits-all. Administratively, it would be much easier to deal with 1-2 contractors, but

that may not be what is best for service delivery. They will have to determine the benefits and risks of selecting multiple contractors.

Adjourn

Marla Rye introduced Selena Moore as the newest member of the NM board. She has been with the Department of Labor for over 20 years and serves on the Southern Middle Workforce Board. She is replacing Ryan Jolley. Marla then reminded that the Board meeting will be held on February 12, 2025, at the Montgomery AJC. With no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned.