**Workforce 3One**

**Transcript of Webinar**

**ACT NOW Series: Partnerships in Action**

**Implementing WIOA**

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CHRIS WATSON: And at this point I'd like to pass things off to our moderator, Joe Barela. Joe is a senior advisor here in the Employment and Training Administration at the Department of Labor. Joe, why don't you take it away?

JOSEPH BARELA: Thanks, Chris. And good afternoon to everyone and I believe still good morning to our folks out on the west coast in the Pacific area. Thank you for taking time to join us this afternoon. I know it's a holiday weekend, and we did have tremendous registration. On behalf of the Innovation Opportunity Network implementing WIOA, this is part of our ACT NOW series, and today we'll highlight partnerships in action.

I just want to let you know the webinar agenda today is basically we're going to go over the federal perspectives on partnerships, best practices presentation – we're excited about our panelists we've convened to talk to you on how they've looked at partnerships at their state and local level – and questions and answers.

We'll give you the opportunity to take the information we give to you today, both from our national partners as well as our state and local experts, and ask questions about partnership engagement development, and then I'll talk a little bit about upcoming TA and a little bit more information on the ION, Innovation and Opportunity Network.

So getting to the topic of today, I want to let you know with us here in the national offices we have Amanda Ahlstrand who is the administrator with the Office of Workforce Investment with the U.S. Department of Labor. We have Mary Lovley, special assistant to the commissioner, Office of Special and Rehabilitation Services, U.S. Department of Education, and Chris Coro, deputy director of Adult Education and Literacy, U.S. Department of Education.

With that I'm very happy to turn it over to Amanda, again, administrator with the Office of Workforce Investment with the U.S. Department of Labor. Amanda?

AMANDA AHLSTRAND: Thank you so much, Joe. And good afternoon and good morning to everyone. I want to apologize for my voice.

For those of you who may know me, this is not my normal sound. I would like to blame it on the celebration of July 1 and the start to our new program year and official kickoff to many of the provisions of WIOA. I know that some parts of the system have been working to implement for almost a year too, but for those of us who celebrate the program year, we'll blame my voice on excessive celebration not on just scratchy summer cold. But congrats to everyone on this new program year.

I do want to start off too by just saying today is an exciting day for the workforce system. It really is one about opportunity, and I think it's really important that we're here today to talk about the opportunities created by partnership in the WIOA and opportunities that are created by partnership across the system and the great things we can all do together.

We're looking forward to hearing from folks from some state and local areas as well as our other federal partners. I think you're going to hear some key themes and actions that have happened on making those partnerships real and really challenging ourselves to work together for the betterment of the system, both in serving job seekers as well as our employer customers.

Thinking a little bit and setting the stage again about the WIOA vision, I just want to note these are some of the three kind of key tenets that we've put out there as part of the WIOA vision. There is a guidance letter that we issued in February. It's TEGL 19-14, for those of you who are familiar with our Training and Employment Guidance Letters.

But even going back to that period of time, this vision is something that we worked very closely with across our federal partners to publish and that we're all really embracing. I do want to highlight the needs of businesses and workers driving workforce solutions is really important as we embrace WIOA.

It's something that we've been working on as a workforce system for many years but something that WIOA really challenges us to take better hold of and improve. There's a huge role for leadership in the workforce system to work with employers to provide education and training, work-based learning, career pathways, and industry sector partnerships that are real and that help employers access skilled workers and help job seekers access information and guidance on both training available and jobs available that can inform the decisions that they make.

There's also the key tenet of that vision where One-Stop centers provide excellent customer service to job seekers, workers, and employers. Obviously the three of these things go very much hand in hand, but when we think about this part of the vision, it's really an opportunity for the partners in the One-Stop career centers to provide job seekers with the skills and credentials necessary to secure and advance employment and family-sustaining wages. It's also an opportunity for them to facilitate employers hiring skilled workers. We're looking for rigorous evaluation to support continuous improvement across the system.

And finally, I just want to talk about that last piece of the vision, that the workforce system supports regional economies. The state and local workforce development boards, which are clearly a key tenet of partners in supporting and guiding and implementing the system, these boards obviously will be working across workforce, economic development, education, and social services within the state level, regional, and local levels.

We want to make sure that those efforts are really targeted to growth of regional economies, ensuring that all job seekers and businesses can access pathways to prosperity. So I think it's also really important to again acknowledge and thank everyone for the partnerships that have been in place and have been strengthened over the past year as we're beginning to gear up for today and many of the WIOA provisions that take place.

WIOA recognizes the value of the One-Stop delivery system and provides the workforce system with important tools to better align services across partners to enhance the quality of these centers. So the law strengthens states, regions, and local areas to align investments in the workforce, education, and economic development to regional in-demand jobs.

And finally, the partnerships that are key to the WIOA success reinforce the strategies necessary for One-Stop centers to provide job seekers and workers with high quality career services, education and training, and supportive services that they need to obtain good jobs and stay employed and to help businesses find skilled workers and access other supports, including education and training for the current workforce.

So thank you and congratulations. I know in previous webinars that we've hosted a lot of you have reported that you're making great progress in your planning and have really established strong partnerships in thinking about your plans going forward. And we definitely thank you for the work you're doing and will continue to do.

I also want to take this chance to acknowledge and thank our federal partners, a couple of them from the Department of Education here in D.C. on this webinar today. So, Mary and Chris, thank you, and the teams that are with you and behind you. We also have a much larger federal partnership than education and labor, looking at the Departments of Commerce, Health and Human Services, Agriculture, and Housing and Urban Development.

And I think I might have said this before too on an earlier webinar, but I know in the time that I've been a part of the federal workforce here at ETA we really are making great strides and working as a federal team under WIOA in ways that I hadn't seen before. And I think it's really exciting. We have strong leadership and support from the secretaries of labor and education and those other cabinet agencies listed here on this slide, and that definitely trickles down.

We have really strong working groups across career staff at all levels of these departments working together on things like today's technical assistance events and other things that we'll do. Clearly a lot of time and thought and effort went into publishing the proposed rules, and we have a lot of time and effort ahead of us to get to final regulations.

We've been working very much together on what will be released as a data collection for both unified and combined planning as well as performance systems. We're working together on One-Stop guidance and infrastructure funding. So those are just a few of the things that have been very specific to WIOA.

There are also very much working and productive groups on things like career pathways across these federal agencies, which are a key tenet of WIOA. And we've had a federal relationship on that topic for quite a few years, and it's definitely helping us move forward on WIOA.

So I did just want to kind of let folks know that we hear you in states and local areas when you say that, wouldn't it be nice if the feds would work together. From my point of view, I think that we really are, and I hope that you can see that as we continue to move forward.

So with that I'm going to turn it over to my colleague, Mary Lovley, and she's going to take it from here and then followed by Chris. So thanks so much, you guys, and go ahead, Mary.

MARY LOVLEY: Hi. Thank you. And that was a nice summary of the work that we've been doing across our federal agencies with each other over the last almost year. I'm with the Rehabilitation Services Administration, and Chris is with the Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education Program, and we are here together as partners in the Department of Education. And we're happy to be part of this webinar.

Speaking for the Rehabilitation Services Administration, we are authorized – most of our programs are authorized by Title IV of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the unique thing about Title IV is that most of the programs within Title IV became effective on the date of enactment, including the vocational rehabilitation program, which is one of the core partners.

So for our grantees these requirements have been in place for a year already. So you've probably already been in contact with them. They've been trying to strengthen partnerships and reach out. So this is not new, and the partnerships that we have are across the workforce system. They are all across all levels of education, and these partnerships are going to be key to successful implementation of this act because no one of us, no one program can reach everybody or do all of the work that's required.

And as we've seen through partnerships that have developed over the years, the outcomes are much more effective for the people we serve when we are able to successfully work together.

The Department of Education and the Rehabilitation Services Administration expects our VR agencies to continue the work that they have been doing with respect to partnering with others and to enhance that and expand that as much as possible in order to serve the unique needs of each of our individuals with disabilities who comes to our program.

Of course they'll partner with the various workforce partners across their states, including the One-Stop partners, but also with all the education partners including the state and local education agencies, special education, all of the non-traditional schools that exist, institutions of higher education, training programs, you name it, as well as with employers, businesses, and industries, which is something that they have been doing.

But again, there will be a much stronger and a much more focused emphasis on there under this act. They'll also work with local service providers, community rehabilitation programs, and other service providers as needed to serve the individuals that they have coming into the VR programs. And of course they'll continue to work with their advisory committees and state rehab councils and other partners that they've identified along the way.

RSA really envisions that under WIOA these new and enhanced partnerships will occur at all levels, whether at federal, state, and local. We've experienced it over the last year at the federal level, and to some extent our VR agencies are experiencing at the state level. But I'm sure that now that the law will be effective for all of the other partners, we'll sort of kick into high gear.

Some of the partnerships that will exist or that may be developed beyond the six core WIOA programs include things like the Ticket to Work program under Social Security, TANF, the Small Business Administration programs, career and technical education, Job Corps, SNAP, the HUD employment and training programs, the various programs related to working with veterans, things like Indian and Native American programs, senior community service employment programs, the national farmworkers' jobs programs, adjustment assistance programs, unemployment compensation; and YouthBuild.

The list is almost endless, and so our expectation is that the state VR agencies will be able to develop partnerships across the board that will effectively meet the needs of the consumers who are coming to the state VR agencies and to your agencies as we work together. I'd like to turn it over to Chris so he can talk specifically about some of the programs under his office.

CHRISTOPHER CORO: Sure. Thanks, Mary, and hello, everyone. And to my non-Title IV colleagues let me say happy WIOA implementation day, and to my Title IV colleagues let me say we're catching up to you. We're all there now. I am from the office in the Department of Education that administers the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act, which I think many of you know as Title II of WIOA.

And that makes us one of the core programs, and as such we're very excited to partner and to learn from today's event. We particularly want to thank our labor colleagues for sponsoring the event and for including us, not just us here at headquarters but also among the presenters and also in the audience, in the participants.

Amanda mentioned that one of the areas where there's been some long-standing history of partnership across the department at the federal level is around advancing the development of high-quality career pathways, particularly for low-skilled adults. And we believe that these partnerships can grow both numerically and qualitatively under WIOA.

From the adult ed perspective, we're excited to see the opportunities that the new law affords us. It's expanded our adult education and literacy activities to include new things like integrated education and training and workforce preparation activities, and these are new services, new strategies, if you will, that can be real game changers in terms of career pathways development for low-skilled adults.

So we're very excited about having these tools and now having the opportunity to partner more meaningfully, shall I say, or more strategically with other agencies and other programs. We're also excited about a stronger workforce connection that's now part of our integrated English literacy and civics education program. So there's another tool in our toolbox now to help immigrants address their linguistic and their civic and also their workforce or economic needs.

Lastly, I want to thank everyone who helped us out in the public comment period to help us get to the best possible rule that we can. We're busy sorting through that right now, and I want to thank you for your participation and commitment to learning in today's webinar.

And at that I'm going to just say that we in adult ed are eager to learn from today's presenters. So we'll turn it back to the moderator.

MR. BARELA: Thanks, Chris, and thank you, Mary and Amanda. I am going to introduce all the panelists we have joining us today, and then I'll turn it over to the first panelist so he can give his perspective on how the workforce development agency is participating or partnering with adult education.

So our first panelist this afternoon is Howard Miller. Howard Miller's career in workforce development began over 20 years ago at a local One-Stop career center office in the city of Camden, New Jersey where he worked as a program monitor and eventually One-Stop coordinator. In 2009 Howard began work at the New Jersey Department of Labor and Workforce Development as chief of business services.

He oversees the department's skills for Jersey customized training grant program. Additionally, Chief Miller serves as the state director of New Jersey's adult literacy program, which provides adult basic education and English as a second language programs to over 20,000 New Jersey residents annually. Howard works with both U.S. Department of Education and New Jersey local workforce development in labor and workforce development in administering the statewide adult literacy program. Howard, thanks for joining us, and I'm turning it over to you.

HOWARD MILLER: Oh, okay. Thank you. I thought you were going to go through all the panelists, but let me get to the slide. Get away from my face.

All right. Greetings from the great Garden State. Thank you to all my colleagues across the country, Labor, Education. It's wonderful to be following up Deputy Director Coro. We've known each other for some time now. How you doing, Chris?

But for the audience out there, just to give you sort of a framework of where our perspective is today, one of the things that we were approached about was to talk and speak to partnerships. And as I examine that word, one of the things that dawned on me is we look at it like it's brand new, and I think anybody that's spent any time in this line of work – you heard Mary and others talk about it just a little bit ago – there's always been a partnership. We've always had the acknowledgment of one another. We've always worked in some level of tandem.

WIOA raises the game I guess is the best way to really describe that, and we here have internalized that to move forward into some real key words. And I guess one of the key things that is a take-away for our state is to look at WIOA from what its predecessor WIA was, and that is it's more about alignment than consolidation. And those words have real power and meaning.

Now, WIA was more about let's gain in efficiency, and when we look at it from an alignment perspective, this really takes on the perspective of how do you best serve the customer and getting things aligned along a customer service timeline. And that to us is really the key because when you focus on alignment, all of a sudden you defuse some of the energy.

When it's consolidation, you have the tendency or at least some stakeholders will internalize that of picking of winners and losers. Am I going to still be around? Is somebody else going to take over what I do? Alignment's not about that. Alignment about your strength, my strengths, and some level of synergy in coming together.

So the real key that we'd like to make sure that we state up front is for everybody is when you really think about this from a partnership perspective, it really starts with that theory of customer service, who are you driving to serve, and then aligning your resources behind that. And I can validate that by just some of the simple exercises New Jersey has taken on in its initial planning phases as we move forward with implementing WIOA.

We held a statewide conference to bring together all of our workforce system, education system, and the vendors that serve under it. And one of the things that came out and it really screamed out over that two-day process was that we don't really see a whole lot of folks that are opposed to the changes. They're really screaming for direction. They're asking, what can we do? How can we help you?

The other key feature that I would tell you that we took away from the state conference was this one point, and that is that, while they're all looking for direction, they have a tendency, if not guided, to retreat back into, how do I do this all by myself? And that to me is how we think you have the opportunity to focus on partnerships. Everybody in the system has a mission to serve.

Organizations have a historical pretext of how they go about doing that, and, as I mentioned, we see it on an everyday basis. Folks are trying to figure out how to move forward with this law, but they will most likely say, I'll do it on my own. When the connection points really come into WIOA, it's really about how do we put these people together? So with that said I feel like we should give you sort of some background on what does the New Jersey adult ed system look like in a before WIOA and where we think we're headed going forward.

So just to set a simple picture for you, the Title II grant system has always historically operated out of education. I think in most states across this country today you'll still find that the Title II grant is operated by the local state education agency or something affiliated with it. Here in New Jersey around 2004 that grant was lifted up out of our Department of Education and moved over to labor, the idea being that we wanted to begin the process of aligning adult education with occupational skills training.

However, just because it's all under one roof doesn't mean that you have a sort of magic bullet process. There's still these silos of historic culture that are built up. So it really wasn't until about 2012 – so you think about all those years that are gone by that we didn't capitalize on things – we finally began to process of reorganizing our own internal units.

And as we look at the Title II program, we say, how does that best serve the people that we see coming through our doors every day? So you'll hear this theme of, again, sort of the customer service model. Who's coming in? Who do we intend to serve, and how do we move forward through that?

And as we began that internal review, one of the things that was very clear is that you start to see the same people in many of these programs, so thus I go back to where we started this conversation. There were always historical partnerships. How well things interacted with one another, how well we recognized them, how well we complemented each other's services was something that we needed to think about, and that was what began our real sequencing of services. How do we begin the process of lining one activity up to the next?

So as I mentioned, just because it's all under one roof doesn't mean that it's any easier. I want to make sure that I say that out loud because I have had the opportunity to work with my colleagues in several states across the country, and they make these statements like, oh, it must be so much easier because your adult ed is inside your house of Labor.

And I want to make sure that we dispel that myth. That's not necessarily the case. These are very cultured ways of doing business. People have historical ways of serving their customer base, and if they're not addressed, if you don't turn around and work to start to link those programs, you will always have sort of separate siloed systems.

So as we again have been working on this for at least a couple years now, one of the things that we are thinking about is who walks through our door. When we think about what is the ultimate goal of the workforce system, we're supposed to move folks who are disconnected and connect them. And there's many people that come to us in lots of different realms. They could be the unemployed and the dislocated worker. They could be the TANF client who's a little bit more long-term.

All of those needs wind up colliding at some point with what adult education we believe can serve as a foundational support. So we examined these things from the workforce focus. This is sort of a quick service thing. Adult ed has got a little bit more longer term, and when you have that TANF client, this is the eventual collision and where we think that we will find our best synergies and partnerships moving forward.

Again, to give you a sort of background of what we've been dealing with on our own front, New Jersey has – well, they've had these programs siloed and eventually moved under one department. Individually the programs don't necessarily perform at their maximum. The Title II program specifically in this state has been an underperforming program.

If you look at us in comparison to our colleagues across the country, we would be in the bottom sort of quartile. And before you can ever have groups come together and decide how they're going to complement one another, the idea is you sort of have to get your own house in order.

So we've been working for the last several years at focusing on performance, and it's in engaging the groups about performance you begin to understand those customers that are joint. How do you turn around and capitalize on synergies of this connecting to that? And this is where we've been moving and we've done it in a couple of different ways.

One of the things that I have done as a labor guy – and I will openly label myself a labor guy – adult ed is the expert in content delivery and recognizing them for the fact that they are the content delivery experts, they have the ability to say how long it will take somebody to get from this point to that point. They should be the people that I should be talking to.

So we've engaged them by bringing in our program directors and actively talking to them initially about performance. How do we go ahead and raise the game of performance? But at the same time as we're doing that we're building a trust-building exercise. How do you feel comfortable with labor directing this activity?

How do you turn around and see if you can complement the existing services? How do we cross people out of adult ed and into the workforce system? And what I will tell you is we gave them a north star. What is really the end game? And that is probably one of the things I've picked up on over the last couple years of overseeing the adult ed system.

We all say that we have a common mission and we may even share the same customer, but if you look at those performance standards, they're not as common as you would think. Workforce has always historically been a quick in and out. It's a service widget environment. We want to get people really quickly into something. And adult ed is very much aspirational. It is focused on the gain of the knowledge, and we culminate that in certificates.

But making the two come together, that's really where the power is, and we've done that again by making the people party to the decision. This is a very old organizational development perspective; right? And instead of edicting it down from the top, the folks are engaged in the process because they can only be the ones that implement the solution. And if they don't feel as though that they're party to it, they're never likely to accept it.

So as we look forward and we're hearing the words career pathways threaded throughout the act, one of the things again we've sort of looked at is what is already taking place? In most of the adult ed programs that I engage with there's already been a linkage of one step to the next. When they come out and they culminate in, say, a high school equivalency certificate, many of those folks are promoted to move on in their education, whether that be through the community college system or in some other form of occupational skills.

But it becomes very much one piece to the next, and what do we see as an opportunity in WIOA is the idea of how can you sort of accelerate through some of that stuff? How do we get the ability to contextualize some levels of education so that you can learn the basic skills component while at the same time that hard threaded occupational skill?

And one of the things that I've had to on a regular basis remind my colleagues here with labor, if you push too hard, remember this was always a second-chance system. If folks weren't successful in the first-chance system, the idea that you're going to push and push and push and think you're going to gain some level of success is a naïve approach. So we really do rely on our adult ed partners to talk about what someone can make be successful. How do you – at what point do you jump across occupational skills and where synergies can be made to have the same skills taught in the same classroom.

So we are continuing to build on our relationships. I don't think that this is ever a game that you stop. We've been on a regular basis at this, and again, we've built from the performance angle through to the new enactment of the act.

And then as we roll out for our statewide implementation of our new state plan, the adult ed partners have always been engaged and they no longer feel isolated. And I think that's one of the things that, if I had to give some ideas of what to be mindful of to my colleagues across the country, the adult ed community probably feels a little threatened, if they're honest with you.

I think what they look at is they're worried about being swallowed up. And one of the things that – and I'm not looking to make a whole lot of comfort blankets here, but the idea is that you need to engage them. Don't forget about that process. Don't focus on them being out there on their own. There's too many opportunities.

So when you look at the way the act is drawn up today and how there's mandatory partnerships and there's mandatory possible contributions and those are financial contributions to the One-Stop, how do you make opportunities there?

There could be the opportunity to deliver services right within the One-Stop system, if it's not already occurring. How do we cross share those expenses? How do we raise the content standards of what we're already doing? And those things are very important when we're building trust with those traditionally siloed groups.

So I guess that's really where I want to end it without going into too much further detail. The idea is when you think about this, maybe not so much from the buzz word of partnerships or career pathways but really thinking about it at the end of the day, who is it we serve? How do we align our customer service opportunities?

How do we take the strength of each individual partner and say where do those things come together? The one thing I suppose that I'm starting to see and I'm developing a strong opinion for now is really that quarterback. Who brings the system together? How do we turn around and make sure that we connect the right pieces to the puzzle?

And the reason I say that is just off of what we've seen with our statewide conference. I again do not see anybody that doesn't wish to participate. I see a lot of taking it on. That's really the theme, and those things can concern you.

And a real quick snapshot. We were doing a presentation. Someone made the comment, oh, well, there's not enough money in the system. Of course the first reaction was, oh, you can partner. But if no one knows how to partner, if they don't know where to connect, all of a sudden they start thinking again internally.

How do I turn around and take what I was doing here and give that job to someone else? And that's where I guess the key points of state leadership can come in pointing out those opportunities and help bringing folks together. So with that I will connect to my next presenter partner and we'll take questions towards the end.

MR. BARELA: Howard, thank you. Very informative. I think if I had to summarize the highlights of your presentation, definitely partnerships are alignment and not consolidation. I think making sure that when you design programs to serve universal customers, you put the customer first and then you decide the outcomes and definitely look for common missions as you serve customers. So thank you for that.

We are going to move on to – I want to remind people that if you have a question for Howard in New Jersey, you can type in those questions in the chat box now, if they're fresh on your mind, and we'll get to those at the end of the panel presentation. Or again, we'll ask for questions when everyone's done presenting.

Again, thank you, Howard, and I am going to now introduce Marla Rye and Margaret Prater.

Marla Rye is president at the Workforce Essentials, Inc. in Clarksville, Tennessee and holds the title of executive director of the North Tennessee Workforce Board. Workforce Essentials provides workforce and economic development services in 34 counties in middle and west Tennessee. Marla has been with Workforce Essentials for a total of 22 years. She has been the recipient of numerous awards and has been recognized on local, state, and national levels for leadership through community service and economic development.

Margaret Prater is a vice president for workforce development for Dyersburg State Community College, the administrative entity and fiscal agent for the Workforce Innovations and Opportunity funding WIOA. Responsible for staff in 11 counties and a budget of over $11 million, Margaret worked with a partner consortium to provide services in all 11 counties through the Tennessee American Job Centers. She has presented on the national level at NODUP and most recently appeared in the Workforce3One video highlighting One-Stop partnerships.

Marla and Margaret, thanks for being here, and I'm going to turn it over to you.

MARLA RYE: Thank you very much, Joe, and good afternoon. The name of this webinar series is partnerships in action, and Margaret and I are here today to share with you real world examples, boots on the ground of what's happening in Tennessee. We're excited about our partnership and believe it has put us ahead of the game in preparing for WIOA.

So today I'm going to give you an overview of what we do with adult education, talk to you about our program results, and how we coordinate with the American Job Center. And then Margaret's going to talk to you about our TANF partnerships.

We're very fortunate that our leadership in Tennessee already recognizes adult education as a critical component of workforce development so much that, like New Jersey, Tennessee, the Department of Labor and workforce development actually administers the program, not the Department of Education.

Jason Beard is our state administrator, and he's committed to developing the workforce to ensure that the 700,000 Tennesseans between the ages of 18 and 64 who do not have a high school diploma are equipped with the skills to earn the credential and enter the workforce as a valued contributor.

I want to say that as an administrator in the American Job Center, in Tennessee we're very blessed to have in some of our instances a 4 percent unemployment rate. Williamson County, which is a suburb of Nashville, has 4.1 percent. We're not fortunate enough to say now where are the jobs coming from? It's where are the people going to be to fill these jobs?

And I think it's our role in the career centers or the American Job Centers to use the adult education component and those 700,000 people to prepare those to enter the workforce. The 95 counties in the state of Tennessee are divided into service areas for adult education. At this time the service areas do not match the local workforce areas, and the contracts for adult education are bid out on a competitive basis.

In middle Tennessee there's been two workforce areas that have actually bid on contracts to be the administrator of adult education programs, and local workforce development area 10, Jan McKeel is the executive director and she provides adult education programs in three counties. And I with the North Tennessee Workforce Board provide adult education in two counties.

And it's kind of interesting that we look and ignore the boundaries of the workforce area, and I think that goes back to the alignment process. Right now Jan McKeel is actually providing adult ed in one of my career centers in Williamson County. Even though it's in my workforce area, she's providing the services. So forget about borders and make those alignments happen.

Some of the advantages that we see by operating adult ed in the career centers is, one, our classes are actually located inside the American Job Centers. So our adult ed students are able to interact with job seekers and employers and be in a professional setting. They're not in the school system that they've already failed at once. So we're bringing them to a new environment and opening up doors for them.

And of course it depends upon what level in their adult education cycle that they're in. If they're just enrolling into adult ed, we know it's not an overnight process. So we use our WIA and we'll use our WIOA funds to provide support services to those individuals to help encourage them to stick to it and actually take their test and complete their high school equivalency.

We also use incentives and we will pay cash incentives to individuals that are co-enrolled in the WIOA that meet their high school equivalency and pass that exam. We also, for the counties that we are not a provider of adult ed, we have opened up our career centers to become adult education high school equivalency testing sites. So those individuals that are going to classes elsewhere, they're actually coming to the career centers to take their test and thus becoming engaged to see what services are available there.

What we found is when we were awarded this contract, that this is a savings to the local school systems that were providing the services and also it's a savings to the career centers because they're a partner in the resource sharing agreement and are actually paying rent to be in those centers. And for the benefit of the student, once they receive their high school equivalency diploma, then that creates an automatic seamless transition into even higher education and building that career pathway.

And as Howard was referencing earlier, when an adult ed student comes into the career center, they don't just fit into one silo. They're oftentimes eligible for many different services, and to have all of those services available to provide wrap-around services to that individual, whether it be through the Department of Vocational Rehabilitation of human services, it's very important to have all of those things available under one roof for them.

And we're really excited about WIOA and our youth programs because having those individuals without their high school diploma come into the career centers, we know that they're automatically going to be eligible for our youth programs and we'll be able to pick them up and assist them with their career development.

Then also the career center benefits because we have adult education staff in there, and they oftentimes will translate services for us because a lot of them are bilingual and teaching English as a second language. We also have them do testing for us to provide assessments, the CASAS and the TABE testing and work with them on just everyday tying those students to the workforce and employment opportunities and also using our disability employment program to assist those adult ed. So again it's that complete services model that we're able to provide the student.

Let's talk a little bit about our results. Again, in this middle Tennessee area where we're within the career centers we've had just under 2,000 people obtain their high school equivalency diploma. And of that we have provided core services through WIA and intensive services and hope to work with many more under WIOA, over 450 of those individuals.

And with the American Job Center serving as a test site for adult education, we've been able to test over 250 applicants the last two years, and we've got about a 58 percent pass rate with that. On a statewide basis we've had over 8,000 individuals this last year attain their high school equivalency exam and about 6500 of those have entered employment for about an 80 percent entered employment rate. So I think that connection there and using the career centers definitely has its advantage.

I'd like to share with you just a little bit about the advantages once that individual obtains their high school equivalency diploma, then using the career center for resume writing, interviewing, and that connection to the career pathways. And there's no better way to explain that than through a real-world success story, and I want to tell you just a little bit about Patrick Garrett. He received his high school equivalency diploma back in January of '14. He was also obtaining services through the career center.

Once he obtained that we put him through a career pathway pilot project where we were doing work experience with him at a local call center. The young man excelled. Once he got his foot in the door, they were able to hire him on permanently. Since then he's bought his first car and he is moving up the career pathway there at that call center. So again, having all of those services together is just exceptional.

The last slide I want to share with you is again how we can reach out and to different target bases under adult education. The picture here of the 18 young men that were incarcerated in one of our career centers, that was one of the greatest days for me is to be able to see those young men graduate and then the connection. Because they know who we are, as soon as they get released they're able to go into the career center and help those offenders transition back to the workplace.

We've served many individuals that have come in, got their high school diploma, gone through training, and are now active and productive members of the society. So that's what we're all about is making a difference through the career center and using all of those services and partnerships to align.

So I'm going to turn it over to Margaret and let her talk a little bit about our TANF partnerships now.

MARGARET PRATER: Thanks, Marla. This is Margaret Prater and talking about the WIOA and TANF coordination in Tennessee. The Northwest Tennessee Workforce Board, which is area 12 in the dark green on the map and part of Marla's service area for the TANF, we started coordinating with the TANF operator, Workforce Essentials, about seven or eight years ago, including aligning our services and also co-locating as space became available. I'd like to share an overview of coordination benefits for the American Job Centers and the WIOA program.

Through coordination with TANF we see increased traffic in our centers. We see a diversified customer base. It provides additional staff and services and results in a substantial cost savings. For the TANF partner, gives access to the many career services in our American Job Centers, access to WIOA training enrollment, and a professional environment for interaction with job seekers and employers.

For increased American Job Center traffic, currently we partner in 10 of the 11 centers in our area, including 1 comprehensive and 9 affiliate sites. We track the TANF customers monthly and have been able to show that we have provided access to all the career center services to an average of 1250 TANF customers a month area-wide. This equates to about 15,000 TANF customers coming in and out of our 10 American Job Centers in our local area.

We are currently in the process of expanding to an additional comprehensive center this month as we have some space open up and know that we will see a significant increase in traffic with that. Having our TANF partner in the American Job Centers has also expanded our customer base and diversified that base. The interaction between customers, as Howard and Marla both mentioned, we have different funding streams, different siloes you might say of adults, youth, dislocated workers, TANF.

Some fall under multiple categories, but they are all job seekers and they all need our services. And what we find is many times they can be dual enrolled to receive various funding and resources from different partners. It is also good for the interaction just between the customers. Example, a young TANF mother who has no experience might benefit from being in a workshop or having interaction with a dislocated worker who has many years of experience.

We also make sure that our American Job Centers are a professional environment that will serve both not only the job seekers but our business customers. We want to make sure that anyone coming into the center is dressed appropriately, that behavior is there, and we need to recognize that when the TANF partner comes in to the career center, we might also see children coming into that career center.

We work with the customer to make sure that they understand that it would not be appropriate to bring a child in for a workshop, but obviously if they do have children, if they're needing to come by and see their career advisor or drop something off, they're going to have children. So we generally try to set up a little area with some coloring books, colors to make that a little child friendly there.

One of the things that we've found in the years that we've been coordinating, that it's very important for all the agencies in the career centers to have the same philosophy and expectations of our customers. If a customer comes in in their pajamas and house shoes, then generally we would tell them that's not appropriate attire for the career center.

We've actually asked an agency to leave before that was partnering with us because they did not have that same philosophy. So it's important that, as a partner, that we all know what's expected and we all try to move to the same goal of betterment of that customer.

Having the TANF partner in the American Job Center provides additional staff and services, for example, the welcome function. We have several large offices that had 8 to 10 people, but we also have several smaller rural offices that only are what we would call a one-man office. So having that second person there is great to provide additional services.

We provide cross-training for all staff in the welcome function, whether TANF, WIOA, or other partner staff so that we can all deliver consistent and excellent customer service. We also utilize our participants, both TANF and WIA participants, in work experience components and place these trainees in the welcome function and resource rooms to help in the career centers assisting other customers.

We provide joint workshops for all customers, resume writing, interviewing skills, and these are delivered by both the TANF and the WIOA staff. Beginning in August our vocational rehabilitation and adult ed will also be in the rotation of offering the workshops. And then there's just a little added sense of security when you have additional staff members in the office, particularly those one-person offices or smaller offices.

Having the TANF partner has resulted in a significant cost savings for not only WIOA but the other partners in our American Job Centers. We develop a resource sharing agreement. Generally this is based on full-time equivalent staff. As you can see here on this slide, the TANF contribution for infrastructure overall has been about 44 percent of our cost of operations of the American Job Center. This includes rent, utilities, security services, internet, technology. Annual savings for the 10 centers this past year was $110,000. We expect to save another $12,000 in the next year.

And the last slide I want to talk about is our partner successes, and what you can see it is all about is the smiling faces in this slide. The young lady in the middle, Ms. Patricia Vaughn (sp), was laid off from her job. So she was a dislocated worker but became a TANF recipient and had to support her two children. She was jointly served by WIA providing career counseling and job search assistance and transportation and gas card support.

The TANF customer service provided family support, and then Tennessee Lottery provided scholarships through the College of Applied Technology. She earned an administrative assistant degree with medical transcriptionist and went to work for major medical center in a nearby city. Patricia stated, "I had three important and caring people in my life, my TANF family's first advisor, my WIA career advisor, and my instructor. I thank God for putting these incredible ladies in my life. They encouraged me and motivated me to keep pushing forward until I reached my goal." This is what TANF coordination can be when it's aligned with American Job Center and puts the customer first.

I'll be happy to answer any other questions with the rest of the panelists.

MR. BARELA: Margaret, thank you, and Marla as well. I think again we're hearing themes that it's looking at the customer, the universal customer, and then figuring out win-wins and meeting their needs and making sure that the American Job Center's responsive to that. We'll have questions for you coming up I'm sure, both – for all three of you, Howard, Marla, and Margaret.

So at this time, again, thank you to our panelists, international presenters. We're going to open up to questions. So if you have a question about partnerships at the national level or with any of our panelists or any questions or things you'd like to share about partnerships in your local or state – local area or state, please type those into the chat box, and we'll try to get to those this afternoon.

The first question coming in is to Mary Lovley, and it's basically, "What activities does RSA advise the VR agencies to engage in with respect to partnering with the education and workforce systems prior to final regulations coming out?" So, Mary, do you feel comfortable addressing this?

MS. LOVLEY: Sure. I can address that. This is something that we worked on very early on after the passage of the act and shared with our vocational rehabilitation agencies and with – posted it on our website and presented on it at the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation meeting and so forth.

We encouraged our state VR agencies to proactively engage with the workforce partners in the states in all kinds of activities, everything from strategic planning to developing the unified plan or the combined plan, including strategic visions and goals and for preparing and educating a skilled workforce, for meeting the needs of employers, and so forth.

We also encourage them to review their memoranda of agreement or memorandum of understandings with their One-Stop partners to make sure that those partnerships were accurately represented and the presence was there and the required partnerships were there in the One-Stops. We also encourage them to coordinate with their education partners, including the LEA – and I saw there was a question about that.

Those are local education agencies – on the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities, which is a new term, a new requirement under this law, and as well as other transition services and also to look at the 15 percent reserve that's a requirement under this law for those services, the pre-employment transition services.

We also encourage them to partner with employers to improve and expand their employment opportunities for individuals with disabilities. This is something that many of our state agencies and the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation have been engaged in in the last several years. But given the focus on the law, we're looking at possible expansion of that.

Also, looking at work-based learning experiences, which could include anything from on-the-job training to internships to apprenticeships and using the resources and the partners that we have in order to help connect the VR consumers to those systems. We also encourage them to partner with local providers within their states so that they can increase their resources for extending services for extended services to individuals with the most significant disabilities who are in the supported employment program, including youth, and of course dialoging with their state rehabilitation councils around their implementation plans.

I believe there was also a question specific to partnering with the state rehabilitation councils, and I just wanted to explain what that is a little bit. If a state has a designated state agency that meets the requirements in the law of an independent commission, then they don't need to have a state rehabilitation council.

On the other hand, for those states that do not meet the qualification of having a designated state agency that's an independent commission, they need to have a state rehabilitation council. The state agency will work with the council to do things like developing state goals and priorities and jointly submitting the annual reports of progress to consulting with the state rehab council regarding the development and implementation and revision of state policies and procedures that apply to the provision of vocational rehabilitation services.

The state – they would include the state rehab council in the state planning and providing them with any revisions to the state plan and provide us with a summary of input by the state rehab council, also providing the state rehab council with plans, reports, and other information that's required by the act with policies and practices and procedures of general applicability that are provided to or used by rehabilitation personnel, and provide copies of due process hearing decisions.

So those are the kinds of activities that state rehab councils are responsible for. It's basically making sure that there's oversight of the state vocational rehabilitation program. So I hope that's helpful.

MR. BARELA: Mary, thank you. I think that was information that was specific to that question. So I appreciate you taking that one.

Our next question is for Howard. "Howard, how do you see Title I youth, adults, dislocated worker using the WIOA measurable skill gained metrics? Title II has used academic skill gain to provide that long-term service. Title I now has the opportunity. Will they take it?"

MR. MILLER: Will they take it? I believe that they will. So the direct answer, I do believe that they will. I think that what you have to have is sort of that apples to apples comparison. One of the things that we have been focused on in New Jersey is how do you take some of those traditional certificate type of programs and there are clear competencies attached to them. So are we going to metric based on competency gains?

And that is where we are actually currently. That is what is fostering the discussion with our adult ed group on where could we eventually contextualize things? At what jumping off point, as I refer to it, can you get to this competency and then turn around and do this metric simultaneous one to another? There are models that are already there, but generally speaking do I think Title I will take it on? I do. I think it will be done through the competency model, though.

MR. BARELA: Thank you, Howard. Our next question is number four, Howard, again. "You mentioned who was coming in. Where does service capacity estimate – estimates come into play to determine how to reach out to discouraged individuals, for example, varied individuals, severely disabled individuals, etcetera. We do not want to over-promise and under-deliver." Very good question.

MR. MILLER: Very good question and one that this system for my entire work history has a major quandary over. I'm not going to try to poo-poo it, but whoever asked it, I have phrased it internally in my organization this way, and it's only done so to spark a conversation. So I'll do it with you all.

This system is at a jumping-off point. Are we all about a lot for a little or a little for a lot? And I say it that way to catch your attention, but we have always been, in the labor system, widgetized. Everybody, we sort of spread it thin and gets a little bit, but one of the things that you can start to see as you start to play WIOA out, the reality is it's based on outcomes.

And we may very well be engaging customers across the longer time frames, something that adult ed ironically has done already but the labor system has not. So will you see people move in and out? I liken it almost to an apprenticeship model where folks come in. They get a little bit. They go and play it out in the workforce. They may very well come back. You'll start to see people carrying over time.

But when you say who is coming in, I think this is an individual decision by individual workforce area by region. The WIBs are supposed to understand their local economies. They are to work with the local employers. That's the driver to all of our outcome products, and from there you build a system. So who's walking through the doors every day? What is it that the local employers say that they want? How do we connect this point to that point?

That is what will drive who gets served. I understand the whole we don't want to over-promise, but at the end of the day you have a requirement, in my mind, to turn around and build the workforce through all of the services and not sit there and say we're only going to give you this little piece and that little piece and therefore we have this slot but nobody's ever really in a finished way.

MR. BARELA: Excellent. Thank you, Howard. Margaret, this one is for you, and it's concerning your slide on the cost savings. Can you talk a little bit more about under – it looks like under WIOA 40 percent of your operation costs for American Job Centers, what's covered by TANF contributions. "Will you keep that percentage moving forward, or are you worried that that's going to be jeopardized under WIOA?"

MS. PRATER: No. I don't really see that it's going to be jeopardized. I would say, in fact, it will actually go up a little bit with us adding an additional center in that. Many of our centers, where we're co-located, is a 50/50 arrangement, in fact. And Marla?

MS. RYE: And this is Marla. As the TANF partner in Margaret's centers, what we usually do is just allocate our cost based upon the number of full-time equivalents in the building. So if she has one full-time and I have one full-time, then we just share equally in the cost.

MR. BARELA: Great. And another question for that arrangement. "Are you doing TANF eligibility in the center as well as employment and training services, workforce development services?"

MS. RYE: Well, this is Marla again. We are the contractor for the TANF program in Tennessee. That eligibility resides at the Department of Human Services. So we receive referrals for eligible TANF clients in the career center.

MR. BARELA: Good. So they process the TANF eligibility at the TANF or the human services office, and then they refer it to American Job Center for employment or workforce development services?

MS. RYE: Yes. They refer to Workforce Essentials as a partner in the American Job Center.

MR. BARELA: Great. Thank you for that clarification. The next question is going to Marla, and it is, "When did Tennessee WIBs decide they wanted to bid on the adult ed contracts?"

MS. RYE: Thanks for that question, Ron. One of the things that I want to make sure that I'm clear on is that all WIBs did not bid on the adult ed contracts. I think it's up to your workforce board how progressive they want to be and how they value the integration of services.

So the two WIBs that I was talking about today were the ones that actually bid on those contracts. There's other LEAs that operate programs in Tennessee as well as community colleges and local technology colleges too. So we were focusing my presentation on the WIBs that were providing those services.

MR. BARELA: Thank you. Marla and Margaret, I think, "How large are those career centers?"

MS. PRATER: Well, it varies. I guess square-footage-wise we have anywhere from probably – I guess the smallest would be around 1500 square feet to maybe about 4,000 to 5,000 square feet in our areas.

MS. RYE: Yeah. And the two career centers who are providing adult education right now, those are – well, first, our workforce area is around 750,000 in population. There's two counties that we provide adult education services. One is a very small county with about 40,000 people. The other one has around 75,000 people, and we just integrate those right into the AJCs.

MR. BARELA: And I know maybe the size was referring to customer volume size in those centers. You gave us population; the correlation is pretty consistent?

MS. RYE: Yes. I don't have the numbers in front of me right now as to the service levels in those counties, but they are a couple of our smaller counties. And we value having those adult ed students come in there to increase our numbers and use them as a referral base for our workforce services in their counties. Are we still there?

MR. BARELA: So our next question –

MS. RYE: Okay.

MR. BARELA: Yeah. Sorry. I was talking to myself and the people in the room here because we had you on mute. So thank you for that. I think the question, one of your slides did show the TANF volume and increases on a monthly and annual level. So hopefully there's some information there for the person that asked that question on the side. I think we're trying to see the impact that that customer base has on American Job Center in Tennessee.

So we're going to go to the next question because we are getting a little bit tight on time. So this is for Howard. "Did New Jersey identify a lead department provider and/or vendor after your statewide workforce conference? Has progress in identifying strengths and roles been made?"

MR. MILLER: A lead department? Forgive me for seeming lost. WIOA is enacted through mostly labor, and adult ed happens to fall under labor here in this state. So yes. The lead agency would be the local labor entity, so our Department of Labor.

MR. BARELA: Thank you. This one's for Marla, one last question. "Does Tennessee encourage career advisors to pursue a career development facilitator certification" – and I'm going to say any other credential – "on an ongoing continuation education credits?"

MS. RYE: The state of Tennessee does not require that, but I know a lot of the local areas do encourage and do participate and even some instances mandate that their career coaches, career advisors be certified through the global development facilitator certification. So yes to that.

MR. BARELA: Excellent. I think we all know that in the NPRM and in the law there's a lot of language on capacity building and staff professional development. So that's a very good question, and I think it's worth that our partnerships look into that cross-training and education and the ability to provide customer service to both our diversified job seekers and our businesses and industries. So thank you.

I would like to let you know that we are running out of time. So we aren't going to take any more questions. I thank you for those who provided feedback and questions, and I thank our panelists for answering those.

We are going to just reference and remind people that the main hub for technical assistance and resources as we implement WIOA is the ION, the Innovation and Opportunity Network. On the screen there you'll see really focused on the dynamic actions and innovations that are required under the new law and look at those really six circles, if you will, as far as activities and opportunities to fully develop and provide capacity building to the system.

Behind that we have the Innovation and Opportunity Network roadmap. Again, this is just a visual to show you over the next few months, the next year, and even on to year two what the departments', both the Department of Labor, Department of Education, and all the core partners at the national level, are really trying to focus on as we help the system embrace the new law and work with implementation. So that's there for your reference. This is available on Workforce3One.org under the ION community of practice, and it is updated as we add new technical assistance.

Again, Joe Barela signing off, and I'm going to turn it over to Amanda for some final words. Amanda?

MS. AHLSTRAND: Thank you, Joe. I will be brief and just again say thank you to everyone who joined today for all the work that you're doing to implement WIOA. Some of you have been working since last July, and many of you have been working toward this for many years, knowing that WIA was needing reauthorization for quite a while.

Thanks again to our panelists as well, and look for future learning events hosted on ION. Take a look at the quick start action planners, voices of experience. Additional guidance is coming out. I know we're releasing quite a few today on July 1st from here at ETA, and I know our education and HHS partners are working hard as well to get information out to folks.

So thank you to everybody, and have a great and safe 4th of July weekend. We'll catch up with you later this month. Take care.

(END)