

Education & Workforce Branch – Lee County Recovery Task Force

Meeting Minutes

11:00 AM – 12:30 PM | SEPTEMBER 21, 2023 | COLLABORATORY | 2031 JACKSON STREET, SUITE 100, FORT MYERS, FL 33901 | PUBLIC MEETING

Call to Order

At 11:01 AM on September 21, 2023, Dr. Mike Martin, Branch Lead, convened the Education & Workforce Branch meeting providing comments to frame the challenges of education and workforce issues in the region. The following members were present:

- Dr. Mike Martin, Lead
- Dr. Aysegul Timur
- Dr. Guido Minaya
- Laura Siebenmorgen
- Katie Larsen (on behalf of Lee Health) (non-voting)

County Liaison:

- Dominic Gemelli

Facilitator and Branch Support:

- Tessa LeSage, Collaboratory
- Robbie Heere, Hagerty Consulting
- Harrison Newton, Hagerty Consulting
- Tracey Phillips, Hagerty Consulting

Introductions

Ms. LeSage provided an update on the work of the Recovery Task Force and the Recovery and Resiliency Plan (Plan) development process.

Overview of Recent Recovery Task Force Efforts

Ms. Phillips reviewed the process for members and stakeholders to provide feedback on the Initiatives. Ms. LeSage provided a summary of the One-on-One meetings with the Recovery Task Force Members and their leadership teams. Dr. Timur expressed the importance of this process and asked for clarification on the timing of the draft Plan. The Resilient Lee Support Team (Support Team) provided an update on the drafting of the Plan and that the project timeline may be extended beyond December per conversations with the County.

Branch Initiative Feedback Summary

Ms. LeSage introduced the process to review the feedback on the Initiatives from Branch Members, RTF Members, and the County feedback. Dr. Minaya asked how the School District is incorporated in this process. Mr. Heere introduced the initiative E&W01: Resilient Workforce. Members suggested the title be changed to “Competency-Based Education and Skills-Based Hiring”. Ms. Phillips requested that members provide feedback on the structure of the Plan as it is developed.

The Support Team introduced the Initiative, E&W02: Resilient Economy and the feedback summary. Members discussed that the emphasis on businesses of 25 employees or less in the Initiative language could be a range that would not exclude small and medium-sized businesses.

The Support Team introduced the initiative, E&W03: Lifelong Learning, and the feedback summary. Members agreed that additional context for micro-credentialing should be included in the description. Dr. Timur provided context on competency-based hiring and credentialing and stated this topic calls for a nuanced conversation. Dr. Martin discussed the challenges of meeting the demand for educational programs because organizations and institutions have failed in the past. Dr. Timur stressed that the changing needs in the workforce require flexible programs to continue to meet the demands of the job market. Dr. Minaya stressed that language should be considered in all areas as there are about 41,000 Latino students in Lee County Schools, and there are challenges with language gaps between teachers, students, and administrators. Members agreed that all Initiatives should consider solutions to language barriers. Dr. Martin suggested that language and literacy challenges be considered.

The Support Team introduced initiative E&W04: Early Learning and the feedback summary. Ms. Phillips described that there are significant funding sources available for equity-focused projects and programs that may be relevant to this Initiative. Ms. Phillips suggested

that public-private partnership opportunities should be included in this Initiative. Members discussed early learning efforts and the effect of childcare on education.

The Support Team introduced the Initiative E&W05: Out of School Programming and the feedback summary. Members discussed gaps in school programming that could be addressed with pilot programs in both public and charter schools.

The Support Team introduced the Initiative E&W06: School to Career Programs and the feedback summary. Members discussed the challenges with school programs and the role of the family members in engaging the students. Ms. Phillips suggested that programmatic Initiatives could be combined in the Plan. Members discussed the importance of various areas in Pre-K and K-12 education and keeping those as separate Initiatives.

The Support Team introduced the Initiative E&W07: Children Services Council and the feedback summary. Ms. Larsen provided information on the Lee Health initiative for children's mental health, Kids Minds Matter.

The Support Team introduced the Initiative, E&W08: Literacy Programs, and the feedback summary. Members discussed that financial literacy should be included and the importance of family and children's literacy issues. Ms. LeSage stated that the Support Team will be combining this Initiative with E&W05: Out of School Programming.

The Support Team introduced the Initiative, E&W09: Education and Mental Health, and the feedback summary. Ms. Larsen provided additional information on Kids Minds Matter, including the value of providing mental health navigators for children. Ms. LeSage suggested that the first step would be to identify gaps and use Franklin Park and other community schools as an example to meet the needs of mental health for students. Dr. Martin suggested that best practices could be identified outside of just Franklin Park for additional knowledge and success in other locations. Dr. Minaya suggested that charter schools should be included in the assessment to make sure there are no gaps in services for children enrolled in those institutions. Members discussed the challenges to the system of mental health care for students. Dr. Minaya suggested that an assessment would be effective in understanding the needs as they are quickly changing.

The Support Team introduced the Initiatives E&W10: Workforce Development Strategies and E&W11: Workforce Development Strategies as well as the feedback summary. Dr. Minya stated that the limit on scalability is the number of seats and how virtual, apprenticeships, and other solutions can be leveraged with funding to scale up the number of workforce development programs. Dr. Martin supported apprenticeships and the importance of that education as the workforce development strategies are considered.

Members agreed that these two Initiatives are related and could be made more powerful with consolidation.

Initiative Consolidation

Ms. LeSage introduced the consolidation plan for the Education & Workforce Branch Initiatives. Members discussed that the education component of mental health and education workforce development is a separate issue from determining how to use Community Development Block Grant- Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR) funding because CDBG-DR typically funds more facilities-oriented projects. They suggested that E&W09: Education and Mental Health is a standalone Initiative as it is a workforce challenge not likely eligible for CDBG-DR funding.

Questions and Next Steps

Members reviewed next steps including that Branch members will be notified as soon as possible of the next meeting day/time. Dr. Martin stated that specific challenges related to education for nurses and teachers are important to consider in the Initiatives.

Public Comment

Dr. Angleo Biasi commented that there should be a focus on soft and transferable skills in workforce training curriculum. He commented that for sustainability, agriculture, and construction, there is a possibility that AI could be displacing jobs in the next few years and this group should consider how to prepare those individuals in those sectors for the changing workforce. He suggested that there should be a focus on the resilience of the workforce and the economy with the potential crisis of workers being displaced by AI.

Amy Turner, with the Sally J. Pimentel Deaf and Hard of Hearing Center, commented on language learning and out-of-school programming. She commented that language barriers exist for deaf children in schools and supported ASL language teaching in schools. Deaf children need to have an interpreter who speaks sign language to continue learning. She stated that the gap needs to be addressed. She stated that Amazon has been an example for companies providing interpreters to employees. The Deaf and Hard of Hearing Center recommends training programs for the community to help with the deaf community.

Chase Pizaris Henderson thanked Branch members for the work they are doing as Floridians.

Kristifer Jackson commented that he served in various roles including child protective services and children's issues. He commented that the area is lacking children's services related to education, and this Plan is exactly what this community needs.

Concluding Remarks and Adjournment

Ms. LeSage thanked the members for attending and adjourned the meeting at 12:32 PM.