



**EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEETING  
MINUTES**

**Thursday, March 8, 2012  
3:00 p.m.  
Merrimack Valley Federal Credit Union  
500 Merrimack Street  
Lawrence, MA**

**Members Present:** Joseph Bevilacqua, Chair, Anne Ormond, Cal Williams, Peter Matthews

**Members Absent:** None

**Staff Present:** Ralph Abislaiman, Barbara Zeimetz, Mary Kivell

**1.) Call to Order**

A quorum of committee members being present, Board Chairman Joseph Bevilacqua called the meeting to order at 3:10 p.m. Joe said that as part of our High Performing WIB initiative the executive committee will be meeting periodically. Joe said that he wanted to give an update on his recent trip to Washington.

**2.) Approval of Minutes of December 16, 2011 Meeting**

Joseph Bevilacqua then called for a motion on the minutes of the December 16, 2011 meeting.

**Motion by Cal Williams seconded by Peter Matthews to approve the minutes of the December 16, 2011 Executive Committee meeting as submitted. Motion passed.**

**3.) Chairman's Update on State Workforce Boards Annual Conference**

Joe Bevilacqua said that he is Co-Chairman of the Massachusetts WIB and that he recently attended the annual State WIB conference in Washington. It was attended by many governors and high-level officials and there was discussion on WIA reauthorization that included both Democrats and Republicans on the workforce committee as well as representatives from education and labor. Joe

said that it is clear that they don't anticipate reauthorization of three key workforce development bills before the election. There are some who believe that there will be some dramatic changes in WIA and those that feel that some changes won't happen. Joe said that if Obama is reelected WIA reauthorization should go through but if republicans win the system could radically change. There are also folks who feel that some changes should happen but won't happen.

Joe also said that at the time he was in Washington he had the opportunity to attend the opening session of the National Governor's Association Conference. The keynote speaker was the Chairman of the Board of the Gallup Poll, Jim Clifton. He said that in the past 50 years pollsters reported that people thought the most important thing is peace in the country and in the world. Now, for the first time in history, pollsters are reporting that people think that the most important thing is a job. This illustrates that the world economy is troubled. People have concerns with getting a job and holding a job.

American attitudes have changed and more realize that not everyone should go to college but still study for productive jobs. Peter agreed and said that he raised this issue at the Stakeholders Group. He stated that the LHS curriculum should include traditional vocational courses because many students apply and don't get into a vocational school are then in Lawrence High School. He said that students need more than just a college track. Peter said that he didn't get a lot of support for this view on the stakeholder group. Rafael Abislaiman noted that some middle class school systems provide vocational courses. Westborough High still has some shop classes.

Joe Bevilacqua, who is on the Haverhill School Committee, said that they have had similar discussions with Whittier Voc. They said that students at the Voc must go to school, behave, and learn. The same message needs to be given at non-voc high schools.

The gentleman from Gallup discussed education and one Governor noted that an individual with an advanced degree who lost a job is not eligible for training that can help that person. Someone who has mandated strikes or barriers qualifies instead. Joe said that we want to move forward and not forget either the poor or the middle class. More training is being focused to take place at vocational schools, and through apprenticeships and OJTs (if they perform then maybe an employer will hire them).

There was also a discussion on community colleges and the concern that not enough of their students are completing their education. There will be fewer publicly funded processes to get a GED and businesses can't find the people with the skills they need. There was also discussion on credentialing and the fact that if kids come out of school with basic skills they won't need remediation. There

was also concern expressed around the mandated cuts, particularly in the military.

Joe finished his remarks stating that what is coming and increasing is the expectation that we should do more with less. The number one issue was more linkage to community colleges and continuing education.

**4.) Statement on the MVWIB's Commitment to Helping Improve Lawrence Public School Outcomes, Specifically those at Lawrence High School & Overview of MVWIB Innovation Grant Proposal to U.S. Department of Labor**

Rafael Abislaiman asked about who in the stakeholders group was not receptive to a more occupational or job focus at Lawrence High. Peter Matthews said that there are fourteen members making recommendations to Jeff Riley and the tone was that this wasn't going to happen. The Receiver asked for a letter from the WIB stating our commitment to getting involved.

Joe Bevilacqua said that Lawrence is a failed education system and both Barbara Zeimetz and Rafael Abislaiman have participated in individual school stakeholder group meetings. Joe said that Peter Matthews is now our representative on the system-wide Stakeholders Committee. The school needs dramatic changes and Peter feels passionately that something can be done to improve the quality of education in Lawrence. Joe said that we should endorse a letter to the Receiver, Commissioner and Secretary of Education stating that we have an interest in a good outcome and will help the system get there.

Ralph said that plenty of data has been compiled and we need to support Peter's multi-track position. Barbara said that helping schools incorporate occupational skills and career awareness into the curriculum is something to consider. Ralph said that, as members know, WIB staff is now working on a \$6M workforce development innovation grant for Lawrence that focuses on this issue.

Discussion followed on how to begin in grade six students and work with them. There should be more adult guidance and an attempt to orient youth to get a meaningful high school diploma. This should include laying out alternative non-college prep options in the 8<sup>th</sup> and 9<sup>th</sup> grade. We need to help identify the latest and greatest skills needed in the next two years while remembering that youth need to stay in school and learn to obtain basic skills.

Joe noted that Whittier has a 99% MCAS success rate but that Lawrence High students need more help with MCAS. The innovation grant is the opportunity to do that by putting someone in the school now to get youth on pathways that will keep them interested in learning. If this works it could become a national model. We can acquaint kids with both the soft and hard skills needed to succeed in a job. Joe said that this is very ambitious but no school system needs it more.

Ann Ormond said that she supports this initiative but wonders if it will work. Peter Matthews also said that he is concerned that 9<sup>th</sup> grade may be too late based on what he is hearing at the Stakeholder group. Rafael said that getting more parents involved in trying to help and giving more visibility to real jobs by putting a Career Center at the high school will help. We could also attempt to reach junior high school kids from Lawrence High. Ralph also said that once inner-city youths reach 16 there is often less adult guidance and we might help with that. Joe mentioned that the dropout age may be raised to 18. Peter Matthews then spoke about the 4 year and 5 year graduation rate with many students entering 9<sup>th</sup> grade at a 6<sup>th</sup> grade level. They need to stay six years in high school to get a diploma but then are not counted in the 4-year grad rate.

Barbara Zeimetz said that she has been told the average freshman entering from another country is 17-18 years old and that many have minimum literacy and are consequently told to go try for a GED after the school census count in October. That count determines how much money a school receives.

Joe Bevilacqua said that we need to reach kids as early as possible. He also said that there are not enough youth learning STEM. We need to support the effort to do as much as we can early and set the tone for lifelong learning. We also need to make sure guidance and parents know about today's employment opportunities. He said that many of tomorrow's jobs will require a minimum of an associate's or bachelor's degrees.

Ralph Abislaiman said that working with lower grades presents a couple of issues as our WIA mandate is for youth aged 14 and up. We could work with junior high students by presenting general information and provide more intensive services to those 14 and older. He also said that we should strongly advocate for basic skills preparation before high school but we should be careful about our system losing focus and trying to do everything. We now have older youth, adults and mature workers seeking services and less money to serve them.

Peter Matthews said that whatever is being done in Lawrence hasn't worked for a lot of people. The stakeholder group has looked at a lot of data and is making recommendations in six categories but he fears they will not be bold enough. We are constrained by the past in Lawrence and this is the biggest opportunity to break out of old molds and get more kids educated.

Peter said that what is going to be required involves compassion because, for example, there are youth who are homeless and others who are beaten down and have few good expectations. But overall we need to show tough love that makes clear the consequences of not using educational opportunities productively. One obvious problem is chronic absenteeism. Cal Williams said that those students will then bring the same bad habits into the workforce. Ralph said that parents should be sanctioned in many of those cases.

Joe said that this has been a good discussion with Ralph and Barbara regarding the innovation grant and asked for a motion to offer WIB staff full support in our joint efforts to improve the Lawrence School system. Discussion also followed on a letter to the Receive. Ann Ormond suggested making the letter more forceful. Ralph agreed to do so and stated that he would be sending it to them for final approval and signature.

**Motion by Ann Ormond seconded by Cal Williams to direct Rafael Abislaiman to tweak the letter and circulate for review and signatures. Motion passed.**

Peter Matthews said that there is \$204M coming in to the Lawrence Public Schools at \$14,000 per pupil. That is more than a lot of school systems receive. He believes that with the right changes, Lawrence Public School can be fixed.

#### **5.) Other Business**

Joe Bevilacqua said that we continue to recognize the MVWIB is a regional entity partnering with all the mayors, town managers and chambers and making sure we reach out to employers. Ralph agreed and added that WIA youth funding expects us to serve the poor with barriers. He said that 95% of the money is spent on poor kids with the majority of that money going to Lawrence.

Cal Williams asked how we can get kids on the right track when his professional experiences indicate that guidance staff is often clueless about what employers want and businesses need. Cal said that we have had good success with teacher externships. He referred to his experience in private industry and how they lose one half the candidates during orientation once job expectations are explained.

Joe mentioned that he was looking forward to attending the NAWB Forum with Cal, Mike Munday and Ralph and about hearing from other WIBs. He will report on that at the next meeting. Ralph also reported that our second H1B proposal was not funded but that Boston and Mass MEP were. Joe said that next full board meeting will be held in April.

#### **6. Adjournment**

**Having no further business Cal Williams made a motion to adjourn seconded by Peter Matthews. Motion passed.**

Respectfully submitted,

*Mary Kivell*

Mary Kivell  
Recorder