

Federal Programs To Help Disconnected Youth

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This fall, NCACC President and Yadkin County Commissioner Kevin Austin appointed a Task Force to help guide his presidential initiative focused on disconnected youth – young people who are neither in school nor working. The Task Force, co-chaired by Mike LaBrose, Caldwell County Commissioner, and Karen Howard, Chatham County Commissioner, will identify strategies to enable young people to find pathways into education and meaningful careers. The Task Force will meet three times throughout the year and its work will culminate in a report on best practices for counties.

Various federal programs can help disconnected youth, and in recent years legislation authorizing federal workforce development programs has placed a greater emphasis on disconnected youth. The primary authority for federal workforce development efforts is the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). On July 22, 2014, the WIOA was signed into law (P.L. 113-128), reauthorizing the programs under the Act for six years, from 2015-2020. Title I of the Act funds a variety of programs jointly administered by the U.S. Departments of Labor and Education in conjunction with state and local partners.

WIOA was the first major legislative reform of public workforce development efforts in 15 years. The legislation was designed to strengthen and improve the system to help Americans, including youth and those with significant barriers to employment, gain access to high-quality jobs and careers, while also helping employers hire and retain skilled workers. WIOA required states to

adopt several changes to their workforce systems, placing a greater emphasis on local and regional collaboration among workforce, education, and industry partners. It also focused on improving services offered to employers, including work-based training programs. It increased both the amount of funding devoted to helping out-of-school youth and the maximum age at which youth can receive services. Additionally, it reinforced connections with registered apprenticeship programs, and promoted strong Workforce Development Boards (WDBs).

WIOA required each state to submit a four-year strategy for its workforce development system. In 2018, Governor Roy Cooper submitted North Carolina's WIOA State Plan to the U.S. Department of Labor. The plan, developed in conjunction with various workforce partners including NC Department of Commerce, NC Community College System, NC Department of Public Instruction, and NC Department of Health and Human Services, recognizes the role of Local Youth Committees, who serve as a subcommittee to Local WDBs. According to the NC state plan, Local Youth Committees are responsible for "developing portions of the local plan related to eligible youth and making recommendations to the local workforce board regarding youth service providers. As part of their local plan, each local area will develop written criteria to identify effective youth activities and providers."

The plan also states that the local boards will fund youth providers based on performance and program cost data

provided by potential providers and based on criteria that may include those youth activities and providers that:

- Develop relationships between youth and caring adults;
- Involve family members;
- Build youth responsibility;
- Develop youth citizenship and leadership skills;
- Place high expectations on youth and staff;
- Provide appropriate services based on age and needs of each youth;
- Demonstrate involvement of the business/employer community;
- Provide accessible facilities and provide accommodations for special needs populations, including individuals with disabilities;
- Demonstrate prior successes in providing employment and training services to youth;
- Prepare youth for success in employment;
- Advocate for the youth perspective; and
- Demonstrate the connection between work and learning.

WIOA established new focus areas including a Youth Services Program, which state and local authorities develop together. Federal WIOA funds are provided to states and outlying areas. States in turn provide resources to local workforce areas to deliver a comprehensive array of youth services that focus on assisting out-of-school youth and in-school youth with one or more barriers to employment prepare for post-secondary education and employment opportunities, attain educational and/or skills training

credentials, and secure employment with career/promotional opportunities.

Counties can influence WIOA activities through their local WDBs. WDB Youth Committees advise Board members on policy and make recommendations, including issues related to disconnected youth. A local WDB is a group of community leaders appointed by local elected officials and charged with planning and oversight responsibilities for workforce programs and services in their area. In all, WDB membership includes individuals representing business and industry, economic development agencies, community-based organizations, education, organized labor and public assistance agencies, to name a few. In North Carolina, 23 local boards, many of which are housed within regional councils of governments (COGs), are responsible for developing local plans for the use of WIOA funds; oversight of the local service delivery system; and coordinating activities with economic development entities and employers in their local areas.

Bottom line, local WDBs influence how North Carolina spends federal workforce development dollars and advise on policies to help disconnected youth. Given the upcoming need to reauthorize the WIOA and NCACC President Kevin Austin's focus on helping disconnected youth find valuable jobs, NCACC encourages its members to become more familiar with the WIOA and local WDBs. Many members of the North Carolina Congressional Delegation also have unique influence over the WIOA and any future refinements it may need.

U.S. Representative Virginia Foxx



(R-NC-5), who was Chair of the House Committee on Education and Workforce at the time, sponsored the WIOA reauthorization bill in February 2013. She also led the effort to coordinate and compromise with her Senate counterpart to see that the bill was passed and signed into law. Currently, the House Committee is renamed the House Committee on Education and Labor. Congresswoman Virginia Foxx is the Ranking Member of the Full Committee, and U.S. Representatives Alma Adams (D-NC-12) and Mark Walker (R-NC-6) also serve on the Committee.

U.S. Senator Richard Burr (R-NC) is the second highest ranking Senator in the majority on the Senate's Health, Education, Labor, Pensions Committee. Therefore, NC counties should use their connections to these Members

of Congress to reinforce programs for disconnected youth and to make any recommended changes to the Act as it approaches time for reauthorization again in 2020.

For more information on WIOA, visit www.doleta.gov/wioa and note there is a WIOA Youth Program Fact Sheet on NCACC's website under www.ncacc.org/NACOWioa. NACo also recently released a new report on the WIOA that details how counties help administer and deliver program resources to local jobseekers and businesses. ■

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