

West Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board

Lisa Greene, Chair

The meeting of the West Central Arkansas Workforce Development Board meeting was held on Thursday, August 14, 2025, at Smokin' In Style BBQ in Hot Springs, Arkansas and via TEAMS.

Members Present In-Person: Lisa Greene, Tim Hall, Neal Harrington, Gary Troutman, Venorris Webb-Delesline, Cindy White-Hamilton, Pati Brown, Kelli Embry, Herman Grayer, Gretchen Newton, Eugene Wilson

Members Present via TEAMS: Greg Black, Karen Breashears, Ben Freeny, Allan George, Mason Robinson, Jeremy Hughes, Brent Black, Kim Darling

Members Absent: Jimmy Hart, Tammy Passafiume, Darla Crump

Staff: Cora McCaskill, Carrie Pratchard, Erica Parker, Ian Bishop, Martha Boyer (Online) and Dwayne Pratt

Guests: Margaret Dearmon, Sarah Perry (online), Andy Hightower (online), Jasmine McCrary (online), Thomas Pittman (online), Lori Strumpf, Brad Coffman, Joe Darling, Bill Weston, Alaura Little, Bill Ritter (online), and Jean Campo

Ms. Greene called the meeting to order at 10:32 a.m. and gave an invocation.

Chair Comments:

Ms. Greene welcomed all those in attendance and online. She asked for the ones online to sign in on the chat for recording purposes.

Approval of Minutes:

Ms. Greene asked for a motion to approve the minutes from the June 12, 2025, meeting.

Motion: Gary Troutman made a **motion** to approve the minutes.

Second: Neil Harrington seconded the motion.

Vote: Motion carried **unanimously**.

Review of PY-25 Budgets:

Carrie presented the financial report for the fiscal year ending June 30, 2025, beginning on page 12 of the board packet. She highlighted the following:

- The board began the year with approximately **\$729,000** in carryover funds.
- Additional funding of **\$1.1 million** was received during the year.
- **Total expenditures** across all programs—including discretionary grants—amounted to just over **\$1.2 million**.
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Carrie explained the benefits of transferring funds from the Dislocated Worker stream to the Adult stream:

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- Dislocated Worker funds can only be used for individuals who meet specific eligibility criteria (e.g., displaced homemakers, long-term unemployed, etc.).
- By transferring the funds to the Adult stream, the board can expand services to a broader population without losing the ability to serve dislocated workers.
- The board has sufficient funds in the Dislocated Worker stream to meet current and near-term program needs, even after a transfer.
- Approval from the state may take 30–60 days, so board action during this meeting would help avoid delays in Adult program service delivery.

Motion: Gary Troutman made a **motion** to transfer \$100,000 from the Dislocated Worker funding stream to the Adult funding stream.

Second: Herman Grayer seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

The board agreed this would help sustain Adult program operations, especially in high-demand sectors such as healthcare and manufacturing, while maintaining sufficient capacity in the Dislocated Worker stream. Carrie confirmed this concluded her report.

Board Staff Report:

Ms. McCaskill provided the board with several key updates, including the status of the Workforce Center certification, the updated Supportive Services Policy, and regional Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)/ACT WorkReady Community efforts.

Workforce Center Certification

Ms. McCaskill reported that the state has issued formal documentation indicating that the workforce center certification application submitted during PY24 has been approved on a provisional basis, pending the execution of the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) by all required partner agencies. The state has established a firm deadline of October 20, 2025, for completion of this process.

Ms. McCaskill expressed confidence that all requirements would be met on time, thanks in part to the assistance of the One-Stop Operator, Andy Hightower.

Supportive Services Policy and State Monitoring

Ms. McCaskill provided a summary of recent monitoring by the state for PY24. Two unresolved findings from previous years were discussed:

1. **Referral Procedure Requirements** – The previous version of the Supportive Services Policy did not contain sufficient language detailing the referral process. In response, the board developed a revised policy, which now includes procedures for referrals and access to supportive services. The updated version begins on page 48 of the board packet, with a redlined version provided for comparison.
2. **One-Stop Operator Monitoring** – The board has not completed formal monitoring of the One-Stop Operator for PY22 or PY23 due to the absence of a standardized monitoring tool. Ms. McCaskill noted that the tool is currently under development and is

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expected to be completed by the end of August. Monitoring for PY22 and PY23 will begin immediately thereafter, with PY24 monitoring to follow.

Motion: A **motion** was made by **Kelli Embry** to approve the revised Supportive Services Policy as presented.

Second: **Kim Darling** seconded the motion.

Vote: Motion passed **unanimously**.

Career Readiness Certificate (CRC)

Ms. McCaskill informed the board that **8 of the 10 counties** in the West Central region have applied to become ACT Work Ready Communities. These designations recognize counties for their commitment to building a skilled workforce through the promotion and use of the Career Readiness Certificate (CRC), also referred to as the National Career Readiness Certificate (NCRC).

She explained that the CRC was initially adopted in the manufacturing sector and has since expanded to other industries. The CRC is a valuable tool for employers, educators, and job seekers, and helps align workforce skills with job requirements. A handout was distributed to the board highlighting the benefits of CRC adoption.

No additional questions or discussion followed. The Director's Report concluded.

Committee Reports

Planning/Performance/Finance Committee:

Review of Initial ITA Programs

Presented by: Karen Breashears, Committee Chair (via remote)

The Planning/Performance/Finance Committee presented a recommendation regarding training provider approvals. Ms. Williams, who joined remotely due to apprenticeship school obligations, introduced the action item related to **Heavy Equipment Operating Academy – Bee Branch Campus**.

Heavy Equipment Operating Academy – Independent Program Approvals

Ms. McCaskill reminded the board that the **Heavy Equipment Operator training** had previously been approved in its entirety. The current request was to approve four **independent training programs** offered through the same provider, allowing for greater flexibility based on participant need and job placement alignment.

The four programs proposed for addition to the Eligible Training Provider List (ETPL) under **Heavy Equipment Operating Academy – Bee Branch Campus** are:

- **CDL Program** – \$4,250 (4 weeks)
- **Dozer Program** – \$7,685 (3 weeks, Mon–Fri, 8AM–5PM)

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- **Excavator Program** – \$7,600 (3 weeks, Mon–Fri, 8AM–5PM)
- **Loader Program** – cost and structure similar to other equipment programs

It was noted that this request was prompted by a local WIOA participant who expressed interest in one of the specialized programs rather than the broader heavy equipment curriculum. The committee expressed support for expanding training access in a way that accommodates targeted occupational needs.

Motion: Gary Troutman made a **motion** to approve the addition of the CDL, Dozer, Excavator, and Loader programs at Heavy Equipment Operating Academy (Bee Branch) to the Eligible Training Provider List as independent ITA programs.

Second: Pati Brown seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

JWS Helping Hands (Conway) – CNA Program

The committee presented a request to approve **JWS Helping Hands** (Conway) as a training provider for its Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program. The program is four weeks in duration, held on Thursdays and Fridays, with a total cost of \$2,045, which includes tuition, books, uniforms, supplies, and testing fees.

A question was raised regarding a cost discrepancy between the provider's website and the amount listed in the application. It was clarified that the cost submitted to Arkansas JobLink reflects all required program components and is accurate.

Following discussion, the board agreed to proceed with approval pending a successful ADA compliance review. Karen Breashears requested a motion to approve JWS Helping Hands (Conway) as a training provider

Motion: Herman Grayer made a **motion** to approve JWS Helping Hands (Conway) as a training provider for the CNA program, contingent upon successful ADA compliance.

Second: Pati Brown seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

NCSI – Cybersecurity Program Approval

Ms. Breashears informed the board that the **Cybersecurity Program** offered by NCSI was newly established in **July 2025**, while the organization itself has been in operation since **2016** (as confirmed by Ms. McCaskill). The training is a **24-week course** (approximately six months), requiring **15 hours of instruction per week**. The **total program cost is \$2,400**, which is all-inclusive and covers **registration, books, materials, testing, and graduation fees**. The program leads to several **industry-recognized credentials**, including:

- Google Cybersecurity Certification

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- CompTIA Security+
- CISSP (Certified Information Systems Security Professional)

The program also includes **extensive job placement support** as part of the curriculum, including career exploration, interview preparation, and job application assistance.

It was noted that while the provider is **ADA accessible**, approval is **pending the completion of the board's ADA compliance review**. The board had previously reviewed another program (Medical Billing and Coding) from this provider but did not take action at that time due to unresolved ADA concerns. The committee expressed confidence that the provider is actively working to complete those requirements.

Motion: Neil Harrington made a motion to approve the **Cybersecurity Program** at NCSI for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List, **contingent upon successful ADA compliance**.

Second: Gary Troutman seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

Cora McCaskill provided the board with a policy clarification regarding the use of **WIOA Title I-B funds for supportive services**. Historically, it was understood that supportive services under Title I-B were limited to participants enrolled in **Occupational Skills Training**.

However, based on recent guidance received through a **WIOA Technical Assistance (TA) request**, it was confirmed that **supportive services may be provided to participants who are co-enrolled in any WIOA Title program**, not solely those enrolled in Title I-B training. This includes participants in **Title II (Adult Education)** or **Title IV (Vocational Rehabilitation/ARS)**, provided the individual is **co-enrolled in a WIOA Title I-B program** and eligible for the support.

This clarification opens the door for more flexible service delivery and coordination across programs. Mrs. McCaskill encouraged staff and partners to explore **co-enrollment strategies** to leverage supportive services more effectively and expand access to resources for participants in non-training tracks.

There was no vote required, but the board acknowledged the importance of this clarification and its impact on participant service planning.

Nirvana Massage Academy – Massage Therapy Program Approval

Karen Breashears presented a request to approve the **Massage Therapy** program offered by Nirvana Massage Academy, established in **August 2024**. The program consists of **500 hours** of instruction delivered over a period of approximately **six to seven months**.

The total program cost is listed as **\$9,131.25**, which includes tuition and costs associated with the **state licensing exam**. It was clarified during the meeting that the discrepancy with the previously stated amount of **\$8,500** was due to the inclusion of licensing and exam-related fees.

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in the final program cost submitted to Arkansas JobLink (AJL).

Upon completion of the program, students receive a diploma from Nirvana Massage Academy and become eligible to sit for the **Arkansas State Licensing Exam** for Massage Therapy. The program is reported as **ADA accessible**, with final approval **pending successful completion of the board's ADA compliance review**.

Motion: **Herman Grayer** made a **motion** to approve the Massage Therapy training at Nirvana Massage Academy (Russellville) for inclusion on the Eligible Training Provider List, pending successful ADA compliance.

Second: **Venorris Webb-Delesline** seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

PY 21 Financial Monitoring Update

Sarah Perry provided an update on the financial monitoring conducted for Program Year 2021 (PY21) for WIOA Title I-B programs administered by the West Central Arkansas Planning & Development District. The review was conducted by Witt O'Brien's using Section B of the State of Arkansas Monitoring Tool and focused on participant financial documentation, procurement practices, and fiscal policy compliance.

Ms. Perry explained that a sample of ten participant files was reviewed during the monitoring process. The files were generally well-organized, with appropriate documentation in place. Three minor discrepancies were noted, including a missing justification form and a receipt, but these issues were not considered significant and appeared to be isolated. She emphasized that in previous reviews of PY22 and PY23 records, the participant files demonstrated 100% documentation completion. As a result, the team was commended for its consistency and attention to detail. The recommendation going forward is to continue using the existing folder checklist and to conduct periodic spot checks to ensure that documentation remains properly filed and accessible in the event of future audits.

In addition to the participant file review, the monitoring also evaluated WCAPDD's procurement and financial oversight practices. The review confirmed that strong financial management systems are in place and that documentation is clear and accessible. One observation was noted in relation to the procurement of the One-Stop Operator, where the selected vendor was the sole respondent to the RFP. While the procurement process itself was compliant, the file did not contain a justification memo explaining the selection, which is a requirement under WCAPDD's internal procurement policy and may also be required by the state.

Ms. Perry advised that, moving forward, it will be important to ensure that all procurement procedures—both state and local—are followed closely and that justification documentation is retained in the file, particularly in cases involving sole respondents. She concluded her remarks by commending WCAPDD's team for its diligence and effective stewardship of WIOA funds, stating that there were no major findings, only minor recommendations. She also invited board members or staff to reach out with any follow-up questions or concerns.

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Youth Council:

Kim Darling, Committee Chair presented two policy items for board consideration: the Basic Skills Deficiency Assessment Policy and the revised Youth Incentive Policy and Procedures.

She began by sharing that the Youth Committee had taken a thoughtful approach to revising both policies to better align with WIOA performance expectations and to motivate youth participants toward both educational and employment success. The committee was especially focused on ensuring that incentives support meaningful progress while maintaining program compliance and consistency across service providers.

The first policy presented was the Basic Skills Deficiency Assessment Policy, which formalizes how the local area determines whether a youth participant lacks basic literacy or numeracy skills. Ms. Darling noted that the policy standardizes assessment tools and procedures in accordance with state and federal definitions.

Motion: Gretchen Newton made a **motion** to approve the Basic Skills Deficiency Assessment Policy as presented.

Second: Karen Breashears seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

Next, Ms. Darling introduced the revised Youth Incentive Policy and Procedures, beginning on page 34 of the board packet. She walked the board through the changes, explaining that the policy had been updated to include new incentive options for GED Ready test passage, measurable skills gains, GED/diploma attainment, industry-recognized credentials, and work-based achievements such as unsubsidized employment in the second and fourth quarters after exit. The policy also introduces a new annual incentive cap of \$1,200 per participant to ensure consistency and prevent disproportionate disbursement across the program.

The GED attainment incentive was reduced from \$300 to \$100 in order to balance the funding structure and make room for increased employment-related incentives. The policy also reinforces documentation requirements for verifying participant eligibility for each incentive type and includes updated language to support service of in-school youth, now permitted under WIOA. Board discussion addressed questions about participants who change employers, receive multiple incentives, or exceed \$600 in cumulative payments, with clarifications provided by Ms. Darling and supporting staff.

Motion: Gretchen Newton made a **motion** to approve the revised Youth Incentive Policy and Procedures as presented.

Second: Kelli Embry seconded the motion.

Vote: The motion passed **unanimously**.

One Stop Oversight Committee

Cindy White-Hamilton provided an update on behalf of the One-Stop Oversight Committee

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regarding the upcoming procurement of a One-Stop Operator (OSO). She reported that the committee has held its initial meetings and is currently working to draft a Request for Proposals (RFP) for the role. The committee is receiving technical assistance from Tammy Predmore of Western Arkansas, who is providing guidance to help ensure the procurement process remains neutral, compliant, and at arm's length

Once the draft RFP is complete, it will be circulated to all committee members for review and confirmation that the scope of work and submission requirements are clearly defined. Mrs. White Hamilton noted that once finalized, the committee will confirm whether the RFP must be submitted to the local board or to the state first, before it is formally released. The finalized RFP will then be publicly advertised in the newspaper for a minimum of 30 days, with advertisements running each weekend during the posting period.

All proposals submitted will be sent directly to Ms. White-Hamilton for collection. Following the close of the submission window, the committee will reconvene to evaluate the proposals and develop a recommendation for the board's consideration. The goal is to present a proposed selection to the full board by the October meeting, allowing for final approval and a new operator to be in place by November.

Ms. White-Hamilton acknowledged that this procurement process is a departure from past practice, as the One-Stop Operator role had previously been held by Cindy and then Andy for an extended period. She noted that there is some discussion that the planning district may consider submitting a proposal but emphasized the hope that multiple qualified proposals will be submitted to ensure a competitive selection process.

No board action was taken at this time. Additional updates will be provided at the next board meeting.

One Stop Operator's Report:

Lori Strumpf provided an update on One-Stop system operations, highlighting recent strategic planning efforts, customer satisfaction trends, industry sector engagement, and upcoming facility changes.

She reported that the One-Stop MOU/IFA partner group held its second strategic planning session to develop a new three-year plan. Using regional data on poverty, unemployment, and education, the partners identified three priorities: (1) increasing awareness of workforce opportunities among in-school youth; (2) improving public understanding of available workforce services; and (3) expanding access to short-term credentialing programs that lead to livable-wage employment. A written plan will follow and guide partner coordination going forward.

Ms. Strumpf also provided an update on the MOU/IFA process, noting that final state review is underway. Once approved, it will be signed by the board chair and CEO before being routed to

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all partners. She anticipates completion by late September, ahead of the October 20 state deadline.

In reviewing customer service data, Ms. Strumpf shared that most respondents rated their experience as excellent, though two individuals in Hot Springs noted they left with unanswered questions. A customer service script has been implemented system-wide to improve satisfaction by ensuring all customers are asked if their questions have been fully addressed before leaving.

The Healthcare Industry Sector Alliance continues to grow, with employers now identifying specific talent gaps and requesting direct engagement with school systems. The board and operator team are helping facilitate those connections. Training providers are now responding directly to employer feedback and aligning programs to meet workforce needs.

Ms. Strumpf also discussed the operational transition of Arkansas Workforce Centers from ADWS to local board oversight. She confirmed that the system is functioning smoothly, with clear lines of communication and support in place for facilities and day-to-day operations.

Finally, she announced a major facilities change at the Hot Springs Workforce Center. The center is relocating from the third floor to the more accessible second floor to improve customer access. The move is expected to be completed by early September, with all customer-facing services on the second floor and UI and other functions moved to the fourth. Ms. Strumpf thanked partners for their strong collaboration throughout the transition.

Partner's Reports

Title 1 – Adult/DLW/Youth

Ms. Boyer provided an update on current activities and staffing within the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. She shared that internal staffing transitions are underway, including the promotion of the Hot Springs Intake Specialist into the Career Advisor role, effective August 18. This change is expected to further strengthen front-line service delivery in that region.

Ms. Boyer also highlighted a variety of recent and upcoming outreach efforts aimed at expanding program visibility and enrollment. The team has participated in events at community-based organizations such as Harbor House and Covenant Recovery's Community Resource Center, as well as a recent record sealing clinic—an event designed to support individuals with justice-involved backgrounds in re-entering the workforce. These outreach efforts have yielded strong engagement and are part of a broader strategy to connect underserved populations with training and employment resources.

In terms of service activity, the Morrilton office recorded 70 in-person walk-ins during the month of July alone, and across the region, more than 330 individuals were served through a combination of walk-ins and phone-based interactions. Ms. Boyer emphasized the team's

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continued commitment to improving access to services, providing individualized support, and meeting performance goals across all Title I-B programs.

No board action was taken; this report was provided for informational purposes only.

Title II Adult Education

Ms. Darling provided an update on regional Adult Education activities and program highlights. She encouraged board members to visit the newly renovated adult education facility in Russellville, where medical billing and coding training is currently being offered. She also acknowledged Brad Coffman, Director of Adult Education at Russellville School District, for his leadership in expanding opportunities for adult learners.

Ms. Darling reported on the recent GED graduation ceremony held by UACCM in July, which saw a total of 125 graduates—significantly exceeding earlier projections. Of those, 24 were adult education students who chose to pay out of pocket rather than enroll in broader coursework, seeking a fast-track path to credentialing and employment. She noted this growing trend and emphasized the importance of ensuring these students are made aware of available support services and workforce opportunities.

Additional updates were provided on ASU Three Rivers, which is launching CNA bridge programs in collaboration with their workforce development team, and UA Rich Mountain, which is exploring new program expansion opportunities in Montgomery County. Ms. Darling encouraged board members to share any local contacts or ideas that might support these outreach and growth efforts.

No board action was taken; this report was shared for informational purposes only.

Title III – Wagner- Peyser

Cindy White-Hamilton provided an update on recent structural changes within the Wagner-Peyser program and local office staffing. She informed the board that Neil Golden, who previously served as the Local Office Manager in Russellville and Regional Outreach Manager for five West Central counties, has transitioned into a new role as an Employment Services (ES) Supervisor for the western region of the state. His responsibilities now include oversight of job service staff across several counties. Cindy White-Hamilton will assume coverage of the five counties previously overseen by Mr. Golden, in addition to her current territory.

Further organizational changes include the addition of Alice Williford, who will serve as a counterpart ES Supervisor for other regions. These staffing shifts are part of a broader state-level restructuring, and Ms. White-Hamilton expressed a commitment to continued engagement and support across the region despite the added responsibilities.

Ms. White-Hamilton also reported on ongoing collaboration with community partners and recent workforce engagement activities. Over the past several months, Job Services has participated in

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interview preparation classes to justice-involved and at-risk populations.

Though a planned event in Russellville had to be postponed due to scheduling conflicts, Ms. White-Hamilton reaffirmed her team's commitment to continued participation in community and employer events, the Healthcare Industry Sector Alliance, and ongoing partnerships with disability and re-entry service providers.

No board action was taken; this report was shared for informational purposes only.

Title IV- Voc Rehabilitation

A report from Arkansas Rehabilitation Services (Vocational Rehabilitation) was not provided at the meeting, as the newly appointed board representative was still transitioning into the role at that time.

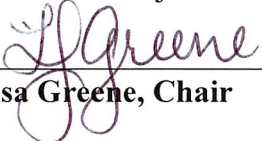
New Business

Open Floor for Discussion and Adjournment:

Cora McCaskill, Brad Coffman, and Cindy White-Hamilton presented to the board on the benefits of becoming an ACT Work Ready Community.

Adjournment:

Ms. Greene adjourned the meeting at 12:45 p.m.



Lisa Greene, Chair

LG/cm

10-9-2025

Date