



**Benchmarks of Success for Maryland's Workforce System**  
Policy Committee  
August 19, 2021 1:00 – 2:30 PM  
Virtual Meeting

**Attendees:** Lauren Gilwee, Tina Turner, Matt Bernardy, Shamekka Kuykendall, Matt Jackson, Lauren Hall, Barbara Ebel, Charles Hunt, Doug Weimer, Grace Kelly, Ken Lemberg, Lynda Weber, Ross Goldstein, Wesley Wilson, Bruce England, Erin Inman, Kate Banimenia, Lura Bozarth, and Patti Morfe

**Handouts:** Agenda and Takeaways and Recommendations form on Staff and Business Engagement

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**Minutes**

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**I. Welcome and Meeting Overview**

- Welcome back Lauren Gilwee!
- The committee welcomed the speakers for the panel on Performance:
  - Kate Banimenia, Regional Performance Specialist, USDOL ETA
  - Doug Weimer, Adult Education Program Specialist, MD Labor DWDAL
  - Lynda Weber, Statewide Manager Data Quality, MD Labor DWDAL
  - Ross Goldstein, Executive Director, MLDS
  - Lauren Hall, Assistant Research Director, UMD School of Social Work
  - Tina Turner, Assistant Director for the Office of Cash Programs Workforce Development, DHS
  - Patti Morfe, Director of Performance and Planning, Baltimore City MOED

**II. Panel Discussion: Performance**

- Pre-pandemic, much data collection was done in-person at the local level, though there were some uses of online portals. Following the transition to virtual, there was a movement to a statewide process management system. Now that in-person activity has resumed, some locals have returned to in-person collection, but some are still in the statewide system. The Unite Us tool through Kaiser Permanente, which connects multiple providers across systems and allows for referrals to other organizations, has been leveraged for data collection efforts. Providers are collecting eligibility documents through secure online platforms (e.g. App River) where jobseekers and staff can both upload. The Maryland Workforce Exchange has added a document management module, and also allows for secure document uploads. Electronic signatures are also allowable.

Local providers have some challenges determining the handling of electronic signatures, enrolling students online, and orientations, etc.

- There were a few Title II assessments flexibilities given by the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education. Participants can take alternative assessments and be enrolled in programming virtually. A challenge with these flexibilities is that measurable skills gains (MSG) are not counted. Titles I and III saw no flexibility; however, the statistical performance model should account for economic conditions. The Department of Human Services (DHS) work participation rate saw no flexibility; however, there was some flexibility because of the caseload reduction credit. There needs to be a culture shift to people before performance and meeting folks where they are. DHS shifted and adopted the Benchmarks of Success as a model!
- A data trend seen across the board (in Maryland and across the country) for Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Titles I, II, III, and IV is a steep decline in participant counts. However, it is anticipated that this number will rise following the end of the federal pandemic unemployment insurance (UI) programs. Programmatically, Title II has seen a decline in gains on the adult education side, but has observed gains on the English as a Second Language side. Some areas have expressed concerns about credential completion rates, while others have expressed the ease. Employment in Labor and Production Material Moving increased and this occupation tends to pay higher than minimum wage. It could be useful to get some analysis on this occupation from Lynda Weber and Adam Greeney. Thus far, data does not show whether there is an increased trend in participants' rates from those states that discontinued pandemic UI benefits. The Maryland State Department of Education's Division of Rehabilitation Services (DORS) has seen a small, eight percent decrease in participation. DHS on the other hand has seen a 27 percent participant increase in the Supplemental Food and Nutrition Program (SNAP) and a 43 percent increase in the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program. DHS has seen an increase in folks who have some additional education, are working-age adults, and are brand new to the program. Ten percent of participants had not been in SNAP for ten years, but came back because of the pandemic, demonstrating just how on the cusp many individuals are.
- In terms of research/analysis in the COVID-19 environment, it has been easier to establish causality since something like a pandemic has a sharp and obvious start and implications. That being said, many challenges have emerged, including: the fact that there have been significant policy changes since the pandemic, making it difficult to determine their impact; much of what people want to know is not supported by data yet and will not be for a while (i.e. a year or so at the earliest), which is why performance goals are still being met; it is difficult to make decisions about a pandemic that is still happening; American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds will likely skew the data because keeping these programs may not be sustainable. In looking at wage data through 2020, a decline started to show up ~six months ago.
- Some research topics folks are interested in seeing come out of the pandemic include: the effect that COVID-19 had on performance and WIOA measures; the effect of COVID-19 on the negotiated models of performance; whether virtual versus in-person versus hybrid service delivery make a difference in performance; what career pathways folks who are not returning to their previous jobs will choose; wages implications; and what sets an adult learner up for success in a virtual environment.

- As things return to the “new normal,” the volume of program participants will shift. For DHS, the numbers may not be representative of traditional populations because more recipients than usual had higher earnings prior to being in the program. For this reason, there will likely be higher employment and earnings data in the short term that will eventually go down. To reemphasize, the “new normal” will be hard to gauge because of the ARPA funding (this type of funding will not be “normal”). Perhaps, the policy report can have a list of trends that will sway things in the future (i.e. ARPA funding)
- Research/analysis and performance data helps: define target populations for discretionary grants; determine formula funding allotments; move states and locals to a standardization of data collection; and identify best practices and technical assistance opportunities. Data can also support developing internal goals for staff, centers, and eligible training providers.
- To better use data to inform policy decisions, the WIOA system needs to look closely at: the best way to allocate resources; what generates the greatest outcomes; which demographics are most impacted; what supportive service needs customers have (e.g. day care); collected customer data on credentials and how it can be better match industry needs. There is a disconnect between policy and data. For example, MSGs matter, but people are only focused on participants getting their highschool diploma.
- To better support WIOA partner needs, it would be helpful to have: better data sharing procedures and process; data that is easy to use and unduplicated so it paints a true, accurate picture of performance; UI data enhancements; and efforts to use a shared data platform (data is scattered). Hopefully the Maryland Department of Labor’s new Workforce Data Quality Initiative Round 8 grant will help enhance data and mitigate some of these issues.
- In this unprecedented moment in time it is critical to take advantage and allow for some experimentation to see what does and does not work. Increased communication is a large component of ensuring success and working through challenges. Additionally, the opportunity to receive services virtually or face-to-face is transformative and lowers customers barriers to entry in many cases. It is challenging to work with locals struggling to meet their performance. The states that have struggled with performance the most are those that were more stringent; had outdated systems; and lacked technology for staff to go remote. The pandemic has highlighted the need to continue virtual services and be on the cutting edge. Once data becomes available, it is important to get it to nontraditional stakeholders. All innovative uses of data systems/policy procedure changes should be documented.

### **III. News and Notes**

- Debrief from last month’s WIOA Alignment Group meeting:
  - The Communications Committee’s July newsletter covered workforce system services for youth, new Accessibility Tips, a COVID Corner feature on a vaccine promotion program, and updates from the Chief Learning Officer. Their August newsletter will cover the physical reopening of offices that are public facing.
  - The Data and Dashboard Committee is analyzing their PY2019 Benchmarks Data and are developing a technology profile of Maryland to share with the National Association of State Workforce Agencies.

- On June 25, 2021, MD Labor received notice that it was being awarded funding from the Workforce Data Quality Initiative (WDQI) – Round 8. The WDQI grant provides an exciting opportunity to increase the data capacity of MD Labor. We are excited to see how the grant work will enhance the work of the Data and Dashboard Committee.
- The Professional Development and Technical Assistance Committee released a training on August 16th on triaging intake for veterans. To accommodate this training, they are pushing back their Benchmarks modules trainings by a month or two.

#### **IV. Next Steps and Action Items**

- With the agenda, Natalie sent a document of takeaways and recommendations from the June panel on “Staff and Business Engagement”. Committee members are asked to review that document and send any comments or edits to Natalie by close of business Thursday, September 9th.
- The next panel will be on Thursday, September 16th from 1:30 – 3:00 PM on “Participant Engagement and Outreach”. This is the panel that was moved from July to accommodate report season.
- This will be a full panel, including speakers from Harford Community Action Agency, DWDAL, America Works, and Vehicles for Change!