

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT  
WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND  
OPPORTUNITY ACT**

**Unified State Plan 2020 - 2023 (July 1, 2020 to June  
30, 2023) –  
2-Year Modification**

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## **I. WIOA STATE PLAN TYPE – UNIFIED STATE PLAN**

The State of Connecticut has opted to submit a Unified State Plan. The plan encompassing the six core programs covered by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) – Adult Program, Dislocated Worker Program, Youth Program, Wagner-Peyser Act Program, Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program, and Vocational Rehabilitation Program – includes details about the efforts of the Governor’s Workforce Council and Chief Workforce Officer to the Connecticut Unified State Plan and also includes reference to the linkages for various Federal and State funded education and training, workforce development grants, and programs.

### **(a) Becoming a Leader in Effective Workforce Development**

Governor Lamont has stated his goal to ensure our CT workforce system is designed to meet the needs of the 21st century. Toward that end, the Governor signed Executive Order No. 4 on October 29, 2019, which directed the creation of the Governor’s Workforce Council (GWC), formerly known as the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission and designated as the WIOA-mandated state workforce board. In 2021, the GWC was codified in state law under PL 21-2 and the number of councilmembers was expanded to include additional representation from community-based organizations and other sectors (see full list of membership composition located in Section III (b)(3)(B)). This codification also included the creation of the Office of Workforce Strategy, to oversee the work of the GWC, and establishes the Chief Workforce Officer as the Department Head to the Agency.

The GWC is responsible for partnering with the business community and addressing barriers amongst state government agencies so Connecticut can have the most aligned, high-quality, and equitable workforce development system in the country. The GWC includes top executives from key industries as well as leaders of nonprofits, unions, the legislature, and educational institutions.

#### **The Governor’s Workforce Council**

The GWC is emblematic of our administration’s approach of bringing the public and private sectors together to drive our state’s economic growth. Strategic goals of the GWC include:

- strengthening the bridge from secondary to post-secondary education,
- reducing barriers to training, and
- measuring data-informed outcomes.

The GWC coordinates among and liaisons with stakeholders in the workforce system, including businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, nonprofit institutions and labor unions. The first meeting of the GWC was held on November 21, 2019. Full Council meetings are held quarterly with Committee work proceeding between meetings.

#### **The Office of Workforce Strategy**

The supporting agency, the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) was established in 2019 and fully codified in 2021 to provide staff to the Council. OWS operationalizes the GWC to:

- Serve as the primary advisor to the Governor and the administration on workforce development policy
- Promote equity and access to the workforce by partnering with community-based organizations and stakeholders to develop specific strategies aimed at increasing workforce participation of historically underrepresented populations
- Partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to fund, support, and design industry-aligned educational and workforce training programs that issue an industry-recognized credential

- Liaison directly with employers to better understand labor market trends and hiring needs to help inform investment and focus of educational, government, and community partners
- Provide staff to the Governor’s Workforce Council, Connecticut’s WIOA-mandated state workforce board
- Research national and state workforce development policy best practices to help bring continuous innovation to Connecticut
- Partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to implement the strategic initiatives outlined in the Governor’s Workforce Council’s strategic plan
- Partner across state agencies and the private sector to help advise on and coordinate existing workforce development initiatives and programs

See Section III (a) for detailed role and functions.

As promised by the inaugural Chair of the GWC, a Workforce Strategic plan was released in one year from Governor Lamont’s Executive order and on October 28, 2020, the GWC released its Workforce Strategic Plan. The Plan details a coordinated, statewide strategy for building an equitable, inclusive, and innovative workforce that meets the needs of the current economic environment. This Plan was a collaborative effort and solicited feedback and recommendations from industry representatives, educators, philanthropic and community-based organizations, and other key groups. The original Plan recommends strategies in four key areas: business leadership, education and training in support of career pathways, equity and access, and data.

Initial Council Committees were established in 2020 and charged with advancing initiatives in the areas of:

- Business Leadership, addressing skills-based hiring, quality jobs, and CampusCT (retaining college graduates)
- Equity & Access – addressing persistent barriers that undermine access to sustainable work and training opportunities
- Education and Career Pathways, addressing Pathways Policy & Development (High School to Post Secondary, including areas of Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment, Business Leadership Partnerships, Career Exploration & Advising, Teacher Professional Development), Adult Education, and Work-based Learning
- Data and Performance, addressing Credential Registry; jobs.ct.gov; Dashboards & Standard Evaluation Framework; CTHires Enhancements; P20WIN Workforce data queries

In the spirit of continuous improvement and ensuring that the Plan remains “living”, the original Committees were expanded to include additional initiatives that were identified during the first year of implementation and through lessons learned. Additional or amended committees include:

- Sector Training, addressing short term training across six sectors, incumbent worker training, and SNAP Employment and Training.
- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, charged with working with Inclusion Advisors to focusing on meeting the needs of re-entry population, Veterans, people with disabilities (Supportive Employment Services), youth, and BIPOC.
- Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Steering Committee, charged with authoring the next State WIOA Workforce Strategic Plan; aligning Regional Plans; and coordinating WIOA partners.
- Access to Employment Committee (renamed from Equity & Access), charged with advancing work in the areas of Childcare & Early Childhood Education; Transportation; addressing “benefits cliffs”; and implementing AJC Navigator Pilots
- Executive Committee, comprised of chairs of each of the 7 other committees, leadership from OWS, and two representatives from education partners to support the other committees

## **(b) Economic Development**

Key components of Governor Lamont's vision to transform the state's economic development strategy include aggressive business recruitment, collaborative work across agencies to better support existing businesses and onboard new ones, as well as a strategic and long-term economic policy focus, including in the important area of opportunity zones. To execute on this vision, Governor Lamont appointed David Lehman, a former partner with Goldman Sachs, to serve in dual roles as the Commissioner of the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and as the Governor's Senior Economic Advisor.

In addition, Governor Lamont announced that DECD will work in close partnership with the nonprofit AdvanceCT (FKA Connecticut Economic Resource Center or CERC). **AdvanceCT** will function as the outward-facing recruitment arm on behalf of the state, and DECD will continue to support, promote, and advocate for existing businesses while also serving as the central resource to help new businesses navigate state and local government to minimize lag time, enhance services, and expedite relocation. Both entities will work closely with Connecticut Innovations, Inc. (CI), the state's primary vehicle for supporting and financing start-up companies. As part of his mandate, Commissioner Lehman will ensure tight alignment between AdvanceCT, CI, and DECD. DECD and AdvanceCT remain strong partners in the work of the GWC, including through AdvanceCT's CampusCT program (see below) and its hiring of a consultant who works closely with the GWC to support the workforce strategies critical to economic development.

**Manufacturing Initiatives.** In recognition of the vital role manufacturing plays in the state's economy, the Governor has appointed a Chief Manufacturing Officer to oversee efforts to grow the state's manufacturing sector. This position operates under the umbrella of DECD and seeks better coordination over multiple agencies, assuring that training and education is available to meet job demands, maintaining supply chains, providing a regulatory process that protects safety and the environment but is not redundant or unnecessarily burdensome, and establishing Connecticut as welcoming to such industries, recognizing that all these are vital components for growth. To advance manufacturing even faster, the state government established a \$75 million Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF), a partnership of DECD and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, Inc. (CCAT).

On the private sector side, the seven major state manufacturing associations formed the Connecticut Manufacturers' Collaborative (CMC) to focus on enactment of policies to advance manufacturing in the state.

**Opportunity zones** are another facet of the Governor's vision for economic development. The federal Opportunity Zones program was designed to incent public and private stakeholders to work together to rebuild American cities. Eligible investors who make qualified investments within those zones may be eligible for significant capital gains tax benefits. Seventy-two urban and suburban areas across Connecticut have been federally designated as Opportunity Zones. Connecticut's state government and its 27 municipalities with designated Opportunity Zones are eager to leverage this program to encourage investments in Connecticut.

**CT innovation** hubs continue to grow in the state, including incubators, accelerators, co-working spaces and maker spaces of all types. These include:

- The Borough496 incubator in Hamden, CT which will offer below-market rent, mentoring and other services to entrepreneurs. It's also an example of adaptive reuse of old buildings – in this case, the long-shuttered Newhall School
- In Fairfield, CT Sacred Heart University's new iHub, a partnership with Verizon, offers entrepreneurs access to university students, staff and services

- Digital Health CT, an accelerator for digital health and medical technology startups opened in 2019 in Hartford. It's a partnership of Hartford HealthCare, Trinity College and UConn
- The District in New Haven, an innovative office and co-op facility capable of offering 50 to 50,000 sq. feet of space that is home to AdvanceCT, CI, and learning partners District Arts and Education, Holberton School, and thinkfwd

### **(c) Strategic Initiatives**

The Committees established by the Governor's Workforce Council will advance its most critical strategic initiatives across the four key areas of business leadership, education and training support, equity and access and data and accountability.

#### ***Business Leadership Initiatives***

- Develop a system of regional sector partnerships across the state
- Build a credential registry to house all secondary and postsecondary credentials offered in the state
- Develop a strategy for retaining college graduates,
- Develop a program inventory and a standardized outcomes measurement system across our workforce boards.

#### ***Education and Training Initiatives***

- Develop new and expand existing career pathway and dual enrollment opportunities that are aligned with in-demand industries
- Develop new and expanding existing short-term sector-based training programs
- Develop a statewide model for creating and coordinating work-based learning opportunities
- Develop a statewide strategy for delivering effective and comprehensive education and career advisory services to students
- Develop a series of pilots and recommendations that improve teacher professional development
- Create a plan for a more integrated, student-centered, adult education system

#### ***Equity and Access Initiatives***

- Create an accessible, affordable, and high-quality statewide childcare system
- Reduce barriers to affordable transportation for students and job seekers
- Increase the number of Supportive Employment Services slots in CT by 2,000
- Remove the adverse effects of benefits cliffs that CT residents are currently experiencing

#### ***Data and Accountability***

- Create a series of performance dashboards and ROI templates.
- Expand the P20 WIN system to include a broader range of education, workforce and supportive service agencies.

### **(d) State Budget Commitments**

The State is investing in Connecticut's future by positioning the state as a leader in effective workforce development efforts. This begins with supporting towns in their effort to provide every person with a high-quality education that lays the foundation for a lifetime of success, continues as people move through our excellent state college and university system, and culminates in our agencies' collaborative approach to scaling the programs that have proven most successful in preparing the people of Connecticut with the skills needed for our businesses to thrive in a 21st-century economy.

The State invests over \$200 million of state, federal, and philanthropic funds in workforce initiatives beyond the funding it receives through WIOA. These funds are distributed across nine departments.

Recent new commitments include:

- \$20M to the OWS in CARES Act funding to mitigate the worst impacts of the COVID pandemic by supporting skills training and supportive services (detailed in Section II(a)(2) below)
- \$70M in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds to the CareerConneCT initiative to ramp up short term skills training and support participants to succeed and fill thousands of in-demand jobs (details in Section III(a)(2) below)
- \$40M appropriated, with \$5M allocated thus far, in State Bond dollars to support workforce programs and systems improvements.
- Apprenticeship pipelines have proven to be an excellent way to develop skills for good-paying careers in manufacturing and other industries. Fifteen million dollars has been authorized through the state bond commission to support the
- \$50M appropriated for short term training programs and pre-apprenticeships and \$15 million in state bond funds were allocated to support the Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative to enable regional partnerships to develop workforce pipeline programs for entry-level workers in manufacturing and other industry sectors in the state that are experiencing sustained workforce shortages.
- \$1M in state bond funding was allocated to the Manufacturing Innovation Fund for incumbent worker training.
- \$40M allocated to create Vocational Villages a workforce training and credentialing program for those currently incarcerated
- \$1M annual investment in Platform2Employment (P2E)
- \$2M annual investment for short-term manufacturing training through the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative

## II. STRATEGIC ELEMENTS

*The Unified State Plan must include a Strategic Planning Elements section that analyzes the State's current economic environment and identifies the State's overall vision for its workforce development system. The required elements in this section allow the State to develop data-driven goals for preparing an educated and skilled workforce and to identify successful strategies for aligning workforce development programs to support economic growth. Unless otherwise noted, all Strategic Planning Elements apply to Combined State Plan partner programs included in the plan as well as to core programs.*

The Office of Workforce Strategy has partnered with the Connecticut Department of Labor's Labor Market Information Division to produce this section which analyzes the State's current economic environment and workforce to inform the plan.

### **(a) Economic, Workforce, and Workforce Development Activities Analysis**

#### **(1) Economic and Workforce Analysis**

Connecticut's economy has experienced strong growth since the end of the COVID recession during the first half of 2020. From February to April of that year, seasonally adjusted employment fell by 17.2%, a drop of 292,400 jobs. The rest of 2020 was marked by strong job growth. By December 2020, the state had recovered 57% of the jobs lost during the recession. This employment rebound continued through the end of 2021, which had 12 months of consistent employment growth and a recession recovery rate of 74.6%.

This recession and the employment shutdowns disproportionately impacted industries in the service sector that could not adapt to remote work. The industries with the largest increase in unemployment insurance (UI) claims during the recession were Accommodations & Food Services, Health Care & Social Assistance, and Retail Trade. These industries skew female, a group that has seen higher unemployment levels throughout the recovery.

Accommodation & Food Services had the largest increase in unemployment claims as COVID-mitigation policies shut down operations at most restaurants and venues. From the first quarter of 2020 to the second quarter, employment fell by 45% and claims rose precipitously, peaking at 54,384 by May 2020, or 17% of total claims. In the year and a half since that UI claims peak, Accommodation & Food Services has seen employment increase and claims fall. By 2021Q4, employment in that industry was 113,000, or 87.7% of corresponding 2019Q4 levels, the last full quarter of employment before the recession. Claims are currently at 79% of levels from mid-January 2020.

Health Care and Social Assistance, the largest employing sector of the economy had the second highest increase in claims, peaking at 43,423 continued claims by early May 2020. Despite the essential nature of this sector overall, the pandemic caused many non-essential medical procedures to be postponed or avoided, which resulted in the layoff increase. Current unemployment insurance claims in the sector are down to 2,927 as of mid-January 2022, which is 8% below two years ago (pre-pandemic). Employment has increased steadily in recent months. By 2021Q4, the sector is at 94% of pre-pandemic 2019Q4 levels. By component industry, Ambulatory Health Care is at 99% of 2019Q4 levels, Hospitals have regained employment equal to pre-pandemic levels 2 years ago, Social Assistance is at 92%, and Nursing & Residential Care Facilities is at 85%. The nature of COVID along with longer term trends suggest that employment growth in Nursing & will lag as demand weakens and people seek alternatives.

Correspondingly, it can be expected that other areas of Health Care & Social Assistance such as Home Health Care Services will increase as people seek to remain in their homes as they age and/or require additional medical care.

Retail Trade experienced employment disruptions during the pandemic similar to Accommodation and Food Services. Unemployment claims increased by over ten-fold from early 2020 through May of that year, as pandemic mitigation severely dampened that industry. As consumers adapted and shifted to online shopping, growth in Transportation & Warehousing increased. Retail Trade unemployment claims through 2022 were roughly equal to the total claims count for the much larger Health Care and Social Assistance sector, falling from 43,423 continued claims in May 2020 to 2,482 by January 15<sup>th</sup>, 2022. Employment in this sector has increased from a 2020Q2 low of 140,500 to 168,570 by 2021Q4. This recent employment level is down 6% from 2019Q4 levels. Longer term trends of employment decline in this sector may impede continued recovery. The sector had a recent employment peak in the 2015Q4 at 190,670 and had been trending downward in the years leading up to the pandemic.

As the state continues to recover and add jobs, unemployment claims in hardest-hit industries are returning towards pre-pandemic levels. As of the week of January 15th, 2022, there were 32,704 continued unemployment claims, levels that are almost a tenth of peak May 2<sup>nd</sup> 2020 levels of 318,901 and down 82% from a year earlier during the week ending January 16<sup>th</sup> 2021 levels of 178,327. Every industry had fewer claims than a year before, the three industries with the largest declines were those heavily impacted by the lockdowns which began to ease in late May 2020: Accommodation & Food Services (-27,538 claims or -92%), Health Care & Social Assistance (-16,321 claims or -84.8%), and Retail Trade (-16405 claims or -86.9%) These three industries accounted for over 41% of over the year declines, with shares respectively of 19%, 11%, and 11%.

Across all industries, current continued claims for the week of January 15<sup>th</sup> 2022 are actually lower than two years ago before the pandemic-shutdown. During the week of January 18<sup>th</sup> 2020, total continued claims was 43,935 or 34% *above* current levels. Every industry is currently below levels from two years ago, ranging between 51%-89% of January 18<sup>th</sup> 2020 levels. This precipitous fall in unemployment

insurance claims indicates that the current labor market is quickly rebounding from the steep and (thankfully) short early 2020 recession. The official unemployment rate has fallen by 50%, from 11.4% in May 2020 to 5.8% as of December 2021. This tightening labor market will present challenges for employers and workforce development agencies as they seek to increase the supply of labor to meet the needs and foster economic growth in the state.

### **Existing Demand**

A differentiating component of the 2020 recession and its recovery is how employment shifts were impacted in large part due to the COVID mitigation and not the cyclical flows that typify “normal” recessions. The comparison of unemployment rates and job opening rates is called the Beveridge Curve, an idea that assumes that the two rates generally have a negative relationship during normal labor market flows, job openings decline as unemployment rates increase during a cyclical downturn, only to gradually recede back as openings increase and unemployment rates decline.

In recent years, this relationship has been heavily distorted relative to longer-term norms, as the unemployment rate jumped precipitously from early 2020 to a May 2020 high of 11.4%. In subsequent months, the unemployment rate remained above 8.0% from August 2020 to May 2021. During that 10-month span, the Connecticut job opening rate as reported by BLS in the Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (JOLTS) data increased from 3.5% to 6.2%. In recent months during the second half of 2021, unemployment has fallen to below 6.0% and the openings rate has increased to 6.5% by November 2021. This upward shift differs from pre-pandemic periods, which saw the job openings and unemployment rate converge to similar levels below 5 percent. The rise in job openings over the past year indicates that Connecticut (along with the US overall) is experiencing very high existing labor demand as the economy recovers from the COVID-pandemic.

## **(2) Economic Analysis**

Connecticut’s economy has been growing slowly since the end of the great recession. As of September 2019 Connecticut has now recovered 85% of the jobs lost from March 2008 to January 2010 one of the few states in the nation where employment remains below its pre-recession level. Nevertheless, employment remains on an upward track with total employment up 8,800 (0.5%) from one year ago and private sector employment up 10,500 (0.7%) September 2018 to September 2019.

### **(A) Existing Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**

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## **(B) Emerging Demand Industry Sectors and Occupations.**

The events of recent years have highlighted the importance of Bioscience, one of Connecticut's emerging industry clusters. The immediate need for pandemic mitigation resulted in a global mobilization that rapidly produced vaccines and increased medical equipment production. Bioscience contains a broad cross-section of service industries and goods producing industries such as pharmaceutical, chemical, and medical device manufacturing. In 2019, the state had over a thousand Bioscience establishments that employed over 23,000 workers. This doesn't account for the total impact of Bioscience on overall employment given spillover effects on other sectors such as Education and Health Care and it doesn't account for the total labor supply of available workers given that many employed in other forms of manufacturing or research & development have compatible occupational skills that would be relevant to an employer looking to expand in the state.

Among the eight industries that comprise Connecticut's bioscience employment, roughly half of employment is in the service sector and half is in the good producing sector of the economy. In 2019, the largest two industries, Research & Development in Sciences (32%) and Medical Equipment & Supplies Manufacturing (28%) account for about half of Bioscience employment in the state.

Overall Bioscience employment fell from 2001-2017, driven by declines in the manufacturing component of the employment cluster, echoing overall trends experienced by manufacturing of all types. In 2018 and 2019, the bioscience cluster grew by 2.5% and 4.4% respectively. These gains in recent years are driven by the service providing components of that industry, which in 2019 included R&D in Sciences, Medical & Diagnostic Labs, and Testing Labs. In 2020, the bioscience cluster was not immune to the swings experienced by the global economy, most of its component manufacturing industries were down while its service-providing half had slight increases, which corresponds with the activity of vaccine rollouts and the Connecticut's bioscience firms involved. Available projections for bioscience industries suggest the cluster will grow in coming years, increasing employment opportunities for workers across all skill levels given the diversity of the industries involved.

This cluster grew from 2017-2019, shown tempered employment declines during the pandemic, and is projected to add jobs in coming years, making it an important emerging industry in the state.

### **(i) Employers' Employment Needs**

Employers are seeking a wide range of knowledge, skills, credential, and licenses. In the large and growing health care sector, the largest demand is for Registered Nurses with a majority of job postings in this occupation currently seeking RNs with a Bachelor's Degree even though an RN license is obtainable with an Associate's Degree. Personal Care Aides and Home Health Aides require less education and training. Within the growing manufacturing sector, hiring is occurring at every education level. The occupations showing the most growth with the Computer Systems Design and Related Services generally require a bachelor's degree.

A concern is finding enough qualified people to meet employer demand not only in manufacturing, but the state's other industry sectors as Connecticut will face a surge in retirements. Forty-eight percent of all jobs in the state are identified as middle-skill and the demand for middle-skill jobs is expected to remain strong. Overall labor market measures, such as a low unemployment rate and high employment to population ratio, suggest that demographics and slow population growth are the largest challenges Connecticut faces as it attempts to accelerate job growth.

Middle-skill jobs generally require some significant education and training beyond high school but less than a Bachelor's Degree including Associate's Degrees, vocational certificates, and on-the-job training and apprenticeships. Other qualities that are commonly lacking among recent hires or attempted hires are overall employability and technical skills. This includes deficits in advanced technical skills, math, writing, reading, English proficiency and computer skills.

With the unemployment rate falling in the state, employers are having difficulty filling positions at all skill levels and as a result job opening are near a record high. The Conference Board's Help Wanted OnLine index shows over 81,000 job postings in Connecticut with 29% requiring a high school diploma, vocational training, or an Associate's Degree and 30% requiring a Bachelor's degree or more.

The various entities, partners and stakeholders comprising Connecticut's extensive workforce development system have planned and implemented a broad array of innovative initiatives addressing Connecticut's workforce development priorities.

## **(C) Workforce Analysis**

### **(i) Employment and Unemployment**

Overall unemployment rates were at historic lows prior to the pandemic recession. Since then, beginning in March 2020, COVID-19 employment shutdowns resulted in unprecedented short-term unemployment increases. As the lockdowns commenced, US and State unemployment rates shifted from 4.4% (US) and 3.8% (CT) to respective peaks of 14.7% for the US in April 2020 and 11.8% in May and June for Connecticut. In the almost two years since those peaks, the US has had sharp declines, down to 3.9% as of December 2021, while Connecticut persisted above 8.0% until June 2021 and was 5.8% by December 2021 seasonally adjusted although the not seasonally adjusted rate was just 4.4%.

Connecticut unemployment rates by age and demographic groups are available annually through 2021. Statewide annual average unemployment rates by age cohort show that workers over age 54 experienced larger unemployment rate increases than workers in the two other cohorts. Workers over age 54 had a 4.0 point increase to 7.3% while the prime age and under 25 cohorts increased by 3.8 and 3.9 percentage points respectively. By gender, men and women both saw 4.1 percentage point increases above 2019 levels.

Available unemployment rates by race/ethnic group show that unemployment rates for Black and Hispanic Populations in Connecticut fell dramatically through 2019 before the recession but their 2020 experiences differed. Hispanic unemployment rates increased by 4.5 percentage points while the unemployment rate for Black/African Americans in Connecticut shifted slightly over the year from 7.3 percent to 7.4 percent. The white population saw a 4.1 percentage point increase from 3.5% in 2019 to 7.6% in 2020.

Connecticut's annual average labor force participation rate (LFPR) peaked in 2008 at 69 percent, a level not seen since the early 1990s. After reaching a low of 64.9 percent in 2013, it was 66.4 in 2019, up from 65.8 percent in 2018. In 2020, the LFPR fell to 64.8, as unemployment rose and the employment to population ratio tumbled from 63.8% in 2019 to 59.7% last year.

As the overall LFPR fell in the state, the over 54 and under 25 age cohorts saw labor force percent share increases, indicating that the 25-54 age cohort had larger LFPR drops than those smaller groups. From 2019 to 2020, the overall labor force decreased by 44,000. Under 25 and Over 54 age cohorts respectively increased by 9,000 and 11,000 while the 25-54 cohort was down 64,000.

The overall working aged population (over age 16) was up 3,000 from 2019 to 2020, while the labor force fell by 44,000. The under 25 population grew by 21,000, the population aged 25-54 fell by 45,000 and the over 54 population increased 27,000. This aging of the labor force will impact the Connecticut recovery, as older age cohorts have lower labor force participation rates. This demographic shift isn't exclusive to Connecticut and is seen in many U.S. states. The overall labor force decline was due to employment falling by 117,000 and unemployment increasing by 72,000. By age cohort, the under 25 labor force grew by 9,000 and the over 54 cohort grew by 11,000. The prime age labor force was down 64,000 over the year. Over the past 10 years the over age 54 cohort has increased from 20.9% of the labor force to 28.6% as of 2020.

The age 16 to 24 cohort has a LFPR below that of prime age workers due primarily to school enrollment. In 2020 overall LFPR for this cohort fell slightly, and the employment to population ratio fell from 50.0% in 2019 to 46.5% in 2020.

For the over 54 cohort, LFPR reached a high of 49% in 2017 and fell to the mid-40s during the three subsequent years through 2020. It remained relatively flat in 2020 as the employment to population ratio fell from 44.8% in 2019 to 43.0%. From 2019-2020, the over 54 population and labor force grew by 27,000 and 11,000 respectively. Most of the overall population growth (24,000) was in the 65 and over component cohort while the labor force growth was more evenly split between the 55-64 cohort (+6,000) and the 65 and over cohort (+5,000).

### **Changing Demographic Composition of Connecticut's Labor Force**

Connecticut's labor force is becoming more diverse. The largest shift in Connecticut's labor force during the past 10 years has been the growth of the Hispanic cohort, which rose from 10.2% to 14.9% through 2020. During this time, White labor force share fell from 84.8% to 77.6% and the Black/African American labor force share increased from 9.5% to 12.5%. 2020 data for the Asian race/ethnic group isn't available, but from 2010 to 2019 it increased from 4.4% to 5.3%.

The Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) allow for detailed analysis of industry employment by various demographic characteristics and employment measures. A review of the demographic trends from 1999 through the 2019 peak can give insight as to what Connecticut can expect in a post-pandemic economy.

#### **Long Term Trends: 1999-2019**

The racial and ethnic composition of Connecticut employment has made some notable shifts over the past two decades. The U.S. Census Bureau's Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) allow for a detailed view of the composition of employment in the state. Total employment is up 1.2% over the period -- falling by 2.3% or 37,213 through 2009 and increasing by 3.5% or 18,872 from 2009-2019. The overall 20-year growth is driven by non-White and Hispanic employment gains, which increased between 31.6% (Black or African American) and 100.5% (Asian). White and Non-Hispanic employment are down 6.7% and 5.5% respectively over the period. Hispanic employment is up 76.4%. These 10-year periods illustrate the differing demographic trends of specific groups in the state. Of groups that saw the largest growth over the period, many had significantly more growth during the recent 10-year period than the prior one. African American employment grew by 52,932 or 33% over the past 20 years, with 84% of that growth occurring in the past decade. Other groups with larger increases during the 2009-19 period than the preceding 1999-2009 period include Hispanic employment, which grew 27% through 2009 and 39% from 2009-2019. Apart from Asian and Native Hawaiian employment, every non-white demographic group had larger gains during the past ten years than the 1999-2009 period. Asian employment grew by 63% through 2009 and by 23% over the past 10 years.

#### **(ii) Labor Market Trends**

The Quarterly Workforce Indicators (QWI) dataset allows for detailed analysis of industry employment trends by various labor market variables including worker demographic characteristics and firm breakouts by age or size.

During the second quarter of 2020 — the quarter of the COVID-19 shutdown — total private employment was down 141,817 or -9.9% from the second quarter of 2019. Just over half (50.1%) of that decline occurred in three industries, Accommodation & Food Services (-38,471 or 27.1% share of total decline), Other Services (-18,828 or 13.3% share), and Retail Trade (-13,799 or 9.7% share). All but one sector experienced declines during the 2019Q2-2020Q2 period. Transportation & Warehousing was up as a result of a shift to online shopping caused by the pandemic and longer-term growth trends. Transportation and Warehousing has been growing in the state since 2010 and was up 12.4% over the year ending 2020Q1.

For the total economy, the firm size cohorts with the largest percent declines were 20-49 employees (-15.9%) and 0-19 employees (-13.5%). For the three larger firm size cohorts, the declines were proportionately smaller the larger the firm size category. Firms with 500 or more employees had a 7.3 percent decline.

Most large industries were down less than 10% over the 2019Q2-2020Q2 period. The three largest industries, Health Care & Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Manufacturing were respectively down 2.6%, 7.9%, and 3.0%. Among these three industries, most firm size cohorts had between 0% and 10% declines, with four exceptions. Health & Care and Social assistance saw a 12.6% increase in the 0-19 firm size cohort, Retail Trade had three cohorts with losses greater than 10% with the largest being the 250-499 employee cohort, down 38.3%. For manufacturing, the larger the firm size the smaller the decline. Small manufacturers employing 19 or fewer workers fell 9.4% while the largest employers were down 0.4%.

Industries with the largest percent declines were Arts, Entertainment & Recreation (-38.2%), Accommodation & Food Services (-30.1%) and Other Services (-28.7%). The losses in Arts, Entertainment & Recreation were driven by losses at larger employers, though every firm size cohort experienced declines of 27.2% or more. The 500+ and 250-499 employee cohorts had the largest percent losses, down 46.4% and 41.7% respectively. That sector was down 9,937 from 2019Q2 to 2020Q2 and the employment share of firms with 50 workers or fewer increased from 45.9% to 49.4% as the larger firms had larger percent losses.

Accommodation & Food Services was the fourth largest private industry in 2019Q2, employing 127,836 workers, with 53.7% of employment in firms of 49 or less. In 2020Q2, it was the sixth largest after falling 38,471 to 89,365, the largest employment drop of any industry. Employment losses for firm size cohorts of 249 or less were within a few percentage points of the 30.1% loss for the industry overall. The 250-499 employee firm size cohort shifted down by 40.0% and the 500+ firm size cohort had a much smaller percent shift of -23.7%. This suggests that larger employers within this industry were able to mitigate the COVID-19 recession better than smaller employers.

The Other Services industry encompasses firms engaging in services not categorized by other industries. Much of the employment in this industry falls within hairdressers and barber shops, nail salons, automotive service, and machinery repair.<sup>1</sup> The largest firm size loss in Other Services occurred in the 0-19 employees cohort, which was down 35.7%. However, about half of the overall losses in Other Services occurred in the Private Households (NAICS 813) component industry, which fell 66.6% from 13,658 to 4,558, much of this drop due to reclassification of this employment into another industry. Even after the steep losses, the 0-19 employment cohort makes up more than half of the employment in the sector. The much smaller 250-499 cohort of Other Services saw a large percent increase, up 60.2% or +644 employees, the largest percent gain of any industry firm size cohort.

Despite the reality that almost every sector declined through 2020Q2, 17 industry firm size cohorts had increases. Most of these firm size cohort gains were less than a few hundred, but the 500+ cohort in Transportation & Warehousing (+4,263 employees or +12.9%) and the 0-19 employees cohort in Health Care & Social Assistance (+4,013 employees or +12.6%) had sizable gains that differed greatly from other cohorts in their respective industries. Looking ahead past the second quarter of 2020 (the worst quarter of the COVID-19 shutdown), other sources show that the Connecticut economy is rebounding from the depths of the pandemic – unprecedented job declines were followed by record employment gains. Some of the industries that were hardest hit have had the strongest recoveries – including those industries with employment concentrated in smaller firms. The data show that smaller businesses had proportionately larger declines; data we receive in the future may show they are experiencing proportionately faster growth as the economy continues to recover.

The most recently available Current Employment Statistics (CES) data illustrate how industries have continued to rebound from the 2020 COVID-recession. The industries with the largest gains over the

year include Leisure & Hospitality, Education & Health Services, and Professional & Business Services. As the state continues its recovery, the rebound trends of recovering the jobs lost during the recession are projected to continue.

### **(iii) Education and Skill Levels of the Workforce**

The educational attainment of Connecticut's overall workforce is higher than corresponding rates for the U.S. but slightly below New England's. In 2019, available census data show that 5.8 percent of the Connecticut labor force aged 25-64 had less than a high school diploma, whereas that level was 8.2% in the U.S. and 5.4% in New England. Connecticut's labor force share with a high school diploma is 24.7%, which is higher than the US and New England, areas with respective rates of 23.8% and 23.3%. The labor force rate for Some College or Associate's Degree, a level of attainment often associated with middle-skill jobs was 24.9% in Connecticut, 29.6% in the US, and 24.6% in New England. The highest attainment level, Bachelor's Degree or Higher has 44.5% of Connecticut's labor force within that group. In the U.S. 38.4% of its labor force has that degree of attainment and New England has 46.7%.

This broad overview of the state in comparison to its New England region and the U.S. overall helps contextualize its labor market. Connecticut has comparatively more workers with a Bachelor's Degree or higher than the U.S., fewer workers with some college or an Associate's Degree, and at the lower end of the attainment scale, fewer workers without a high school diploma. These broad labor market trends impact specific industry and occupational labor markets, as employers seeking workers with a Bachelor's or more will have a larger share of the workforce to supply their needs, and correspondingly those seeking workers with less academic credentials will have more difficulty finding people to hire. Continued training for workers with less than a Bachelor's will help increase the supply of workers with the credentials necessary to elevate their employment to higher paying middle skilled jobs.

Within Connecticut, current occupational employment estimates are categorized by minimum educational, work experience, and on the job training requirements. Of the categorized occupations, in 2021, 22% of Connecticut employment worked in occupations whose minimum requirements didn't include a formal educational credential, 37% of employment worked in occupations that required a high school diploma, 7% worked in occupations requiring more than a diploma but less than an Associate's degree, 2% of employment required an Associate's Degree, 27% required a Bachelor's, and 5% required a Master's or more.

The most common occupations among major educational thresholds are as follows:

- No Educational Credential: Cashiers: Employment 39,580, Annual Median Wage: \$26,840
- High School Diploma: Customer Service Representative: Employment 29,020, Annual Median Wage: \$40,145
- Associate's: Preschool Teachers: Employment 5,220, Annual Median Wage: \$35,793
- Bachelor's: Registered Nurses: Employment 33,400, Annual Median Wage: \$84,449
- Masters or Professional Degree: Lawyers: Employment 7,710, Annual Median Wage: \$135,841

The above most common occupations by educational attainment illustrates the advantages and importance of getting more of Connecticut's lower-credentialed workforce additional training to improve their employment outcomes over the long term.

The impact of the recent pandemic is illustrated when examining educational attainment breakouts of projected employment in the short term. During the projections period, 23% of job growth will be in occupations that require a credential or degree beyond high school. This share of occupational growth is half what it has been in recent years and reflects the impact of the pandemic on base-quarter employment and subsequent growth — industries and occupations that have lower levels of required educational attainment fell the most due to the pandemic and therefore have a stronger rebound. A shift of projected

employment growth to higher levels of educational attainment as was seen before the pandemic can be expected in coming years as the hardest-hit sectors of the economy recover to pre-pandemic levels.

#### **(iv) Skill Gaps**

The in the almost two years since the start of the pandemic, job openings as reported in the Bureau of Labor Statistics Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey (BLS JOLTS) and job postings as reported in The Conference Board's Help Wanted OnLine (HWOL) database have been at record highs. The recently-available JOLTS state-level data show that total openings in Connecticut grew from 104,000 in October 2021 to 112,000 in November 2021. Connecticut had the third highest percent increase (+0.5 points) in Openings over the month after nearby states of New Hampshire (+0.8 points) and New York (+0.7 points). Job openings in Connecticut are up from 65,000 in November 2020. This recent labor market swing differs greatly from the high unemployment that occurred in early 2020.

These record levels of openings indicate that employers have unmet demand in Connecticut and are looking to hire, which is echoed in job postings data available from HWOL. Though these tabulations of job postings don't necessarily equate to available openings, they are a real-time display of the types of skills and occupations employers are seeking. During the most recent full month of data, January 2022, there were 81,400 job postings, up 68% over January 2020 levels, two years ago and the month before the pandemic. Additionally, the most recent month of data is nearly double the level of 40,900 had in January 2018, two years before the pandemic. Comparing the skills found in postings before and after the pandemic-recession of early 2020 can help illustrate what skills are most-commonly looked for by employers in the state.

In January 2022, across all job postings, the most commonly cited skills include broadly applicable skills such as Scheduling, Customer Service, Sales, Patient Care, Budgeting, Customer Contact, Project Management, Teaching, Retail Industry Knowledge, and Vaccination. This top 10 skill list looks very similar to the top 10 for February 2018. When comparing the two years all but three 2022 skills were also in the top 10 four years ago. The three differing ones reflect post-recession labor market shifts and were Patient Care, Vaccination, and Teaching. These skills were particularly impacted by the pandemic and were not as sought out by employers in the years before COVID-19.

Among the top 500 skills across all job ads in January 2022, almost all had total count levels above corresponding 2020 or 2018 levels. Scheduling, Customer Service, and Vaccinations, Patient Care and Forklift Operation all had the largest skill increases, up 3,700 job ads or more. The skills of Vaccination and Forklift Operation were respectively the 10<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> most commonly posted skill in January 2022. In January 2018, Vaccination wasn't a found skill in January 2018 job ads, and Forklift Operation was ranked 130<sup>th</sup>, this helps illustrate some of the labor market demand shifts that have occurred during the post-recession period. Additional skills that had large posting increases from 2022 and 2018 were Hand Trucks and Dollies, which respectively was ranked 396<sup>th</sup> and unlisted in 2018. These skill shifts echo some of the shifts in job ad trends by occupation seen in recent years.

When examining skills by occupation during the present and pre-COVID period, the occupational lists are similar, occupations such as Truck Drivers, Nurses, and Retail Salespersons are typically among the most commonly posted in HWOL. The top occupations in January 2022 that differ from four years prior are mostly those that relate to Transportation and Warehousing, which has seen large expansion in recent years, only to be amplified further by COVID-related shifts in consumer behavior. In January 2022, Laborers & Freight Material Movers (SOC 53-7062) had the second largest number of postings behind Registered Nurses and have top specific skills that are mentioned among the largest increases from 2018-2022. These include Forklift Operation, Hand Trucks, and Dollies. Among other occupations with the most job postings, the skills are relatively consistent with pre-recession job ads.

Beyond shifts in specific skills as found in job ads, comparing the minimum-advertised educational requirements across years helps give an indicator of what skills employers are looking for during the

current period of record job openings. In January 2018, 38 percent of job ads included a minimum educational requirement. By January 2022 this increased to 42%. Among job postings that have educational requirements, in January 2018, 49.5% required a Bachelor's degree and 9.7% required a Master's or Doctorate. By January 2022, Bachelor's was 43% while Master's or Doctorate fell to 8.2%. These shifts in educational skill requirements were met by gains in High School or Vocational Training, which increased from 30.8% of education-specified job ads to 38.4% from January 2018 to January 2022.

Comparing specific occupational education requirements for common positions such as Registered Nurses and Software Developer Applications didn't show much shift in ed. Requirement within common occupations, suggesting that the minimum educational attainment shifts across all job ads reflects the changing employer demand in recent years. In January 2018, Finance and Insurance industry job ads, an industry that commonly requires higher educational skills, was 13% of total job ads, by January 2022 it was 8%. Professional, Scientific and Technical Services is another sector that saw a four-year share drop, falling from 9.3% of job ads to 6% by January 2022. Retail Trade had corresponding increases over that four-year period, increasing from 11.6% to 13% of total job ads.

The assortment of skill and educational requirements found in current job ads help suggest that employers have skills gap in certain industries for workers with lower educational attainment. This echoes other measures of the labor market that show strong wage percent increases for lower paying jobs over the pandemic than higher paying ones that are more likely to adapt to remote work and experience fewer COVID-restrictions. At present, the industries with the most ads are Health Care & Social Assistance, Retail Trade, and Finance & Insurance. The current array of skills demanded by employers will likely shift as the pandemic becomes endemic and mitigation strategy adapts.

#### **(D) The State's Workforce Development Activities**

This section outlines strategies and activities that the GWC is seeking to align, connect, and improve to meet its goal of an aligned high-quality, and equitable workforce development system

##### ***Responding to COVID***

With the onset of COVID, GWC pivoted with the rest of the state to put in place a number of emergency efforts to address the immediate workforce needs brought on by the pandemic. These included:

- **SkillUp CT:** Connecticut's unemployed residents were provided free access to more than 5,000 online courses offered by Metrix, primarily in information technology, and to 180 Skills, an online learning platform offering over 700 courses focused on manufacturing and professional skills. To date, more than 20,000 people in the state have signed up for SkillUp CT services.
- **Customized Indeed Job Portal and Job Fairs:** Connecticut was the first to partner with Indeed to create a custom jobs portal for Connecticut jobseekers and employers. This new portal complements the existing CTHires jobs portal by providing additional resources and opportunities to businesses and job seekers. Connecticut partnered with Indeed to hold virtual hiring events with over 40 employers. Indeed also provided a free webinar to help prepare jobseekers for virtual interviews. Employers hired approximately 300 jobseekers.
- **Job Training for Displaced Workers:** With \$20 million in funding made available through the CARES Act, the GWC partnered with our five regional workforce boards, employers, nonprofits, and the community college system to fund 19 workforce programs for displaced workers. We prioritized jobs with family supporting wages and strong career pathways, primarily in Healthcare, IT, and Manufacturing. Overall 1,300 participants will have received training and employment opportunities. These programs all provide access to childcare and transportation as well as a training stipend.
- **CT CARES Child Care Programs:** The Office of Early Childhood (OEC) created a series of new, short-term childcare programs to help families and childcare providers. They offer access to

childcare, financial help, and assistance for childcare providers. These programs will reach approximately 2,500 individuals.

### ***Implementing the GWC Strategic Plan***

Even as it was addressing the impact of the pandemic, the Office of Workforce Strategy proceeded to implement components of its Vision and Goals detailed in Section (2) (b) below. These include:

- Launched seven Regional Sector Partnerships (RSPs) (4 Manufacturing, 2 IT / Tech Enabled, 1 Bioscience) with 3 Healthcare RSPs in development. Continued employer recruitment efforts, with the support of AdvanceCT, to expand the partnerships
- Built a working group of over 10 IT employers to adopt more inclusive and skills-focused hiring practices
- AdvanceCT recruited over 27 employers and universities to join CampusCT, a website and mobile app students can use to explore living and working in CT, designed with the goal of keeping them in state after graduation
- Passed enabling legislation establishing the CTPass program to provide free transportation for students across all levels
- Completed a study to test the effectiveness of the Atlanta Fed CLIFFS tool in personalized financial and career counseling
- Launched Early Childhood Business Coalition

Work in progress includes:

- Conducting a cost of care study and developing a recommended early care and education provider compensation schedule with the Office of Early Childhood
- Developing a plan for expanded Supportive Employment Services through the Ticket to Work program
- Developing a series of initiatives using State Bonding dollars to pilot innovative approaches to improve participation and performance of our workforce system

### ***Key Workforce Legislation***

Several key pieces of legislation related to workforce development were passed in 2021:

- S.B. 1032 promotes postsecondary enrollment through such mechanisms as:
  - The development of an automatic CSCU admissions program for high school students who obtain a certain class rank or GPA
  - Local and regional boards of education adoption of policies to improve Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) completion rates
  - Raising the eligible high school drop out age from 17 to 18
- S.B.3 Vocational Villages enables The Department of Correction to develop programs to provide workforce training and industry-recognized credentials to currently incarcerated individuals
- H.B. 6121 will expand employment opportunities for persons with disabilities
- Public Act 21-1 will improve workforce data and accountability through:
  - The development of a credential registry system to house information on all secondary and postsecondary credential programs in the state
  - The collection of additional data from Unemployment Insurance wage records to track effectiveness of workforce training programs
  - The collection of participant-level information for individuals who complete workforce training programs at private occupational schools

## ***Launching CareerConneCT***

In 2022, OWS is launching its flagship initiative called CareerConneCT through which the OWS will make available a variety of funds to advance workforce training or systems improvements.

Phase I of the CareerConneCT initiative includes an \$70M dollar investment, through the Federal American Rescue Plan, to launch short-term training opportunities to make an immediate impact on those most impacted by the pandemic and offer an opportunity to reskill and enter demand driven fields. This competitive, grant-based, application aims to support the training of approximately 8,500 residents. The OWS plans to braid additional funds, for example CT Bond dollars, to continue to augment and provide complimentary funding opportunities to CT.

At its February 10, 2022 quarterly Governor's Workforce Council meeting, company leaders on four sector-based employer panels committed to hiring over 5,000 workers through CareerConneCT in the short-term as a start and indicated a need for many more.

CareerConneCT features include:

- Participant will apply through a newly built statewide recruitment portal.
- Extensive marketing to underserved and marginalized communities
- Participant pre-assessment in skills, abilities, & interests
- Short-term certificate programs across five market sectors developed to prepare participants for in-demand occupations
- Providers will offer full supportive services to remove documented barriers to success – transportation, childcare, housing, etc.

Qualifying residents can complete training, earn an industry recognized certificate, and be placed in high-wage (\$50K+) jobs. Participant outcomes will be tracked up to 12 quarters post-completion

The goal is to allocate as much funding as possible to the 5 DEI populations: BIPOC, People with Disabilities, Re-Entry, Youth, and Veterans. This equity lens undergirds the entire program philosophy of CareerConneCT.

## **Connecticut Department of Labor Activities**

CTDOL is responsible for a number of workforce development activities which are detailed here.

### ***Apprenticeship CT Initiative***

With the support of the General Assembly and the Bond Commission, to date, \$15 million dollars have been allocated for ACI to CT-DOL. The initial \$5million were allocated in December 2018 with awards to two regional partnerships (Northwest WIB Partnership \$1.25M and South Central Workforce Alliance \$3.45M) in April 2019. Both regions implemented manufacturing programs administered by CTDOL under the Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative. In September 2019, an additional \$10M award was approved by the Bond Commission with awards in March 2020 to each of the five regional partnerships to meet their respective needs in manufacturing, and other industry training. Awards were made as follows: Capital Workforce Partnership (CWP), \$2.2M; Eastern Workforce Investment Board Partnership, (EWIB)\$3M; Workplace Inc. Partnership, (Workplace)\$2.2M; Northwest WIB Partnership (NRWIB)\$1.5M; and Workforce Alliance Partnership,(WA) \$500K). Administered by the Office of Apprenticeship Training, the four-year initiative implements sustainable workforce pipeline training programs to train qualified entry-level workers for job placement with manufacturers and employers in industries experiencing work force shortages. While the Covid-19 pandemic impacted and challenged the start of the regional programs, currently all regions are steadily progressing in various stages of executing and meeting program deliverables.

### ***Registered Apprenticeship and Pre- Apprenticeship***

The Office of Apprenticeship Training (OAT) administers Connecticut's Registered Apprenticeship (RA) system, which is supported by the state's general fund, federal funding, and industry support from registration fees. Registered Apprenticeship is a proven solution for training and retaining talent and offers individuals the opportunity of "learning while earning."

OAT provides registration, monitoring, technical assistance, and consulting services for the administration of apprenticeship agreements per state and federal regulations and standards. Registered Apprenticeship provides a structured training strategy that combines on-the-job training with related technical instruction. The office also qualifies employers for tax credits, works with the Department of Education, Department of Consumer Protection and other state agencies, and performs outreach to veterans, employer groups, unions and many community-based organizations to promote Registered Apprenticeship and Registered Pre-Apprenticeship throughout Connecticut.

Aggressive outreach by CTDOL/OAT has increased apprenticeship in all areas. GWC, with its significant business stakeholder list, also supports the Registered Apprenticeship model. Currently, over 1,710 active employer-sponsors and over 6,100 registered apprentices are enrolled in the program. In addition, over 1400 apprentices completed their apprenticeship training while over 2900 new apprentices were registered in the program last year – a significant increase over previous year's total. CTDOL/OAT intends to add an additional 1250 apprentices in the healthcare sector over the next three years due to being awarded a competitive federal grant. As CTDOL/OAT focuses on new industry sectors, through industry partnerships, the goal will be to augment Registered Apprenticeships such as has been successful in the manufacturing and construction sectors.

Systemic modifications, such as streamlining the Apprentice Sponsorship registration and compliance paperwork, assisting in creating a more user friendly, self-service system, have been instituted. For example, Registered Apprenticeship (RA) sponsors and Related Technical Instructors (RTI) may request to have their programs listed on the state's Eligible Training and Providers List available on the CTDOL website. Annually, employers are sent a letter informing how they may utilize WIOA funding opportunities to support related instruction, OJT and supportive services.

### **Registered Apprenticeship and Non-Traditional Industries –**

Various Registered Apprenticeship programs have grown outside of the traditional industries as more industries require skilled workers and trainings tailored to specific occupations.

As healthcare represents the largest employment segment in Connecticut, the CTDOL OAT has identified healthcare as a high demand industry in need of a qualified, diverse workforce and the focus of many initiatives.

The first cohort of Certified Nursing Aide apprenticeships with SEIU District 1199NE, Genesis HealthCare, and the Connecticut Department of Labor has been established. These Certified Nursing Assistants (also called Certified Nursing Aides) work under the mentorship of a union Certified Nursing Assistant. They will complete 147 hours of classwork and have the opportunity to take CT's CNA licensure exam. CT's CNA apprenticeship program was created in partnership with Genesis Healthcare and SEIU 1199, the first of its kind in Connecticut and among the first nationally that provides a career pathway for the industry as nursing aide jobs will open at a rate of more than 2,000 per year for the next 10 years. Additionally, another 1,000 home health aide and 5,500 personal care attendant positions are expected to open up as well. Certified nursing assistants (CNA) help care for ill, injured, disabled and/or infirm individuals in nursing homes. they answer patients' calls, serve meals, help patients perform daily tasks, monitor physical and mental health, and take vitals. This newly established program has met industry standards; it covers occupational pathways, related functions and performance criteria, as well as academic, workplace and personal competencies for job success. The apprentices finish their clinicals and

educational training portion of their apprenticeship and the apprentices will be onto their mentored on the job apprentice proficiency portion for the next year.

Built upon the success of the Yale Healthcare networks nurse residency apprenticeship program, the CTDOL OAT developed and is implementing a new Registered Apprentice Program (RAP) for Unlicensed Assistive Personnel (UAP). UAP refers to individuals who perform various clinical and nonclinical jobs that augment nursing care. This includes Patient Care Associates, Clinical Technicians, Emergency Department Technicians, Ambulatory Care Associates and Patient Care Technicians who provide direct and indirect patient care activities under the supervision of a Registered Nurse. For this initiative, we use the Patient Care Associate's and Patient Care Technicians (PCA's/PCT's) as an analogous term. This initiative will be more than a program; it will be a statewide strategy with regional impact. Federal funding will support a high growth, employer driven, healthcare workforce development program utilizing Registered Apprenticeship (RA) increasing apprenticeship opportunities to women, veterans, underserved and underrepresented populations for Patient Care Associates / Patient Care Technician careers. The grant provides the funding necessary for CTDOL OAT's comprehensive partnership with Yale New Haven Health Systems 5 system hospitals and 119 Medical Centers around the state to design, build, and implement a new Registered Apprenticeship program for PCA's/PCT's and will serve a minimum of 1,250 individuals over the 4-year life of the SAEEI grant . The increased demand for PCA's/PCT's has become immensely evident due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Developing a formalized Registered Apprenticeship program is the solution to overcoming this occupations worker shortage. This funding will allow for the YNHH System to build the RAP occupation focused technical education and skill sets, instill more confidence as the skill sets are developed, ensure better team communication, and provide support to the new Registered Apprentice PCA's/PCT's. This results in more efficient patient care models that will alleviate the growing nursing care demands. The results of the new Registered Apprenticeship program will produce proficient, efficient, high quality, highly skilled, confident, PCA/PCT while reducing turnover rates throughout the system hospitals. When an employee, invested in through mentored On the Job Training and Related Technical Instruction availed by an apprenticeship, return on investment is not only a financial gain but also increase employee retention and dedication to an organization is a result. This will be a model program potentially demonstrating to other healthcare providers/hospital systems the value of creating/upskilling workers that provide direct patient support as an integral part of the healthcare team utilizing Registered Apprenticeship for workforce development. This new RAP will require a High School Diploma or the equivalent GED and a CNA Certification. As a result, these minimum requirements will present opportunities for many marginalized individuals that are typically unemployed, underserved and under-represented to apply for this new RAP and a viable career. Additionally, issued upon completion, apprentices are issued a nationally recognized, Registered Apprenticeship Program Completion Credential. The YNHH System Hospitals hire over 400 PCA's/PCT's annually. This annual average openings for these positions are expected to remain steady and even increase. As the annual job postings for these positions has been 400 annually, the CTDOL OAT SAEEI will likely exceed the proposed 1,250 number under this grant.

The Nurse Residency apprenticeship program at Yale New Haven Hospital and throughout Yale Healthcare Network hospitals continues and includes extensive mentoring by individually assigned experienced nurse practitioners/preceptors. Upon successful completion of the program, participants that are systemically trained for the specific nursing occupation receive a nationally recognized certificate of apprenticeship completion of the Nurse Residency Apprentice Program issued by the CT DOL/OAT.

The skills gap has been proven to be nothing more than a training gap. Providing employer designed training for careers in healthcare to the unemployed, underserved, under-represented citizens will improve not only the economy but increase diversity, equity and inclusion opportunities. As more individuals are hired and enrolled into the new Registered Apprenticeship program, they move off Unemployment Insurance benefits or from a low wage job into a promising career path. Our workforce partners will collaborate with us and serve as a catalyst to enroll youth, women, people of color, veterans, formerly

incarcerated individuals, individuals with disabilities and underrepresented populations into the various Registered Apprenticeship program. The American Job Centers staff will also be able to refer job seekers to the YNHH healthcare training opportunities and the new PCA/PCT RAP. We have commitments in place for aligning the Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and Community Based Organizations (CBO's) healthcare training programs to provide referrals of their successful training program participants to the new RAP at the YNHH (5) System Hospitals. The CTDOL also partners with the Opportunities Industrialization Center's (OIC's), a Non-Profit organization. The OIC's Mission is: "To provide quality education and training services that will enable economically disadvantaged and unemployed people of all races and backgrounds become productive, more fulfilled members of society." The OIC's also provide skills training in healthcare including PCA/PCT training. The CTDOL has an established relationship with the OIC's as they have been providing services to our communities and partnering with the CTDOL under state funded support of their programs. This will be leveraged and aligned with our workforce partners and the YNHH System under the SAEI federal grant. As the CTDOL OAT has partnered with the state WDBs, the OIC's, AJC's, the CT NAACP and our educational partners for the CT SAEI grant application, these organizations have a broad base of knowledge and experience in providing training programs and supportive services to our most vulnerable citizens. They will provide referrals or candidates from their healthcare training programs for the new SAEI Registered Apprentice Program job openings to the (5) YNHH System Hospitals. They will also provide supportive services, where needed, that are available under their WIOA, JFES, ACI, state and federal funding sources.

Registered Apprenticeships have been implemented and are also being considered for expansion throughout the corrections system for Service Guide Dog Training, Barbering and Hairdressing apprenticeships. The goal of apprenticeships within the correctional facilities is intended to offer an opportunity to build work skillsets, job experience, potential licensure and earn an industry recognized credential that may lead to an apprenticeship career or other career opportunity upon return to society.

Additional industry led considerations for Registered Apprenticeship include Peer Recovery Navigator and Certified Recovery Specialist training programs to combat the opioid crisis, Childcare development apprenticeships as well as Para-professional to educator pathways utilizing apprenticeships. Through these efforts, CT will be poised to enhance the state's economy and growth while expanding registered apprenticeships which will support middle to high skilled jobs.

#### Apprenticeship Education Pathway

CTDOL/OAT has formalized the Apprenticeship Education pathway to move individuals from multiple entry points through their educational and apprenticeships programs culminating in a credentialed career and a degree.

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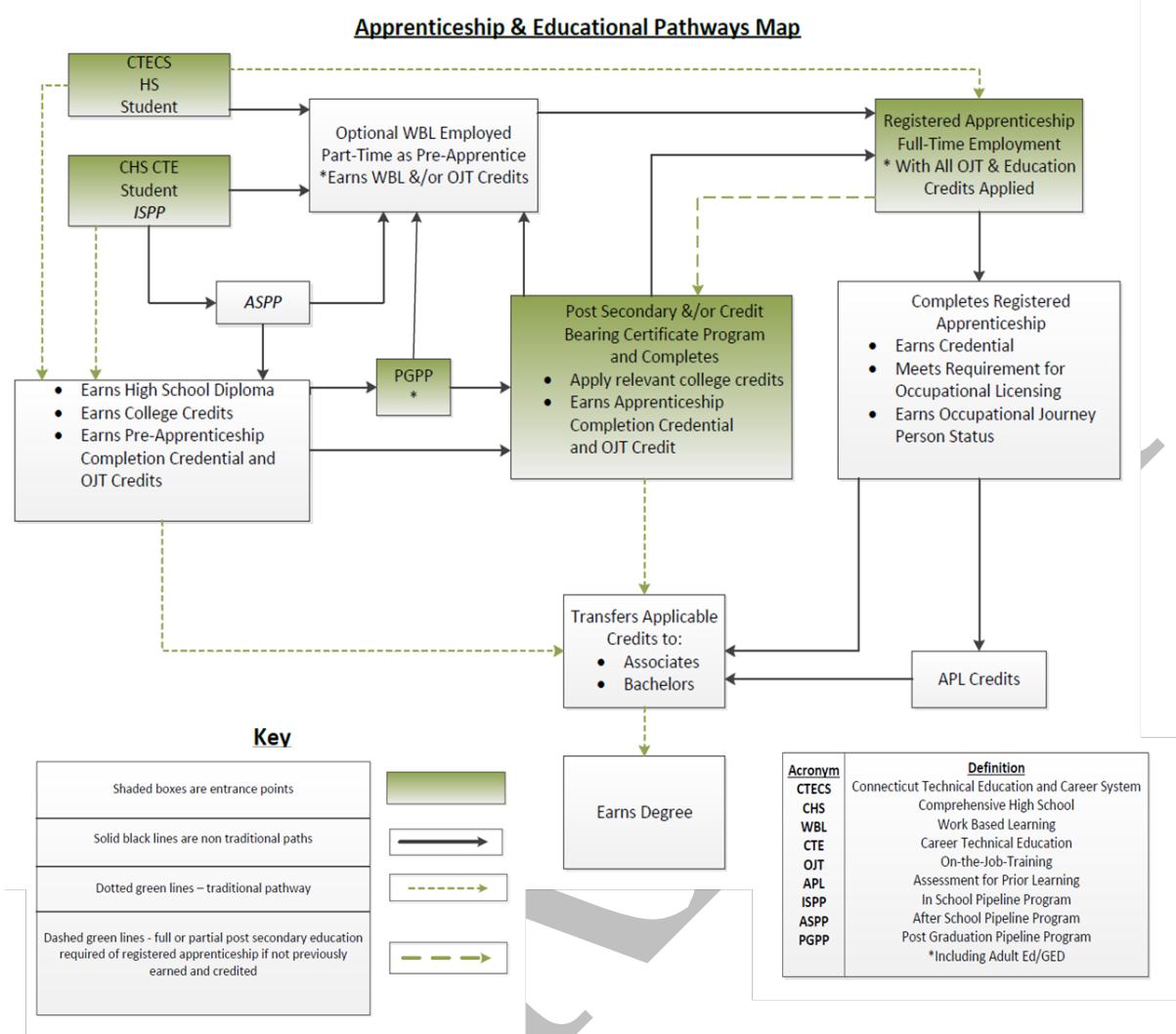
<https://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/progsupt/appren/Apprenticeship%20&%20Educational%20Pathways%20Map.pdf>

#### Pre-Apprenticeship

Quality pre-apprenticeship programs are an integral piece of a pathway for employers and students. A student may earn on-the-job credits toward a registered apprenticeship if employed, on a part time basis, after school, or as part of a Work Based Learning release program that may be established by the school and an apprenticeship employer sponsor. Pre-apprentices can carry up to 2,000 hours of on-the-job

experience upon graduation into their registered apprenticeship program similar to how an Advanced Placement (AP) program is designed and recognized.

There are increasing amounts of



careers that do not require a college degree yet require a certificate or credential inclusive or exclusive of post-secondary education. Career Technical Education (CTE), enhanced in high schools with industry recognized credentials, has recently been utilized as a workforce development pipeline.

### Apprenticeship Education Pathway

CTDOL/OAT has formalized the Apprenticeship Education pathway to move individuals from multiple entry points through their educational and apprenticeships programs culminating in a credentialed career and a degree.

[Apprenticeship & Educational Pathways Image accessible online via URL:

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CTDOL/OAT has partnered with the CT State Department of Education (SDE) to begin statewide strategic planning for CTE Perkins V programming implementation. Various plans will encompass policy considerations and the creation of Industry Councils at the local school district level for CTE credentialing, career exploration, career pathway development, business and industry led curricula alignment, Work Based Learning (WBL) partnerships and articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions for college credits.

CTDOL/OAT, in partnership with SDE, has expanded CTE under Perkins V, thus increasing Perkins V Pre-apprenticeship and Apprenticeship opportunities. These include work-based learning and the development of industry recognized credentials. CTDOL/OAT has partnered with nearly 30 high schools and community colleges to credential their CTE courses and link them to the pre-apprenticeship program. Students enrolled at those schools now have the ability to enhance their theoretical knowledge with hands-on skill development. Additionally, through relationships built at these schools, CTDOL/OAT has been able to present the benefit of these credentials to school boards and encourage stable funding for Career Technical Education moving forward. Some new, exciting pre-apprenticeships include:

**Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative** - focuses on high school students in addressing the hiring needs of Electric Boat, members of the East Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA), and other manufacturers.

**Adult Education programs** have been expanded in the Bristol and Vernon regional area as an elective to their course offerings in the traditional and also the plastics manufacturing sector.

## ***JFES 2Gen Approach***

The CTDOL JFES Unit Director has been very involved in the state's 2Gen Initiative providing representation on the state 2Gen Workforce committee, Benefit Cliffs committee and the Statewide 2Gen Steering committee. As a result, the CTDOL JFES unit continues to look at the entire JFES program through the 2Gen lens and has implemented a number of enhancements to the program that are in the spirit of 2Gen.

## **JFES Family Centered Coaching**

The JFES programs utilizes Family Centered Coaching, an approach puts the client in the driver's seat where the client identifies the goals and challenges for themselves and their families. It focuses on the whole family unit rather than just the individual themselves. It also takes into account that families need different things at different times to move forward.

In January 2020, CTDOL formed a workgroup consisting of representatives of all 5 WDBs as well as some front line JFES case managers and supervisors, and the DOL JFES team. The goal was to move from a group JFES Orientation to a one-on-one orientation that would assimilate a variety of different Family Centered Coaching strategies and tools into this new type of orientation session. Before this one-

on-one orientation could be finalized, COVID struck in March 2020, forcing CTDOL to temporarily abandon the planning for this transition to an in person, one-on-one orientation.

### **JFES Response to COVID**

In response to the new COVID environment, in August 2020, CTDOL JFES administrative staff convened a “Virtual Services” workgroup consisting of representatives from each of the five WDBs, JFES case managers, JFES case manager supervisors and CTDSS administrators. The goal of the workgroup was to share best practices and develop a plan to continue serving JFES participants virtually throughout the duration of the pandemic.

The workgroup also began to develop a plan to serve participants in anticipation of the day when the JFES program would begin accepting new referrals from CTDSS. This included the development of a new virtual JFES Orientation session that would be delivered via Zoom, alleviating the usual child care and transportation barriers that a participant would have to address in order to attend an in-person session held at the AJC.

New procedures for serving those JFES participants, who chose to voluntarily participate, were developed in partnership with CTDSS and the Connecticut Council of Family Service Agencies (CCFSA) to provide more in-depth assistance with barrier resolution and COVID related resources.

In addition, CTDOL worked closely with CTDSS and (CCFSA) to coordinate efforts for CCFSA case managers to attempt to contact those individuals who were granted cash assistance, but chose not to participate in the JFES program, to determine if they had any barriers or family issues that needed to be addressed during the pandemic.

### **JFES Innovations and Partnerships**

In October 2018, CTDOL partnered with DSS, Integrated Refugee and Immigrant Services (IRIS) and Workforce Alliance to implement a pilot in New Haven which involved embedding a JFES case manager at IRIS in order to allow a more seamless transition for refugees into the JFES program. This pilot was designed to remove some of the historical barriers that refugees have faced in transitioning into the JFES program, including confusion around who was supposed to serve them and to what extent, language barriers, transportation barriers and other bureaucratic obstacles. This Pilot has been referred to as a national model by representatives in the federal government—which oversees services to refugees. In February 2022, CTDOL convened a series of meetings with representatives from CTDSS, Workforce Alliance and IRIS to update the referral process of refugees who are referred to the JFES program. This new process was designed to meet the needs of the 400 plus Afghan refugees who have arrived in Connecticut in the past 6 months.

In June 2021, CTDOL launched a pilot program in Hartford with CTDSS Child Support Services, the Connecticut Judicial Department, and Capital Workforce Partners that targets non-custodial parents, primarily fathers, who are involved with the judicial system regarding child support matters. The goal of the program is to provide case management services and other supports to the non-custodial parent in order to help them become employed and able to pay down their child support obligation. This program was funded with Social Service Block Grant funding from the CTDSS.

The Certified Employment Interview Professional (CEIP) credential is offered through the Professional Association of Resume Writers and Career Coaches (PARW/CC). In early 2020, all 70 JFES case managers from across the state of Connecticut were certified as Certified Employment Interview Professionals (CEIP), enabling them to now coach all of their JFES participants on the finer points in the Art of Job Interviewing.

The DOL JFES Unit is required to produce an annual report on the details of the program. For the SFY 18,19 and 20, the DOL JFES unit produced their Annual Report in the form of a customized video rather than a printed document. The 8 minute video was produced in partnership with the Corporate Media

Production unit at Middlesex Community College and the 5 WDBs in Connecticut. The video featured both program data as well as several success stories of JFES clients and their employers telling their stories in their own voices on camera, which resulted in a very powerful video.

In the Fall of 2020, CTDOL and CTDSS began meeting with their counterparts from the states of Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine on a bi-monthly basis. The purpose of these multi-state conversations was to share ideas and strategies to better serve clients during the pandemic and share any best practices that each state felt was noteworthy. These meetings have continued on a regular basis right through the present.

### **JFES Looking ahead**

Looking ahead to SFY 23 and SFY 24, the JFES program intends to take advantage of some of the lessons learned from COVID and incorporated these lessons into our program operation. For instance, now that we have established that we are capable of offering virtual JFES orientation sessions to clients, we expect that this option will continue to be available to JFES clients on some level. During COVID, we have also mastered the art of conducting periodic check in appointments with our JFES clients in a virtual manner and expect that to be part of our normal operating procedures going forward. We now have extensive experience providing professional development opportunities and trainings to our JFES staff in a virtual format which eliminates staff having to travel across the state to attend in person training, so we expect virtual professional development to be a big part of our training plans in the future.

We will continue to emphasize the incorporation of Family Centered Coaching principles into every aspect of our program whether we are serving participants in person or virtually. The Financial Literacy classes we offer through our partners from CAHS will continue to be offered virtually to all of our JFES clients going forward as well.

In addition, the DOL JFES Unit Director has made a commitment to the 5 WDBs to continue to incorporate Racial Equity policies and strategies into the JFES program. Four half days of training and two full days of training on this subject have already been conducted with all JFES case managers and JFES WDB Administrators. The DOL JFES Director is also participating in a year long Racial Equity program that will focus on workforce development as a member of the East Hartford Working Cities task force. This program is one year in length and involves a commitment of about 5 hours per month. This program is being sponsored by the Federal Reserve Bank of Philadelphia.

### ***National Health Emergency- Dislocated Worker Opioid Emergency Grant***

In 2020 there were 1,359 accidental intoxication deaths in the state (Office of the Chief Medical Examiner, 2021) There was a 13.3% increase in drug overdose deaths by December 2020, compared to 2019. The average percentage of fentanyl -involved deaths was at 85% as of December 2020. In Connecticut, residents are more likely to die from unintentional drug overdose than a motor vehicle accident. The majority of these deaths are linked to overdose of prescription opioid painkillers and illicit opioids. According to the CDC, the 2016 Connecticut age-adjusted rate for drug-induced mortality is 25.1 per 100,000 population compared to the 2016 national rate of 17.1. The most recent data from the National Safety Council reveal that, while 70% of employers report being negatively impacted by prescription drug misuse, and just as many feel strongly about helping their employees return to work after substance abuse treatment, approximately 80% of employers lack a comprehensive workplace substance use policy, and a similar percentage lack training on identifying substance abuse in their workplaces.

In October 2019, the Connecticut Department of Labor was awarded \$1,585,948 with up to \$4,757,845.00 for the CT National Health Emergency (NHE) Dislocated Worker Grant (DWG). An additional \$1,585,948.00 was awarded for Program Year 2021-2022. The “Recovery Works” program provides workforce services to Connecticut’s diverse population by leveraging existing resources with new initiatives. To date the grant has served 211 participants providing workforce services including

training individuals to support those affected by substance use disorders and retraining individuals directly affected by the crises. Grant services extend to assist employers engaged in “Recovery Friendly Employment” implementation. Braiding existing resources with its partners the CT Department of Public Health and the CT Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services a toolkit was developed to assist employers with the process.

### ***National Health Emergency- Dislocated Worker Covid-19 Emergency Grant***

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic CT was awarded \$2,331,000.00 in April 2020 as part of a National Dislocated Worker Grant to provide disaster-relief employment, along with employment and training services, to eligible individuals significantly impacted by the spread of COVID-19 in the state of Connecticut. The grant provides disaster-relief cleanup and humanitarian assistance activities including cleaning/sanitizing public facilities; delivering food, medicine, and other supplies to the quarantined; and healthcare support positions caring for vulnerable populations. In addition, employment and training activities include online learning platforms such as Metrix Learning, Work-Keys, and Year Up Career Readiness online suites. Short-term, demand-driven, customized training programs are available that target occupations with immediate job openings. Eligible participants include workers laid off due to quarantine orders or business closures related to disruptions caused by the outbreak are eligible participants. Also eligible are workers unable to go to their regular workplace due to social distancing requirements, as well as those missing work to care for a family member. The grant has served a total of 64 participants and is scheduled to conclude on 3/31/2022.

### ***State-Wide Initiatives***

Each comprehensive American Job Center will employ at least one Peer Recovery Navigator, supported by the WIOA NHE/DWG Disaster Employment Grant. Trained at the minimum level of Certified Counselors in Training or Peer Recovery Coaches, navigators will work to identify individuals in the occupations most associated with abuse and provide them with referrals to remove barriers, provide supportive services, obtain counseling and treatment and return participants to their former employment or employment which is more suited to their recovery efforts. These navigators will work at the American Job Centers and their hubs and in the communities they serve to provide the support services needed to obtain and continue in occupations that provide a living wage. In addition, Peer Navigators will work on the Employer Recovery Friendly Initiative. All Peer Recovery Navigators will be enrolled in CT’s Certified Alcohol and Drug Counseling Apprenticeship Program.

CT will join the growing number of states committed to providing employers with training on “Recovery Friendly Workplaces”. Recovery Friendly Workplaces (RFW’s) support their communities by recognizing recovery from substance use disorder as strength and by being willing to work intentionally with people in recovery. RFW’s encourage a healthy and safe environment where employers, employees, and communities can collaborate to create positive change and eliminate barriers for those impacted by addiction. Through its Business Service Unit and with the assistance of Peer Navigators, American Job Center will reach out to employers in the state of CT who wish to be designated by the Governor as “Recovery Friendly”. Employers wishing to be designated as Recovery Friendly must attend an orientation, complete a short training program, commit to a recovery friendly work environment and be subject to an annual review. Employers designated as Recovery Friendly will receive recognition by the Governor, a distinctive sign to display regarding their designation, be advertised as a Recovery Friendly Workplace and receive valuable referral options for those affected by substance abuse and mental health issues.

### **Connecticut Workforce Development Council**

The Connecticut Workforce Development Council coordinates activities and advocacy across the five Workforce Development Boards and facilitates joint projects across the boards like their 2019 grant from

CHEFA for \$500,000 to supplement supportive services funding across the regions. Initiatives of each board are detailed in this section.

## **Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board (EWIB)**

### ***Virtual Services***

To accommodate customers who could not visit the American Job Centers during the pandemic, EWIB put together a few Virtual Services. Specifically, the need for technology workshops has increased significantly as a result of the pandemic. To meet this need, EWIB and its partners offer Technology workshops virtually utilizing the Zoom platform to reach customers at home. Workshops include: CTHires Resume Builder, How to Apply Online, Email for Job Seekers, Preparing for a Virtual Interview/Job Fair, Skill up CT Metrix Learning and Networking with LinkedIn. Our Job Development team also coordinates a monthly Virtual Hiring Event where employers are invited to conduct interviews over Zoom with AJC customers. In addition, we are conducting our WIOA Orientation workshop via a pre-recorded video or a live zoom workshop. We are also offering 2 virtual workshops for those impacted by the Pandemic called: Dealing with Pandemic Unemployment and Rebounding & Recovering from Covid 19 Job Loss. These virtual services continue through today to support our clientele.

### ***Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative***

The Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI), an award-winning workforce program managed by the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) and other partners, continues to flourish in the Eastern region. The program is designed to raise the baseline of our labor force's competencies to align with skills that are in-demand by manufacturers. The core element of the MPI is high-rigor, skills training classes with curriculum designed by the employers in concert with academia across eleven trades (welding, machining, electrical, pipe fitting, sheet metal, design & drafting, planning, plastics, and others). Since its inception in 2016, the MPI has placed over 2,000 individuals in jobs. The MPI's success is largely attributable to its strong sector partnership of ~30 stakeholders, including the Eastern Advanced Manufacturing Alliance which designed and implemented the program. During the pandemic, the MPI was able to continue with a hybrid in-person and online model, as well as offering the assessment virtually. The classes have since begun to meet in-person once again. During this fiscal year (FY22), EWIB expects the MPI to conduct more than 40 classes, a record pace since the program was launched. Because of this success, the MPI has been recognized nationally as a program that fosters sector partnerships in the community and creates a "win-win" for both jobseekers and employers.

## **Youth**

### ***Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative***

The Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) is an extension of the Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) described above. The YMPI offers the potential for a career pathway for high school graduates who have chosen to enter the job market instead of college. EWIB has partnered with 17 regional high schools, that have begun to embed the YMPI curriculum into their schools. In its first three years of existence, the YMPI has placed 130 graduates into jobs. The program has received strong support from the participating schools' administrators and youth participants. EWIB partnered with the Three Rivers and Quinebaug Valley Community Colleges to offer the high schools a virtual model to accommodate students during the pandemic. Students were provided with online material and a shortened hands-on summer course to learn the manufacturing skills needed for a career. For this school year, the high schools have returned to their in-class model, with more than 100 students registered in the program. Job fairs are being organized for the YMPI students to meet the employers to support their potential transition into a career upon graduation.

### ***Summer Youth Employment Program***

EWIB's Summer Youth Employment Program (SYEP) is delivered by EASTCONN, in partnership with New London Youth Affairs and Norwich Human Services, across the 41 towns in the region. The program provides valuable job experience and skills to youth while paying their wages. In the past program year, the SYEP served 383 income-eligible youth. The Summer Youth program was done primarily in a virtual format due to the pandemic. Summer experience consisted of an 80-hour internship via Google Classroom that covers resume, career decision making, labor market information, communication, interviewing, and youth worker safety. The program also used Metrix on-line Learning Platform and Virtual Job Shadow to round out the youth's summer experience. The program was financially supported by the Connecticut Department of Labor, Department of Children & Family, CARES Act and philanthropic donations from local foundations. Our plan for this coming summer is to return to in-person work experiences at various job sites, but that depends upon the state of the pandemic.

### **The WorkPlace- Southwestern Connecticut's Workforce Development Board**

#### ***Southwestern Connecticut Health CareeRx Academy (HCA)***

The Southwestern Connecticut Health CareeRx Academy (HCA) provides healthcare employers with qualified candidates in medical support occupations. The Academy helps save the cost of finding qualified workers with proper occupational and work-readiness training.

The HCA provides tuition assistance and support to help participants obtain a career in the growing healthcare field. The WorkPlace's Health CareeRx Academy is a broad partnership of healthcare providers, educators, trainers, and community-based organizations in Southwestern Connecticut. Designed with input from employers, the HCA's mission is to meet the current and evolving workforce needs of healthcare employers. The HCA provides occupational training, work readiness, and other supports to individuals who desire to begin or advance a career in healthcare. All training by HCA leads to a certificate or degree and prepares individuals to pass a state or national licensing exam.

The HCA provides tuition assistance and other supports to help people build a career. Participants have access to career readiness and personal growth classes and seminars. Upon completion, participants can move into occupational skills training in a variety of healthcare related fields. Program participants residing in Southwestern Connecticut receiving TANF, meeting program requirements, impacted by a layoff or position elimination may also be eligible for comprehensive support services and access to internship opportunities and job placement assistance.

#### ***Apprenticeships***

ApprenticeshipWorks is creating a pipeline of skilled and qualified labor combining on-the-job training and related classroom instruction for high school students and adults. ApprenticeshipWorks provides training to address the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing and healthcare sectors and prepares workers to enter apprenticeships and employment. Apprenticeships combine a full-time job with training—and prepare workers to enter in-demand careers. Trainees receive access to career coaching and exploration, workforce readiness training, resume, interview, and job search assistance, occupational training, and certifications as well as supportive services at no-cost.

Components of a registered apprenticeship include:

- Work-based learning, structured on-the-job training from an experienced mentor for a minimum of 2,000 hours.
- Related instruction on technical and academic competencies that apply to the job.
- Paid employment with wage progression, apprentices receive a reduced wage during on-the-job training which increases as their skills advance.
- National occupational credential from the CT Office of Apprenticeship Training.

### ***Incumbent Worker Training***

The WorkPlace also offers the Connecticut Workforce and High-Tech Industry Skills Partnership (CT WHISP) Grant which provides funding and other resources to advanced manufacturers in Southwest Connecticut who provide Incumbent Worker Training (IWT). IWT supports current employees in obtaining industry-based skills or credentials that lead to career advancement and income mobility. Training must relate to the manufacturing sector.

#### **Benefits To Employers**

- Receive a reimbursement (up to \$2,000) for each eligible employee to offset skills-based training costs
- Increase competitive edge by upskilling your workforce from entry-level to mid- or high-level positions
- Process improvement that contributes to business productivity
- Build and maintain a quality workforce
- Employee retention and layoff aversion

### ***Platform to Employment***

The Platform to Employment (P2E) program was created by The WorkPlace to assist the long-term unemployed return to work while addressing employers' needs to recruit skilled workers. P2E provides businesses a risk-free opportunity to evaluate and consider hiring qualified participants in a work experience program. P2E supports individuals who have exhausted their unemployment benefits and remain unemployed.

Participants engage in a structured preparatory program including skills assessment, career readiness workshops, employee assistance services, coaching and other supports. Upon completion, participants are helped to find open positions at local companies. Placements occur on a trial basis and subsidized over an eight-week period. The expectation is that a company satisfied with a candidate's performance will offer a full-time job.

P2E acclimated very well to operating remoting due to COVID-19 and continued to meet the demand to support the state's long-term unemployed. They have found participants to be engaged and comfortable in this new learning environment and our success metrics continued to match results achieved before the pandemic.

They have a wide-ranging recruitment strategy, including social media, referrals of past participants, the AJC's, referrals from legislators, targeted messaging using Constant Contact, libraries, churches, outplacement agencies, partner agencies through other WorkPlace programs, non-profits, and Community Action Agencies. The P2E Team has been consistent and steadfast with building community-based relationships to grow the applicant pool.

The Connecticut General Assembly continues to fund P2E on a statewide basis with classes held virtually due to the pandemic. P2E's success is unparalleled. Nearly 80% of Connecticut participants who complete the preparatory program take the next step into a paid work experience with local companies. Of this population, nearly 90% have successfully moved to employer payrolls with average annual earning at placement more than \$50,000.

Platform to Employment Re-Entry, modeled after the success of P2E is also offered on a statewide basis. This program has demonstrated remarkable success reducing unemployment and recidivism rates among the re-entry population. Like P2E, Platform to Employment Re-Entry provides formerly incarcerated individuals with work readiness and career development training. The core of the training focuses on life skills and professional development training to enhance confidence and improve employment

opportunities. Other supports include resources to address barriers to employment such as transportation and childcare.

### ***Senior Community Service Employment Program***

A Senior Community Service Employment Program (SCSEP) funded by the U.S. Department of Labor under Title V of the Older Americans Act enables the provision of job skills training to low-income individuals, age 55 and older. SCSEP participants are placed in temporary training assignments where they receive valuable on-the-job work experience and training needed to gain meaningful employment. Participants work 20 hours a week at training sites and are paid minimum wage.

Program goals include:

- Assisting participants in acquiring marketable jobs skills.
- Participating in community service assignments to learn new skills in on-the-job training.
- Assisting in developing job search skills and tools including résumé development.
- Connecting participants to supportive services as needed.
- Helping participants secure meaningful unsubsidized employment.
- Changing stereotypes about older workers.

The WorkPlace branded the SCSEP program as *MaturityWorks* which provides services to over 800 Connecticut residents experiencing limited employment prospects and having on average nearly 3 significant barriers to employment. Barriers to employment include, lacking a substantial employment history, basic skills, and/or English-language proficiency, lacking a high school diploma or the equivalent or experiencing mental and physical impairments, homelessness, or persistent unemployment.

Through *MaturityWorks* job seekers can be placed in a wide variety of positions with local host agencies. A host agency is typically a non-profit, community-based organization, or municipal government agency. These positions are training assignments designed to offer skills and experience needed to obtain future employment, but at the same time provide no-cost support for the local organizations. Host agencies are instrumental to presenting a realistic work environment and the opportunity to gain knowledge and feedback that will help job seekers become successful.

### ***Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program***

The Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program helps homeowners who are two or more months behind in their mortgage gain the skills they need to be able to earn more money to become financially stable by providing employment assistance. Services include:

- Job Training Scholarships
- Financial Literacy
- Housing Counseling
- Referrals to other needed services

The Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program staff work in partnership with housing counselors and other support agencies to help improve a client's financial standing with lenders. The program has expanded outreach to include display advertising, PSAs, and digital media. Community partners such as food banks and chambers of commerce play a significant role in sharing program information. Partnerships with the American Job Centers across the state, Connecticut's Foreclosure Mediation Program and the Connecticut Housing Finance Authority.

## **Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB)**

### **Regional Sector Partnerships:**

- Northwest Manufacturing RSP (NM-RSP): Launched in February 2021, the NM-RSP business leadership team has outlined the following strategic priorities and anticipated projects: a) Host events to engage additional partners and to increase awareness of manufacturing education and career pathways among youth; b) Work with subject matter experts to enhance and/or develop curricula to better meet the in-demand skills identified by employers and adapt to the growing use of emerging technologies; and c) Expand training delivery for entry-level, in-demand roles (e.g., Machine Operators, Assemblers). Danbury Community Action Agency and the local sites of Cities Alliance will help recruit participants from historically marginalized populations.
- Northwest Healthcare RSP (NH-RSP): The NH-RSP initial launch meeting will occur in Q1 2022. NH-RSP conveners have worked with OWS, healthcare industry consultants, and Next Gen consultants to develop preliminary goals and SSPI projects to address those goals. The NH-RSP plans to: a) Engage new partners, particularly smaller workforce non-profits and CBOs, to support diversity and equity planning; b) Utilize subject matter experts and educators to enhance the existing training programs, with a focus on ensuring improved consistency and transferability among entry-level healthcare roles to address racial inequities in the healthcare workforce by promoting upward mobility for minority populations; and c) Support training for entry-level, in-demand roles to ease unprecedented healthcare staffing shortages.

### ***Northwest Construction Careers Initiative (NCCI)***

The Northwest Construction Careers Initiative (NCCI) continues to offer residents of the Northwest region a coordinated system of outreach, recruitment, assessment, case management, and placement for career opportunities in the construction building trades. NCCI, now in its 16th year, works in partnership with the local trade unions and private sector companies to encourage apprenticeship in the construction trades. The system brings together community-based organizations, direct-service providers such as the American Job Center in Waterbury, the local school system, the building trades and other community groups to achieve specific goals. The NCCI also coordinates Asbestos, Lead and HAZWOPER refresher classes for program participants. NCCI, which operates as a program within the NRWIB, also administers the City of Waterbury's Good Job Ordinance, a local hire ordinance that requires publicly funded construction contractors and construction-related projects to employ a certain percentage of Waterbury residents on project crews. The NRWIB provides a fee for service function to the City of Waterbury serving as the administrator for its Section 3 HUD programs. The development of an industry sector training program in the area of green jobs (Growing Renewable Energy Employment Network) is under development and will launch in the summer of 2022.

### ***Retail Training – Retail Industry***

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board assembled a partnership with the National Retail Federation Foundation, Connecticut Retail Merchants Association and area Adult Education providers to address the region's most pressing workforce needs in the retail industry. This regional collaboration strives to address the employment needs of each town in the Northwest CT region and focuses on those areas with the most concentrated employment needs. This program provides out-of-school youth ages 16-24, with a groundbreaking training and credentialing initiative, designed by the retail industry, to help youth acquire the skills they need to land jobs in the retail industry and advance into promising careers.

The following nationally recognized credentialing programs, stackable and transferable across the nation, are available to eligible participants:

- Customer Service and Sales: a classroom-based, instructor-led program that typically takes 40 hours to complete. The Customer Service and Sales curriculum is designed to help entry-level

sales and service associates learn skills related to frontline work in retail or any industry that values customer service and sales skills.

- Advanced Customer Service and Sales: designed for sales and service associates looking to expand their skills in retail and other sales and service-focused industries. This is a classroom-based, instructor-led program that typically takes 40 hours to complete. Candidates must earn the basic Customer Service and Sales credential to be eligible for this course.

### ***Business Services***

The NRWIB is an aggressive partner in the region's business services team (BST). The BST has relationships with area retailers including CVS and other locally owned retail entities. The Connecticut Retail Merchants Association (CRMA) currently has partnerships developed with several area retailers such as Macy's Department Store, Home Depot, BJ'S Wholesale Club, Target and AT&T Telecommunications Company. Representatives from partner companies have curriculum, ensuring the training would prepare graduates for a successful career in the retail industry. These partnerships are leveraged to secure internship slots for participants. Partner employers have committed to give special hiring consideration to those candidates who have achieved these credentials.

### ***WIOA Transitional Jobs***

In an effort to sustain the success of our Disability Employment Initiative Program, the NRWIB has earmarked WIOA Transitional Jobs funds to continue improving outcomes for in-school and out-of-school persons with disabilities. This program aims to serve those who are looking to transition into high-quality postsecondary education, career-pathway training programs, career exploration, and the workforce system. Built on the notion that youth with disabilities need added supports and opportunities to develop and learn an internship component is also incorporated. American Job Center (AJC) resources such as Résumé Writing, CTHires and various work-readiness workshops are also available for participants to access. Outreach efforts in the region have led to a significant increase in persons with disabilities using AJC career services, working to land an internship, seeking training, or entering employment. The partnership in this effort includes six local school districts: Waterbury, Watertown, Naugatuck, Torrington, Ridgefield and Region 6. The NRWIB provides funds for an internship program for persons with disabilities for which participants are paid \$14 per hour to participate.

### ***Ticket to Work***

The NRWIB is a Social Security-approved Ticket to Work "Employment Network". Ticket to Work is a free and voluntary program offered by Social Security that assists people age 18 through 64 who receive Social Security disability benefits and who are interested in returning to work or working for the first time. By participating, a person who is interested in working receives support throughout their journey to financial independence.

Ticket to Work helps persons who receive SSI or SSDI benefits to obtain vocational counseling, training, job readiness, job referrals and other employment support services, free of charge.

Services that NRWIB and the American Job Center can provide to Ticket holders include:

- career counseling
- résumé development and interview preparation
- a wide variety of employment workshops
- referrals to additional services and supports
- job matching and job development
- SSA disability benefits advisement referral
- job accommodations instruction and assistance

- possibility of training through WIOA funds, based on eligibility
- follow-up supports and retention services after employment

### ***Home Works***

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board (NRWIB) has developed a program, “Home Works” which helps to address the issue of economic insecurity, lack of employment opportunities, and homelessness in Waterbury. The program provides employment services that assist homeless individuals attain housing and economic self-sufficiency. This program employs an innovative approach that affords individuals and their families the platform they need to pursue economic independence. Funded by the United Way Collaborative, this program provides rent subsidies to get homeless families into housing, coupled with an aggressive employment and training component to keep them there.

As the NRWIB worked with the United Way, Waterbury’s Early Childhood Office, New Opportunities, St. Vincent de Paul Place, Salvation Army, the Center for Human Development and others it became clear that an Employment Focused Program with Housing, similar to Honolulu’s Rent to Work Program could be replicated here and have a profound impact on the homeless community. In an effort to expand and enhance the program, NRWIB will work closely with the City of Waterbury to establish further resources. Home Works is designed to address needs and mitigate the barriers to securing and maintaining housing. Our Tenant Based Rental Assistance program coordinates with homeless service providers, emergency/transitional shelters, churches and other community agencies through the media, email, phone, site visits, newsletters, brochures, fliers, etc. to continue to promote the program and inform potential participants. Participants are assigned a dedicated Career Navigator who helps them follow a Housing Employment and Learning Plan (HELP) geared toward gaining and maintaining employment; increasing savings; sustaining a fair market rental unit; and transitioning to affordable housing.

### ***Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative***

This program focuses on addressing the shortage of skilled workers in the manufacturing sector. A regional partnership comprises the following entities: Manufacturing Alliance Service Corporation, Northwestern CT Community College, Naugatuck Valley Community College, CT Technical High Schools, Torrington High School, Danbury High School, New Milford High School, and Waterbury high schools along with sixteen employers throughout the northwest workforce region and several business associations and Chambers of Commerce. The project provides separate training programs by creating pipelines for 11th or 12th grade students and individuals 18 years of age or older who are not currently enrolled in 11th or 12th grade.

Training programs available include (but are not limited to):

- Introduction to Manufacturing (7 weeks)
- Introduction to Machinist (30 weeks)
- Fundamentals of Manufacturing Technology
- Engineering Drawing Specifications (8 weeks)
- Manufacturing Process/Precision Machining (8 weeks)]
- Introduction to Plastics ( 8 weeks)
- Master Cam

### ***Digital Literacy***

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board utilizes Northstar digital literacy to assess and remediate basic digital literacy skills. additionally, one on one digital literacy tutoring is available to individuals struggling with the online component.: Digital Literacy Orientation, Windows (File) Explorer, Computer Basics, Internet Explorer, Word I, Word II, Word III, Excel I, Excel II, Excel III, PowerPoint I and PowerPoint II Are just a few of the offerings.

### ***Connecticut Works to Recover - Employer Friendly Workforce Initiative***

The Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board has created a multi-entry point career pathway designed to increase the number of credentialed counselors and address the needs of its member communities in addressing Connecticut's opioid crisis. Identification of eligible participants at each entry point is geared to address necessary prerequisites to move forward to the next level. This comprehensive training program contains three components: classroom training, clinical apprenticeship opportunities, and documentation of the required number of clinical supervision hours which varies in accordance with education attained by participant. Upon completion of the three components, the successful participant attains pre-requisites for credentials and, where applicable, is prepared for the certification or licensure exam. In harmony with the goals of this program, Connecticut has joined the Employer Friendly Workforce Initiative which aims to prevent substance misuse and recovery support. Recovery Friendly Workplace demonstrates a commitment to creating a Recovery-friendly environment promotes a culture that challenges the stereotypes associated with substance use disorders and, enhances workplace safety while improving productivity and profitability by addressing behavioral health issues "head-on". Connecticut engages its local and state partners including the State of Connecticut Department of Mental Health Services and Addiction Services, the CT Community for Addiction Recovery and the CT Counselor Certification Board, to deliver training and support to Connecticut's employers regarding substance use disorders.

### ***Work Readiness Boot Camp***

The NRWIB worked closely with the State of CT Bureau of Rehabilitation Services to develop a work readiness boot camp. This workshop is designed to enhance opportunities by providing participants with the proper skills needed to gain employment. This is a dynamic and interactive workshop which encourages the participant to break out of their shell and connect with their classmates and instructor. The topics discussed during training include: first impressions, work expectations and ethics, the value of prioritizing and managing time, appropriate attire, interpersonal skills and many more. This workshop is offered on a monthly basis and all participants must be referred by their career navigator and/or case manager.

### ***Future Bankers Program***

This program is designed to motivate and tap into the talent of high-achieving students, providing them a clear and promising career path in the financial services industry. It is a collaborative effort of the Center for Financial Training, area public schools, and local financial services institutions. NRWIB's Future Bankers has also been recognized by the CT State Office of Apprenticeship as a registered pre-apprenticeship program. The Future Bankers Program consists of three online courses designed and offered by the Center for Financial Training. Program curriculum consists of the following: Principles of Banking and Practell: Online Teller Training and Center for Financial Training On-Course Learning Banking Catalog.

**Principles of Banking.** This course explores the fundamental principles and practices of banking and credit in the United States. The course gives an excellent overview of financial services, including information on human resources, marketing, and ethics. Topics to be covered include: money and interest, negotiable instruments, mortgages, commercial lending, security and ethics, and the role of banking in today's economy.

### **Practell. Online Teller Training**

- gives real-life examples for real-life experiences
- increases customer satisfaction
- reduces training time—gets tellers out to the line faster
- offers over 200 topics on the basics of being a teller, and much more

- provides continuous self-testing of knowledge, topic by topic, and unit by unit
- covers every critical teller responsibility

**Center for Financial Training (CFT) Learning Catalog.** The CFT/On-Course Learning Banking Catalog offers an annual subscription featuring hundreds of self-paced online courses on pertinent banking topics including regulatory compliance; lending, management, sales and service, insurance and retirement account/planning courses. All courses feature instantly graded exams and students can track course enrollments and completions for this and external programs in their account.

### ***Waterbury Working Cities Challenge***

The NRWIB is a partner in a local initiative known as the Waterbury Working Cities Challenge. This project addresses the economic and racial/ethnic inequities that have devalued the once vibrant South End Neighborhood by creating a strong, resident-driven, civic infrastructure, realigning and relocating job training services and revising child care decision-making policies to be more equitable, insuring adequate access for neighborhood residents, children and families. Focusing on one neighborhood provides an opportunity to advance changes in systems and policies and pilot a resident engagement model that can be replicated in other city neighborhoods. Job training efforts focus on the healthcare sector, namely Certified Nurses' Aide training and employment services.

### ***Danbury Working Cities Challenge***

This is a city-wide collaborative designed to improve the lives of the 50 percent of Danbury residents who live in poverty or who struggle to make ends meet. It links services across the community to make it easier for households to access the tools they need to improve their economic situations and become a stronger economic force in the city. The goal of the program is to reduce the number of immigrants and people of color who are in poverty by 30 percent within 10 years. The effort evolves through two phases. Phase one focuses on building trust among the diverse cultures in Danbury through a system of language acquisition programs and increasing access to affordable, quality childcare. Reducing these barriers paves the way for phase two, which moves residents who have acquired appropriate childcare and language proficiency into job and educational training programs to improve economic self-sufficiency.

### ***Reentry Council and Collaborative***

The NRWIB actively participates on the Greater Waterbury Reentry Council, Northwest CT Reentry Council and Greater Danbury Reentry Collaborative. As Connecticut's prison population continues to decline, reentry supports become an integral part of one's successful reintegration back into the lives of their children, families and communities. Reentry is complex as it touches on every aspect of a person's life. Once an individual is released from prison, challenges can arise with finding assistance around basic needs, housing, employment, mental health and substance abuse supports, and other necessary resources. Identifying resources in a timely fashion is critical to one's overall success. The Reentry Strategy creates a recommended framework to guide comprehensive and coordinated policy development and service delivery systems for people transitioning from jail or prison to communities throughout the state, with the goals of reducing recidivism, improving public safety, saving and more efficiently using taxpayer dollars, and assisting people to return to and stay home. This year utilizing ARPA dollars provided by the city of Waterbury, a housing component will be added to the reentry initiative in the city.

## **Workforce Alliance: South Central Workforce Development Board**

### ***Hospitality Pipeline Training***

The Hospitality Pipeline training program seeks to begin to build an industry pipeline for the hospitality industry. This project offers an important opportunity to enhance employment-focused services and system capacity for the public workforce system in meeting the fast-growing needs of this sector. Participants will explore careers and career pathways in the hospitality industry as well as receive industry recognized credentials. Career pathways include Food Service operations, convention and event management, and lodging operations.

### ***Skill Up for Manufacturing***

The Skill Up for Manufacturing program is a five- week training program run in conjunction with area Community Colleges. Advanced training will initially be offered in area of Plastics. Additionally, grant funds will be used to provide guidance and technical assistance to select school districts in the region as they develop pre-apprenticeship training in manufacturing. This program seeks to begin to build an industry pipeline for the manufacturing industry. This project offers an important opportunity to enhance employment-focused training and system capacity for the public workforce system and its education and industry partners in meeting the fast-growing needs of this sector. Funding, provided by the State of Connecticut Bond Commission, and supplemented with Workforce Alliance WIOA formula funds, will be used to provide entry level and advanced manufacturing skills training, technical assistance to area schools and project support. Additional school districts in the region will offer expanded pre-apprenticeship training through the Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative.

### ***Ticket to Work***

Ticket to Work is an initiative where individuals with disabilities who are on Social Security Disability Benefits and who are able to work, are encouraged and provided incentives to do so. The savings differential based on earnings and savings from SSA are passed on as a reimbursement to Workforce Alliance in unrestricted funds.

### ***Apprenticeship CT Initiative- Health Careers Advancement Program***

The Health Careers Advancement Program provides opportunities for individuals to enter and advance along four health career pathways through a) work-readiness and contextualized basic skills boot camp; b) occupational skills training resulting in a community college certificate; c) intensive, person-centered case management and other supportive services; d) work-based learning opportunities; and e) job placement assistance.

### ***Department of Children and Families (DCF) Summer Youth Employment***

Department of Children and Families (DCF) Summer Youth Employment Program provides summer employability skills to youth age 14-21 that are determined to be in the care and custody of the Connecticut Department of Children and Families. The youth are referred from DCF to Workforce Alliance for services. The program offers work experience or work-based learning at both private and public sector worksites. The youth are supported during participation by individuals who provide case management, mentoring, guidance and counseling. Academic enrichment and financial literacy may also be offered, and an effort will be made to connect these youth to other year-round activities and services provided by Workforce Alliance and the American Job Centers.

### ***Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF)***

Supportive Services for Veteran Families (SSVF) funding assists veteran families at risk of homelessness to maintain their housing and to rapidly re-house veteran families who have recently become homeless. This Veterans' Administration funded program provides case management to support housing stability, education, and job placement. Those in need of more comprehensive workforce development services are

linked with a Career Advisor in the American Job Centers. Also included are coordination and linkages to VA benefits, transportation assistance, rental assistance, and legal services. This grant was awarded on a competitive basis.

### ***Pre-Employment and Training Services (PETS)/Level Up***

The Pre-Employment and Training Services (PETS)/Level Up initiative is a grant from the State of Connecticut, Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), designed to provide workshops for in-school youth with disabilities. The workshops provide instruction in work readiness, labor market information, career pathways and other relevant topics. This program is reimbursed on a fee-for-service basis and also leverages the assets of other funding sources through the American Job Center and its partners. Vendors were procured through a competitive bidding process.

### ***CT Workforce & High Tech Industry Skills Partnership (CT WHISP)***

This USDOL funded, statewide grant seeks to address the lack of a training pipeline for Connecticut workers in two industry sectors: 1) tapping new talent for IT; and 2) retooling the advanced manufacturing workforce. The project uses the nationally acclaimed Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI) as a roadmap to build an IT talent pipeline and deliver demand-driven IT training and credentials, and support services, to un/under-employed workers, and promote skills-based hiring. The project enhances the MPI model by increasing upskilling options for incumbent workers to enable IT and manufacturing workers to retain their jobs or advance to higher-wage positions while earning stackable credentials and/or meeting related technical instruction requirements for apprenticeship pathways.

### ***Pathways Home***

The Greater New Haven Pathway Home Project will serve participants transitioning from the New Haven Correctional Center (NHCC) to South Central Connecticut in partnership with the Greater New Haven Re-entry Welcome Center. The project will improve several outcomes that promise to support the successful reintegration and long-term self-sufficiency and well-being of individuals returning from incarceration by increasing credential attainment, employment and wages through a range of workforce services, including pre-release contextualized basic skills boot camps that prepare participants to succeed in short-term, post-release, occupational training programs proven to lead to employment in manufacturing, construction and transportation, plus entrepreneurial training, job development and partnerships with employers willing to hire ex-offenders.

### ***Summer/Year Round Youth Employment- Department of Aging and Disability Services***

Funding from ADS is being utilized to increase the capacity of two proven youth employment programs that provide paid work experience to low-income, disengaged, and disconnected Connecticut youth. This funding allows WA to reduce the Connecticut Youth Employment Program through additional funding for wages for more participants and by relaxing income eligibility requirements to serve more youth who would benefit from the program. Funding from ADS will be available for a three-year period.

### ***Secure Jobs 2.0***

Workforce Alliance is one of two boards in CT to continue the learnings of the three-year Secure Jobs pilot, supported by the Melville Charitable Trust and the United Way of Greater New Haven. Throughout the pilot period, Secure Jobs increased coordination between housing and workforce agencies; built connections with state agencies and local community resources, used flex funds to help participants overcome barriers to employment, and provided crucial participant navigation services. Secure Jobs 2.0 builds on the foundation and learning from the pilot and includes four strategic changes to its implementation: 1) the public workforce system must be the lead agency 2) high level leadership must be engaged; 3) workforce and housing systems' change; 4) strive toward family-sustaining income.

## **Capital Workforce Partners: North Central Workforce Development Board**

### ***Adult National Dislocated Worker Grant***

The National Dislocated Worker grant is a \$5.8 million Federal Trade and Economic Transition grant which enables Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) and the North-Central Connecticut region's American Job Center (AJC) network to address ongoing and emerging workforce and economic challenges by providing training and career services to dislocated workers seeking reentry into the workforce and increasing their skill levels to become competitive for growing or high demand employment opportunities. The initial grant award focused on two sectors, Manufacturing and Health Care for the period of October 2018 to September 2020. CWP received a one year, no cost extension until September 2021 and added three additional sectors, Construction, Information Technology and Transportation & Logistics. Under this grant CWP enrolled 710 participants with 403 enrolling in training opportunities. Of those in training, 145 have earned a credentials (127 are still in training). 92 participants were placed in On-The-Job Training and 241 participants gained employment.

### ***Connecticut Recovers Opioid Grant***

Capital Workforce Partners, in partnership with the Connecticut Department of Labor, was awarded a Connecticut Recovers Opioid grant. A Peer Recovery Navigator is stationed at the Hartford American Job Center. In addition, the Best Chance program provides pre-manufacturing training at Manchester Community College, culinary training at the Chrysalis Center and Customer Service Training at the Center for Latino Progress. To date 70 participants have been enrolled in this grant, 4 have earned Serv-Safe Food Handler Certificates, 3 have earned Serv-Safe Food Production Manager Certificates, 6 have earned OSHA-10 license and 6 have earned National Retail Federation Certification.

### ***H-1B CT-WHISP***

The H-1B Connecticut Workforce & High-Tech Industry Skills Partnership (CT-WHISP) Grant Program is a four-year, \$10 million grant to invest in training for key sectors of the U.S. Economy running from February 2021 – January 2025. Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is one of the nineteen Grant recipients, who will focus on upskilling the current workforce and training the workforce of the future for critical industries such as IT and advanced manufacturing. This grant is in partnership with the other four workforce boards in Connecticut and is targeted to serve 2086 individuals statewide and 440 in the North Central Region. Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) in partnership with the American Job Center (AJC) network, regional IT and manufacturing employers and regional IT and manufacturing training providers are using innovative training strategies and training delivery methods to provide individuals in our communities with the skills necessary to succeed in middle and high-skilled H-1B occupations. Training models will include a broad range of virtual/hybrid/classroom skills training, on-the-job training, and incumbent worker training. During the first year of this grant statewide, 41 participants enrolled in skills training, 37 participants have been enrolled in incumbent worker training and 1 has enrolled in on-the-job training.

### ***Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative***

The Apprenticeship Connecticut Initiative (ACI) is a four-year Connecticut bond-funded initiative promoting Pre-Apprenticeship and Registered Apprenticeship programming. CWP was awarded \$2.2 million in 2020 to implement Pre-Apprenticeship and credential-based programming in the Manufacturing, Healthcare, and Construction sectors. These programs were organized in partnership with the Connecticut State College & University (CSCU) system, Goodwin University, and other partners, serving both adults and youth. The ACI grant enables CWP to leverage the American Job Center (AJC) network to provide enhanced Pre-Apprenticeship training opportunities for recipients of AJC services leading to either Registered Apprenticeship enrollment or unsubsidized employment. During year one of this initiative, 147 participants received Pre-Apprenticeship or Registered Apprenticeship training with 87 earning credentials and 29 gaining employment.

### ***Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training Second Chance Pilot – BEST Chance***

In 2016 the State of Connecticut chose Capital Workforce Partners as the lead organization to implement the Integrated Basic Education and Skills Training (I-BEST) Second Chance Pilot as a contextualized learning pilot program in Hartford County to reduce unemployment and recidivism rates among soon to be released offenders and ex-offenders in Connecticut. The goal was to help ex-offenders compete in today's labor market by providing relevant training and support to gain good jobs. Specifically, program goals included:

- Completion of basic, occupational, and advanced training
- Increased earnings and employment
- Reduction of recidivism
- Placement and Retention of employment
- The BEST Chance Program is based on the I-BEST, an evidence-based model designed to provide vocational education combined with contextualized adult basic education, through a partnership of a dozen organizations supporting this comprehensive program.

### ***Jobs Funnel***

The Jobs Funnel was launched as a pilot in Hartford to provide qualified workers opportunities to pursue careers in the construction trades. Jobs Funnel programs now operate in two local workforce areas – north central and northwest – under the aegis of the respective regional

WDBs. State-level coordination is provided through the Office of Workforce Competitiveness.

State general fund dollars help support Jobs Funnel efforts.

Jobs Funnel services typically include: outreach/recruitment, assessment, case management, pre-employment training, job placement, and retention support services. Since their inception, the various regional funnel initiatives have helped to place more than 4,488 individuals in a variety of construction-related jobs, in both union and non-union settings, and in apprenticeships. The average hourly starting wage for participants who have completed the Jobs Funnel training is approximately \$17-21. The Jobs Funnel are an example of innovative public-private partnerships involving employers, labor, community-based organizations, state and local agencies, non-profits and local funders to address shared objectives.

### ***Free to Succeed***

Free to Succeed provides career exploration, career advancement planning, employment services, support, and retention to former offenders for 24 months. The program, staffed by two full-time Retention Specialists, is housed at the AJC satellite at the Hartford Public Library. Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is able to leverage the resources of the AJC system to provide job training and placement services. Individuals may be referred to Free to Succeed upon their recent release from incarceration or after gaining employment.

### ***Ticket to Work***

Ticket to Work is an initiative where individuals with disabilities who are on Social Security Disability Benefits and who can work, are encouraged and provided incentives to do so. The savings differential based on earnings and savings from SSA are passed on as a reimbursement to Capital Workforce Partners as unrestricted dollars. An Integrated Resource Team (IRT) staffed by AJC partners often meet to triage the needs of the participating individuals.

### ***Listen for Good***

Listen for Good is a research project, developed with financial support from the Fund for Shared Insight, a private foundation seeking to improve customer outcomes. Capital Workforce Partners was awarded

\$30,000 to design, develop and conduct customer service and customer feedback instruments and use the findings to improve the jobseeker experience in their American Job Centers in the region. CWP completed two feedback loops, one in 2019 and one in 2020 under this project. In 2019 we had 324 respondents and in 2020 we had 534 respondents. We also had a significant number of responses in Spanish which prompted us to produce more materials in Spanish and ensure that we had adequate Spanish speaking staff. The annual customer satisfaction survey is now a function of the One Stop Operator. The methodology learned from this initiative will be used in analyzing and enhancing the services provided at the AJCs. The Operator is currently working in partnership with the One Stop Contractor to develop a comprehensive process for tracking systemwide referrals to further enhance the supports provided to AJC customers.

### ***Hartford Working Cities Challenge (HWC)***

CWP is a partner with Hartford's Working Cities initiative, which is a focused, concentrated, and urgent effort that tackles two economic challenges facing Hartford: poverty and the need for an educated workforce to attract and retain employers to the city and the region. The Hartford Working Cities is a partner with the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative, and supports youth leadership development, career pathways support and providing outreach to the community for employment and training opportunities.

### ***East Hartford Working Cities Challenge (EHC)***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) is an active partner in *East Hartford CONNects (EHC)*. EHC represents East Hartford's initiative as one of five municipalities participating in the Connecticut Working Cities Challenge, organized by the Federal Reserve Bank of Boston. EHC's purpose is to assist East Hartford residents with career development and educational resources and to foster community engagement. The initiative's staff works with residents who are searching for a new job or need assistance navigating available resources in the community.

### ***Adult Literacy***

Capital Workforce Partners, working with 35-40 adult education providers in the N. Central CT area is collaborating to support the Capital Area Adult Literacy Network, focusing on workforce development programs and adult education providers accentuating efforts to strengthen coordination between workforce development and adult education. The group is focused on several priorities:

- Providing feedback and insights to CWP and workforce development initiatives to support improvements for services and referrals to/from the American Job Center (AJC) and also supports new piloted adult education/work-readiness preparation services at AJC sites.
- Supporting Adult Education and Contextualized Training initiatives led by Capital Workforce in close partnership with the adult education providers in North Central Connecticut and other industry, education, and community stakeholders. Projects focus on demand-driven, credential-based training opportunities to North Central Connecticut in close alignment to industry and business needs. Initiatives also drive equity by improving access to further training and employment opportunities for adult learners, including ESL students and other special populations.
- CWP convenes quarterly meetings of the American Job Center lead staff with the Adult Education providers to enhance coordination and communications.
- A 'community of learning' focused on sharing best practices, networking and communications focuses on special topics of benefit to improve adult education and workforce development services and strategies.
- Additional enhancements to strengthen the system were further noted.

- Doing more to braiding CTE/Academic Programs with workforce development programs at the local site level (strategic program development)
- Support efforts for adult education to better link with the comprehensive workforce development system.
- IBEST Programs: need to be able to think through how adult education and contextualized IBEST options can be brought to scale
- Pre-readiness boot camps for adult education
- Working with AJCs and Adult Education Programs to have an integrated communications packet of services
- Updating the array of intake/assessments to be systemized – to reduce duplication and redundancy; create common forms.

### ***One Stop Operator***

In 2017, Capital Workforce Partners contracted One Stop Operator services for building and maintaining partnerships with WIOA mandated partners. In addition, the Operator builds partnerships with other State agencies and community partners to support the American Job Center's customer needs. The Operator is responsible for completing One Stop Certification every three years for all AJC sites in the North Central region. The Operator conducts quarterly partners meetings and facilitates the annual AJC customer satisfaction survey. The Operator works in partnership with the One Stop Contractor to ensure continuous improvement of the One Stop System. CWP procured continued services in March 2020.

## **YOUTH**

### ***Summer Youth Employment Program***

SYELP is a regional summer employment program that runs from June to August, with funding through the State Departments of Labor and Aging & Disability Services, the City of Hartford, and Hartford Foundation for Public Giving. It places an average of 1100 youth per year in subsidized employment opportunities. SYELP is organized into three tiers of work-based learning, designed to provide competency development and work-based experiences to youth ages 14-21 at all levels of job readiness.

### ***Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative***

Capital Workforce Partners is the backbone organization for the Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC), a collective action effort to improve the life outcomes for the almost 5000 Opportunity Youth (OY), ages 16-24, in Hartford who do not have a high school degree or who have a diploma but are not in school or working. HOYC complements the One Stop system and WOIA Youth programming facilitated by Capital Workforce Partners to increase access and supports for Opportunity Youth.

HOYC OY strategies emphasize: (a) empowering youth leaders, (b) enhancing and expanding effective career pathways, (c) using RBA to inform decision-making, assess progress, and improve methods of evaluation, and (d) engaging in policy and systems alignment to scale up and sustain this work. HOYC engages membership, establishing commitments to: (a) a common agenda for OY programming, (b) shared measurement, (c) mutually reinforcing activities, and (d) continuous communication. Members of HOYC, align systems and resources to implement successful career pathway programs and Jobs for the Future “Back on Track” interventions: “Enriched Preparation” and “Postsecondary/Career Bridging,” which are core to the Opportunity Works program that has become a local and national best practice.

Currently, the group has two focuses: utilizing better outreach strategies to engage OY and building an understanding of effective mental health practices. A few months ago, the HOYC completed a packet which includes nine outreach strategy suggestions which are backed by proven research to be effective. The group will begin focusing on 3 of the 9 strategies to incorporate into their outreach efforts to OY. The

group has also transitioned their focus to understand how to help OY improve their mental health. The goal is to combine outreach and engagement strategies with better education on youth and adult mental health resources to provide OY in Hartford well-rounded and a complete set of services.

### ***Hartford Work Based Learning Network***

The Hartford Work Based Learning Network (WBLN) is comprised of twenty-five organizations who are dedicated to helping Hartford school-aged youth develop critical hard and soft workplace skills necessary for post-secondary education and/or career. The WBLN evaluates WBL program participants on 12 competencies. These competencies range from general professional skills to problem solving/critical thinking skills to teamwork/collaboration skills. The competencies help assess areas where youth show strong skillsets and areas where students need to improve.

The WBLN is currently focused on improving how Hartford youth are evaluated in WBL programs. This will be achieved by re-working the evaluation rubrics through using a process known as a Results-Based Accountability Framework (RBA). The Network is also working with Jobs For the Future (JFF) who will be providing consultation to the WBL on metric development, community employer relationship building and relationship development with other WBL networks outside of CT. Finally, the Network is also developing a website to highlight WBL youth testimonials, general WBL updates and plans to include an interactive inventory of WBL programs available to Hartford in-school youth.

### ***Navigation Tool for Young Adult Services***

In response to an identified, systemic need for coordination of and navigation to employment and training resources, and in-line with a commitment to eliminating the duplication of projects and services through increased collaboration, The Hartford Opportunity Youth Collaborative (HOYC) and Hartford Generation Work (Gen Work) have developed the [Training and Employment Navigation Tool](#) in partnership with the United Way 2-1-1 service system. This coordinated tool operates as a screener to better connect individuals ages 16-29 to programs that meet their unique needs and eligibility, and can be found on the HOYC, United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut, and United Way 2-1-1 websites with HOYC and Generation Work branding. HOYC and Gen Work are continuously working on optimizing the functionality of the tool, updating the services available within, as well as increasing its exposure and use, largely through outreach efforts to partner agencies, youth groups such as the Young Legends, and the Hartford community.

## **Partnerships**

### ***Capital Area Pipeline Partnership (CAPP)***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) convenes the Capital Area Pipeline Partnership, a unique regional employer-led “partnership of partnerships” representing leaders of sector-specific partnerships and associated strategic partners driving strategy and action in to develop a regional pipeline of job-ready talent to meet employers’ demand for skilled workers, support business growth and promote workers’ financial security. CAPP partners include: Advanced Manufacturing Employer Partnership; Metro Hartford Alliance for Careers in Health; Jobs Funnel Construction and Transportation Partnership (Jobs Funnel); Capitol Region Council of Governments; Connecticut Business and Industry Association; Hartford Foundation for Public Giving; MetroHartford Alliance; United Way of Central and Northeastern Connecticut; Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford; Connecticut General Assembly Leadership; Municipal Economic Development Officials.

### ***Metro Hartford Alliance for Careers in Healthcare (MACH)***

The Metro-Hartford Alliance for Careers in Health (MACH) is an industry sector partnership, convened by CWP, with the mission of identifying and responding to workforce development policy issues for entry level and middle skill positions in the healthcare industry. MACH is an employer-driven, employer-led table that meets quarterly to address the workforce needs of healthcare institutions in North Central

Connecticut. Members support strategic initiatives that bridge the gap between training programs and job placement efforts, ensuring that healthcare providers have access to a highly qualified workforce.

The MACH partnership is further developing and supporting workforce pipeline efforts to prepare qualified entry-level workers for job placement in healthcare. The need for short-term training in industry-based certificate programs is critical for regional healthcare employers. New efforts are also underway to prepare community health care workers and those in other occupations to qualify for pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship opportunities.

*MACH receives funding from Workforce Solutions, a funders' collaborative.*

#### ***Advanced Manufacturing Employer Partnership (AMEP)***

The Advanced Manufacturing Employers Partnership (AMEP) is an employer led consortium that supports initiatives to grow and enhance the manufacturing talent pipeline for aerospace and other manufacturers in North and Central Connecticut. It is a prime venue for manufacturing employers to come together to share ideas, express challenges, and influence workforce development initiatives. AMEP has a core focus on the manufacturing talent needs of advanced manufacturing employers, primarily aerospace in support of the supply chain of small-medium size manufacturers centered around Pratt and Whitney.

Each quarterly meeting brings together speakers on current topics such as apprenticeship, manufacturing innovation, and workforce forecasting. Participating employers have first-hand access to state and federal programs that offer financial support aimed at helping businesses succeed and grow.

*AMEP receives funding from Workforce Solutions, a funders' collaborative and is convened by the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology (CCAT).*

#### ***Capital Area Tech Partnership (CATP)***

Capital Workforce Partners co-convenes the *Capital Area Tech Partnership (CATP)* with the MetroHartford Alliance using the Next Generation Sector Partnership model. CATP comprises around 40 IT/Technology companies in North Central CT. Since first convening in the spring of 2021, CATP businesses have identified talent pipeline gaps as the most critical and constraining challenges in the Metro Hartford market. This stark reality has prompted many firms to rethink their talent sourcing strategies and consider non-traditional populations, providing a significant opportunity to drive equity and justice-based workforce development initiatives. To simultaneously address multiple facets of the issue, CATP businesses are leading three workgroups: INSPIRE, Building Student Interest in Tech Careers; BUILD, Aligning Postsecondary Supply with Industry Demand; and HIRE, Elevating Skills-Based Hiring Practices.

#### ***Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (TDL) Partnership***

CWP, with funding from the Workforce Solutions Collaborative of Metro Hartford, will engage business leaders in the formation of a new regional sector partnership for employers in the Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics (TDL) sector. The partnership will launch in early 2022, and like other regional sector partnerships, will be a platform for TDL employers in north central Connecticut to come together to tackle common issues related to industry stability and competitiveness.

#### ***Jobs Funnel Advisory Committee***

Capital Workforce Partners (CWP) convenes the Jobs Funnel Advisory Committee. The Jobs Funnel Advisory Committee oversees the development and implementation of partnership opportunities with key stakeholders to lead efforts in all regional Jobs Funnel activities. This includes strategies for jobseekers' training and placement in the construction industry sector. The committee's guidance will ensure that the North Central Region's Jobs Funnel initiatives enhance and develop a workforce which is equipped with the necessary skills to enter and advance in the state's construction and related green industry sector.

### ***Relocation of the Hartford American Job Center***

Capital Workforce Partners and the Department of Labor are relocating the Hartford American Job Center and are taking a systems-building approach to create a customer-centered and customer-driven service delivery model. This model will provide an innovative delivery of services in that it will be fully integrated by function rather than by provider, e.g., Business Services will be provided by Capital Workforce Partners and the Department of Labor under one umbrella. Additionally, it will seek to provide seamless delivery of services to its customers through enhanced coordination of services amongst all partner organizations that will be housed in the new American Job Center.

### **Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE)**

CSDE continues to support Integrated Education and Training (IET) projects using Title II, WIOA funds. CSDE conducted a new competition in April 2021 in which four adult education providers applied for and were awarded funding to offer training programs which aligned with their local workforce development boards' identified industry sectors. Certification programs include manufacturing, various health occupations and auto technicians. These projects, entitled Program Enhancement Projects (PEP), are being conducted through two Regional Education Service Centers: (CREC and EASTCONN), New London Adult Education, and Bristol Adult Education. The total funding for the projects is \$160,000 with the promise to support a minimum of 82 participants. CSDE will continue to offer the IET program in its next program year.

### **State Board of Education – Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education**

In September 2018, the CSDE met with the CT-DOL to discuss Connecticut long-term industry and occupational projection data. In November 2018, the Assistant Director of Research and Information in the Office of Research and Information at the CT-DOL matched Connecticut industry and occupational data and projections to the National Career Clusters Framework. The CSDE examined each of the five WIBs occupational areas of growth and utilized an article published by the CT-DOL and the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (CDECD) pertaining to Connecticut's long-term industry and occupational projections for 2016–2026. Through a triangulation of these data, and knowing the data are most complete for industries having payroll employment covered by unemployment insurance, top clusters for Connecticut emerged.

In February 2019, the CSDE convened a core Perkins V leadership group consisting of key stakeholders to: analyze Connecticut Workforce Needs, establish Program Career Clusters and Pathways, and inform the CTE Transition and State Plans.

After consideration of the Perkins V leadership group analysis, stakeholder feedback, and the National Forum on Educational Statistics (NCES) and the School Courses for the Exchange of Data (SCED) coding system, the approved Perkins V Connecticut Career Clusters that will drive the pathways and programs or programs of study (POS) to be supported, developed or improved at the State and local levels are:

- Agriculture, Food and Natural Resources;
- Architecture and Construction;
- Business Management and Administration;
- Family and Consumer Sciences;
- Finance;
- Health Science;
- Hospitality and Tourism;
- Information Technology;

- Manufacturing;
- Marketing;
- Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics; and
- Transportation, Distribution, and Logistics.

### ***Partnering in CTE***

In Connecticut, the five regional WDBs are geographically aligned to the six RESCs across the state. The CSDE partnered with the CT-DOL and the Perkins V Leadership Workgroup to create a map that shows WIB/RESC alignment. The CSDE is working with the CT-DOL to establish a communications pipeline between WDBs and eligible recipients to stay up-to-date with workforce data, pathway and POS development, and high-skill, high-wage and in-demand industry sectors and occupations.

In addition, the CT Perkins V plan promotes coordination and collaboration amongst agencies to ensure that every student, regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, family wealth, zip code or disability status, is prepared to succeed in lifelong learning and work beyond school. The following themes are supported throughout the plan including:

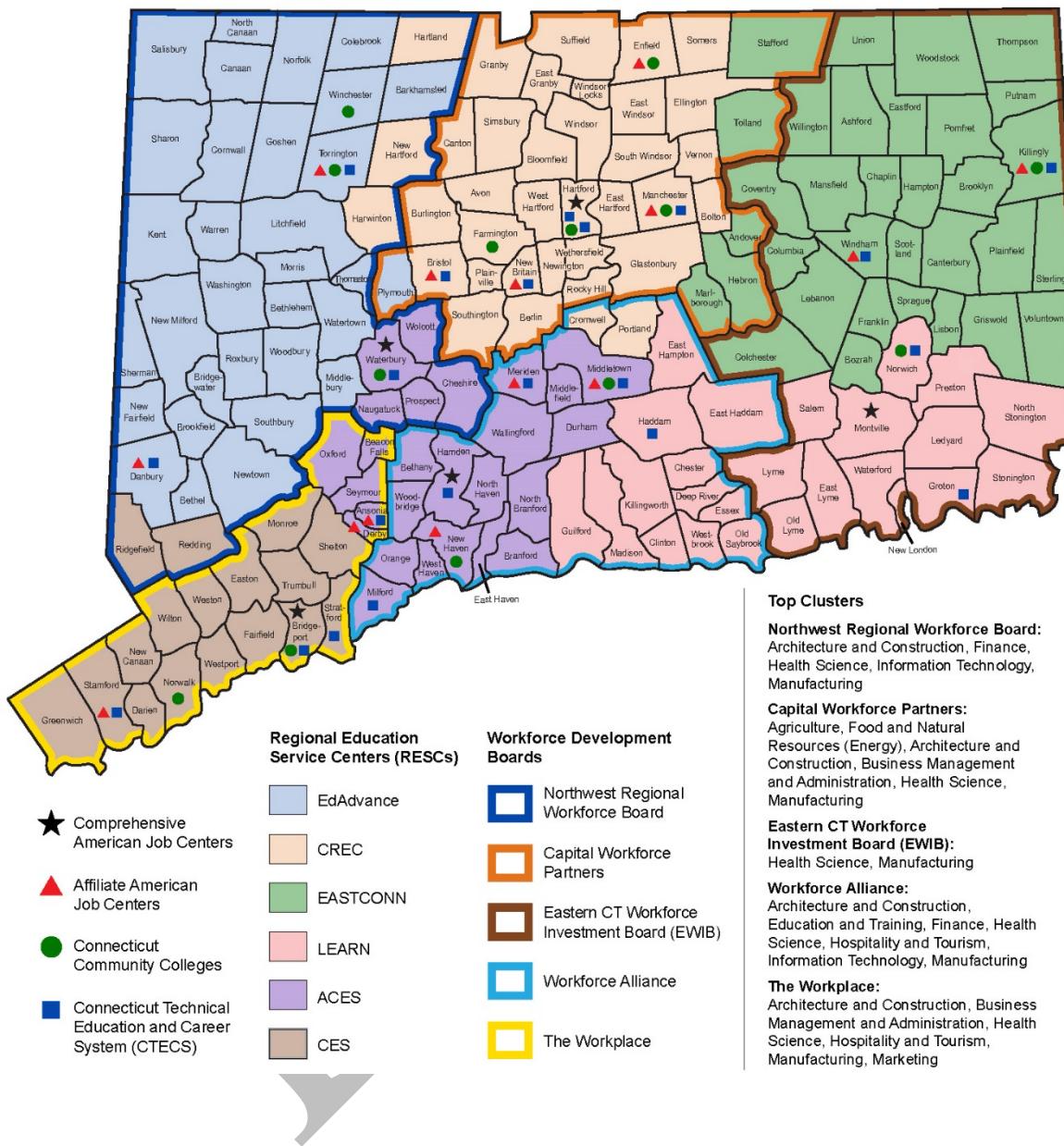
Connecticut's vision for CTE is that all Connecticut's students have access today to high-quality, culturally responsive guidance, teaching, and learning that will position them to graduate tomorrow as innovators equipped with adaptable, transferable skills that will contribute to the growth of Connecticut's high-knowledge economy.

Connecticut's vision for education and workforce development demands schools, districts, and community colleges design rigorous pathways and programs of study from a perspective of bold innovation that fosters deep and long-lasting changes.

Furthermore, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Perkins V goals align to Title IV, Part B in which 21st Century School programs can partner with in-demand fields of the local workforce or build career competencies and career readiness. This funding may provide workforce development boards with additional opportunities to collaborate and leverage resources for in-school youth services. Continued coordination with these programs will help to unify CSDE guidance.

The CSDE collaborates with outside agencies in order to braid funding, ensure cohesiveness among programs, and educate the whole child from preK–12.

## Regional Education Service Centers & Workforce Development Boards: Partnering in Career and Technical Education



## University of Connecticut

The Next Generation Connecticut initiative intends to significantly expand educational opportunities, research and innovation in the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) disciplines at the University of Connecticut. The broad objective is to leverage UConn's strengths and resources to help build Connecticut's future workforce, create jobs and invigorate the state economy. The cornerstone of the effort is a major increase in student enrollment, faculty expansion, development of facilities for

enhanced STEM research and teaching, and expansion of critical programs at UConn's Hartford and Stamford campuses.

Next Generation Connecticut aims to transform UConn into an elite public research institution, fueling Connecticut's economy with new technologies, training highly skilled graduates, creating new companies, patents, licenses and high-wage jobs. Components include: hiring research and teaching faculty in STEM disciplines; building research facilities for materials science, physics, biology, engineering, cognitive science, genomics and related disciplines; constructing teaching laboratories; creating a STEM Honors program to attract high achieving undergraduate students; upgrading aging infrastructure; expanding Stamford degree programs; providing student housing in Stamford; and relocating the Greater Hartford campus to downtown Hartford. This aggressive investment hopes to dramatically increase UConn STEM research and graduates, producing innovations and inventions contributing directly to sustainable economic growth in Connecticut, with high-wage jobs for a STEM-skilled and educated workforce.

### **Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS)**

The Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) provides a direct employment pipeline for approximately 11,250 grade 9-12 students and 3,000 adult education students.

CTECS has developed a rich system of trade education opportunities in [31 in-demand career areas](#). Our settings mirror the best from Connecticut businesses and industry. Our learners learn in highly professional and technically current, collaborative environments that will prepare them for the workforce today and tomorrow. The historical connection between what CTECS offers and the needs of our industry partners is well established. Interim Superintendent of Schools Dr. Ellen Solek, CTECS Central Office leadership, school's principals and faculty, are actively engaged in a wide range of partnerships and collaboration with employers, post-secondary institutions, K-12 schools, workforce agencies and others.

Ultimately, our school system not only benefits industry, but benefits Connecticut's economic health. CTECS graduates leave with comprehensive employability skills. Our students represent the best of the American melting pot, and our programs prepare them to be contributing citizens and economically self-sufficient.

Of note:

- Nearly half of our 18 schools operate 2 to 3 shifts each day –
  - High school day program
  - [The Career Academy](#) after school program in partnership with regional high schools (plans to expand to other regions in the state), and
  - Evening college programs for technical credit, as well as seven CTECS schools offering [CTECS Apprenticeship Coursework](#) that is CT-DOL approved (recently began offering online courses in addition to on-site).
- 9 locations currently have technical college partnerships that make use of our manufacturing facilities in the evening. Partnerships include MXCC, NVCC, Three Rivers, Housatonic, Gateway, Northwestern, QVCC and Tunxis.
- Placement after graduation – Of approximately 4,800 apprentices in the state in the trade areas offered by CTECS (i.e. excluding firefighters, etc.) 1,600 are CTECS graduates and 3,000 attend adult education evening programming.
- A goal of CTECS strategic plan focuses collaboration with key regional employers. Over 600 companies participate in the [Work-based Learning program](#), which allows employers to hire student workers who are often eligible for full-time employment after graduation. Over 200 employers participate in [Career Technical Education Advisory Committees](#) (CTEAC) who inform program alignment to industry trends.

- CTECS graduates earn a Connecticut high school diploma, CTE certificate in their field of study and multiple industry recognized credentials (On average 10-15 per trade).
- Provide pre-apprenticeship hours - graduates are eligible for full hour credit in related instruction requirements towards their occupational license. This equates up to 720 hours in licensed trades (ex. S2, E2, SM2, P2). Upon graduation, this is up to 1,500 hours towards apprenticeship.

*Working for Students and Connecticut's Future*, the CTECS 2019 to 2022 strategic plan is central to accomplishing the system's mission. It outlines what CTECS wants to achieve, how to achieve it, and how success will be measured.

CTECS goals are organized around five themes:

- **Culture, Climate, Instruction:** Cultivate and sustain safe, effective, collaborative schools for staff and students.
- **Industry Alignment and Collaboration:** Collaborate with key regional employers to enhance and expand a coordinated statewide effort to develop curriculum, career pathways and experiential opportunities that cultivate highly employable, workforce-ready students; respond to industry needs; and prioritize economic development.
- **Access and Opportunities:** Partner and strengthen relationships with K-12 school districts and colleges to create clearly articulated career and technical education pathways and opportunities for a broader set of students and adult learners.
- **Systems of Excellence:** Redesign the CTECS operational model to facilitate flexibility, innovation and responsive education, to achieve success as a new, independent agency.
- **Human Capital:** Recruit, hire, develop and retain a diverse and high-quality CTECS workforce.

*Working for Students and Connecticut's Future* reaffirms CTECS' commitment to its mission of preparing students for successful careers and supporting Connecticut businesses and industries. Going forward these efforts and partnerships will become increasingly important elements of the state's broad workforce development strategy, particularly in occupations in critical industries demanding specific technical skills.

## **United States Department of Labor Job Corps**

Job Corps is a national, federally funded educational and vocational training program administered by USDOL, that helps low income youth (ages 16-24) gain workplace skills, train for high-demand occupations, and become independent and self-sufficient. With centers in Hartford and New Haven, more than 400 students enroll each year to earn a high school diploma or GED, learn a trade, obtain third party certifications and receive assistance finding a job. CTDOL has an assigned staff member who provides on-site support to the Hartford and New Haven Job Corps Centers.

## **Connecticut P20-WIN**

### ***Overview***

P20 WIN is Connecticut's state longitudinal data system and is the mechanism by which data from multiple agencies are matched to address critical policy questions. P20 WIN informs sound policies and practice through secure sharing of longitudinal data across participating agencies to ensure that individuals successfully navigate supportive services and educational pathways into the workforce. P20 WIN is a federated data system that has been operational since 2014. P20 WIN is used to answer policy questions, fulfill federal and state reporting requirements; support program review; inform school districts of postsecondary outcomes; provide employment and wage outcome data; and support research and analysis on a variety of topics.

## ***Participating Agencies***

P20 WIN has a membership of 10 state agencies, institutions of higher education, and nonprofits, including: the Office of Early Childhood (OEC), the State Department of Education (SDE), Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU), the University of Connecticut (UCONN), the CT Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), the Department of Labor (DOL), the Department of Social Services (DSS), the Department of Children and Families (DCF), the Office of Higher Education (OHE), and the CT Coalition to End Homeless (CCEH).

## ***Governance***

P20 WIN has an Executive Board and a Data Governing Board that develop and implement the necessary policies and procedures for a multi-agency Data Sharing system to address broad policy questions and state needs. P20 WIN is administered by the Office of Policy and Management (OPM), which provides program management to support the continued operation and improvement as a resource for the participating agencies and the State. The Department of Labor is the Data Integration Hub for P20 WIN and conducts all data matching for approved data requests for the participating agencies.

## ***Research Priorities***

The P20 WIN Learning Agenda reflects the priority issues and burning questions for the State of Connecticut and P20 WIN participating agencies. The topics and questions in the Learning Agenda are used to prioritize and inform data requests to P20 WIN:

- College and Career Success: to support placement decisions at colleges and universities
- Student Readiness: to analyze transitions between early childhood and K-12 schools, to include social services, child welfare, housing, family life and adult education
- Financial Aid: the dynamics and outcomes for state financial aid grant recipients
- Workforce Training: measuring the net impact and return on investment for public workforce training programs
- Overcoming Barriers to Success: using data to help individuals who face barriers to success due to factors like homelessness or engagement with the child welfare system

## ***(E) The Strengths and Weaknesses of Workforce Development Activities***

*Provide an analysis of the strengths and weaknesses of the workforce development activities identified in (A), directly above.*

The preceding discussion of Connecticut's workforce development activities addresses an inventory of selected noteworthy initiatives, programs, and services responsive to the goals that serve as the focus for this Unified State Plan. The process of developing Connecticut's Unified State Plan included review of the Strengths, Weaknesses and Opportunities.

### ***Strengths***

The Governor's Workforce Council is emerging as a major strength – it brings together many of the most influential leaders in Connecticut's workforce ecosystem to concurrently address business and workforce needs. A successful workforce development system depends upon collaboration, alignment, innovation, equity, performance accountability, and access to sufficient information and data. The GWC shares a commitment to eliminating administrative and statutory barriers to success wherever possible and supports Connecticut's efforts to improve outcomes for its workers, students, and businesses by creating a comprehensive vision and strategy for growing the economy through innovative, accessible, and easily navigable workforce programs.

Connecticut brings distinct strengths to this mission of workforce development. It has one of the most educated workforces in the country, ranking among the top five states. It is home to innovative, globally leading companies in aerospace, advanced manufacturing, insurance and financial services. It is among the top 10 states in research with commercial potential, particularly in bioscience. And it is consistently

recognized as one of the best places to live in the country. At the same time, the state's achievement gap in education is totally unacceptable, and the State's fiscal constraints limit the state's ability to make needed investments. We must capitalize on our strengths while planning carefully and seeking to elevate the best of what we have to offer.

The work of GWC and partners has accelerated Connecticut's progress in transforming its workforce system into a business and industry driven model and design its services to meet local and statewide industry demands. The state incorporates the key elements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) through its sector partnerships, career pathways development and system collaboration efforts. Outlined throughout this plan are numerous examples of workforce programs that strive to address the essential components of a comprehensive approach to career pathways responsive to employer needs and focused on good career opportunities.

Connecticut's workforce development efforts are supported and encouraged by the strong relationships among executive leadership in key State agencies and key administrative and program staff in each organization. State, regional and local partners have a demonstrable track record of successful collaboration on applying for and winning significant national competitive grant awards that address strategic priorities, developing innovative partnerships responsive to employer priorities, and effective sharing of information and best practices.

Examples of this collaboration include:

- **The Eastern CT Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (MPI)** exemplifies the strengths of the state's workforce system. The MPI is an evidence-based, demand-driven workforce pipeline model developed by the Eastern CT Workforce Investment Board (EWIB) and its partners. In four years, the regional MPI partnership has placed more than 2,000 people in living-wage jobs by: a) leveraging existing workforce development, industry, education and training, economic development, and apprenticeship systems and resources; b) using a demand-driven approach that responds directly to the documented needs of sectors with pressing workforce needs; and c) leveraging the MPI's assessment, customized training, and job placement model, which quickly prepares and immediately places more than 90% of workers (most of whom lack relevant industry experience) in jobs that offer a living wage and career pathway.

The MPI model holds great potential to stimulate the Connecticut economy because it: a) is being replicated statewide and extended into several industries (e.g., health care, construction, transportation and logistics, hospitality, and IT) that project strong, long-term demand for skilled workers statewide; and b) has a high return on investment and high employment multipliers.

- Transportation consistently ranks as one of the two biggest barriers to enrolling in and completing postsecondary education for low-income Connecticut residents. The Connecticut Department of Transportation's **U-Pass CT program** allows students enrolled in credit-bearing programs at most Connecticut community colleges and state universities and at all UConn campuses to ride buses and trains on most public transit systems for free. With the strong urging of GWC, this program was recently expanded to cover students enrolled in non-credit-bearing programs, leverages the existing public transit and U-Pass CT infrastructure.
- Childcare consistently ranks as the other top-two barrier low-income residents face to accessing postsecondary education. The Office of Early Childhood is collaborating with workforce partners to pilot workforce initiatives connected directly to child care.
- Connecticut received \$346 million in relief funding from the federal government to roll out support to child care providers in Connecticut to help them recover and rebuild during COVID-19. In early 2021, Governor Lamont assigned \$120 million of the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) stabilization funding to go out to CT's licensed child care programs to address operational costs, including increased expenses due to COVID-19. Connecticut was one of the first states in the country to get this funding out to the field, and has been recognized as a national

leader in developing a fair and simple formula that advances equity and takes into account the varying situations of child care providers. As part of this funding, center-based providers must commit to spending 25% of total funding received on increasing the compensation of early educators, ensuring that the staff benefit directly from the distribution of stabilization funds. Under these Ready, Set, Rebuild efforts, the OEC has obligated funding towards making child care affordable for families, retaining and recruiting the ECE workforce, supporting child and family behavioral health, and increasing supply and infrastructure.

In addition, Connecticut has been awarded a three year PDG Birth-Five Renewal Grant which is a competitive federal grant with an annual funding of \$8.9 million dollars, totaling \$27 million dollars to help create more community-based early childhood development programs. The funds will be used to advocate for young children and families by promoting equity, supporting early learning and development, and advancing policy and services that strengthen the essential role of families, providers, educators and community throughout a child's life. PDG funds will give parents a voice in early childhood programs in all communities through the establishment of a parent-led advisory group to the Office of Early Childhood.

- Childcare Access- CT received funding through the American Rescue Plan Act which has allowed CT to expand the Care4Kids Program to families with up to 60% of the state median income and those in need of childcare while attending school or work training.

## **Response to COVID**

At the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, Workforce Development Boards and the CTDOL needed to transition state and partner staff and our participants to the remote working world, so a barrier that was quickly identified during this period was access to internet and hardware for technology. With stay-at-home orders, children also needed to attend virtual school. Childcare centers were closed indefinitely and some may not be able to reopen, which resulted in an almost immediate disparity of primary caretakers being unable to return to work as quickly as their counterparts who had access to childcare. To respond to the needs of our participants, many core and partner programs offered loaned laptops and Chromebooks to customers in training or for initial eligibility and enrollment needs, funded lower cost internet packages and hot spots, and made accommodations such as holding orientations or meetings outside of school hours so parents and caretakers had time to actively participate and engage in services. With the variety of needs and changes, it was critical to partner with existing organizations and focus on ways to keep participants engaged in programs and provide access to community supports. Many partnering organizations were a referral source when participants indicated stress, overwhelm, and anxiety related to the pandemic and its effects on daily life for themselves or their families. Many of these supports for hardware, software and internet will continue to be funded as we move to identify groups who may experience difficulty in accessing services.

The leadership role of the local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) – collaborating with CTDOL, other key State agencies and numerous local partners and stakeholders – is a key asset in Connecticut's ability to develop innovative strategies, programs and services responsive to the needs of jobseekers, workers and employers. The WDBs and their partners have developed numerous effective programs, shared successful efforts and adjusted strategies as results dictate.

Connecticut has an extensive network of committed, mission-driven, effective community-based organizations and non-profit service providers delivering effective on workforce programs and services accessible to key target populations. Connecticut has an active philanthropic sector that is increasingly engaged in supporting workforce development-related initiatives, including local community foundations, local United Ways and corporate foundations.

## Weaknesses

**Resource Challenges.** Insufficient funding limits the ability to take effective practices to scale and sustain them. Prospective participants' needs and demands for services have overwhelmed available resources and capacity of workforce programs and services across the state workforce system. Eligibility requirements can limit flexibility, innovation and responsiveness. As a result, some programs struggle to provide the optimal amount of assistance that customers may need. Individuals without work experience and/or poor educational achievement continue to have difficulty entering and competing in the CT workforce.

**Participant Challenges.** A large proportion of Connecticut's potential workforce face significant challenges to success in the labor market, including:

- Low literacy levels of many prospective participants in workforce programs. The Workforce Alliance, the South Central Workforce Development Board, tracked intake literacy assessments of all jobseekers coming into their American Job Center, over 14 years. Among over 14,000 tested, over 60% did not have the literacy level required to enroll in WIOA skills training programs (ninth grade reading).
- Lack of work-readiness ("soft") skills which, often together with low literacy, limits prospects for career advancement and tax the capabilities of programs with limited resources.
- Criminal justice system involvement. An estimated 24% of all working adults have a criminal record nationally, with rates for young Black men as high as 49% [citation]. This has a demonstrated negative impact on job prospects, but there are models of employer partnerships, like Johns Hopkins Medical Center, that have demonstrated that this can be overcome.
- Homelessness. With housing prices soaring again, the rate of households unhoused or underhoused is increasing and creating challenges for holding down a steady job. Over 2,900 working age individuals are estimated to be homeless in Connecticut, representing an untapped supply of labor.
- Substance Abuse. The opioid epidemic has not spared Connecticut, with the number of people addicted to opioids increasing in recent years. Employment is a key part of any recovery plan.

**System Challenges.** In its early work, GWC has uncovered a number of weaknesses in the workforce development system that need to be addressed, including:

- **Data Availability:** Each of the State agencies engaged in Connecticut's workforce/talent-development efforts collects data and conducts analysis to support its priorities, investments and programs. However, the multiple systems are stand alone and do not interface with each other which hinder the ability to compile critical data and insight and bring together key sources of information to assess challenges and identify opportunities. Data sharing between agencies is not always available and does not allow for cumulative system outcome reporting.
- **Navigation:** Jobseekers and other users face challenges in navigating the rapid expansion of sources and content, which now includes personality assessments, career interest inventories, career coaching, online recruiting, and online training courses. Jobseekers need an easy-to-use online portal to find jobs, education, training, employment, and other services, such as financial aid or housing assistance.
- **Childcare Access:** Only parents who receive cash assistance from the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program and who participate in the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program, however, qualify for this benefit. Other low-income parents – including those who receive SNAP and/or Medicaid – are not eligible for Care 4 Kids, dramatically reducing their ability to take advantage of opportunities (including tuition-free opportunities) to enhance their

skills and earn the credentials they need to qualify for a good job on a career pathway and escape unemployment, under-employment, and low-wage employment. According to the Connecticut Early Childhood Alliance, Connecticut is one of only two states in the country that does not currently have a provision that allows all low-income parents enrolled in job training programs or college to use the state childcare subsidy program. Expanding Care 4 Kids eligibility to all low-income parents would create upward mobility, as research shows that subsidies promote mothers' educational attainment, particularly for those with low education levels.

- **Shrinking Labor Force:** While the State reported over 110,000 job openings in December 2021, even if all eligible workforce participants filled available job openings, a remaining 5,000 jobs would remain unfilled. Factors such as COVID-19 concerns, childcare access, and mismatched job training and workforce development efforts are contributing to the shortage. Policy changes and reducing barriers to labor force participation are needed to encourage more people to enter the workforce.

## **(F) State Workforce Development Capacity**

*Provide an analysis of the capacity of State entities to provide the workforce development activities identified in (A), above.*

Connecticut's capacity to implement current and proposed workforce development activities and provide coordinated, aligned, integrated, comprehensive workforce development programs and services to jobseekers, workers and employers is strong, and improving. Governor Lamont and the Governor's Workforce Council support a series of initiatives and investments to address Connecticut's workforce challenges, ranging from early childhood development, to strengthened career and technical education, to industry-specific enhancements in higher education, to focused training for targeted workers.

Likewise, the General Assembly has raised the broad workforce development, education and training agenda to a new level of attention and support through an array of investments in innovative programs. Many of these workforce development activities are described in the preceding section. Connecticut businesses and employers have increased their active support for and participation in numerous practical partnerships to help build the skills of the workers they need for their companies to prosper. The capacity of Connecticut's workforce system to meet the challenges ahead is manifest in numerous examples. At both State and regional/local levels, an array of sector-specific workforce partnerships are in place to prepare targeted jobseekers and incumbent workers to meet employers' needs. The statewide network of comprehensive American Job Centers and satellite offices provide accessible facilities and presence in key communities. The P20WIN longitudinal data system provides increasingly useful information to guide system investment strategies.

### **(b) State Strategic Vision and Goals**

#### **(1) Vision**

Core to Governor Lamont's vision for Connecticut is a nimble workforce ready to meet the needs of the 21st century economy. In October 2019, Governor Lamont signed Executive Order No. 4 elevating the State Workforce Board by directing it to do business as the Governor's Workforce Council. That Council, through its chair and his Chief Workforce Officer, now serve as the Governor's principal advisor on workforce development issues and coordinates the efforts of all state agencies and other entities promoting workforce development. A central component of the rebranding of the Governor's Workforce Council was including all new members, who are now CEOs of Connecticut's most successful and innovative companies, ranging from Stanley Black and Decker to Indeed to small clean energy training companies. Ensuring that a diverse suite of business leaders are deeply engaged in the work of GWC remains paramount. GWC, assisted by the Office of Workforce Strategy is also focused on breaking down silos across the state and by precipitating partnerships between industry, philanthropy, community-based

organizations, and academia with the goal of developing industry-aligned workforce programs that promote pathways into upwardly mobile careers.

Central to this vision is promoting educational and workforce training programs that promote equity in the workforce. Given the adverse effects the pandemic had on populations who were already historically marginalized or disadvantaged, the Governor's Workforce Council has even more of a prerogative to ensure these individuals are a central focus of programs that are being developed. By revamping the Governor's Workforce Council, Governor Lamont is not only prioritizing the development of an innovative and successful workforce but also the intentionality of ensuring this workforce works for everyone in Connecticut.

Governor Lamont's vision is centered around engaging businesses to be more proactive in shaping their own workforce agendas. A foundational initiative outlined in the Governor's Workforce Council's strategic plan was the development of regional sector partnerships across the state. These are consortia of regional businesses who develop their own goals and objectives pertaining to their associated industry. These partnerships are a fundamental component of the workforce system that Governor Lamont envisions since it puts business front and center into outlining their collective needs first and then engaging partners such as educational or training providers, community-based organizations, or local governments. While the Governor's Workforce Council and Office of Workforce Strategy provides critical statewide oversight, these partnerships are a central way for regions to maintain regional autonomy by developing focused, organic, talent pipelines.

## **(2) Goals**

In issuing Executive Order No. 4 on October 29, 2019, Governor Ned Lamont created the Governor's Workforce Council to advance a bold goal that **every Connecticut resident will benefit from equitable, life-long access to pathways for career advancement that fit their interests and capabilities while providing job opportunities that meet the needs of our employers.**

The goals first articulated in Executive Order No. 4 which are embodied in GWC's October 2020 Strategic Plan, and continue to drive the work of the Office of Workforce Strategy which seeks:

- To serve as the primary advisor to the Governor and the administration on workforce development policy
- To promote equity and access to the workforce by partnering with community-based organizations and stakeholders to develop specific strategies aimed at increasing workforce participation of historically underrepresented populations
- To partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to fund, support, and design industry-aligned educational and workforce training programs that issue an industry-recognized credential
- To liaison directly with employers to better understand labor market trends and hiring needs to help inform investment and focus of educational, government, and community partners
- To provide staff to the Governor's Workforce Council, Connecticut's WIOA-mandated state workforce board
- To research national and state workforce development policy best practices to help bring continuous innovation to Connecticut
- To partner with employers, educators, government, and community organizations to implement the strategic initiatives outlined in the Governor's Workforce Council's strategic plan
- To partner across state agencies and the private sector to help advise on and coordinate existing workforce development initiatives and programs

The goals of this work include:

- Create in Connecticut the most aligned, high-quality, and equitable workforce development system in the country;
- Develop a sustainable framework for coordination among all stakeholders in the state's workforce development system, and report annually to the Governor and General Assembly about workforce coordination efforts and on how to further improve such coordination;
- Retain skilled individuals within Connecticut;
- Introduce and mainstream best practices from academic research and from other cities, states, regions, and countries; and
- Achieve data-driven outcomes, consistently measured outcomes across different programs and agencies, made possible by improved labor market and programmatic data systems across state agencies;

Key objectives reflected in the plan strategies detailed below in Section II (c) include:

With respect to the overall workforce development system:

- Reduce the cost of education and training borne by individuals;
- Improve the use of funds and resources under applicable state and federal programs;
- Develop recommendations on potential state and federal statutory reforms to support the continuous improvement of workforce development services;
- Study the future of work and the resulting implications for Connecticut's workforce needs and opportunities;

With respect to Connecticut's career pathways and workforce pipeline:

- Increase emphasis on career readiness in our public schools and universities by strengthening and supporting teaching of essential employability skills and habits of mind for the 21st century workplace, such as teamwork, professionalism, adaptability, complex problem-solving, situational awareness, cultural competencies, and resilience;
- Reduce barriers to higher education and quality workforce training with an emphasis on two-generational and whole-family approaches, including through wraparound services, mentoring, and career navigation and coaching;
- Strengthen the bridge from high school into post-secondary training and education;
- Increase the speed of developing new courses and programs at state universities and colleges and other related educational institutions or workforce training providers in order to meet the needs of employers and to improve the labor market outcomes of graduates;
- Improve and standardize processes for enrollment, transfer, and credit for prior learning between;
- Bring transparency to the credentials conferred by public higher education institutions by translating credentials wherever possible to the skills and competencies developed to attain those credentials;
- and among training providers and educational institutions;
- Improve opportunities for work-based, credit-bearing and non-credit bearing learning such as internships, apprenticeships and project-based learning with workplace application. Increase access to portable and transferable dual-credit coursework in high schools;
- Emphasize lifelong learning and provide opportunities for up-skilling to workers throughout their careers;

With respect to partnering with employers to improve outcomes in the workforce development system:

- Assist industry and labor in ongoing efforts to close racial and gender gaps in healthcare, education, building trades, STEM, and other fields;
- Support businesses in shifting from degree-based hiring requirements to a skills-based focus because skill-based hiring can address inequities and improve job matching;
- Remove barriers for employers to engage as partners in the creation of a talent pipeline they need to be successful, such as train-to-hire and up-skilling initiatives for incumbent workers;
- Support state agencies and municipalities in their efforts to recruit businesses to Connecticut, such as by facilitating new pathways and programs to create the necessary supply of workers;

State agencies are assisting the Governor's Workforce Council as it pursues these goals and objectives by:

- Providing all relevant information and data about agencies' workforce development programs and services, funding streams for these programs and services, and the outcomes of those programs and services.
- Enacting appropriate data-sharing agreements with one another and with the Governor's Workforce Council to facilitate such analysis.

The work of the Governor's Workforce Council shall include all regions of the state, and focus on providing workforce opportunities for all of Connecticut's workers, and, therefore, incorporate strategies to provide opportunities for people of any age, ancestry, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression, as well as to justice-involved persons, individuals with disabilities, military service members and veterans, immigrants and refugees.

The GWC is working to ensure that the statewide strategic is actively used to drive the Connecticut workforce system's goals, strategies, staff, partners, and decisions. Connecticut's growth more than ever depends upon fostering an innovative, entrepreneurial and inclusive economic environment in which its residents can build strong careers and businesses can find highly-skilled employees.

Through the Governor's Workforce Council, Connecticut is creating a comprehensive vision and strategy for growing its economy through innovative, accessible, and easily navigable workforce programs and a workforce development system that includes collaboration, alignment, innovation, equity, performance accountability, and access to sufficient information and data. This includes a commitment to eliminating administrative and statutory barriers to success wherever possible and the improvement of outcomes for the state's workers, students, and businesses.

### **(3) Performance Goals**

*Using the table provided in Appendix 1, include the State's expected levels of performance relating to the performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance described in section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA. (This Strategic Planning element only applies to core programs.)*

CTDOL Core Programs

	Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service Program			
	Program Year: 22		Program Year: 23	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	65		66	

Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	62		63	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	6,400		6,450	
Credential Attainment Rate	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable
Measurable Skill Gains	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable	Not Applicable

	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act			
	Title I Adult Program		Program Year: 23	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	69%		70%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	67%		68%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$5,600		\$5,800	
Credential Attainment Rate	71%		72%	
Measurable Skill Gains	65%		66%	

	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act			
	Title I Dislocated Worker Program		Program Year: 23	
	Expected Level	Negotiated Level	Expected Level	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	77%		78%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	77.5%		78.5%	

Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$9,000		\$9,200	
Credential Attainment Rate	65%		66%	
Measurable Skill Gains	55%		56%	

	Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act			
	Title I Youth Program			
	Program Year: 22	Negotiated Level	Program Year: 23	Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	73%		74%	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	73%		74%	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$3,300		\$3,500	
Credential Attainment Rate	73%		74%	
Measurable Skill Gains	63%		64%	

#### CSDE Core Programs

	Title II – Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program			
	Program Year: 2020		Program Year: 2021	
	Proposed/ Expected Level	Negotiated /Adjusted Level	Proposed/ Expected Level	Negotiated /Adjusted Level
Employment (Second Quarter after Exit)	57		57	
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit)	72		72	
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)	\$6,700		\$6,700	
Credential Attainment Rate	56		56	
Measurable Skill Gains	46.2		46.2	

## ADS Core Programs

### (4) Assessment

*Describe how the State will assess the overall effectiveness of the workforce development system in the State in relation to the strategic vision and goals stated above in sections (b)(1), (2), and (3) and how it will use the results of this assessment and other feedback to make continuous or quality improvements.*

The Office of Workforce Strategy is charged under state law (Public Law 21-2) with continuously assessing the overall effectiveness of Connecticut's workforce development system under the direction of the Chief Workforce Officer. The Office of Workforce Strategy is working closely with the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) Performance and Accountability Unit and the CTDOL WIOA Administration Unit, in collaboration with colleagues in comparable functions at ADS, CSDE, and the Workforce Development Boards, to:

- Ensure that thorough reporting, assessment and continuous improvement processes are built in to all workforce funding contracts, Requests for Proposals processes, and state agency operations to ensure full assessment of all programming and tools.
- Develop and maintain a dashboard tool to capture and summarize selected data concerning program effectiveness and the aggregate impact of Connecticut's workforce system in addressing the vision, goals, and principles described in this plan, including disaggregation of reporting by race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, gender and other participant characteristics of focus in the plan.

Broad measures to be reviewed regularly will include:

- Business engagement and delivering value to business/employer customers.
- Measurable skills development in terms of educational attainment and workforce credentials that matter to Connecticut businesses.
- Workforce training program data collected from wage records
- Securing jobs in demand occupations showing promise for long-term growth in industry sectors valuable to Connecticut's economic expansion.
- Earned wages that help jobseekers and workers attain financial security and demonstrate career advancement.
- Achievement of equity, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of the operation of the workforce system.
- Degree of public awareness of in-demand careers offering a range of career opportunities and of the workforce system strategies to facilitate skill development and job access.
- Workforce system investments that generate a quality return.

See Section III (b) (4) Assessment and Evaluation of Programs.

### (c) State Strategy

*The Unified State Plan must include the State's strategies to achieve its strategic vision and goals. These strategies must take into account the State's economic, workforce, and workforce development, education and training activities and analysis provided in Section (a) above. Include specific strategies to address needs of populations provided in Section (a).*

*(1) Describe the strategies the State will implement, including industry or sector partnerships related to in-demand industry sectors and occupations and career pathways, as required by WIOA section 101(d)(3)(B), (D). "Career pathway" is defined at WIOA section 3(7) and includes registered apprenticeship. "In-demand industry sector or*

*occupation" is defined at WIOA section 3(23).*

*(2) Describe the strategies the State will use to align the core programs, any Combined State Plan partner programs included in this Plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs, and any other resources available to the State to achieve fully integrated customer services consistent with the strategic vision and goals described above. Also describe strategies to strengthen workforce development activities in regard to weaknesses identified in section II(a)(2).*

Economic development is most effective when approached with a clear vision, an eye for long-term stability and growth, and a strong plan of execution. While the state needs to continue to manage its finances responsibly and to streamline government, it must also make the required investments to move our economy forward and innovate in ways that will benefit all Connecticut residents.

As mentioned, key components of Governor Lamont's vision to transform the state's economic development strategy include aggressive business recruitment, collaborative work across agencies to better support existing businesses and onboard new ones, as well as a strategic and long-term economic policy focus, including in the important area of opportunity zones.

Section III(b)(3) below details the recently revamped organizational structure charged with delivering improved workforce development services to Connecticut communities and residents.

The most recent expression of the state's strategies to achieve its vision and goals is the Governor's Workforce Council Strategic Plan approved in October 2020. This plan detailed strategies across four main areas of work: Business Leadership, Career Building, Equity and Access, and Accountability and Data-Driven Management. As a working document it is subject to ongoing adjustment to meet new challenges and opportunities and in response to extensive input from employers, agencies, and individual workers.

Strategies in GWC's Strategic Plan (October 2020) include the following and will be adjusted to reflect the new committee structure from Section III (b) below.

## **Business Leadership**

Business Leadership strategies are those that rely most importantly on business as the driver. Regional Sector Partnerships will serve as the anchor strategy to reinvigorate Connecticut's demand-driven approach to workforce development. Educators and trainers will partner with business to develop strategies that fill gaps in the regional talent supply chain. Students and other jobseekers will benefit from a more clearly articulated job demand picture and improved availability of training and support. Businesses can also lead the way in adopting skills-based hiring practices that will expand opportunities for all.

### **Regional Sector Partnerships.** Launch eight Regional Sector Partnerships(RSPs)

These partnerships will be the core leadership organizations for building a business led workforce agenda that provides for effective alignment of business needs, education and training programs and other supportive services in pursuit of an effective, inclusive workforce system.

All members of these partnerships will sit at a "shared table" and commit to sustained, continuous improvement in talent development outcomes. Data-driven, transparent processes will be a defining characteristic of this approach.

***Update February 2022:*** 7 RSPs launched (4 Manufacturing, 2 IT/Tech Enabled, 1 Bioscience). 2 Healthcare in development.

### **Credential Registry System.** Agree upon a plan by June 2021 to create a Connecticut credential registry.

Searchable and comparable data about credentials should be readily accessible, usable, understandable, and actionable for students, workers, parents, counselors, employers, educators,

and policy makers. Connecticut will launch a statewide credential registry system for secondary, postsecondary, and technical programs (credit and non-credit bearing) that improves educational access and equity, lifelong learning and career pathway advancement, and helps to sustain a globally competitive workforce for the 21st century.

**Skills-Based Hiring and Training Systems.** Launch three to five skills-based hiring pilot initiatives during 2021 and 2022, including pilot initiatives in Connecticut state government. Agree on a plan to scale skills-based hiring practices statewide by 2023.

Connecticut will promote a skills-based hiring and training environment that provides greater equity and access and sets new standards for how educators train individuals for in-demand jobs. Ultimately, the process will more effectively and quickly match qualified jobseekers with employers, and create immediate economic benefits for workers, employers, and communities. Our state government will provide leadership by launching a skills-based hiring initiative in 2021. We will also launch a skills-based hiring working group that will develop plans for a more comprehensive skills-based approach to building our workforce in both the public and private sectors.

**Retain College Graduates.** Launch talent retention organizations in three cities by 2022; increase retention of undergraduates by 5% in participating markets within five years.

Connecticut can grow its talent pool and attract more businesses by providing more postsecondary students with meaningful internship experiences in their college years and highlighting the rich, diverse quality of life in Connecticut. Employers can play a leading role in retaining home-grown talent while helping to win the war for talent. Students who have substantive work-based experiences and develop meaningful work relationships during college are much more likely to remain in state after graduation. Opportunities to seed retention efforts will increase as our work-based learning and Regional Sector Partnership initiatives gain greater traction.

**Update February 2022:** AdvanceCT recruited over 26 Hartford-based employers and universities to work with students to stay in Connecticut upon graduation. AdvanceCT is also developing an app students can use to explore living and working in CT

## **Career Building – Educating Our Workforce**

These strategies align training and education with occupational demand and career opportunities. The cultivation of career pathway systems and in-demand, sector-based training will serve as the anchor strategies to achieve this alignment. Career Building strategies will promote lifelong learning and modernize core skills in digital literacy, problem solving, teamwork, and communication. This plan also recognizes the need to invest in our teachers' professional development if we are to succeed. New approaches to student advising and a redesign of our adult education system will also be critically important change initiatives.

**Career Pathways.** Develop a comprehensive, flexible Career Pathways System plan by December 2021.

Connecticut must develop an integrated career pathways strategy that effectively responds to today's workforce challenges and opportunities. This should include a re-imagination of our educational system that responds to our rapidly changing, digitally-driven workplace. As it pertains to the education system, this requires a more responsive, adaptive curricular development system, modernization of the teacher preparation, professional development, and certification system, more career focused student advising resources, and an accountability system that incentivizes desired system change. Parallel changes must occur in the workforce and business sectors to assure needed progress

**Update February 2022:** OWS has developed high school career pathways working group and strategy in partnership with SDE

**Sector-Based Training.** Propose a series of new sector training programs for high-priority jobs in manufacturing, healthcare, and IT by December 2021. Build a process to scale the strategy statewide.

Connecticut must build scalable and sustainable sector-based training strategies that address near-term shortages and anticipate emerging needs. These training programs must include opportunities for returning citizens, youth, Veterans, and other individuals with barriers to employment.

**Update February 2022:** On the heels of the deployment of \$15million in Coronavirus Relief Funds for short term skills training in 2021, OWS has launched CareerConneCT which will initially invest \$62M in training 8,000 workers over three years (see detail in Section II (a) (2) above)

**Work-Based Learning.** Create a state-level WBL intermediary function by June 2021. Launch a WBL portal and marketing initiative by December 2021.

OWS will coordinate WBL activities at a statewide level. This will include the creation of a digital platform for sharing best practices, enabling communication, and facilitating a community of practice among WBL system participants. OWS will also promote and market WBL activities to multiple stakeholders such as students, parents, school counselors, educators, and employers to engage more participants in these activities. At a regional level, the Regional Sector Partnerships will help convene local stakeholders to improve program-level coordination among educators, employers, and workforce boards.

**Accelerating Postsecondary Access.** Launch a Dual Enrollment Working Group by March 2021.

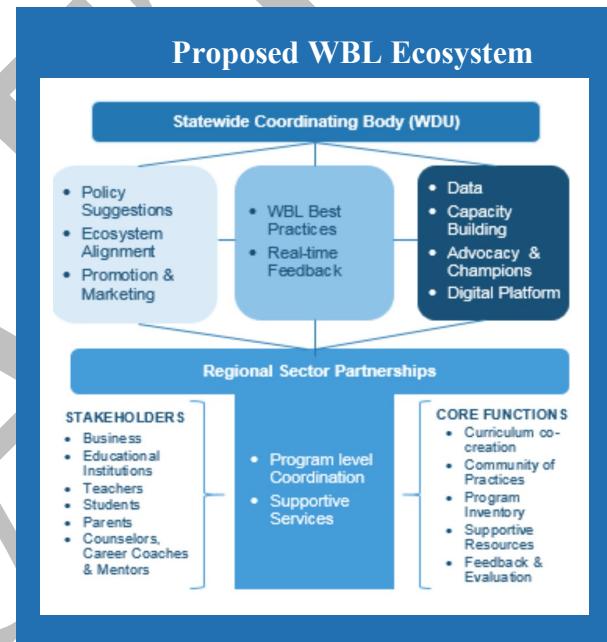
Report findings by March 2022. Launch an automatic admission plan for the state universities and other interested institutions of higher education.

Connecticut will increase participation in dual credit programs statewide for all high school students, with a focus on educational pathways leading to living-wage careers. SDE and CSCU will lead an effort to increase the number of students completing their FAFSA applications, with a focus on school districts that score low on the Accountability Index (e.g., Alliance Districts).

**Academic and Career Advising.** Develop a regionally based high school career advising system by December 2021. Achieve a student to advisor ratio of 250:1 by Spring 2024.

Connecticut will develop a modern advising system in which all high school and public university students have an individualized career and academic plan, with data systems to support academic and career progress and credential completion.

**Improving Teacher and Student Preparedness.** Adopt Next Gen Accountability System measures for high school digital literacy and computer science by December 2022. Reconvene the Educator Professional Development Task Force by March 2021.



A state plan for high school computer science was passed by the State Board of Education in 2020, and a teacher professional development task force from 2017 proposed a set of policy recommendations. We should expand and capitalize upon the progress of these groups and work with CSCU and UConn to expand K-12 outreach programs and increase enrollment in college-level data and CS programs.

**Adult Education.** Launch a working group including Adult Ed leadership, CSCU's community colleges, and WDBs to develop plans and goals to redesign AE by Q1 2021. Implement a regional pilot in Q3 2021.

Connecticut will create a coordinated, accountable adult literacy system that links Adult Education, community colleges, and regional WDBs to deliver education and training programs tailored to students' goals and needs. The AE system will support a contextualized and work-based learning approach to help students achieve their desired outcomes.

*Update February 2022:* OWS has engaged Social Finance to conduct a review of all adult literacy programming and work with stakeholders to develop a unified strategy

## **Equity and Access**

These strategies developed seek to address persistent barriers that undermine access to sustainable work and training arrangements. The foremost barriers facing Connecticut's lower-paid workforce include child care, transportation, benefits cliffs, and access to behavioral health services. Many of these barriers disproportionately affect specific underserved populations and have been exacerbated by the COVID-19 crisis.

Fundamental to these strategies is the recognition that a motivated person with a good job or training opportunity is often thwarted by barriers not of their making. These plans are intended to help our workers and jobseekers while creating a positive return for the state and its taxpayers. They recognize the talent potential that can be unleashed through thoughtful, data-driven policy initiatives. A by-product of these strategies will be to broaden our workforce and widen the pipeline of talent available to Connecticut's employers.

**Expand Capacity of Child Care System.** Develop a plan to redesign the early childhood education system by December 2021.

GWC supports existing efforts by the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (OEC) to enact system-wide reform and integrate these efforts with business-led strategies that increase opportunities for working parents to earn, to learn, and to support their families.

**Reduce Transportation Barriers.** Develop a bulk transit pass purchasing program for individuals enrolled in non-credit bearing workforce training and Adult Education programs by September 2021.

GWC recommends: a) increasing access to affordable public transit passes for individuals participating in non-credit bearing workforce training programs; and b) expanding proven models that offer reimbursements for individualized transportation solutions (typically for rural participants) to and from non-credit bearing workforce training programs and employment-related activities.

*Update February 2022:* Public Law 21-2 codified the CTPass program which provides free transit passes to all students in public schools, colleges and universities and is being expanded to cover access to non-credit skills training programs.

**Expand Access to Behavioral Health Services.** By 2023, increase the number of Supportive Employment Services slots for residents with mental health challenges from 2,000 to 4,000.

GWC supports DMHAS's plan for a phased approach to expanding its provision of SES and IPS services. This approach will require additional state resources to build infrastructure and capacity,

which in turn will leverage federal reimbursements to expand SES programming without drawing down additional state resources.

**Reduce the Adverse Effects of Benefits Cliff.** Adopt the Federal Reserve of Atlanta's Benefits Cliffs tools for use by Connecticut's state caseworkers, counselors, and analysts by December 2021.

GWC supports revenue-neutral changes that incentivize work and career progression while eliminating benefits cliffs. These solutions may include introducing or extending benefits phase outs, implementing earned income disregards, reducing or removing asset limits, and increasing the earned income tax credit (EITC).

**Update February 2022:** The 2Gen Work Group has brought forth a comprehensive list of proposals to address a range of barriers to access to training and employment that will be addressed across the OWS and partner committee structure.

### **Accountability and Data-Driven Management**

Accountability and Data-Driven Management strategies use technology to increase accessibility, transparency, and accountability. They allow us to better understand program outcomes and the return on our investment in training and supportive services. Program managers and policy-makers will be able to create and revise programs based on real-time data. Analysts can study the overlapping impacts of government initiatives to improve their design.

Jobseekers will gain clarity on career options, pathways, and specific educational programs, leveraging a user-friendly online platform. Businesses will contribute to this user platform, creating a much more useful feedback loop while gaining access to a broader talent pipeline. In fact, we cannot hope to achieve an inclusive, demand-driven system without effectively using data.

**Online Workforce Development Services.** Propose a comprehensive online services redesign by year end 2021, including delivery of an initial prototype of the new system

Connecticut will enhance its online job-related systems and improve equity of access to these offerings. The enhanced system will include information on labor market conditions, career pathway advancement strategies, and lifelong learning opportunities while providing users with access to regional partners who can offer support. The system should also provide data about program employment outcomes, affordability, and available financing along with supportive services information that can help to sustain a work and training strategy.

**Update February 2022:** New online portal in development to offer a single point of application for skills training opportunities across sectors and to track and report skill and credential acquisition and employment outcomes.

**Data and Performance Management Tools.** Create standard system-wide performance dashboards and ROI templates by December 2021.

Connecticut must build data and performance management tools at both a system-wide and a program level that illuminate our results and help GWC to analyze program impact and return on investment. Ideally, these tools will build the capacity to analyze the effectiveness of programs alone and in combination and also better understand labor market trends. This functionality will help decision-makers understand the participants in workforce programs, the services they receive, and the outcomes.

**Update February 2022:** Through the GWC, the Office of Workforce Strategy, Office of Policy and Management and other agencies have developed and reviewed indicators and performance measures at the system- and program-level. The system-wide measures will be reviewed through the GWC Data and Performance Committee and developed into a data request to the state longitudinal data system, P20 WIN, in accordance with Public Act 21-2, Section 250(e), June Special Session. In order to develop a framework for assessment of effectiveness of programs, in

2021, DOL, in collaboration with the Office of Policy and Management and the University of Connecticut, through the P20 WIN collaboration, piloted a ‘return on investment’ (ROI) framework for assessing program impact, using data from the WIOA Adult program for the pilot. While results are preliminary, the tools and methods developed for this pilot could be expanded and replicated for other programs. The ROI framework is based on similar work undertaken in Virginia, and guidance from national workforce applied research groups.

**Integrated Data System.** Obtain agreement of all relevant state agencies to join the P20 WIN longitudinal data group by June 2021.

As of August 2021, P20 WIN has expanded to include social services, homelessness, child welfare, and financial aid agencies to provide a more complete understanding of workforce and social program outcomes across a much broader, more textured universe of users. In addition, the Chief Workforce Officer was added to the Executive Board for P20 WIN, to ensure alignment for the P20 WIN learning agenda and continued expansion.

In addition, OWS will develop requests for standard program reporting and analytics that, among other things, will provide essential time series data for trend analysis that can be invaluable in understanding how our tax dollars can be used for maximum impact.

**Update February 2022:** The statutory basis for P20 WIN was updated in Public Act 21-2, June Special Session, with an expanded vision and purpose – to inform sound policies and practice through the secure sharing of longitudinal data across the participating agencies to ensure that individuals successfully navigate supportive services and educational pathways into the workforce. In addition, the learning agenda was updated and revised in late 2021 to reflect current state priorities, with future updates planned annually.

The Office Workforce Strategy, under the leadership of the Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor’s Workforce Council has responsibility to ensure alignment of all workforce programs as described above. Powerful examples of these alignment efforts are provided throughout the plan sections.

OWS works with representatives of State agencies responsible for administering core WIOA programs (CTDOL, ADS and CSDE) joined by representatives of other critical workforce system collaborators and stakeholders in ongoing integrated State and local-level monitoring and oversight to identify gaps to be addressed and opportunities for effective program and resource alignment.

Lead responsibility to review and assure alignment of programs and resources falls to the Governor’s Workforce Council. OWS is supported in this role by the Connecticut Department of Labor’s Performance and Accountability Unit and Office of Research which are charged with system performance review to ensure value and productivity of investments, analyze labor market information to identify gaps, needs and opportunities for innovation and improvement, and provide insight and guidance to the OWS and the Governor’s Workforce Council on appropriate actions.

### **III. OPERATIONAL PLANNING ELEMENTS**

#### **(a) State Strategy Implementation –**

##### **(1) State Board Functions**

*Describe how the State board will implement its functions under section 101(d) of WIOA (i.e., provide a description of Board operational structures and decision making processes to ensure such functions are carried out).*

Governor Lamont’s Executive Order No. 4 in 2019 set the initial expectations and requirements for the Governor’s Workforce Council, with GWC and its Chair taking a lead role in advising the governor on the state’s workforce development strategy and supporting the state’s economic growth.

Connecticut's State Workforce Board has been operating under the Alternative Entity provisions of the federal Workforce Innovation Act and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act since 2000. Those provisions have allowed Connecticut to simultaneously implement the federal acts and abide by section 31-3i of the Connecticut General Statutes, which dictates the Board be composed of twenty-four members, a majority of whom represent business and industry, and the remainder of whom represent state and local governments, organized labor, education and community-based organizations, including a representative of a community action agency. For the last two decades, the U.S. Department of Labor has repeatedly approved that structure as each new Governor provided their workforce development vision and appointed leaders to the State Board. In 2019, Governor Lamont decided to retain that grandfathered structure and appointed a slate of Board members that complies with section 31-3i and is substantially similar to the state board described in WIOA.

The Governor's Workforce Council, as the State's Workforce Board, coordinates among stakeholders in the workforce system, including businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, nonprofit institutions and labor unions. The first meeting of the GWC was held on November 21, 2019. Full Council meetings are held quarterly to approve all plans and projects with Committee work proceeding between meetings.

The Office of Workforce Strategy was established in 2019 and fully codified in 2021 to provide staff to GWC to:

- Implement, promote, & improve the GWC & WIOA State Strategic Plans
- Serve as the primary advisor on workforce development policy, in coordination with other state entities/legislature
- Liaison with state agencies, workforce development partners, educators, philanthropy, & employers
- Promote equity and access to increase workforce participation of historically underrepresented populations
- Be a complimentary agency, not duplicative
- Create, support, and fund sustainable workforce curriculum that is high quality, industry aligned, and represents best practice

Public Act 21-2 was enacted in the 2021 Legislative Session. This law:

- Codified the Governor's Workforce Council and the Office of Workforce Strategy and their roles as listed above
- Expanded Governor's Workforce Council to 51 council members
- Established Governor's Workforce Cabinet to discuss and coordinate workforce programs across state agencies
- Located the Office of Workforce Strategy within the Office of the Governor for administrative purposes only
- Created the role of Chief Workforce Officer
- Established a cadence for annually updating the strategic plan and sending it to the state legislature

Under PL 21-2, The Chief Workforce Officer, Kelli-Marie Vallieres, and her Office of Workforce Strategy team were charged with supporting GWC in its work, including:

- Serving as

- the principal advisor to the Governor for workforce development policy, strategy, and coordination
- the lead state official for the development of employment strategies and initiatives
- the chairperson of the Governor's Workforce Cabinet
- Develop, and update as necessary a state workforce strategy in consultation with the GWC
- Collaborate with the regional WDBs to adapt best practices for workforce development established by such boards
- Coordinate the measurement and evaluation of outcomes across education and workforce development programs
- Issue guidance to state agencies, the GWC, and the WDBs in furtherance of the state workforce strategy
- Coordinate, in consultation with DOL and the WDBs, to ensure compliance with state and federal laws for the purpose of furthering the service capabilities of programs offered pursuant to WIOA
- Liaison and ensure the coordination of workforce programs across all Connecticut State Agencies

The Governor has appointed a Council and associated Committees with the experience and skill to ensure a cohesive, collaborative, ongoing, and meaningful process, drawing on the people leading Connecticut's workforce development efforts. Since the inception of planning for the Governor's Workforce Council, Governor Lamont and Chairs Moran and then Argosh have reached out to many other stakeholders to engage their support and input for the new CT workforce strategy. They have hosted informational meetings with and visited businesses, state public and private universities and colleges, local workforce boards, non-profits, philanthropy, training programs, local schools, apprenticeships programs, chief elected officials, and border state Governors, all in an effort to be transparent, inform their knowledge of areas of concern and identify opportunities for future action.

After one year of development, the GWC released its Workforce Strategic Plan on October 28, 2020 (detailed in Sections . The Plan puts forward a coordinated, statewide strategy for building an equitable, inclusive, and innovative workforce that meets the needs of the current economic environment. This Plan was a collaborative effort and solicited feedback and recommendations from industry representatives, educators, philanthropic and community-based organizations, and other key groups. The original Plan recommends strategies in four key areas: business leadership, education and training in support of career pathways, equity and access, and data.

The 8 Council Committees that have been established and charged with advancing initiatives as described in Section x above of will soon be working on Key Performance Indicators for their work as they craft their charges going forward Add Charge -- to come up with KPIs for 2022:

Business Leadership, addressing ring skills-based hiring, quality jobs, and CampusCT (retaining college graduates)

- The Career Sector Training, addressing short term training across six sectors, incumbent worker training, and SNAP Employment and Training.
- Education and Career Pathways, addressing Pathways Policy & Development (High School to Post Secondary, including areas of Dual Credit/Dual Enrollment, Business Leadership Partnerships, Career Exploration & Advising, Teacher Professional Development), Adult Education, and Work-based Learning
- Data and Performance, addressing Credential Registry; jobs.ct.gov; Dashboards & Standard Evaluation Framework; CTHires Enhancements; P20WIN Workforce data queries

- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Committee, charged with working with Inclusion Advisors to focusing on meeting the needs of re-entry population, Veterans, people with disabilities (Supportive Employment Services), youth, and BIPOC.
- Access to Employment Committee, charged with advancing work in the areas of Childcare & Early Childhood Education; Transportation; addressing “benefits cliffs”; and implementing AJC Navigator Pilots
- The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Steering Committee, is charged with authoring the next State WIOA Workforce Strategic Plan; aligning Regional Plans; and coordinating WIOA partners.

**Figure x: Governor’s Workforce Council Committees, February 2022**



22

## (2) Implementation of State Strategy

*Describe how the lead State agency with responsibility for the administration of each core program or a Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan will implement the State’s Strategies identified in II(c) above. This must include a description of—*

### (A) Core Program Activities to Implement the State’s Strategy

*Describe the activities the entities carrying out the respective core programs will fund to implement the State’s strategies. Also, describe how such activities will be aligned across the core programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan and among the entities administering the programs, including using co-enrollment and other strategies, as appropriate.*

The Office of Workforce Strategy has responsibility of the full implementation of many of the strategies detailed in Section II (c) State Strategy working with many State and private partners. The WIOA-supported One-Stop Career Centers, branded as the American Jobs Centers, remain the central vehicle for delivering much of the programming contemplated in the plan – connecting jobseekers to skills training

and education activities as well as directly to employment and ensuring that all training is responsive to the needs of employers, especially those offering middle skill jobs with career ladders.

### **Redesigning Customer Access to Workforce and Education services**

Leveraging the Department of Administrative Services (DAS) and IT Capital Bond dollars, OWS and DAS will work in partnership to develop MyCT Journey, a comprehensive discovery tool for workforce training. MyCT Journey will be a one-stop hub offering easy access to state services, training opportunities and career pathways. The portal will be customer friendly in order to easily connect job seekers to the workforce supports they need while providing data about program outcomes.

### **WIOA Career Services**

The CTDOL WIOA Administration Unit administers the WIOA Title 1B funding for CT's workforce development system which includes three of the core required partner programs – Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth. The administration of the funds includes but is not limited to the following functions; policy and procedure development, monitoring – both programmatically and fiscally, development of grants and contracts, reporting, and management information system support.

Through these functions, CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit is able to assist with the strategies and alignment of the core program activities of WIOA Title 1B with other required and non-required partner programs in the American Job Center network. This is accomplished through various means including the assignment of liaisons to the workforce development boards (WDBs) who have regular communication with the staff at the WDB and who also attend regularly scheduled meetings of the WDBs in order to keep abreast of their planning, priorities, policies and strategies for the ensuring that a full complement of programs and services are available to the job seekers and employers in the region. Technical assistance is also provided through regular meetings of the WIOA Administration Unit with the WDBs on various WIOA Title 1B topics including the negotiations of service delivery by and through required and non-required partner programs; ensuring MOUs and appropriate cost sharing mechanisms are in place. Co-enrollment is a specific target of these efforts as well, with significant progress being made with regard to the co-enrollment of Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) participants in the WIOA Title 1B program for Dislocated Workers. In late 2021, a revised state-wide co-enrollment policy was implemented that charges CTDOL counselors with completing the actual co-enrollment of TAA clients into the Dislocated Worker program. This was done in part due to the new regulatory requirement that TAA workers must be co-enrolled and also due to historically low co-enrollment rates in the state. This new approach will eliminate hand-offs to non-TAA staff and allow for greater control during the entire co-enrollment process. The intent moving forward is to replicate the successful attributes of this work to increase co-enrollment across programs whenever appropriate. These combined efforts serve to lead and strengthen the commitments of the required partner and non-required partner programs in meeting the goals and objectives as outlined in the state's strategy in II(c) above. Core WIOA program activities in Connecticut will be aligned as partners build upon existing inter-agency relationships and program collaborations.

Whenever possible, especially after the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, services are delivered in a variety of formats include by phone, over web-based tools like Zoom or Microsoft Teams, email, and when appropriate, in-person. The WIOA application and many client intake forms are now fully online, resulting in greater access to services during periods of office closures. All regular in-person services such as case manager appointments or orientation sessions are now hosted over Zoom or Teams throughout the state.

Additionally customers that come through the AJC system from a Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) referral from the CT Department of Social Services are encouraged to be co-enrolled into WIOA Adult or Youth programs whenever possible in order to leverage funding, supportive services, and to leverage

training dollars. Through a data sharing agreement with JFES and DSS, WIOA case managers are able to utilize the JFES data within the CTHires system as verification of TANF recipient for low income eligibility for WIOA services. This expedites the data collection and document gathering process for this population.

### **American Job Centers (AJC) Customer Flow**

Walk-in customers at comprehensive American Job Centers will be greeted at the main reception desk by a team of CTDOL and/or WDB partner staff, as front desk coverage will be a shared responsibility between the two partners.

CTDOL will provide Unemployment Insurance staff experts at affiliate and comprehensive offices to answer Reemployment and Unemployment Insurance-related inquiries from customers. In July of 2020, Connecticut stood up a Consumer Contact Center to answer numerous claimant UI inquiries as a result of the Pandemic. The Contact Center currently has 200 representatives answering phone calls and emails on general UI inquiries every day.

In addition, the American Job Centers staff still assist individuals seeking unemployment-related information or services one-on-one. Each of the five comprehensive American Job Center offices are staffed with a full-time CTDOL Unemployment Insurance staff expert providing service one-on-one through Teams. Some staff members may be able to assist in the processing of unemployment claims directly, in-person, for jobseekers with disabilities who may have difficulty filing applications over the phone or via the Internet.

CTDOL will provide access to Unemployment Insurance inquiries via Consumer Contact Center (phone, “Quick Clicks” and provide callbacks option). UI staff experts will also be accessible by scheduled appointments via Teams at our comprehensive offices to answer Reemployment and Unemployment Insurance-related inquiries.

Generally, the Career Centers in each comprehensive American Job Center are staffed jointly by CTDOL and WDB staff (with the exception of Hamden/New Haven), with each partner committed to assigning a minimum of one staff member on a full time basis.

AJCs have expanded access to services via virtual through Teams, Zoom and other online resources.

When a job seeker enters an American Job Center seeking services, the AJC staff will first determine whether or not the customer is registered in the CTHires system, which is used to track the services provided to each job seeker. If the customer is not registered, he or she will be guided to a computer and asked to complete the CTHires customer registration. If the customer needs assistance in completing the registration process, staff assistance will be provided.

American Job Center customers are provided with some form of orientation to the employment services that are available to them through all the various partners. Job Center staff discuss the customer’s job search plans and provides customers with the opportunity to sign up for employment readiness core workshops, such as Successful Job Search Strategies, Interviewing Strategies and Techniques, and Fundamentals of Resume Writing. Additional workshops are available depending on the region. If the customer needs one-on-one job search assistance, career counseling, or a resume critique, every effort will be made to provide that service at that time, if not, then scheduled based on customer’s availability. If the customer is interested in self-service activities, s/he can utilize CTHires to conduct job searches, create a “virtual recruiter”, post a resume, or access online courses. Customers can also visit AJC Career Centers for access to computers, fax machines, copiers, resume paper, and free postage for mailing applications and resumes. Customers will also be informed about the various services available under WIOA.

Customers who self-identify as veterans or eligible spouses will be assessed for significant barriers to employment and other characteristics that qualify for one-on-one job search assistance from a CTDOL

Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist. Jobseekers with a self-disclosed disability may be referred to either a Disability Program Navigator or Disability Employment Initiative representative (depending on region). Jobseekers with disabilities may also be referred to Aging and Disability Services (ADS) for service. All customers have the option of accessing the universal services available in the center.

Staff is assigned to each of the career centers in the comprehensive American Job Centers to support and assist jobseekers in whatever way needed. Jobseekers needing to improve computer skills will be referred to a computer skills workshop or drop-in computer skills classroom to work on developing or enhancing their computer skills.

Customers interested in WIOA services will be connected to the appropriate WIOA representative or WIOA information session. This is coordinated online since early 2020 to accommodate virtual service delivery and will continue when convenient for both staff and participants in the future. Application, intake and employment plans or any subsequent forms are shared over CTHires and with tools such as DocuSign to gather signatures electronically.

All American Job Center (AJC) customers will be asked if they are receiving public assistance benefits (i.e. TANF, SNAP, HUSKY, Care 4 Kids) and referred to the appropriate WIOA service entity to assist with any special needs beyond those offered by the AJC. Such referrals will be documented and outcomes noted.

Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) services and WDB Title I services have been co-located wherever/whenever possible with Title II/Adult Education and Title IV/Vocational Rehabilitation Services. Two Vocational Rehabilitation programs of ADS have been successful in achieving a model of part-time co-location in each of the WDB regions. Two Adult Education providers have also experienced success in co-locating in the Northwest WDB and in the East WDB. If/where co-location is not feasible, all staff in each of the comprehensive American Job Centers will be trained to become familiar with services provided by Adult Education and ADS and be able to make an intelligent, informed decision about when to refer a customer to one of these agencies. In turn, all staff at Adult Education and ADS has been trained to become familiar with the services available at the American Job Centers across Connecticut, capable of making referrals to those Job Centers for any customer.

The American Job Centers are hubs from which jobseekers can be referred to sector-focused programs in targeted sectors such as Manufacturing, Health Care or Construction. Job Developers from organizations like ADS have joined the Regional Business Service teams in each region.

American Job Center staff will be familiar with these targeted sector grants and programs in each region and capable of making informed referrals to them. In some situations, targeted sector program staff may be co-located at an American Job Center. Accessible printed program information is made available to jobseekers.

The regional WDBs deliver Adult and Dislocated Worker program activities through the American Job Center system via comprehensive and affiliate centers. Career services are provided to a wide range of jobseekers, with specialty programs directed to returning citizens, veterans and individuals with disabilities. Services include career coaching, guidance on job search techniques, skill and interest assessments, advice and support through peer groups, individual employment planning, and job development and placement. Occupational training is provided through access to Individual Training Accounts (ITAs). Support services are funded for transportation, childcare, or technological needs, among other needs, to support an individual's successful participation in WIOA activities. Needs-based payments are available by regional policy to support individuals in training. When resources are designated, the Workforce Boards coordinate layoff aversion activities locally to complement state Rapid Response efforts. This can include the funding of supplies or training to keep a business open and its employees on

staff, preventing a layoff from occurring, as well as leveraging other resources such as Shared Work programs to address payroll needs.

## **Business Services**

Teams engage employers and provide recruitment and hiring assistance, as well as access to an array of training resources for incumbent workers and new hires. See detail on services to employers in Section III(a)(2)(D) below.

### **CTDOL-Administered Services**

WIOA Title 1 and Wagner-Peyser services are available through Connecticut's affiliate and comprehensive *American Job Centers*. CTDOL will provide the following services:

#### **Wagner-Peyser Labor Exchange**

Under the Wagner-Peyser Act, CTDOL Employment Services (ES) receives federal funding to provide universal access to an integrated array of employment-related labor exchange services, including job search assistance, job referral, and placement assistance for jobseekers, reemployment services to unemployment insurance claimants, and recruitment services to businesses with posted job openings.

During the last program year, a total of 29,976 Wagner-Peyser program participants received employment services (staff-assisted or self-services) through the American Job Centers, with 71,709 staff-assisted services provided statewide. Virtual employment workshops on resume writing, interviewing, job search strategies and LinkedIn were attended by 4,645 participants. Participants also benefited from services such as career guidance, information about specific companies and labor market trends, and one-on-one career counseling through the American Job Centers. In addition, staff with board-certified credentials from the Professional Association of Résumé Writers provided resume preparation services.

#### **Unemployment Insurance Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (UI RESEA)**

CTDOL meets the reemployment needs of many UI claimants through the Unemployment Insurance Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (UI RESEA) program, which serves claimants who are either profiled as most likely to exhaust benefits or receiving Unemployment Compensation for Ex-service members (UCX). Selected claimants receive virtual or in-person services through the Bridgeport, Hamden, Hartford, Montville and Waterbury American Job Centers. DOL's RESEA program design includes an increased UI presence in the AJCs and the involvement of UI trained staff. Specifically, each RESEA customer meets one-on-one with a RESEA representative to discuss the rights and responsibilities of the unemployment insurance program. Ongoing staff training includes an emphasis on enhancing the skills needed to assist claimants with their reemployment efforts; RESEA program representatives have been trained to effectively access labor market information specific to a claimant's job skills and employment prospects, develop a reemployment plan to meet the claimant's needs and determine appropriate referrals to reemployment services or training. CTDOL completed more than 9,835 Initial RESEA Appointments during the 12-month period ending December 31, 2021.

Each RESEA must include the following minimum components to serve the needs of the claimant.

- UI eligibility review, including review of work search activities if such activities have not been waived, and referral to adjudication if an issue or potential issue(s) is identified;
- Customized labor market and career information based on an assessment of the claimant's needs;
- Enrollment in the ES program;
- Support, to the extent needed, for the claimant in the development of an individual reemployment plan tailored to the claimant's needs; and

- Information and referral to additional reemployment services and other AJC services, resources, and training, as appropriate.

#### UI RESEA Joint Impact Study with NYDOL

CTDOL successfully implemented a joint RESEA Impact Study in partnership with NYDOL. The goal of the study is to evaluate the effectiveness of reemployment services and service delivery strategies and the impact they have on improving employment outcomes and reducing UI benefit duration. CT's RESEA selection began on 11/26/2021 with Initial RESEA Appointments beginning on 12/14/21. All individuals who complete their Initial RESEA Appointment are referred to CTDOL's new virtual RESEA Bootcamp Workshop which includes Job Search, Interviewing, Resume Preparation and LinkedIn content. The RESEA Bootcamp Workshop serves as one of multiple reemployment services under evaluation in the study.

#### Fidelity Bonding Demonstration Grant

In June of 2019, CTDOL received a Fidelity Bonding Demonstration Grant to help persons with criminal records, including ex-offenders recovering from opioid and other drug addictions obtain employment. These bonds provided to employers, help reduce the risk of hiring individuals whose criminal backgrounds pose barriers to securing employment and in turn decrease recidivism. CTDOL continues to educate employers and the public on the availability of the bonds, which provide up to \$25,000 coverage per employee over a six-month period and encourage employers to use them as a hiring tool for persons with criminal records.

#### Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA)

Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) helps individuals return to suitable employment as quickly as possible following employment loss. Participants are part of worker groups certified by the United States Department of Labor (USDOL) whose jobs were believed to be affected by increased imports or a shift in production to a foreign country. Benefits to eligible workers include job training, job search assistance, relocation and readjustment allowances; health coverage tax credit; and wage subsidies for individuals 50 years of age and older who return to lower-paying work. TAA activity during the program year included:

Worker group certifications: Petitions filed on behalf of workers from 19 companies were approved, with the workers determined by USDOL to be adversely affected by foreign trade and certified as eligible to apply for TAA; petitions filed on behalf of workers from two companies were denied.

During the program year:

- 269 eligibility determinations were issued in response to submitted applications.
- There were 225 active participants
- Training payments totaled \$ 912,364.36.  
Currently, there are 84 workers enrolled in training.
- Trade Readjustment Allowances (TRA): \$542, 646.00 was provided for 1047 weekly TRA claims, including 117 weeks of basic TRA, 825 weeks of additional TRA, and 105 weeks of completion TRA. Individuals who satisfy applicable program requirements may receive one or more types of TRA income support: up to 26 weeks of basic TRA; up to 65 weeks of additional TRA, and up to 13 weeks of completion TRA.
- Reemployment/Alternative Trade Adjustment Assistance (R/ATAA): \$22,218.00 in payments was issued to eligible workers.

Since the last report, CTDOL has partially implemented a restructuring of the TAA Administration Unit. In addition to the new Petition Coordinator and two TAA Navigators, we are currently in the process of transitioning to a dedicated case management service model. This means a specific number of CTDOL counseling staff will report directly to the TAA Unit and will focus solely on serving the needs of TAA

clients. This is a shift from the existing structure where counselors report to their respective AJC directors and work with participants from multiple programs.

Counselors will still be located in the AJC's, however, they will only focus on the TAA program. This new model is being adopted after consulting with the US Department of Labor and conducting research with other states who have successfully implemented similar structures. The Trade program has become more specialized and complex in recent years and requires specially trained and dedicated staff to deliver these programs and services in the most effective and efficient manner possible.

The roles of our TAA Navigators continue to evolve, with a major emphasis on guiding our customers through the process of becoming enrolled in the program. From the very beginning, assistance is provided with completing the applications, registering for informational webinars, collecting documentation. If extra, individual assistance is required, our Navigators will provide all the help that is necessary to make the worker feel comfortable and compete each task.

**Veterans Services:** CTDOL assists Connecticut veterans and covered persons with their employment and training needs by providing job search assistance and individualized career services, making referrals to supportive services, and sharing information about other state and federal programs. CTDOL ensures priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses and encourages their use of American Job Center (AJC) resources; in the AJCs, customers may receive one-on-one assistance either on a walk-in basis or by appointment. During the most recently completed program year, PY 2020, CTDOL staff assisted 1045 eligible veterans under Wagner-Peyser and provided services to 879 participants through the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program.

JVSG-funded Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialists provide intensive services and facilitate placements to meet the employment needs of veterans and eligible spouses who have significant barriers to employment or have otherwise been designated by the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service (VETS) as qualifying for DVOP services. These barriers and designations include the following:

- a special disabled or disabled veteran, as those terms are defined in 38 U.S.C. §4211(1) and (3); special disabled and disabled veterans are those who are entitled to compensation (or who, but for the receipt of military retired pay, would be entitled to compensation) under laws administered by the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; or, were discharged or released from active duty because of a service-connected disability;
- veterans who had active military service, in whole or in part, during the Vietnam Era, which is Aug. 5, 1964, through May 7, 1975; for veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam, the timeframe is Feb. 28, 1961, through May 7, 1975;
- a homeless person, as defined in Sections 103(a) and (b) of the McKinney-Vento Homeless Assistance Act (42 U.S.C. 11302(a) and (b)), as amended;
- a recently-separated service member, as defined in 38 U.S.C. § 4211(6), who has been unemployed for 27 or more weeks in the previous 12 months;
- an offender, as defined by WIOA Section 3 (38), who is currently incarcerated or who has been released from incarceration;
- an individual lacking a high school diploma or equivalent certificate;
- a low-income individual (as defined by WIOA Section 3 (36));
- veterans ages 18-24;
- transitioning service members in need of intensive services (specifically, those who have been assessed as not meeting Career Readiness Standards; are ages 18-24, regardless of whether they meet Career Readiness Standards; or are active duty service members being involuntarily separated through a Service reduction-in-force); and

- wounded, ill, or injured service members receiving treatment at Military Treatment Facilities or Warrior Transition Units (MTFs – WTUs) and the spouses and family caregivers of such wounded, ill, or injured service members.

Individualized career services include comprehensive and specialized assessments of skill levels and service needs; development of an individual employment plan to identify the employment goals, suitable objectives and appropriate combination of services for the participant to achieve the employment goals; group counseling; individual counseling and career planning; and short-term prevocational services that may include development of learning skills, communication skills, interviewing skills, punctuality, personal maintenance skills, and professional conduct to prepare individuals for unsubsidized employment or training. Veterans and eligible spouses who do not qualify to receive intensive services from a DVOP may receive these services from other AJC staff.

DVOPs will continue to employ effective outreach strategies to identify veterans and encourage their enrollment in the workforce system. Outreach locations include, but are not limited to, the Connecticut Department of Veterans Affairs Connecticut Veterans Home; U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs Clinics and Vet Centers; Connecticut State Colleges and Universities; local homeless shelters, libraries and town halls; community and veterans organizations including Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) and The American Legion; and military reserve and national guard units. DVOPs also participate in re-entry and ex-offender meetings and serve on a number of advisory boards including those of members of Connecticut's delegation in the United States Congress.

Local Veterans' Employment Representatives (LVERs), also funded by JVSG, conduct outreach to area employers to assist veterans in gaining employment and facilitate the employment, training, and placement services furnished to veterans in the state's AJCs. LVERs are available to:

- plan and participate in job and career fairs;
- conduct job searches and workshops and establish job search groups, in conjunction with employers;
- coordinate with unions, apprenticeship programs and businesses or business organizations to promote and secure employment and training programs for veterans;
- inform Federal contractors of the process to recruit qualified veterans;
- promote credentialing and licensing opportunities for veterans; and
- coordinate and participate with other business outreach efforts.

**Coordination of Services:** In providing services under JVSG, the DVOP will assess the need for intensive services, determine whether case management is necessary, and make appropriate referrals to other services available through CTDOL or other workforce partners. Veterans and eligible spouses with significant barriers to employment (SBE) will be classified as job-ready or not job-ready. Those deemed not job-ready will receive individualized career services from the DVOP and other AJC staff such as CTDOL Career Development Specialists and WIOA partners. Referrals to other agencies and organizations providing supportive services, including the Department of Veterans Affairs, will assist veterans with addressing barriers and resolving issues that hinder their ability to secure gainful employment. AJC services such as job search and career planning, résumé-writing assistance, career counseling, and prevocational services will also help the veteran attain job-ready status. Once a veteran is determined to be job-ready, the DVOP will work with the LVER to make employment connections while continuing to provide case management and other intensive services as appropriate. CTDOL has implemented a case conference system whereby any CTDOL or partner staff member may refer a job-ready veteran to an LVER for job development or job referral services, including veterans who do not qualify for JVSG but are served exclusively by the Wagner-Peyser, WIOA Adult, or WIOA Dislocated Worker programs.

**JVSG Staff Development:** The DVOPs and LVERs participate in required online and classroom courses facilitated by the National Veterans' Training Institute (NVTI) and are afforded opportunities to earn credentials such as Certified Professional Résumé Writer (CPRW). CTDOL supports the participation of JVSG staff in the annual National Association of State Workforce Agencies (NASWA) Veterans Conference which provides training and networking opportunities.

**Employer Outreach and Business Support:** LVERs will perform structured outreach to better engage employers, identify new contacts, and maintain established relationships, utilizing service delivery strategies that include the provision of routine follow-up after veterans are referred and more frequent employer visits. CTDOL will rely on LVER staff to help increase the employer penetration rate and enhance relationships with business organizations. LVERs will collaborate with federal contractors and other specific employers to more regularly assist with their hiring needs, and will promote employers' apprenticeship opportunities for veterans. In partnership with local businesses, community organizations, and other state and federal agencies, CTDOL will support career fair opportunities for veterans by assisting with organizational efforts and performing outreach to engage employers, maximize veteran attendance, and promote the American Job Center system.

CTDOL staff members will make referrals to the University of Connecticut's Entrepreneurship Bootcamp for Veterans (EBV) program, which supports business initiatives for veterans through experiential and small business management training, and will provide information to EBV participants about JVSG services. Additionally, CTDOL will maintain relationships with partners of the U.S. Small Business Administration (SBA), such as SCORE, and the Small Business Development Center (SBDC), which also includes the involvement of the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development and the University of Connecticut. JVSG staff will attend the SBA's Veterans Business Outreach Center (VBOC) meetings and cover outreach tables to promote AJC services to veterans and to further support entrepreneurial development services.

**Homeless Veterans:** Services to homeless veterans will be coordinated with the grantees of the U.S. Department of Labor's Homeless Veterans' Reintegration Program (HVRP) and the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs' Supportive Services for Veterans Families (SSVF) program. CTDOL's DVOPs will participate in regularly scheduled outreach at HVRP grantee locations or otherwise coordinate with grantees to provide individualized career services and ensure the enrollment of HVRP participants in Wagner-Peyser. The DVOPs will also help to identify homeless veterans in the community, make referrals to HVRP and SSVF, and provide supportive services of their own to help connect homeless veterans with housing and employment. Additionally, JVSG staff will participate in annual Stand Down events that provide supplies and services to homeless veterans.

**VA Vocational Rehabilitation Participants:** CTDOL will continue to collaborate with state and federal agencies to provide services to veterans who may benefit from vocational rehabilitation, including those who are participating in the Veteran Readiness and Employment (VR&E) program. A Memorandum of Understanding between CTDOL, the Hartford Regional Office of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs/VR&E Division, and the U.S. Department of Labor Veterans' Employment and Training Service, defines the partnership in place to assist veterans served under the auspices of Title 38, Chapter 31 of the United States Code.

## **Connecticut State Department of Education**

The Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) administers core programs and services listed in the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (WIOA Title II). Each local and regional board of education must establish and maintain a program of adult classes or provide for the participation in a program of adult classes for its adult residents (Connecticut General Statutes Section 10-69).

### ***CSDE-Administered Activities***

- to support shared governance structure, CSDE will participate in the Governor’s Workforce Council meetings.
- to strengthen interagency partnerships, CSDE will:
  - have members of the CSDE Adult Education Unit serve as members of the five regional Workforce Development Boards.
  - share system infrastructure costs.
  - provide services through the One-Stop system.
  - make funding available to each of Connecticut’s five designated local workforce areas.
  - review and evaluate proposals with a team including representatives of the WDBs and One-Stop system partners.
  - assess local workforce areas’ needs and WDBs’ goals in conjunction with each WDB.
  - refer students to One-Stop Centers, monitor, act on referrals from One-Stop Centers.
  - provide appropriate training for One-Stop partners.
- to strengthen coordination and collaboration with key educational sectors and employers, CSDE will:
  - align Integrated Basic Education and Training (I-BEST) training curriculum with employer/labor market needs. (I-BEST is Connecticut’s contextualized integrated education and training program strategy.)
  - partner with community colleges to assist adults’ transition to postsecondary education and training.
  - work with the One-Stop system to address the needs of local customers and employers and link adult education strategically to other employment and training services.
  - work with the State’s longitudinal data system and use a common intake form to provide consistently defined and applied data from adult education programs.
- to continue to invest in integrated technology to meet the unified technology requirements of WIOA and other Federal initiatives, CSDE will:
  - work to interface the Connecticut Adult Reporting System (CARS) with the State’s common intake and reporting system.
- to support engagement in continuous research and analysis to realize the potential of state’s workforce programs and delivery systems, CSDE will
  - continue to offer the I-BEST program and ensure that it is aligned with labor market needs.
- to assist the entire WIOA partnership deliver a unified message, CSDE will:
  - participate in coordinated system-wide efforts to increase awareness of the Connecticut workforce system.

## **Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Administered Activities**

The department’s Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) and Supported Employment (SE) programs will assist individuals with disabilities to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in or regain employment.

Housed within the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) are two Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs. The general VR program, situated within the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), serves individuals with all types of disabilities except those with the primary disability of legal blindness. The Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) serves consumers that are legally blind, as well as current or former transition-age consumers with visual impairments. Consumers who are legally blind and deaf or hard of hearing are served by either BRS or BESB. The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) projects their core programs, including the two VR programs and the Senior

Community Services Employment Program, will collectively assist 9,815 individuals in FFY 2023. This includes an estimated 9000 individuals with disabilities served by BRS, 745 individuals who are blind or have a visual impairment served by BESB, and 70 older workers in the SCSEP program.

### **Connecticut Department of Social Services Administered Activities**

The CT Department of Social Services (CTDSS) administers SNAP E&T, a work program designed to help SNAP recipients gain skills that will help increase self-sufficiency. SNAP E&T offers short-term vocational programs that are job focused and employer driven. Offerings range from 1-day security guard programs to 2-year associates degrees. The program operates on a third party reimbursement model. Partners investing nonfederal funds in allowable employment and training activities can leverage those funds and receive a fifty percent reimbursement. In addition to leveraging funds, these partnerships allow CTDSS to leverage the expertise and experience of each partner.

The SNAP E&T components included in the CTDSS state plan of operations include; Education/Vocational Training, Supervised Job Search, Work Experience and Job Retention. These activities are delivered through eighteen partnerships that include five nonprofit organizations, a private nonprofit college, and all twelve community colleges within the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system. The current partners delivering services are; Capital Community College (CCC) located in Hartford, Gateway Community College (GCC) located in New Haven, Housatonic Community College (HCC) located in Bridgeport, Asnuntuck Community College (ACC) located in Enfield, Northwestern CT Community College (NWCC) located in Winsted, Three Rivers Community College (TRCC) located in Norwich, Naugatuck Valley Community College (NVCC) located in Waterbury, Middlesex Community College (MXCC) located in Middletown, Quinnipiac Valley Community College (QVCC) located in Danielson, Norwalk Community College (NCC) located in Norwalk, Manchester Community College (MCC) located in Manchester, Tunxis Community College (TCC) located in Farmington, Goodwin College located in East Hartford, Community Culinary School of Northwestern CT located in New Milford, Connecticut Center for Arts and technology (ConnCAT) located in New Haven, Opportunities Industrialization Center located in New London, Capital Workforce Partners located in Hartford and Homeless Hospitality Center located in New London. In addition to the partnerships with service providers, CTDSS also partners with the Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (CSCU) system office to help coordinate statewide initiatives. CTDSS partners with CTDOL through an MOU, which allows data sharing needed to fulfill the annual reporting requirements, included in the Agricultural Act of 2014, also known as the 2014 U.S. Farm Bill. In addition to the data share agreement, CTDSS utilizes CTDOL labor Market information (LMI) to approve programs based on the availability of jobs in selected employment fields.

As mandated in the Agricultural Improvement Act of 2018, SNAP E&T participants receive case management. Our current contractors provide case management services that are unique to their SNAP participants and beyond what they provide to their other non-SNAP clients. This includes employability assessments, progress monitoring, monthly case notes and coordination with other service providers. Case management services can also include referrals to other services such as Adult Basic Education or other support services to enable the participant to remain engaged in his or her activity. While skills building are the focus of the program, CTDSS balances the need for immediate employment with the goal of moving participants to self-sufficiency. There are circumstances when the component will be Supervised Job Search or Work Experience.

Successful participants who begin employment after participating in an E&T component may participate in Job Retention services. Job Retention provides support services to participants for a minimum of 30 days and a maximum of 90 days. Examples of supports offered are reimbursements for expenses that are reasonable and necessary; including equipment or tools, clothing or uniforms, and transportation needed to maintain employment.

As of October 14, 2019, there were 212,861 households, comprised of 364,474 individual recipients, receiving nutrition assistance from the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program. These low-income households include approximately 54,400 individuals who are not exempt from SNAP general work requirements. The Connecticut SNAP population is a diverse group with varying degrees of work readiness.

In addition to direct food benefits, SNAP in Connecticut also includes free educational opportunities. SNAP E&T is a skills based, employment focused, work program. The SNAP E&T program's primary goal is to assist SNAP recipients in gaining skills and utilizing work-related activities that will lead to paid employment. SNAP E&T is voluntary, with a focus on vocational training. SNAP recipients, who are not receiving TFA, are encouraged to participate by self-enrolling with the provider of their choice. Successful participants gain skills needed to find employment or improve employment in the current job market. The resulting outcome is increased self-sufficiency and decreased dependence on public assistance.

### **Office of Early Childhood (OEC)**

OEC Workforce Initiatives include:

- Creation of a Job Board. Employers will be able to post open positions early childhood education free of charge ([www.ctshares.org](http://www.ctshares.org)). Posting are shared to eight other online job sites.
- Marketing Campaign designed to: (a) help recruit individuals to the field of early childhood education, (b) promote certification and degree completion, and (c) direct individuals looking for ECE related jobs to a state-wide Job Board.
- Qualified Workforce Incentive Bonuses: direct payment to providers in licensed, state funded programs to promote certificate and degree completion.

The Office of Early Childhood is also working with the Department of Labor, SEIU, and other pilot programs to establish an apprenticeship program to mentor and guide participants toward degree completion while working in the field.

### **Community Services Block Grant (CSBG)**

CTDSS administers the CSBG federal block grant (approx. \$8M annually) with assistance from the CT community action agency network. The purpose of CSBG is the reduction of poverty, revitalization of low-income communities, and empowerment of low-income families and individuals to become fully self-sufficient.

CSBG can provide an array of services - employment work supports, child and family development, community empowerment, independent living. CSBG has identified the following national performance indicators for states to follow: 2,943 persons employed; 1,741 maintain job for at least 90 days/achieve a "living" wage; 27,311 receive employment supports such as skills/competencies; and 599 completion of ABE/GED.

### **Child Support**

CTDSS administers the statewide child support program. The goals of the child support programs are to assist families in reaching independence through increased financial and medical support, establish paternity for children born out of wedlock, and connect non-custodial parents with the Fatherhood Initiative.

## **(B) Alignment with Activities outside the Plan**

*Describe how the activities identified in (A) will be aligned with programs and activities provided by required one-stop partners and other optional one-stop partners and activities provided under employment, training (including Registered Apprenticeships), education (including career and technical education), human services and other programs not covered by the plan, as appropriate, assuring coordination of, and avoiding duplication among these activities.*

Preceding sections have described numerous programs and activities provided by education, human services, training and economic development partners that may be considered outside of the plan. CT believes that in order to be prudent and effective, these programs must be managed with a unified workforce strategy and vision led by Governor Lamont and his Chief Workforce Officer.

Activities conducted for and services provided to jobseekers, workers and employers through the core WIOA programs covered by this Unified State Plan represent a significant portion of the state's larger workforce development system. Other vital entities and stakeholders in the broadly conceived workforce system include the Connecticut Department of Social Services (DSS), Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD), Board of Regents for Higher Education/Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (BOR/CSCU); Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) K-12 comprehensive schools system, Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS), Office of Early Childhood (OEC), an extensive network of private colleges and universities represented by the Connecticut Conference of Independent Colleges (CCIC), proprietary schools, regional/local Chambers of Commerce, sector-focused business associations, organized labor, community-based organizations (CBOs) and non-profit service providers. Collectively this spectrum of stakeholders represents more workforce development-related resources and programs, serving more participants, than do the core WIOA programs covered by this Unified State Plan. The stakeholders in Connecticut's broad and informal workforce system identified above have an impressive history and track record of collaboration in developing effective strategies and minimizing duplication.

State agencies, educational institutions and workforce partners will participate in the efforts of the Governor's Workforce Council to align activities across programs. The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS), for example, collaborates and cooperates in a coordinated manner through a set of specific agreements with a wide array of organizations, entities and programs among workforce-related partners and stakeholders not specifically covered by this Unified State Plan, to pursue and achieve their respective objectives. Details are available in the two state plans for vocational rehabilitation and supported employment services incorporated in this Unified State Plan.

In CT, two entities receive federal funds for the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP). The State Unit on Aging, as the State Grantee and The WorkPlace, as the National Grantee, are active statewide partners. With the State Unit on Aging now part of ADS, the actions and goals of SCSEP are now included in this combined state plan to provide a roadmap for serving older workers along with individuals with disabilities under the other Bureaus of ADS. Memorandums of Understanding and Infrastructure Agreements were developed to cultivate partnerships. Through these partnerships, the regular use of shared office and meeting space at the American Job Centers rounds out the services for older workers and workers across the life span. With a dedicated presence at the AJC, SCSEP staff work collaboratively to integrate services delivered through the AJC. Co-location limits the likelihood that older workers will miss opportunities to avail themselves of the quality services delivered through the American Job Centers. Co-location improves the connection between SCSEP staff, The WorkPlace and AJC staff through the visible presence as well as collaborative conversations centered on the best menu of services for each individual.

Another example of an "outside" collaboration, is with the Office of Early Childhood (OEC). The OEC will be an engaged partner with entities that prepare and provide training for individuals working with young children and their families across any setting. The OEC will partner with workforce entities to

ensure individuals entering and re-entering the workforce have access to high-quality and stable child care through our School Readiness Program, Child Day Care Centers, Smart Start, Preschool Development Grant program, and Care4Kids child care subsidy program.

The child care subsidy program is an integral partner within Connecticut's workforce system. Funded by the federal Child Care Development Block Grant Act, Care4Kids provides a child care subsidy to parents who are either enrolled in TFA, enrolled in an approved education and training program, or who are employed. The childcare subsidy is intended to make child care more affordable, therefore, allowing parents to enter the workforce and stay employed. The child care subsidy can be used for all types of early childhood settings, including licensed centers and family child care homes, and unlicensed family, friend or neighbor. The CCDBG reauthorization of 2014 is requiring states to implement significant policy shifts that address continuity of care and quality of care for the child. The focus on continuity provides more child care stability for working parents. The OEC will be available to provide information to the Workforce Development Boards and various workforce partners on the importance of high-quality childcare and early childhood resources. In addition to providing materials at the American Job Centers, the OEC offers information and training through the Child Care Resource and Referral Service and Child Care 211 Infoline.

### **(C) Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Individuals**

*Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, Combined State Plan partner programs included in this plan, and required and optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high- quality, customer-centered services, including supportive services to individuals including those populations identified in section II (a)(1)(B). The activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.*

Key State agency and local WDB partners were engaged in the statewide process of planning for WIOA implementation at State and local levels, emphasizing coordination of services and resources to provide high quality customer services and requisite support services. The Commissioners of CTDOL, ADS and CSDE are responsible for the review, endorsement and modification of the Unified State Plan to ensure coordination objectives are met.

Commitments to service and resource coordination among these State agencies are captured in Memoranda of Understandings (MOUs) executed by the local workforce boards and the respective State agency Commissioners. Representatives of these State agencies participate in the planning efforts of each of Connecticut's five WDBs to develop and update local WIOA plans, emphasizing cross- agency coordination consistent with provisions described in the endorsed Unified State Plan.

Furthermore, the CSDE will provide services to eligible individuals who are 17 years old or older, are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under Connecticut law, are basic skills deficient, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, or are English language learners. Adult education programs will serve as the major Unified Plan Partner entry point for individuals who lack basic skills. Once a participant has enrolled, adult education provider staff will refer participants to an American Job Center or Youth Provider to conduct a workforce assessment and develop an educational/career plan. Once participants meet adult education exit criteria, they will be referred to the American Job Center for evaluation. A unified referral management system will help local programs track participants as they move from agency-to-agency. This system will allow programs to give timely assistance to participants if they get stuck or seem to be dropping out. Information will be shared with WIOA core partners about adult education eligibility requirements, as well as dates, times, and locations of sites where adult education is offered.

The ADS Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) programs within BESB and BRS offer a wide range of services to eligible individuals, including guidance and counseling, mobility training, rehabilitation technology,

adaptive equipment, rehabilitation teaching, job coaching, on-the-job training, low vision services, as well as a variety of skills assessments. BESB provides services on a statewide itinerant basis through its office location in Windsor. BRS provides services in 14 offices across Connecticut where consumers may apply for assistance. In three of these locations, BRS is co-located with at least one core partner program. In several other locations, offices are in close physical proximity to partners. As long-term lease obligations and other logistical issues prevent movement toward increasing the number of co-locations, it is believed that formalizing referral processes and creating a service delivery structure that encourages partner collaborations will lead to improved coordination in services.

BRS and BESB have assigned staff to the primary American Job Center (AJC) locations in each of the five WDB regions to engage clients in services and to act as a dedicated liaison to the AJC. Staff serves on relevant committees and work groups at the AJCs. Through this approach, BRS and BESB staff become aware of initiatives, employment opportunities within each region, as well as workshops and training opportunities for consumers to register for and participate in. In addition, ADS has assigned staff to act as administrative liaison to each of the five boards in an effort to enhance communication and promote continued collaboration. An example of this continued collaboration was in the area of work-based learning experiences. BRS and BESB worked closely with each of the five WDB regions to develop and implement contracts to facilitate work-based learning experiences for Pre-Employment transition students. This innovative model increased access to important learning opportunities and exposed this young adult population to services available through the workforce system.

ADS also administers the Senior Community Services Employment Program (SCSEP) through its State Unit on Aging. SCSEP participants may register with the local American Job Centers. The first visit to an American Job Center can be overwhelming when an older worker is returning to the labor market. Older workers may be individuals seeking employment after being employed in a particular field for a length of time; individuals who have been out of the workforce for a length of time; or individuals who have recently exhausted unemployment compensation. As a required WIOA partner, SCSEP staff presence at the AJC will increase visibility of the program as well as promote familiarity and willingness to actively engage in services through AJC. The shared cubicle and meeting space promote interaction between SCSEP and AJC Staff. These interactions increase collaboration and sharing of resources to support older workers. Older workers who come to the AJC can also be referred to SCSEP as they seek assistance. Older workers can meet their SCSEP program coordinator at the AJC as well as attend monthly job club meetings at the AJC. However, since this co-location occurs on a part-time basis and SCSEP participants often access services on differing days and times, a second action to improve participant enrollment is the establishment of a single point of entry at the AJC for SCSEP's older workers. This staff person would guide the SCSEP participant through the enrollment process at the AJC to support ongoing and regular use of the AJC.

An additional aspect of this coordination includes cross referral processes already in place between the SCSEP Grantees. With services that overlap in some areas of the state and due to the limited resources of each grantee, ADS and The WorkPlace work together and determine who and how to best serve the participant. This program coordination streamlines program point of entry and services and maximizes limited resources.

**Strategy:** SCSEP will develop and implement marketing strategies aimed at increasing awareness of SCSEP services within labor market and job training initiatives.

During the last SCSEP Work plan, strides were taken to improve the partnership between SCSEP and the one-stop system. The ADS State Unit on Aging met with one-stop administrators to provide information about older workers and about SCSEP. Each of the state's SCSEP offices has a working relationship with the local one-stop. In some areas that relationship is very strong as sub-grantee staff is co-located in the office. Staff provides information about SCSEP to potential enrollees. In other regions where co-location is not available, SCSEP continues to refer participants for workshops and job development services. The

one-stops continue to be valuable resources for SCSEP participants across the state and the state will endeavor to continue cultivating these partnerships.

## **(D) Coordination, Alignment and Provision of Services to Employers**

*Describe how the entities carrying out the respective core programs, any Combined State Plan partner program included in this plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs will coordinate activities and resources to provide comprehensive, high-quality services to employers to meet their current and projected workforce needs and to achieve the goals of industry or sector partners in the state. The activities described shall conform to the statutory requirements of each program.*

### **State Level**

CTDOL maintains collaborative partnerships with workforce system partners including OWS, Aging and Disability Services, Adult Education, Economic and Community Development, Workforce Development Boards and the state's community colleges and university system to develop a statewide vision that enhances and aligns the services offered to Connecticut businesses. This partnership supports the coordinated approach of its five Regional Interagency Business Engagement Teams to improve communication among all partners and develop innovative solutions to ever-changing business challenges. All workforce partners contribute content for the *Interagency Employer Resource Guide* and *Employer Reference Card* publications which offer road maps to the many programs, services and incentives available to business. These publications are maintained by CTDOL and are available in electronic format and provide an important marketing tool for the business services professional.

The Office of Workforce-Strategy engages with employers and workforce system stakeholders to promote strong employer and association-led industry partnerships, sector strategies and career pathways initiatives and support effective service strategies for the workforce system's business customers. OWC maintains a list of industry sector partnerships and initiatives to coordinate state efforts and to inform and connect new entrants to share ideas and best practices. State Board meetings have included presentations from industry sector leaders and offered an opportunity for members to share this information with their constituencies. OWC has maintained a strong relationship with the CT Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and through their leadership and funding resources, CT has successful manufacturing and IT sector partnerships. The Manufacturing Innovation Fund and the Tech-Talent Initiative (described in previous sections) have provided millions of dollars to CT businesses to support and foster their growth. DECD recently hired a Manufacturing Professional to lead that sector and he is also an ex-officio member of the Governor's Workforce Council.

OWS sponsors business breakfast seminars to provide information to business owners, human resources professionals, union leaders, etc. on current workforce issues. Presentations are given by staff from state agencies, colleges, businesses and non-profits. Recent topics have included: Creating an Inclusive Workplace with Assistive Technology, Cyber security Threats – What Every Employer Needs to Know, Effective Participation in Unemployment Compensation Proceedings, Drug Testing in the Workplace, Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA)...How to Avoid Mistakes, Medical Marijuana in the Workplace, The Basics of Workers' Compensation, and Wage and Hour Basics and Compliance for Employers. These seminars occur on a monthly basis and can be accessed through the businessct.com Web site, which provides streamlined access to business resources, industry sector partnerships, training assistance and incentives. Recently created publications – Connecticut's Industry Sector Partnerships, Employer Resource Guide, and Employer Resource Card offers a roadmap to the many programs, services and incentives that may be available to business. The publications are also available electronically through the businessct.com Web site.

OWC has been participating in workforce development technical assistance opportunities such as the National Governors Association (NGA) Center for Best Practices multistate collaborative project that supports state efforts to analyze and understand the on-demand economy in their respective states and to

take action to identify policies to support economic opportunity for on-demand workers. Through the project, states will share best practices and develop innovative ideas to improve economic outcomes and growth.

## **Local Level**

Each comprehensive American Job Center has organized Business Services functions to serve business customers in a single, unified, coordinated Regional Business Services Team structure. The Team consists of experienced business services professionals from a variety of partner organizations including the state's Workforce Development Boards, the Departments of Labor, Economic and Community Development, Aging and Disability Services (ADS), Education, regional community colleges and technical high schools, and regional/local economic development officials.

The Regional Business Services Teams coordinate services across programs and agencies to provide each business customer with effective strategies and aligned services that meet their needs. Monthly working meetings among the Regional Business Services Teams support information sharing and cross-training on partner programs and lead to the coordination of service strategies and effective service strategies for the varied business customers. Program descriptions, services and incentives available to business customers are published in the Employer Resource Guide and Employer Resource Card. Business services are marketed extensively, consistent with a focused business outreach strategy in each region. Social media tools such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter are utilized as a low cost option to market workforce and education training programs, job fairs, events and available jobs.

Guiding principles of the Business Services Teams are:

- It's not about us – It's all about the Business!
- We are committed to providing service to Business customers that is seamless.
- Business customers in the CTHires databank must post all job openings for which recruitment support is provided.
- All posted job openings will be communicated and made accessible to the full network of prospective jobseekers.
- All job openings and recruitment efforts will be communicated to all Business Services Team members within 24 hours of becoming known.

Furthermore, from the perspective of the ADS VR programs, the primary goal of coordinated activities with employers is to establish long-term partnerships that foster a mutually beneficial relationship for both the employer and VR consumers. These long-standing relationships are built on genuine interest in the work of each employer, their needs and their priorities. This could mean that an actual job opening for a particular client may not come along for some time, but the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is nonetheless a resource employers can turn to for information, referrals to other service providers, and to learn about job site accommodations and provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). Other valuable services such as informational interviews, job shadowing opportunities and work assessment site hosting can be offered. Company tours can be arranged for consumers to teach about a wide variety of careers, particularly important to transition-age youth clients who may otherwise have very limited exposure to actual job sites.

ADS is enthusiastic about CT's collaborative strategy that offers employers a seamless and coordinated team approach to placing job orders and identifying qualified candidates for employers.

In addition, CSDE promotes workforce preparation skills including literacy instruction, employability skills, career exploration and development, and links to employment, employment services and other options to respond to the evolving workforce needs of Connecticut's business community and to promote individual self-sufficiency. Providers develop partnerships with local businesses for on-site workforce education classes to assist employees perform specific job tasks and increase productivity. Adult

Education services are also included in the Employer Resource Guide and the Employer Resource Card that are published by DOL and distributed to employers.

### **(E) Partner Engagement with Educational Institutions**

Connecticut education leaders and their key staff participate in decision-making processes defining and driving workforce system policy and strategy at both State and local levels. At the State level, Connecticut's Commissioner of Education (executive leader of Connecticut's public schools system), and the President of the Board of Regents for Higher Education/Connecticut State Colleges and Universities (executive leader of a system of public 4-year universities and 2-year community colleges) are directly engaged in all phases of workforce development planning, strategy design, oversight and coordination. In addition, the Superintendent of the Connecticut Technical Education and Career System (CTECS) ensures that the contributions of CTECS are included, critical information is shared, and opportunities for coordination of programs and services are pursued, addressing the shared goal of ensuring that youths and adults (students) are ready for productive work in Connecticut's key industry sectors.

#### **CSDE: Partner Alignment with Educational Institutions**

CSDE will promote partnerships among local adult education providers and institutions of higher education, especially community colleges, to promote the successful transition of participants to postsecondary education and training. CSDE will rely on information from the workforce development system to track the progress of participants who have exited from their programs and have entered postsecondary education and training.

#### **ADS: Partner Alignment with Educational Institutions**

Both Vocational Rehabilitation Programs at ADS are actively involved in a variety of transition school-to-work initiatives, with extensive collaboration and coordination at the administrative and service delivery levels of the organization. Through a cooperative agreement with the State Department of Education, the roles and responsibilities of the VR programs and the public educational system are clearly defined, including financial responsibilities and coordination of services and staff training.

Representatives from both VR programs serve on an interagency transition task force and appointed representatives from the Connecticut State Department of Education serve on the State Rehabilitation Council to BESB and to BRS. VR program information is presented at in-service training programs for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who have disabilities.

Regarding higher education, the Board of Regents has a cooperative agreement addressing services available in the university setting for students with disabilities. This agreement is with both VR programs and describes responsibilities to ensure that students with disabilities achieve equal access to classroom instruction, internships, and school-sponsored activities.

VR Program staff members participate and present information at BESB-organized in-service training programs for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. BESB Children's Services Program provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff about low vision aids and adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.

### **(F) Partner Engagement with other Education and Training Providers**

*Describe how the state's Strategies will engage the State's other education and training providers, including providers on the state's eligible training provider list, as partners in the workforce development system to create a job-driven education and training.*

The Governor's Workforce Council Education and Training Committee will engage education and training providers to infuse new certificate programs to the eligible training provider list. The five Workforce Development Boards each engage multiple education and training providers in their regions and regularly solicit new providers to join in providing their services. The GWC has significant representation from business leaders from many industry sectors and will be identifying training gaps and educational solutions to those gaps.

The CSDE will work with other core programs and One-Stop partners to ensure that adult education and literacy activities are in alignment and to develop career pathways which provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities. The CSDE will collaborate with the DOL to assist local providers in partnering with One-Stop Centers to develop career pathways and provide access to employment and training services. Professional development will be provided to local programs, including orientation to adult education programs and services for One-Stop partners and other agencies. Local adult education providers will refer adult learners to the Workforce Development Boards' Eligible Training Providers Lists for information about training opportunities in their region.

ADS liaison counselors work closely with the American Job Centers to make referrals for services within each agency's programs. When appropriate, ADS consumers may be eligible for training offered on DOL's eligible training provider list. Consumers take an active role in the process of pursuing these trainings, and VR Counselors are available to provide assistance. If there is a barrier to the ADS consumer accessing the trainings as a similar benefit to what ADS offers, the ADS counselor can approve payment to fund the DOL training. When ADS consumers access these DOL services, their names are automatically entered into the CTHires database allowing for optimal performance reporting.

### **(G) Leveraging Resources to Increase Educational Access**

*Describe how the State's strategies will enable the State to leverage other Federal, State, and local investments that have enhanced access to workforce development programs at the above institutions, described in section (E).*

### **CT State Department of Education**

The funding of adult education programs in Connecticut is provided through state, local, federal, and private source funding. There are 58 adult education programs in the state that provide mandated programs and continuing education classes. This includes 40 adult education Providers and 9 Cooperating Eligible Entities (CEEs) which receive state reimbursement. As provided for in statute, supplementary funding ranges from 0% to 65% based on the adjusted equalized net grand list per capita, as defined in C.G.S. 10-261. The reimbursement percentage is based on the total operating budget of each Provider or CEE, and the difference is funded by Local or Private Source dollars. In FY22, the state funds totaled \$21,011,062 with local funds contributing \$19,050,684. . Federal funds are made available through a competitive RFP, and are distributed to adult education programs. In FY22, 35 programs received a total of \$5,101,183. In addition, many local adult education programs receive philanthropic and corporate contributions.

### **(H) Improving Access to Postsecondary Credentials**

Connecticut recognizes the value and importance of postsecondary credentials and certificates to workers and businesses, and that they vary significantly by industry sector and specific occupation. A variety of sector-specific initiatives are underway within each of Connecticut's five local workforce areas, most in conjunction with the appropriate local WDB.

In addition, the GWC committees will also be focused on examining characteristics of gaps in supply and demand, identifying high quality credentials and certifications, and ensuring swift access to training for CT residents. The GWC will solicit input from industry associations, unions, companies large and small

to identify credentials of value, stackability, and ensure that proper marketing and messaging reaches students and job-seekers to improve WIOA program performance. The goal is to identify and verify the credentials employers value and that actually contribute to hiring, productivity and opportunity for career advancement.

Customers credential needs range between a GED, a RA, and a college degree. Two programs on the spectrum are described as follows:

CSDE offers three programs leading to a high school equivalency diploma: Adult High School Credit Diploma (AHSCD), General Educational Development (GED), and the National External Diploma Program (NEDP). Local adult education programs also provide basic skills and workforce education through its highly successful contextualized integrated education and training program, Integrated Education and Training program (IET). All participants in adult education, including those in Adult Basic Education and English as a Second Language, will learn about career pathways and will be taught the skills needed to succeed in postsecondary education and training. Participants who earn the high school equivalency diploma will be referred to community colleges and other institutions of higher education to transition to postsecondary education and training.

## **Registered Apprenticeships**

With regards to Registered Apprenticeships (RA), the **Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training (CTDOL/OAT)** will continue to implement strategies to support expansion, diversification and integration of RAP and further our commitment to new programs. CTDOL/OAT staff provide outreach, marketing and technical assistance statewide.

Elements of our strategy include:

- Creatively applying RA as an important workforce and career solution to introduce employers to Registered Apprenticeship as a recruitment, training, retention, skills transfer, and succession model.
- Encouraging utilization of WIOA funding, where applicable, to support training programs and supportive services
- Building strategic and scalable partnerships in new sectors including, but not limited to, insurance, manufacturing, health care, finance, education, construction, and hospitality to coordinate and identify potential pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship program development, integration and implementation
- Cultivating relationships with Boards of Education, Superintendents, Career Technical Advisors and School Counselors with industry employers/partners
- Fostering a better understanding with CT's Community Colleges, Adult Education, and other institutions of higher education linking their programs to workplace-based related instruction
- Identify CTE programs within high schools and programs within higher education institutions for careers in various industries for pre-apprentice credentialing as best practice models
- Consult with SDE for the development of a best practices guide to help local and regional boards of education to incorporate relationships with the industries in their middle and high schools in accordance with Student Success Plans (SSP) and capstones
- With workforce development system partners and the American Job Centers (AJCs), incorporate apprenticeship into the workforce development system's business model so that Workforce Board and AJC personnel can emphasize to employers and job seekers the value of an industry-recognized credential awarded through an apprenticeship

- Engage employers and introduce them to the WDB's and AJC's to potentially increase the numbers of low-income individuals and underrepresented populations in their apprenticeship programs
- Explore modernization of Connecticut's apprenticeship IT system to enhance data collection capabilities and reporting of programmatic data.

Through these efforts, CT will be poised to enhance the state's economy and growth while expanding registered apprenticeships which will support middle to high skilled jobs.

## **Board of Regents for Higher Education - Connecticut State Colleges and Universities**

CSCU is the state's public higher education system of community colleges, regional universities and the state's on-line college. Benefiting students, as well as Connecticut and its citizens, CSCU:

- Offers expansive access to affordable high-quality undergraduate and graduate full-time and part-time educational opportunities.
- Instills a culture of innovation and entrepreneurship.
- Promotes economic growth and workforce development.
- Provides vital services to communities and individuals.

### ***Mission***

The Connecticut State Colleges & Universities contribute to the creation of knowledge and the economic growth of the state of Connecticut by providing affordable, innovative, and rigorous programs. CSCU learning environments transform students and facilitate the opportunities for an ever-increasing number of individuals to achieve their personal and career goals.

### ***Vision***

The Connecticut State Colleges & Universities will continually increase the number of students completing personally and professionally rewarding academic programs.

## **CSCU Governance**

### ***Board of Regents***

A 22-member Board of Regents for Higher Education governs CSCU. Among many responsibilities, the board adopts an operating budget for the CSCU system; sets statewide tuition and student fee policies; establishes financial aid policies; reviews, licenses, and accredits academic programs; adopts policies addressing human resources operations; and, also holds broad responsibilities for development and coordination of statewide higher education policy.

### ***About Connecticut State Colleges and Universities***

- In the last two decades, CSCU institutions have conferred over 260,000 degrees and certificates.
- CSCU educates Connecticut students and a small but growing number of out-of-state students. More than 97% of CSCU students are Connecticut residents.
- With nearly 60,000 students enrolled in credit certificate and degree programs, the CSCU system is the second-largest public higher education system in New England.
- About 45% of all college students in Connecticut attend a CSCU institution.
- Approximately 87% of CSCU graduates remain in Connecticut after receiving their degrees.
- Non-credit programs, such as those targeting workforce training, serve an additional 30,000 students.

- In 2017 the Board of Regents announced its decision to merge the 12 community colleges under its purview into a single institution. “Students First” was developed to address the fiscal challenges faced by the 12 colleges and to improve student success. Currently, the colleges are experiencing on-going enrollment declines and budget cuts, that have been layered on top of long-standing structural problems. As a result, the students in Connecticut (CT) suffer. CT has the lowest community college 3-year completion rate in New England at 16%. The data is more jarring when considering completion rates – 22% for white students and 11% for Black and Hispanic students. Faculty, staff, and administrators care deeply about improving these metrics but have not been able to realize meaningful change despite the best intentions, and it is only made more difficult by a fragmented structure
- The merger seeks to leverage economies of scale to address longstanding budget deficits while remaining firmly committed to the access that is the foundation of the community college mission. In short, the merger addresses financial concerns without closing any locations while leveraging resources to increase vital student supports. The BOR’s commitment to keeping all locations open lies at the heart of the strategic motivation behind the merger. In a small state, when students can move easily and freely between the campuses and when all courses count toward a degree or credential, student outcomes will improve. A single institution provides a way to remove barriers for students and implement student success reforms at scale. The merger also provides the resources to address years of individual colleges’ under-investment in infrastructure and faculty and employee development.
- The new college structure organizes workforce development and continuing education regionally with Regional Presidents and Regional Workforce Development Officers coordinating programs and services across campuses. This promotes greater capacity to address industry need, opportunities for students and incumbent workers to participate in programs regardless of geography, and greater assurance of the consistency of outcomes from programs statewide for both students and employers.

## **WIOA Related Policy and Funding Solutions**

CSCU has identified a number of innovative solutions to the challenges the system faces which align with the WIOA system. Implementing any of these will require additional resources from policymakers.

### ***Partnerships with K-12***

Expanding pathways from high school is essential for Connecticut to reach its goal of increasing college completion rates, closing the achievement gap, and increasing high school student engagement.

### ***Partnerships with Business***

CSCU has been dedicated to addressing the needs of business and industry for a skilled workforce. The state can help to meet employer demand by partnering to promote internships or apprenticeships for Connecticut college students and graduates. Early exposure to employment opportunities while in higher education programs can help students and businesses to see their future in Connecticut. CSCU colleges and universities can also address the incumbent worker training needs of the state’s small and mid-sized employers.

### ***Partnerships with Office of Workforce Strategies & Workforce Development Boards***

CSCU has been working closely with OWS and the WDBs to design and deliver industry-responsive programs. During the pandemic, the Regional Workforce Officers implemented short term training programs in partnership with the WDBs and guided by OWS. The new CareerConneCT initiative being launched across the state has provided an opportunity for the Regional Workforce Officers to propose programs and services with the WDBs to assist Connecticut residents in gaining the skills they need to

meet the workforce needs of the state's employers. This partnership will greatly expand the training provided in the areas of manufacturing, healthcare, construction and IT.

### ***Partnerships with Other State Agencies***

CSCU works closely with state agencies to implement special projects related to workforce. CSCU is working with the Office of Early Childhood to stabilize lab schools on college campuses and supporting the current workforce in building their skills and experience. CSCU, and its 12 community colleges, have established a partnership with Department of Social Services to expand educational opportunities to low-income families through the SNAP Employment and Training Program.

## **(I) Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies**

### **Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development**

The Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) is the state of Connecticut's leading agency responsible for strengthening Connecticut's competitive position in the rapidly changing, knowledge-based economy. DECD is focused on support for existing businesses and jobs with a wide range of programs and services to help companies prosper; promote Connecticut industries and businesses both domestically and across the globe; and strengthen Connecticut's communities by provided funding and technical support for local community and economic development projects. The agency oversees a broad range of initiatives and programs in the following areas: business development, opportunity zones, brownfield redevelopment, arts, historic preservation, community revitalization and tourism.

DECD is executing a vision to dramatically improve the state's economic development performance in conjunction with the Connecticut Economic Resource Center, Inc. (CERC) through a public-private partnership. In addition, underway, the state is developing a long-term comprehensive, data-driven strategic plan as well as a cluster strategy for recruitment and retention of companies.

The needs and priorities of Connecticut's in-demand and emerging industries and businesses are:

- fiscal stability of the state's finances to ensure a stable and predictable environment that will yield private investment confidence
- build on the state's strengths (talent, location, quality of life)
- focus on innovation, key business sectors to stimulate business development, including offshore recruitment
- focus on talent development
- streamline governmental processes/regulation
- comprehensive multimodal transportation and infrastructure plan
- collaborate with key partners to improve business climate

The state and its economic development partners are focused on key economic drivers such as Insurance/Financial Services, Manufacturing, Bioscience, Software, Data Services and Technology, and Tourism. The need for skilled talent in critical growth occupations in these key industry sectors has been identified as a strategic priority requiring a continued close cooperation and coordination of workforce and economic development efforts. The agency works closely with industries to address challenges and opportunities facing all businesses.

DECD is a strategic partner with the Department of Labor with the recent launch of the Governor's Workforce Council to ensure alignment between industry needs and developing the talent pipeline. In addition, in the area of manufacturing and tech talent, DECD has resources in place to promote innovation and growth.

Governor Lamont's administration plans to reform the way state government provides incentives to private companies looking to add jobs or make significant capital investments in Connecticut. The foundation of the state's strategy is taking shape with a focus on four key programs, including two new concepts. Led by the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) Commissioner David Lehman, the state's overall goal is to move toward a performance-based, "earn-as-you-go" system, meaning employers won't reap state incentives until they create a certain number of jobs or make a certain level of investment.

The new strategy will not require the state to borrow money up front to incentivize job growth as the Department of Economic and Community looks to reduce its bond obligations. The objective is to develop a competitive strategy that works for taxpayers and grows the economy. The major programs the state will now focus on include:

- a modified Small Business Express program that will no longer offer state loans or grants, but instead morph into a loan guarantee program run by private banks – emphasis would shift toward woman-owned companies, underserved communities and distressed municipalities
- a Grow CT Rebate will reward companies in specific industries (finance and insurance, advanced manufacturing, health care, bioscience, technology, and digital media) that create at least 25 jobs paying above-average wages.
- a greater focus on two existing incentive programs: the Urban and Industrial Site Reinvestment Tax Credit - which will be available to projects that add significant new economic activity and jobs at an old industrial site or urban center; and the Sales and Use Tax Relief Program that exempts businesses from paying the sales and use tax when they acquire tangible personal property, equipment and services from Connecticut Innovations, the state's quasi-public venture investor that oversees the program.

The state and its economic development partners are focused on key economic drivers such as Insurance/Financial Services, Manufacturing, Bioscience, Software, Data Services and Technology, and Tourism. The need for skilled talent in critical growth occupations in these key industry sectors has been identified as a strategic priority requiring a continued close cooperation and coordination of workforce and economic development efforts. DECD is a strategic partner with the Department of Labor and with the recent launch of the Governor's Workforce Council strives to ensure alignment between industry needs and developing the talent pipeline. In addition, in the area of manufacturing and tech talent, DECD has resources in place to promote innovation and growth which include the following:

### **Chief Manufacturing Officer**

This newly created position is an important ambassador for the industry on matters of workforce development, business climate, regulations, etc. and will collaborate with private, public, academia, local, state and federal government partners to develop and implement a comprehensive strategy to strengthen Connecticut's manufacturing sector.

### **Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF)**

Connecticut manufacturing is booming, fueled by a robust supply chain of 4,500 businesses. Nearly one of every ten Connecticut employees now works in the manufacturing sector – and the demand for skilled manufacturers continues to accelerate. To advance manufacturing even faster, the state government established a \$75 million Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF), a partnership of the state Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) and the Connecticut Center for Advanced Technology, Inc. (CCAT). Among its many initiatives, the MIF supports innovation and growth in the state's advanced manufacturing sector. The fund assists manufacturers to develop or modernize critical equipment, support technological advancement, encourage research and development, and provide critical workforce training. The objective is to strengthen the supply chain network of small/medium manufacturing companies and ensure a productive, flexible, well-trained advanced manufacturing talent pool with competitive skills.

DECD provides administrative oversight, with the counsel and support of an eleven-member advisory board, the majority from manufacturing companies. To date, DECD has directly invested approximately \$27.7 million in workforce development through the Manufacturing Innovation Fund (MIF). This funding supports incumbent worker training and pipeline development by way of pre-apprenticeships, apprenticeships and youth programs.

### **Connecticut Tech Talent Fund**

The \$10 million Connecticut Tech Talent Fund is a resource for both workers and employers to ensure Connecticut has the workforce talent needed to fuel growth in key industry sectors in the digital economy. To date, \$4.5 million has been deployed to provide matching grants to companies hiring tech interns from local colleges and universities to specialized technology training programs focused on building capacity in the areas of Full Stack Development and Data Science and Analytics. This funding and programming meets a critical area of skills demand for Connecticut companies.

CSDE: Coordinating with Economic Development Strategies

CSDE will participate in and support efforts of the Governor's Workforce Council to assist Connecticut business employers by continuing to develop and implement contextualized integrated education and training I-BEST programs that address the workforce needs of those businesses.

### **(b) State Operating Systems and Policies**

*The Unified State Plan must include a description of the State operating systems and policies that will support the implementation of the State strategy described in section II Strategic Elements.*

#### **(1) State Operating Systems**

##### **(A) The State Operating Systems that will support the implementation of the State's strategies.**

*State operating systems that support coordinated implementation of State strategies (e.g., labor market information systems, data systems, communication systems, case- management systems, job banks, etc.)*

As administrative entity for WIOA implementation in Connecticut, CTDOL has lead responsibility to ensure that appropriate operating systems are in place and used effectively by all WIOA and workforce system partners, with appropriate oversight by the state board. A description of Data Collection and Reporting elements is included below.

### **Connecticut Department of Labor**

Data collection and reporting for the six core WIOA programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Adult Education and Literacy Activities, and Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) will occur within separate case management systems located at each of three State agencies including the Connecticut Departments of Labor (CTDOL), Education (CSDE), and Aging and Disability Services (ADS).

CTDOL has contracted with Geographic Solutions to implement a web-based case management system, CTHires, to provide virtual services to individual jobseekers and employers, and to collect data required by WIOA for reporting on self-services and staff-assisted services for the Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, and Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) and Foreign Labor Certification, TANF/Jobs First Employment Services Program and the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) Program.

### **Connecticut State Department of Education**

All adult education providers funded by the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), Adult Education Unit, collect and report through the Connecticut Literacy, Adult and Community Education System (LACES). The data entered in LACES are used by CSDE to meet reporting requirements at the Federal and State levels. LACES data are the basis for completing the Federal reporting requirements of the National Reporting System (NRS).

LACES is a longitudinal database containing student information. The Student ID created for each new student in LACES is unique to that student across adult education providers and fiscal years. Students returning to adult education in a future fiscal year maintain the same LACES Student ID. Students who transfer from one adult education provider to another, or prepare in adult education and then register for the GED test will also be able to utilize the same LACES Student ID.

### **Connecticut Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The ADS maintains an approved vocational rehabilitation case management system for both of the department's vocational rehabilitation programs. This system runs locally on servers housed within ADS and contains case information relevant to individual consumers and reportable data. The vendor has maintained an active relationship with the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) who governs data collection for public vocational rehabilitation programs. RSA data elements have been adjusted to be compatible with the WIOA- Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) document.

SCSEP uses the SCSEP Performance and Results Quarterly Progress Reporting System (SPARQ) developed and maintained for the US Department of Labor. It is an online system and both grantees and sub-grantees have access to the system for data entry. Information about SCSEP locally, statewide and nationally can be accessed through this system.

### **WIOA Annual State and Local Area Reporting**

Reporting processes for the WIOA Annual State Performance Report will involve CTDOL obtaining electronic files for each report period from the three Connecticut State agencies for each of the six WIOA core programs. The WIOA Annual Local Area Performance Report is a subset of the WIOA Annual State Performance Report, covering only the Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. Individual records in each of these electronic program files will be matched against the CTDOL database that stores the WIOA unique identifiers to determine if such identifier already exists. If it exists, the unique identifier will be appended to the record. If it does not exist, CTDOL will assign a unique identifier for each participant and will append it to the participant record. This process will ensure a common unique identifier across the six WIOA core programs, and will ensure that this unique identifier will be the same for every period of participation.

These same electronic files will be matched to each of the electronic files for each of the six WIOA core programs to determine if an individual was co-enrolled in one or more of those programs. If the participant was co-enrolled in another core program, the specific code value identified in the WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) that applies to those services will be appended to the participant record.

These same electronic files will be used to obtain employment information for each program participant who has a social security number and an exit date from one or more of the six WIOA core programs. CTDOL currently is responsible for reporting wages, entered employment rates, and employment retention rates for individuals who exit the Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs.

Each program's electronic file containing the assigned WIOA unique identifier, co-enrollment data, wages, and employment information will be returned to each of the three State agencies for use in their Federal report submissions.

## **Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Performance Report**

CTDOL will use the CTHires case management system to collect data and generate the Eligible Training Provider Performance Report on all students in programs, and on WIOA participants, as required under WIOA.

## **Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report**

CTDOL will assume the role as lead agency in the Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report. Connecticut will be reporting on the Employer Penetration rate and Employee Retention.

### **(B) Data Collection and Reporting**

Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) maintains and operates an automated Workforce Development Business System to support the operational and management needs of the State of Connecticut's One-Stop employment service delivery system under the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). To address these operational, management, and reporting needs, CTDOL requires that state and contractor staff funded under the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser and National Dislocated Worker grant programs enter data into the CTHires system. Staff delivering services under the Trade Adjustment Assistance and Apprenticeship programs also record data for this federal program into the CTHires system.

CTDOL also requires authorized representatives of contractor agencies funded under WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs to sign a Data Access Agreement, to ensure the protection of Personally Identifiable Information (PII) in their possession. United States Department of Labor (USDOL), Training and Employment Guidance Letter (TEGL) No. 39.11 is appended to the Data Access Agreement. In addition, staff members of these agencies that will access the CTHires system are required to sign a form entitled Acknowledgment of Receipt of Confidential Information to advise them of responsibilities with respect to confidential information.

## **(2) State Workforce System Policies**

*The State policies that will support the implementation of the State's strategies (e.g., co-enrollment policies and universal intake processes where appropriate). In addition, provide the State's guidelines for State-administered one-stop partner programs' contributions to a one-stop delivery system.*

As the coordination entity for all workforce activities in the state, including WIOA, the Office of Workforce Strategy facilitates and drives the development of all policies. With respect to WIOA, OWS is supported by the CTDOL which maintains day-to-day responsibility to ensure that an appropriate and comprehensive set of state workforce system policies is established and are in place to guide effective WIOA service delivery. CTDOL has demonstrable experience and expertise in this role, having been responsible for administrative oversight and direction of the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) implementation in Connecticut. Building on a foundation of administrative policy developed during that time, the CTDOL's WIOA Administration Unit has systematically drafted and developed the necessary inventory of WIOA-related workforce system policies. The CTDOL WIOA Policy Manual can be found at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa.htm>. The policy manual is designed to be updated as necessary to account for changes and improvements in WIOA service delivery over time.

### **CTDOL Policy on Infrastructure Funding**

WIOA makes improvements to the public workforce system including a requirement that required partner programs dedicate funding for allowable infrastructure and other shared costs that are allocable to the partner and in proportion to the partner's use and the relative benefit received by the partner program. US DOL has recently provided detailed guidance to states regarding the development of MOUs and the determination of infrastructure and other shared costs (TEGL 17-16). The Memoranda of Understanding

(MOU) between local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and one-stop partners is the instrument by which costs to support the one stop centers are outlined. The MOU must describe the operating budget of the one-stop centers, including how the costs of services provided by the one stop system and how the operating costs of the system will be funded, including the infrastructure costs for the one stop system. An Infrastructure Funding Agreement (IFA) detailing the respective costs of each partner agency is a mandatory component of the local Memorandum of Understanding between the WDBs and one-stop partners. In addition, USDOL has made available resources provided at recent WIOA convenings including the attached information regarding a comparison between local and state funding mechanisms.

CT DOL has issued initial guidance from the Office of Workforce Strategy (OWS) predecessor, Office of Workforce Competitiveness (OWC), in MEMO GP 17-02 that was delivered to the Chief Elected Officials, Workforce Board Chairs, and Workforce Board Directors, and Agency Commissioners on June 1, 2017. The Memorandum of Understanding One-Stop Infrastructure Cost Sharing Guidance referencing WIOA Sec. 121(c), 121(h), USDOL TEGL 17-16, 20 CFR 678.700 – 678.760. The Memo provided updated guidance regarding one stop infrastructure cost sharing and the development of Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs).

After Memo GP 17-02, CT DOL WIOA Administration shared a policy issuance on One-Stop Center Infrastructure Cost-Sharing Agreements. The Issuance conveyed guidance for Local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs), Chief Elected Officials (CEOs), and one-stop center Required Partners to manage creation of a local infrastructure cost-allocation agreement (IFA). This included the deadline for advising the State of an impasse in completing the agreement is given, and the deadline for submission of infrastructure budgets. Procedures were discussed whereby a State- determined infrastructure-cost allocation mechanism would be triggered if a local agreement is not reached prior to the State deadline. The appeals process for disputing the contribution required of a one-stop partner by such a State mechanism is described.

WIOA requires that the MOU include details on how the Local WDB, CEO, and one-stop center Required Partners will fund one-stop infrastructure costs for all comprehensive one-stop centers in the local area. It is recommended that any infrastructure cost-sharing agreement for affiliated-site costs be negotiated separately from the statutorily required cost-sharing agreement covering comprehensive one-stop centers. WIOA sec. 121(h) mandates that the State, through the designated authority of the Governor, provide guidance to assist local WDBs, CEOs, and one-stop partners to determine equitable and stable methods to fund one-stop center infrastructure costs. The cost-allocation methodology must be in accord with Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Uniform Administrative Requirements, Cost Principles, and Audit Requirements for Federal Awards in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 2900. WIOA and its implementing regulations also require that the State's guidance include timelines for Local WDBs to notify the State if local infrastructure cost- allocation negotiations reach an impasse. If the Local WDB and the required partners are unable to conclude *and sign* a local infrastructure cost-sharing agreement for the ensuing Program Year before the State's deadline, WIOA gives the State no recourse but to impose an alternative State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism. This is *not* an alternative to the local funding agreement. It is a statutory *consequence* triggered by an inability of the concerned parties in the LWDA to self-determine a funding plan.

**State Guidelines** In compliance with WIOA sec. 121(h)(1)(B)(ii) and the implementing rules at 20 CFR 678.700-678.55, as well as US Department of Labor Guidance letters, e.g. Training and Employment Guidance Letter 17-16, OWC issued the “Connecticut WIOA Infrastructure Cost Sharing Guidelines.” Local MOU signatories are not bound to follow these recommendations; they may, in fact, adopt any local cost-allocation mechanism that is in accord with the Uniform Guidelines in 2 CFR Parts 200 and 2900. Nevertheless, we strongly encourage local WDBs, CEOs, and one-stop partners to develop their local infrastructure-cost allocation agreements using these guidelines.

**Notice of Impasse** An agreement must be negotiated, signed, and in effect by January 1, 2018, therefore final IFAs are due by December 1, 2017. Local WDBs must provide a Notice of Impasse to OWC no later than November 1, 2017 where local negotiations were unsuccessful. This notification may originate with the Local WDB, the CEO, or any one of the Required Partners.

**Budgets** Local budgets upon which the local infrastructure cost-allocation agreements will be based must be submitted to OWC by November 1, 2017. These will be reviewed by OWC and the WIOA Administration Unit. In the event of unsuccessful negotiations for a local infrastructure cost-allocation agreement, any budget approved by the Local WDB, CEO, and Required Partners will be used by the State as a basis for a State-imposed mechanism, as mandated by the WIOA Final Rules. If, by the State deadline for local cost-allocation agreements, there is also no locally approved infrastructure budget, the WIOA Final Rules require the State to determine that budget for the local area.

**State Infrastructure Cost-Allocation Mechanism** If, by December 1, 2017, the local infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism has not been completed, signed, and submitted to the State, the State will be statutorily compelled to impose a State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism as prescribed by WIOA sec. 121(h) and the Final Rules in 20 CFR Part 678. The specific allocations in this mechanism will be transmitted to the LWDB, the CEO, and the one-stop Required Parties for the local area prior to the start of January 1, 2018, if feasible. The State mechanism generally makes fewer funds available than a local agreement. The U.S. Department of Labor notes in its preamble to the WIOA Final Rules, "...while under the local-funding mechanism partner programs may contribute through any funds allowed by their authorizing statutes, under the State funding mechanism, infrastructure funds must come from administrative funds for the majority of partner programs."

**Appeals Process** Upon receipt of the specific terms of a State infrastructure cost-allocation mechanism, any local WDB or one-stop required partner may appeal for cause, within 21 calendar days, in writing (electronic or hardcopy) the State's determination regarding the portion of funds (or non-cash contributions) it the Local WDB or required partner is to provide. To be officially received, an appeal must fully contain evidence of the following:

- a. An introduction identifying the appellant and designating the letter as a formal appeal
- b. Full citations from WIOA or the WIOA Final Rules in Title 29 or Title 34 of the *Code of Federal Regulations* that support the appeal.
- c. Identify the basis for the appeal. WIOA stipulates that a State mechanism allocation determination may be appealed only if the determination is inconsistent with the requirements of WIOA sec. 121(h)(2)(E). The Final Rule at 20 CFR 678.750 further limits admissible grounds for an appeal to three possibilities. The petitioner must make a case that the State's determination is inconsistent with:
  - i. the proportionate-share requirements in 20 CFR 678.737, or
  - ii. the cost-contribution limitations in 20 CFR 678.730(c), or
  - iii. the cost-contribution caps in 20 CFR 678.738
- d. The letter must be signed (electronic signature is acceptable) and dated.

WIOA provides that in circumstances where the local Board is unable to reach an agreement with required partners regarding infrastructure costs that a State Funding Mechanism (SFM) will be applied.

### **(3) State Programs and State Board Overview**

#### **(A) State Agency Organization**

*State Agency Organization. Describe the organization and delivery systems at the State and local levels for the programs covered in the plan, including the organizational structure. Include an organizational chart*

As of July 1, 2021, Public Law 21-2 enacted in June 2021 codified the role of the Office of Workforce Strategy, located within the Office of the Governor for administrative purposes.

The law designated the Chief Workforce Officer to serve as (1) the principal advisor for workforce development policy, strategy and coordination to the Governor; (2) the lead state official for the development of employment and training strategies and initiatives; (3) the chairperson of the Workforce Cabinet, which shall consist of agencies involved with employment and training, as designated by the Governor; and (4) the liaison between the Governor, the Governor's Workforce Council and any local, regional, state or federal organizations and entities with respect to workforce development policy, strategy and coordination, including, but not limited to, implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014.

Responsibilities of the Chief Workforce Officer include:

- Develop, and update as necessary, a state workforce strategy in consultation with the Governor's Workforce Council and the Workforce Cabinet and subject to the approval of the Governor;
- Coordinate workforce development activities (A) funded through state resources, (B) funded through funds received pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act of 2014, as amended from time to time, or (C) administered in collaboration with any state agency for the purpose of furthering the goals and outcomes of the state workforce strategy approved by the Governor and the workforce development plan developed by the Governor's Workforce Council;
- Collaborate with the regional workforce development boards to adapt the best practices for workforce development established by such boards for state-wide implementation, if possible;
- Coordinate measurement and evaluation of outcomes across education and workforce development programs, in conjunction with state agencies;
- Review any state plan for each WIOA program before such plan is submitted to the Governor;
- Establish methods and procedures to ensure the maximum involvement of members of the public, the legislature and local officials in workforce development policy, strategy and coordination;
- Market and communicate the state workforce strategy to ensure maximum engagement with students, trainees, job seekers and businesses while effectively elevating the state's workforce profile nationally;
- Identify subject areas, courses, curriculum, content and programs that may be offered to students in elementary and high school in order to improve student outcomes and meet the workforce needs of the state;
- Issue guidance to state agencies, the Governor's Workforce Council and regional workforce development boards in furtherance of the state workforce strategy and the workforce development plan developed by the Governor's Workforce Council pursuant to the provisions of section 31-11p.
- Coordinate, in consultation with the Department of Social Services, with community action agencies to further the state workforce strategy; and
- Coordinate, in consultation with the Labor Department and regional workforce development boards to ensure compliance with state and federal laws for the purpose of furthering the service

capabilities of programs offered pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, and the USDOL's American Job Center system.

In conjunction with one or more state agencies enter into such contractual agreements, in accordance with established procedures and the approval of the Secretary of the Office of Policy and Management, as may be necessary to carry out the provisions of this section. The Chief Workforce Officer may

enter into agreements with other state agencies for the purpose of performing the duties of the Office of Workforce Strategy, including, but not limited to, administrative, human resources, finance and information technology functions;

Public Law 21-2 also established or modified a number of committees and boards involved in workforce development that will assume central roles in the efforts of the Office of Workforce Strategy to align and improve the workforce system (Figure x)

- Governor's Workforce Council. Serves as Statewide Workforce Board under WIOA, see full description
- Governor's Workforce Cabinet. Includes all state Commissioners involved in workforce development. To align policies across state agencies.
- Council of Advisors on Strategies for the Knowledge Economy. To promote the formation of university-industry partnerships, identify benchmarks for technology-based workforce innovation and competitiveness and advise the award process for innovation challenge grants to public postsecondary schools and their business partners and grants under section 4-124hh.
- CTECS Industry Advisory Committees. Industry cluster committees advise CTECS and the community colleges on specific skills standards, corresponding curriculum and a career ladder for the cluster which shall be implemented as part of the schools' core curriculum
- Connecticut State Apprenticeship Council
- Connecticut Apprenticeship and Education Committee
- Technical Education and Career System Board
- Technology Talent Advisory Committee
- Manufacturing Innovation Advisory Board
- P20 WIN Governing Board. To oversee development and implementation of the P20 WIN data system
- Credential DataBase Advisory Committee. To advise the Office of Higher Education on the development of the credentials database.

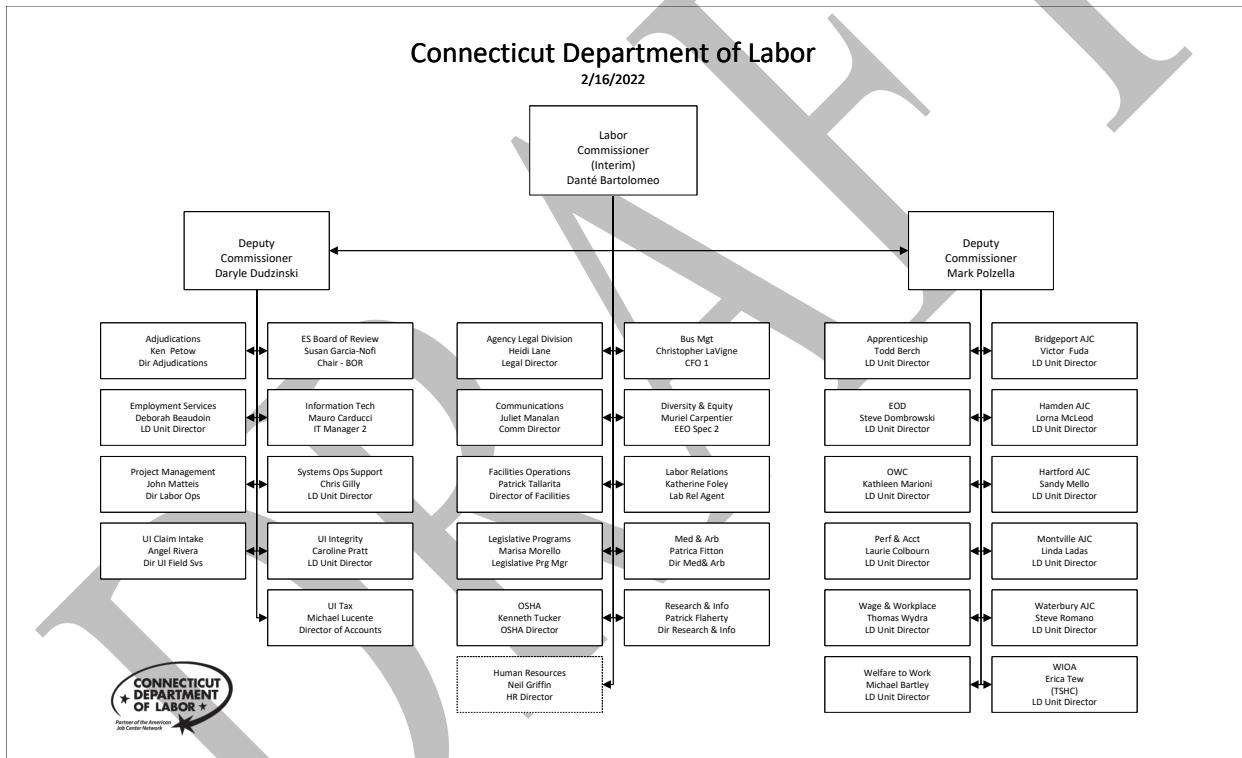
The Connecticut Department of Labor is committed to protecting and promoting the interests of Connecticut workers. In order to accomplish this in an ever-changing environment, we assist workers and employers to become competitive in the global economy. We take a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of workers and employers, and the other agencies that serve them. We ensure the supply of high-quality integrated services that serve the needs of our customers.

The CT Department of Labor's WIOA Administration Unit has administrative responsibilities for the WIOA Title IB funded programs as well as a multitude of other federal, state and discretionary funded programs providing workforce development programming.

These programs include: Trade Adjustment Allowance, National Dislocated Worker Grants, including Disaster Relief, Rapid Response, State Youth Employment Program, Department of Children and Families Youth Employment Program, STRIVE, Second Chance Initiative, Opportunities for Long-term Unemployed a.k.a. Platform to Employment, Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program, Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative. The administrative functions of this unit includes but is not limited to policy and

procedure development, monitoring – both programmatically and fiscally, development of grants and contracts, reporting, and management information system support.

## CT Department of Labor Organization Chart



The Connecticut Department of Labor is committed to protecting and promoting the interests of Connecticut workers. In order to accomplish this in an ever-changing environment, we assist workers and employers to become competitive in the global economy. We take a comprehensive approach to meeting the needs of workers and employers, and the other agencies that serve them. We ensure the supply of high-quality integrated services that serve the needs of our customers.

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Unemployed a.k.a. Platform to Employment, Mortgage Crisis Job Training Program, Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative. The administrative functions of this unit includes but is not limited to policy and procedure development, monitoring – both programmatically and fiscally, development of grants and contracts, reporting, and management information system support.

CTDOL local office staff members deliver direct services within American Job Centers under the Wagner- Peyster, Trade Adjustment Assistance, Unemployment Insurance, and Veterans programs. Examples of services provided under these programs include: assessment of skills, vocational counseling, provision of labor market and other information, provision of referrals to employment and to supportive services for individuals, recruitment services for employers, unemployment insurance, and rapid response assistance for employers and their employees. These services are designed to assist individuals to obtain employment to ultimately achieve self-sufficiency, and to assist employers to secure qualified employees to assist them to become competitive.

CTDOL's Unemployment Insurance (UI) Operations, UI Tax, and ES Board of Review are separate divisions within CTDOL. These divisions work closely with the Employment and Training Division and the local American Job Centers to provide seamless customer services. **Jobs First Employment Services (JFES):**

The Connecticut Department of Labor's Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) unit, often referred to as the CTDOL Welfare to Work unit administers the Jobs First Employment Services program, which serves recipients of Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). TFA is Connecticut's cash assistance program for low-income families or pregnant women using federal Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) funding. TFA eligibility is administered by the Connecticut Department of Social Services (CTDSS). The CTDOL administers the JFES program in partnership with the Department of Social Services (CTDSS) and the five Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). The WDBs operate as intermediaries that subcontract with other organizations to provide services to JFES participants at American Job Centers (AJCs) located throughout the state. Services include job search assistance, vocational education, adult basic education, unsubsidized employment, subsidized employment, case management, community service and other support services such as in-home assessments, case management and transportation benefits. All JFES participants are eligible to receive childcare subsidies through the Connecticut Office of Early Childhood (CTOEC). The ultimate goal of the JFES program is to enable participants, through employment, to become independent from cash assistance and be self-sufficient.

The CTDOL JFES unit has implemented a number of initiatives since the last CT WIOA state plan was submitted. First, CTDOL implemented the JFES CTHires electronic case management system in March 2018. Connecticut was the first state in the country to successfully implement a TFA/Welfare to Work system in partnership with Geographic Solutions.

Since the implementation of the JFES CTHires system in 2018, the JFES unit has worked to maintain this system and to fine tune the various types of reports and data that can be generated from the JFES CTHires system.

## **CT State Department of Education**

The Connecticut State Department of Education is committed to quality adult education programs which are accessible to all Connecticut adults and lead to mastery of the essential proficiencies needed to function as productive citizens in work, family and community environments. Connecticut's adult education programs are governed by Connecticut General Statutes, which require local school districts to offer education programs necessary to acquire basic literacy skills, elementary education, English language proficiency, secondary school completion and/or preparation for equivalency or proficiency examinations. Local school districts and other eligible agencies providing mandated adult education programs are reimbursed by the Connecticut State Department of Education on a cost-sharing, sliding scale based on the relative wealth of a district.

By supplementing Connecticut's commitment of state and local adult education dollars with WIOA Title II dollars, Connecticut expands its provider network while enhancing and supporting programs and services that are more comprehensive, cost-effective and responsive to community needs. In addition to the local school districts, volunteer programs, community based organizations and other agencies provide adult education services in

Connecticut by recruiting and retaining educationally and economically disadvantaged adults. By focusing on the needs of learners, families, communities and employers, adult education programs succeed in improving the skills of Connecticut's learners, enabling thousands of residents to attain a secondary school diploma, helping to close the skills gap in the workplace, assisting non-English speakers to learn English, easing the transition to post-secondary education, preparing residents to attain U.S. citizenship and helping families to break the intergenerational cycle of illiteracy.

### **Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The mission of the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) is to maximize opportunities for the independence and well-being of people with disabilities and older adults in Connecticut. The primary customers of the agency are individuals with disabilities and older adults. In the employment-based programs, business/employers are a dual customer.

The Department has four programmatic bureaus, including:

- Bureau of Aging Services (Aging)
- Bureau of Disability Determination Services (DDS)
- Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB)
- Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS)

Programs, policies and practices are designed to promote employment, independence, equal access, self-sufficiency and self-advocacy. ADS is the designated state agency for the two VR programs. Consumers with disabilities who need help finding employment may apply for assistance at the applicable ADS offices. They may seek assistance to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment in a competitive and integrated setting. Services may include vocational counseling, benefits counseling, job search assistance, skill training and career education, school-to-work transition services, on-the-job training in business and industry, assistive technology services for mobility, communication and work activities, vehicle and home modifications, supported employment services, restoration services for a physical or mental condition and assistance accessing transportation options. Once eligibility has been determined, consumers work with a VR counselor to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) to identify the target employment goal and the services that ADS can provide to assist them in reaching that goal. The IPE also identifies the consumer's responsibilities to help reach the desired job goal.

### **ADS-SCSEP**

As the state SCSEP grantee, ADS relies on its sub-grantee, who is under contract to provide services in the grant's service areas of Fairfield, Litchfield and New Haven Counties. Consumers seeking assistance in these areas can contact the sub-grantee or the State SCSEP Coordinator at ADS. In areas served by The WorkPlace, consumers can contact their local offices or the State SCSEP Coordinator at ADS, as well, to be directed to local services.

### **CT Department of Social Services**

CTDSS provides a wide range of services to children, families, older adults, persons with disabilities, and other individuals who need assistance in maintaining or achieving their full potential for self-direction, self-reliance and independent living. CTDSS delivers a wide variety of services to children, families, adults, people with disabilities and the elderly, including health care coverage, food and nutrition

assistance, child support services, independent living services, energy assistance, and program grants. CTDSS administers Medicaid and the Children's Health Insurance Program; the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families program, among others. With a staff of about 1,900, the department provides services to more than 1 million Connecticut residents of all ages.

## Local Initiatives

### ***Connecticut's Workforce Development Boards (WDBs)***

Connecticut's Workforce Development Boards conduct comprehensive planning, and coordinate regional workforce development policy and programs. With a regional focus, the Boards assess regional employment and training needs and priorities, conduct planning for and coordinate programs that address those needs. In addition, the Boards create annual employment and training plans, and review regional grant proposals and plans submitted to state agencies by other organizations to assure that all regional planning is consistent with an overall statewide blueprint for workforce development. The Boards, with the Connecticut Department of Labor, other State agencies and private organizations, form a statewide partnership to achieve comprehensive workforce development in the State.

Details of Workforce Development Board initiatives are provided above in Section II (a) (2) Workforce Activities above

### ***Workforce Development Board Initiatives***

The following demonstrates Connecticut's Workforce Development Boards leadership in attracting funds to support Connecticut's workforce development efforts across the education and training continuum and the willingness of the WDBs to play a critical intermediary role in the efforts led by higher education and workforce system partners. Together they have developed and implemented several new industry sector partnerships with career pathway components.

## **(B) State Board**

*Provide a description of the State Board including membership roster and Board activities.*

### **(i) Membership Roster and Affiliations**

The Governor's Workforce Council brings together stakeholders working to build a workforce system second to that of no other state. Membership prescribed by PL 21-2 includes businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, non-profit institutions, labor unions, and the State's Chief Manufacturing Officer. The Board includes three Fortune 500 CEOs, the CEO of Connecticut's largest private employer, university presidents and public school superintendents, the Connecticut AFL-CIO president and 32BJ district director, elected officials, and experienced leaders of community-based organizations and of small and large companies in key industry sectors.

The voting members of the Governor's Workforce Council, the State Workforce Board under WIOA, and their professional affiliations, include:

## **Council Members**

Name	Sector
Mark Argosh   Social Venture Partners CT, Executive Director	Business
Kelli-Marie Vallieres   CT OWS, Chief Workforce Officer	Public Sector
Governor Ned Lamont   CT Governor	Elected Official

Name	Sector
Toni Walker   CT General Assembly, State Representative	Elected Official
Will Haskell   CT General Assembly, State Senator	Elected Official
Neil O'Leary   City of Waterbury, Mayor	Elected Official
Peter Nystrom   City of Norwich, Mayor	Elected Official
Leslie Torres-Rodriguez   Hartford Public Schools, Superintendent	Local Government
Dante Bartolomeo   CT DOL, Commissioner	Commissioner
David Lehman   CT DECD, Commissioner	Commissioner
Amy Porter   CT ADS, Commissioner	Commissioner
Charlene Russell-Tucker   CT SDE, Commissioner	Commissioner
Sharon Barr   Alexion, Senior VP of Research & Product Development	Business
Cindi Bigelow   Bigelow Tea, Executive Director	Business
Andrew Bond   General Dynamics Electric Boat, VP of Human Resources	Business
Marna Borgstrom   Yale New Haven Hospital, CEO	Business
Leticia Colon de Mejias   Energy Efficiency for All, Co-Chair	Business
Chris DiPentima   CBIA, CEO	Business
Brian Doubles   Synchrony, President & CEO	Business
Shane Eddy   SVP Operations, Pratt & Whitney	Business
Sue Figueredo   Travelers, Global Head of Operations	Business
Jeffrey Flaks   Hartford Healthcare, CEO	Business
Rohan Freeman   Freeman Associates, President	Business
Joseph Gianni   President Greater Hftd, Bank of America	Business
Maggie Hulce   Indeed, Senior Vice President	Business
Surya Kant   Tata Consultancy Services, Chairman North America	Business
Molly Kellogg   Hubbard-Hall, CEO	Business
Ravi Kumar   Infosys, President	Business
James Loree   Stanley Black & Decker, CEO	Business
Anthony Medici   Medtronic, Sr. Director of Operations	Business
John Murphy   Nuvance Health, CEO	Business
Ray Pineault   Mohegan Gaming & Entertainment, President & CEO	Business
Kathy Silard   Stamford Hospital, CEO	Business
Erika Smith   ReNetX Bio, Inc, CEO	Business
Shellye Davis   Executive Vice President, AFL-CIO	Labor
Tiana Ocasio   Executive Secretary, AFL CIO	Labor
Ed Hawthorne   AFL-CIO, Incoming President	Labor
Keri Hoehne   Local 371 UFCW, Executive Vice President	Labor
Paul Costello   NECA & IBEW Local 90 JATC, Apprenticeship Director	Labor
Peter Salovey   Yale University, President	Higher Education
Andrew Agwunobi   UCONN, President	Higher Education

Name	Sector
Terrence Cheng   CSCU, President	Higher Education
Sal Menzo   Goodwin University, Superintendent	Higher Education
Judy Olian   Quinnipiac, President	Higher Education
Monette Ferguson   Alliance for Community Empowerment, Exec Dir.	Nonprofit
Alexis Gevanter   Moms Demand Action for Gun Sense in America, Lead Organizer	Nonprofit
Michelle James   CAA of Western CT, Executive Director	Nonprofit
Jay Williams   The Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, President/CEO	Nonprofit

## Ex-officio Members

The five Workforce Development Boards sit as Ex-officio, non-voting on GWC.

- Alex Johnson, Capitol Workforce Partners, President & CEO
- Bill Villano, Workforce Alliance, President & CEO
- Cathy Awwad, Northwest Regional Workforce Investment Board, Executive Director
- Mark Hill, Eastern Connecticut Workforce Investment Board, President and CEO
- Joseph Carbone, The WorkPlace, President & CEO

### (ii) Board Activities

*Board Activities. Provide a description of the activities that will assist State Board members and staff in carrying out State Board functions effectively.*

The Governor's Workforce Council is making great strides in bringing together the best minds to advance the state's approach to education and training. The Office of Workforce Strategy provides extensive direct support to Council members to enable them to be most effective in their leadership roles. The Chair of GWC and the Chief Workforce Officer meet regularly with all Committee Chairs to support their effective leadership in their areas of cognizance.

The Governor's Workforce Council relies on this staff work, quarterly meetings and regular and clear communications to coordinate among the important stakeholders in the workforce system, including businesses, state agencies, quasi-public and independent entities, boards, councils, and commissions, public and private education and training institutions, workforce development boards, nonprofit institutions, labor unions, and the state's Chief Manufacturing Officer.

The functions of GWC and its committee structure to actively guide its work to implement its Strategic Plan were fully described above in Section III (a) (1) State Board Functions.

## (4) Assessment and Evaluation of Programs and One-Stop Program Partners

### (A) Assessment of Core Programs

Connecticut's Unified State Plan outlines a four-year strategy for the six core programs:

- Adult Program (Title 1 of WIOA)
- Dislocated Worker Program (Title 1)
- Youth Program (Title 1)
- Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program (Title II),

- Vocational Rehabilitation Program – BESB (Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV,) and
- Vocational Rehabilitation Program – BRS (Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by Title IV.)

Assessment of these core programs will be done by the respective administrative State agency.

Executive Order #4 requires the Governor’s Workforce Council to review the state’s workforce development system and submit a report to the governor and the legislature by January 1, 2021 that makes strategic recommendations to improve the state’s workforce system in a variety of areas, including better coordination, reducing barriers to training, strengthening the bridge from high school into post-secondary training and education, and emphasizing data-driven outcomes.

This year, the GWC Data and Performance Committee will be establishing new metrics for assessing performance across programs at the ground level.

CTDOL’s Employment Services Operations Unit conducts annual case file reviews and monitoring of the Wagner-Peyser and Unemployment Insurance (UI) Reemployment Services and Eligibility Assessment (RESEA) programs in each of the five workforce development regions. These reviews ensure the American Job Centers (AJCs) are providing effective and appropriate services to program participants and are adhering to federal and state program requirements. A formal written monitoring report identifying best practices, areas of concern and findings resulting from the review is generated within thirty days of completing each review. The Employment Services Operations Unit provides technical assistance to AJC Directors, Programs & Services Coordinators and staff to quickly address any deficiencies and ensure the delivery of high-quality services that meet the specific reemployment needs of program participants and Unemployment Insurance eligibility requirements for UI claimants.

The Connecticut Departments of Labor (CTDOL), Education (CSDE), and Aging and Disability Services (ADS), will use the primary indicators of performance specified in section 116(b) of WIOA and contained in State Performance Reports to assess the performance of the six core programs. Each program’s actual performance will be assessed in relation to the State adjusted levels of performance and revised State adjusted levels of performance. Connecticut does not have any additional indicators of performance referenced in section 116(b)(2)(B) as part of this Unified State Plan.

This State assessment will utilize quarterly wage records to determine program quality and effectiveness with respect to outcomes including employment rates and median earnings for participants with a social security number that exited from one or more of the six core programs. Also, the average cost of those participants who received career and training services, respectively, during the most recent program year and the three preceding program years will be assessed, while considering relevant economic conditions e.g., unemployment rates and characteristics of participants.

Additionally, CTDOL will use the Local Area Performance Report broken down by local area for the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs to determine each local area’s performance on the primary indicators with respect to local performance targets. This local area data will be used to identify best practices and opportunities for improvement.

## **(B) Assessment of One-Stop Program Partner Programs**

Other One-Stop delivery system partner program services included in the Workforce Performance Accountability, Information, and Reporting System that are reportable to USDOL will be assessed annually using outcome measures on the Program Performance Scorecard e.g., employment rate, and median earnings.

CT Department of Labor (CTDOL) will use the program performance scorecard and the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Template to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner-Peyser programs in entering or remaining in

employment. The state assessment will use quarterly wage records to determine entered employment rates in the second and fourth quarters after exit for program individuals who exit with social security numbers to determine their success in entering or remaining in employment. Median earnings will also be considered to determine progress towards self-sufficiency. Local Workforce Development Boards will be responsible for following up with participants exiting from the WIOA Youth program to assess enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of postsecondary education. Connecticut has not set any additional indicators of performance.

### **(C) Previous Assessment Results (Prior 2 years)**

*Beginning with the state plan modification in 2018 and for subsequent state plans and state plan modifications, provide the results of assessments of the effectiveness of the core programs and other one-stop partner programs and Combined State Plan partner programs included in the Unified or Combined State plan during the preceding 2-year period (i.e. the 2-year period of the plan modification cycle). Describe how the State is adapting its strategies based on these assessments.*

### **(D) Evaluation**

*Describe how the state will conduct evaluations and research projects on activities under WIOA core programs; how such projects will be coordinated with, and designed in conjunction with, State and local boards and with State agencies responsible for the administration of all respective core programs; and, further, how the projects will be coordinated with the evaluations provided for by the Secretary of Labor and the Secretary of Education under WIOA.*

The Governor's Workforce Council and OWS are charged with ensuring the thorough evaluation of all initiatives and investments in the workforce development system to ensure that funds are deployed effectively to generate the impacts desired. Evaluation projects will be conducted in collaboration with the subject initiative's sponsors, the cognizant state agency, the WIOA partners, including the local workforce development boards, and other stakeholders in the work of the initiative. Consideration will be given to past evaluations to ensure that future ones are valuable use of State and local resources. The nature and type of these projects will unfold throughout WIOA implementation and will at a minimum focus on factors effecting program outcomes. Evaluations provided by Federal agencies will also guide the direction of State efforts.

In implementation of the GWC Strategic Plan, Connecticut will build data and performance management tools at both a system-wide and a program level that illuminate results and help the Council to analyze program impact and return on investment. Ideally, these tools will build the capacity to analyze the effectiveness of programs alone and in combination and also better understand labor market trends. This functionality will help decision-makers understand the participants in workforce programs, the services they receive, and the outcomes.

OPM and OWS will advance work in three areas:

- **System-wide Dashboard.** OPM will assist OWS to design and build a publicly-available workforce data dashboard. OPM and OWS will catalogue available data sets and technology platform requirements for the dashboard. OWS will coordinate a process to prioritize and socialize goals and metrics with public and private stakeholders.
- **Program-level Data.** OWS, DOL, OPM and other state agencies will develop an annual report for the purposes of assessing performance and outcomes of the state's workforce system, pursuant to Public Act 21-2, Section 250(e), June Special Session. The next steps involve: a) finalizing the scope of programs and the data elements and outcome measures for the report; and b) developing a standard process for updating and expanding this request in the future.
- **Net Impact and Return on Investment (ROI).** An expanded P20 WIN integrated data system will provide a cross-agency data platform to support net impact and ROI analyses for workforce training programs. Specifically: a) DOL and OPM have completed research on best practice methodologies used in other states to compare programs and impact, especially when clients

receive multiple services, to develop recommendations for the Council; and b) DOL and OPM will develop a methodology and recommended approach to pilot a net impact and ROI evaluation in consultation with the Council and OWS.

## **(5) Distribution of Funds for Core Programs**

### **(A) Title I**

*Provide a description of the written policies that establish the State's methods and factors used to distribute funds to local areas for: Youth activities in accordance with WIOA section 128(b)(2) or (b)(3), Adult and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) or (b)(3), Dislocated worker employment and training activities in accordance with WIOA section 133(b)(2) and based on data and weights assigned.*

CTDOL has created a policy concerning methods/factors to distribute funds to local areas for Youth activities, Adult and training activities, Dislocated Worker employment and training activities. The policy can be found in the **CTDOL WIOA Policy Manual**.

Proposed methods and factors will be reviewed with and approved by for the Governor's Workforce Council.

### **(B) Title II – Adult Education and Family Literacy [SDE] .**

#### **(i) How Agency will Award Multi-Year Grants**

Through CSDE, the State of Connecticut will award multi-year grants to eligible providers through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to enable providers to develop, implement and improve adult education and literacy activities. Grantees will have the opportunity to continue for a second year depending upon satisfactory performance and funding from Congress. The following agencies are eligible for funding through the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE):

- a. a local educational agency;
- b. a community-based organization or faith-based organization;
- c. a volunteer literacy organization;
- d. an institution of higher education;
- e. a public or private nonprofit agency;
- f. a library;
- g. a public housing authority;
- h. other nonprofit institutions that have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals;
- i. a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries, or authorities described above;
- j. a partnership between an employer and an entity described above.

CSDE will make funding available in each of Connecticut's five designated local workforce areas. In conjunction with each WDB, CSDE will help to assess local area needs and WDB goals.

CSDE will use the 13 WIOA considerations for funding to award grants, including the following consideration: "past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals, to meet State-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance", described in WIOA section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals who have low levels of literacy. Prior performance will be evidenced by meeting or exceeding performance measures based on documentation

from the LACES database and annual reviews of previously funded providers, and evidenced by comparable objective performance measures demonstrating successful student outcomes for new eligible providers.

*Describe how the eligible agency will ensure direct and equitable access to all eligible providers to apply and compete for funds and how the eligible agency will ensure that it is using the same grant or contract announcement and application procedure for all eligible providers.*

To ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers, the Connecticut State Department of Education will publish a *Notice of Availability* in all major newspapers throughout Connecticut and post the notice on the CSDE's web page. The RFP will be emailed to all local education agencies and higher education institutions; to a master list of current and past providers including community-based organizations, regional education service centers, housing authorities, volunteer organizations, Department of Correction, other correctional facilities and institutions; and to all current providers and WDBs. A Bidder's Conference will be publicly advertised with the *Notice of Availability* and held at a central location to provide answers to questions regarding appropriateness of proposed projects and application procedures.

### **(C) Title IV – Vocational Rehabilitation [BRS]**

Under the Rehabilitation Act, the Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) provides vocational services to eligible individuals with disabilities who are seeking to prepare for, secure, retain, advance in, or regain employment through the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and the Bureau of Education and Services to the Blind (BESB). Federal Title IV funds are distributed at a rate of 85 percent of the appropriation applied to the VR General Program and 15 percent allocated to the VR Blind Program. For the state match appropriation, funding is applied at a rate of 88 percent to VR General Program and 12 percent to the VR Blind Program. Factors that contribute to the application of these funding allocations includes consideration of the number of consumers served within each program, maintenance of effort requirements, programmatic and purchase of service costs, and staffing requirements to maintain each program. Flexibility is built into the state appropriation to allow for adjustment in the allocation percentages to each program in response to variations in these variables.

## **(6) Program Data**

### **(A) Data Alignment and Integration**

#### **(i) Interoperable MIS**

Connecticut has developed a Unique ID system with the WIOA core partners. The primary purpose of the Unique ID system was to create a Unique ID that would be used for federal reporting as well as integrating data from the WIOA core programs. WIOA, Adult Education, Wagner-Peyser and Vocational Rehabilitation have been using the Unique ID for the past four program years.

Connecticut has a database with the PIRL from Vocational Rehabilitation, WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth, and Wagner-Peyser. The database allows Connecticut to compare the data from the three core WIOA programs. In comparing the files Connecticut can determine which customers are served by multiple programs, success rates for those served by multiple programs, indicators a person is likely to participate in more than one program, which Workforce Development Boards are more successful at integrating services.

#### **(ii) Data Systems Integration**

Connecticut currently has an integrated web-based data system for four of the six core programs and includes the Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) Program. Connecticut is looking for integrated system options as they become available in the near future.

### **(iii) Technology and Data Systems Alignment**

*Describe the State's plans to integrate data systems to facilitate streamlined intake and service delivery to track participation across all programs included in this plan.*

Connecticut is working to align technology and data systems across mandatory One-Stop partner programs under the direction of Chief Workforce Officer and the Governor's Workforce Council.

This future system would provide for a common intake and data collection across multiple agencies and programs. This alignment would improve service delivery to individuals by enabling data to be collected once and shared by service providers within the system, resulting in efficiencies.

This common system will also foster communication and collaboration among service providers to ensure optimum service delivery using a variety of funding and resources while minimizing duplication of services.

The Governors Workforce Council (GWC) will assist the Governor's Chief Workforce Officer and Agency Commissioners in finding ways to align technology and data systems to improve service delivery by participating on interagency work groups to identify financial and other resources necessary to accomplish this work. By working with the State's Data Officer and the GWC Data and Performance Committee, experts will identify financial and programmatic actions necessary to accomplish this work.

### **(iv) Develop and Produce Performance Reports**

*Describe the State's plans to develop and produce the reports required under section 116, performance accountability system (WIOA section 116(d)(2)).*

Connecticut had formed a WIOA transition interagency work group on Technology, Data and Outcomes. The work group and its technology subcommittee met several times to develop various options to enable reporting for the six (6) core programs across three state agencies – the Connecticut Departments of Labor (CTDOL), Education (CSDE), and Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS). Data collection for the six core programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, Wagner-Peyser, Adult Education and Literacy

Activities, and Title 1 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973) occur within separate case management systems located at each of three State agencies. CTDOL will explore assessment for performance reporting with CTDSS to determine application and feasibility between WIOA, TANF and SNAP E&T.

Reporting processes for the WIOA Annual State Performance Report will involve CTDOL obtaining electronic files for each report period from the three State agencies for each of the six core programs. Individual records in each of these electronic program files will be matched against the CTDOL database that stores the WIOA unique identifiers to determine if such identifier already exists. If it does exist, the unique identifier will be appended to the record. If it does not exist, CTDOL will assign a unique identifier for each participant and will append it to the participant record. This process will ensure a common unique identifier across the six core programs, and that this identifier will be the same for every period of participation.

These same electronic files will be matched to each of the electronic files for each of the six core programs to determine if an individual was co-enrolled in one or more of the six core programs. If the participant was co-enrolled in another core program, the specific code value identified in the WIOA Participant Individual Record Layout (PIRL) that applies to those services will be appended to the participant record.

Also, these same electronic files will be used to obtain employment information for each program participant who has a social security number and an exit date from one or more of the six core programs.

CTDOL currently is responsible for reporting wages, entered employment rates, and employment retention rates for individuals who exit in the Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs. CSDE reports the data on these indicators for Title II.

Each program's electronic file containing the assigned WIOA unique identifier, co-enrollment data, wages, and employment information will be returned to each of the three State agencies to use in their federal report submissions.

### **Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Performance Report**

CTDOL will use the new CTHires case management system to collect data and generate the Eligible Training Provider Performance Report on all students in programs, and on WIOA participants as required under WIOA. Once the CareerConneCT portal is operational it will supplement the CTHIRES data.

### **Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report**

CT DOL will assume the role as lead agency in the Effectiveness in Serving Employers Report.

Under section 116(b)(2)(A) of WIOA, there are six primary indicators of performance: Employment Rate – 2nd Quarter After Exit, Employment Rate – 4th Quarter After Exit, Median Earnings – 2nd Quarter After Exit, Credential Attainment, Measurable Skill Gains, Measurable Skill Gains, and Effectiveness in Serving Employers.

### **(B) Assessment of Participants' Post-Program Success**

CT Department of Labor (CTDOL) will use the program performance scorecard and the WIOA Annual Statewide Performance Report Template to assess the progress of participants who are exiting from the WIOA Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Wagner- Peyser programs in entering or remaining in employment. The state assessment will use quarterly wage records to determine entered employment rates in the second and fourth quarters after exit for program individuals who exit with social security numbers to determine their success in entering or remaining in employment. Median earnings will also be considered to determine progress towards self-sufficiency. Local Workforce Development Boards will be responsible for following up with participants exiting from the WIOA Youth program to assess enrollment in, persistence in, and completion of postsecondary education. Connecticut has not set any additional indicators of performance.

CT State Department of Education will use local program performance to assess using the same standards used for the National Reporting System (NRS). The National Reporting System (NRS) is the accountability system for the federally funded, State-administered adult education program. It embodies the accountability requirements of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA, the Act) for the adult education and literacy program (Title II) and reporting under WIOA.

### **(C) Use of Unemployment Insurance (UI) Wage Record Data**

The electronic files containing records for the six core programs will be used to obtain employment information using Unemployment Insurance Wage Record data for each program participant that has a social security number and an exit date from one or more of the six core programs. CTDOL is currently responsible for reporting wages, entered employment rates, and employment retention rates for individuals who exit in the Wagner-Peyser, Adult, Dislocated Worker, Youth, and Trade Adjustment Assistance programs. CTDOL will continue this work and expand its responsibilities to include individuals who exit from all six core programs. Therefore, CTDOL will append wages and employment information to each exiter's record. MOU's have been established with the other agencies to limit the use of wage records to the proscribed purposes and ensure that proper security will be in place to protect confidentiality.

Each program's electronic file containing the assigned WIOA unique identifier, co-enrollment data, and wages, will be returned to each of the three State agencies for use in their federal report submissions. Also, CTDOL uses the CTHires case management system to collect data and generate the Eligible Training Provider Performance Report on all students in program and on WIOA participants, as required under WIOA. CTDOL will use Unemployment Insurance Wage data for employment rates, median earnings, and credential rates for all students in a program on the Eligible Training Provider Performance Report.

Unemployment Insurance Wage Record data will also be used to comply with federal evaluation requirements, and to inform workforce and labor market information available to customers.

#### **(D) Privacy Standards**

*Describe the privacy safeguards incorporated in the State's workforce development system, including safeguards required by section 444 of the General Education Provisions Act (20 U.S.C. 1232g) and other applicable Federal laws.*

#### **Connecticut Department of Labor**

- Information on individuals referenced for purposes of the WIOA Core Programs in the Connecticut Department of Labor's automated One-Stop Career-Center system (CTHIRES) is considered confidential Personally Identifiable Information (PII) and may not be released or used for any purpose other than one directly connected with the administration of the programs. Information may also be released when the participant authorizes disclosure.
- Access to the system is provided upon an entity's entrance into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Connecticut Department of Labor, which acknowledges the confidentiality and security requirements associated with the system. Moreover, every individual accessing the system must first sign an Acknowledgment of Confidential Information form, to ensure each individual is aware of such requirements.
- Finally, access to network components comprising the System is limited to authorized administrators, to ensure no unauthorized disclosure of PII. The system itself is configured to comply with Federal and State of Connecticut laws and regulations regarding the protection of confidential and PII, including but not limited to all sections of NIST SP 800-53 and IRS Publication 1075.

#### **Connecticut State Department of Education**

CSDE will ensure that program providers are compliant with all applicable laws and RFP guidelines including ADA 504 and Section 427 GEPA.

#### **(7) Priority of Service for Veterans**

*Describe how the State will implement and monitor the priority of service provisions for veterans in accordance with the requirements of the Jobs for Veterans Act, codified at section 4215 of 38 U.S.C., which applies to all employment and training programs funded in whole or in part by the Department of Labor. States should also describe the referral process for veterans determined to have a significant barrier to employment to receive services from the Jobs for Veterans State Grants (JVSG) program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist.*

In accordance with 38 U.S.C. Sec. 4215, the State will ensure that veterans and eligible spouses are given priority for the receipt of employment, training, and placement services provided under any job training program funded in whole or in part by the U.S. Department of Labor. A veteran or eligible spouse will therefore take precedence over a non-covered person if otherwise eligible to participate and receive services under the program. Depending on the type of service, a covered person shall have access earlier in time or, if resources are limited, instead of a non-covered person. For a service such as classroom training, priority of service will be applied to the selection process, up to the point at which an individual is both approved for funding and accepted or enrolled. As such, a veteran or eligible spouse would be

moved to the top of any waiting list used for the formation of the class; once a non-covered person has been approved for funding and is accepted or enrolled, he or she may not be displaced by a veteran or eligible spouse who is subsequently identified.

American Job Center staff is regularly trained on the protocols for implementing priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses, which includes training on the definition of covered persons and how priority of service is applied. Visible signage, placed prominently at or near the front desk, alerts AJC customers about priority of service provisions and encourages them to reveal their status as soon as possible.

AJC management ensures that priority of service is provided to all covered persons, which includes:

- any veteran who served at least one day in the active military, naval, or air service, and was discharged or released from service under any condition other than a condition classified as dishonorable, including those in Reserve and National Guard units activated for Federal Service; and
  - any person qualifying as an “eligible spouse” on the basis of any of the following:
  - a spouse of any veteran who died of a service-connected disability;
  - a spouse of any member of the Armed Forces serving on active duty who, at the time of application for the priority, is listed in one or more of the following categories and has been so listed for a total of more than 90 days: missing in action; captured in the line of duty by a hostile force; or forcibly detained or interned in the line of duty by a foreign government or power; and
  - a spouse of any veteran who has a total disability resulting from a service-connected disability, as evaluated by the Department of Veterans Affairs; or a veteran who died while such a disability was in existence.
  - (Spousal eligibility derived from a living veteran or service member would end if the veteran or service member loses the status that is the basis for eligibility, as it would in the case of divorce from the veteran or service member; however, a spouse who qualifies on the basis of a deceased veteran would not lose covered status through subsequent remarriage.)

Front desk and other AJC staff working with customers are trained to inquire about military service performed by either the customer or the customer’s spouse. Individuals who self-identify as a veteran or eligible spouse may receive access to appointment slots before non-covered persons and, when resources are limited, instead of non-covered persons. Where registration for a workshop is full, a seat will be made available for a veteran or covered person who wants to attend, an accommodation not extended to non-covered persons.

Individuals who fully register in CTHires are identified as veterans or eligible spouses based on their responses to required system intake prompts; veterans receive a priority-of-service advisory upon completing the registration process and then benefit from CTHires’ job search functionality, which includes a 24-hour veteran hold on job postings. AJC staff members utilize a triage form to identify customers who may not have fully registered, which helps assess whether an individual has significant barriers to employment (SBEs) or other characteristics that would qualify for one-on-one job search assistance from a Disabled Veterans’ Outreach Program (DVOP) Specialist. In such cases, the individual is either promptly referred or scheduled for an appointment. DVOPs receive an email alert whenever a veteran or eligible spouse with an SBE self-registers in CTHires, and they will contact these individuals to inform them of JVSG and AJC services and offer to set up an appointment. JVSG services are regularly provided at all five comprehensive centers but may also be made available at affiliate AJC locations by special arrangement.

Local Veterans’ Employment Representatives (LVERs) collaborate with AJC Business Services teams to coordinate employer outreach and job development activities. The LVERs inform employers about the

benefits of hiring veterans, and they promote the Hire VETS Medallion Program to employers interested in hiring veterans. LVERs also advise federal contractors about the requirements of the Department of Labor's Office of Federal Contract Compliance Programs (OFCCP) to provide hiring preference to veterans and promote the hiring of veterans.

Ongoing monitoring of the AJCs will ensure that signage remains visibly posted and regular staff training is provided on priority of service, SBE identification, and the DVOP referral process. Program operators will be monitored for evidence that first consideration for participation was given to those veterans and eligible spouses who met the eligibility criteria for that program and, in cases where resources were limited, that no such covered persons were turned away in favor of a non-covered person. The State will also ensure that websites include language advising visitors of the veterans' priority of service provisions with regard to workforce programs, and that such information is included in contracts, sub-contracts, solicitations for grant awards, sub-grants, memoranda of understanding, and other service provision agreements to ensure compliance with priority of service by sub-recipients.

## **(8) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for Individuals with Disabilities**

Connecticut's One-Stop system currently provides and will continue to ensure physical and programmatic access to facilities, programs, services, technology, and materials for individuals with disabilities in a variety of ways. With respect to physical accessibility, all five of Connecticut's comprehensive One-Stop American Job Centers are designated ADA-compliant. Assistive technology is available to assist jobseekers with disabilities in each of the comprehensive American Job Centers. These technologies include electric adjustable workstations, large screen visual magnifiers, JAWS screen reader software, TTY lines for deaf or hard of hearing customers, and large-font computer keyboards in the Career Center. In addition, efforts are underway to explore how NVDA software could be installed and managed on the public career center computers in the comprehensive American Job Centers. All five comprehensive American Job Centers provide adequate public parking for individuals seeking to use the facilities and have been determined to provide adequate accessible parking options for jobseekers with disabilities. Each of the comprehensive American Job Centers is located on a public bus route.

Since COVID-19, services have been offered and provided remotely using a variety of technology and interfaces such as Teams and Zoom. This new service delivery mechanism has been welcomed by many customers with and without disabilities. We have established a protocol to serve individuals with hearing impairments that use American Sign Language using an ASL interpretation service utilizing Zoom. This has assisted individuals with Unemployment Compensation as well as those seeking workforce assistance.

In addition, the American Job Centers staff still assist individuals seeking unemployment-related information or services one-on-one. Each of the five comprehensive American Job Center offices are staffed with a full-time CTDOL Unemployment Insurance staff expert providing service one-on-one through Teams. Some staff members may be able to assist in the processing of unemployment claims directly, in-person, for jobseekers with disabilities who may have difficulty filing applications over the phone or via the Internet.

In November and December of 2021 more than 70 AJC staff members attended training sessions on Equal Opportunity that reviewed how to serve individuals with disabilities.

## **(9) Addressing the Accessibility of the One-Stop Delivery System for English Language Learners**

The State of Connecticut contracts with several separate entities to provide interpretative /translation services for English Language Learners. Services range from oral to written translation and in person or telephonic interpretation. CTDOL service providers are encouraged to follow the CT DOL LAP Policy.

Procedures for obtaining interpretive services are listed on CT DOL's Intranet and are accessible to all staff.

Due to COVID-19, an adjustment in delivering services remotely were made. The CTDOL arranged to have services delivered using Teams and utilizing this technology to offer interpretation services on the call. In November and December of 2021 more than 70 AJC staff members attended training sessions on Equal Opportunity that specifically reviewed the Language Assistant Plan and how to serve individuals that are English Language Learners.

## IV. COORDINATION WITH STATE PLAN PROGRAMS

*Describe the methods used for joint planning and coordination among the core programs, and with the required one-stop partner programs and other programs and activities included in the Unified State Plan.*

With the enactment of Public Law 21-2, the Chief Workforce Officer coordinates workforce development activities funded through WIOA and serves as the liaison between the Governor, the Governor's Workforce Council, and any local, regional, state or federal organizations and entities with respect to workforce development policy, strategy and coordination, including, but not limited to, implementation of the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act.

WIOA joint planning and coordination across programs in CT began in 2014 following passage of this Act and continues today. Many informational meetings, presentations, etc. were held across CT by state and local partners. Several workgroups were formed and some continue today as described in previous sections.

The Office of Workforce Strategy has lead responsibility for coordinating production of the two-year modification of Connecticut's WIOA Unified State Plan. OWS has built relationships with key senior staff from WIOA required partners in the course of developing and implementing the Governor's Workforce Council's Strategic Plan since fall 2019. Leadership and staff of these partner agencies have shared their knowledge and expertise in the planning and production of the Unified State Plan modification. In addition, OWS has conducted extensive outreach to other "optional" partners since its formation in 2019 and many brought forward with new ideas and plans for further coordination of services for our customers.

The several collaborative committees and structures continued, restructured, or created in Public Law 21-2 provide a robust process to guide collaborative work to implement the plan. See Section III (b) (3) (A) State Agency Organization)

### **Department of Labor**

The Department of Labor has lead responsibility for many sections across the plan, with lead responsibility for much of the content of the sections of the plan related to Title II.

### **Department of Aging and Disability Services**

The Department of Aging and Disability Services (ADS) Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) and Bureau of Education and Services to the Blind (BESB) have lead responsibility for developing the Title IV Vocational Rehabilitation Program content for Connecticut's Unified State Plan. OWS staff met and conferred with BRS and BESB staff to review the status of Unified State Plan drafting and Title IV planning, to ensure alignment of focus and content during the drafting and production process.

For the initial four-year plan, ADS posted a draft of its Title IV plan components for public comment. The two State Rehabilitation Councils and the Advisory Board for Persons who are Blind or Visually Impaired approved those sections of the plan, which were then received and reviewed by OWC. A joint

effort between OWS and ADS staff integrated the Title IV content into the Unified State Plan draft, including intended coordination of implementation efforts going forward. As with the Title II program, the Unified State Plan specifically addresses coordination of Vocational Rehabilitation Program services for individuals and employers, and coordinated engagement with the education system and economic development efforts. A similar process is underway for this modification.

### **State Board of Education – Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (CSDE)**

On July 31, 2018, President Trump signed the Strengthening Career and Technical Education for the 21st Century Act into law. This bill amends the Carl D. Perkins Career and Technical Education Act of 2006 (Perkins IV) and this amended act is now referred to as Perkins V. The passage of Perkins V provides new opportunities to improve Career and Technical Education (CTE) and enables more flexibility for Connecticut to meet the unique needs of our learners, educators, and employers. full implementation of The CTE State Plan required under Perkins V covering fiscal years 2020–23 was issued in the 2020-21 school year.

Connecticut's vision for CTE is that all Connecticut's students have access today to high-quality, culturally responsive guidance, teaching, and learning that will position them to graduate tomorrow as innovators equipped with adaptable, transferable skills that will contribute to the growth of Connecticut's high-knowledge economy.

The CSDE's vision demands that all Connecticut's students have access today to flexible CTE pathways that will position them to graduate tomorrow as innovators equipped with adaptable, transferable skills that will contribute to the growth of Connecticut's high-knowledge economy.

Connecticut's vision for education and workforce development demands schools, districts, and community colleges design rigorous pathways and programs of study from a perspective of bold innovation that fosters deep and long-lasting changes.

This new understanding of CTE, based upon collaborative partnerships, will result in students graduating with the essential knowledge, skills, and employability expertise to successfully meet the demands of Connecticut's expanding economy.

The CSDE collaborates with outside agencies in order to braid funding, ensure cohesiveness among programs, and educate the whole child from PreK–12. Interaction between programs and staff generate improved services to students, schools, and LEAs. This comprehensive thinking locates the intersections and weaves together the strategies, timelines, and funding sources from the multiple programs in order to achieve a cohesive vision.

Furthermore, Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and Perkins V goals align to Title IV, Part B in which 21st Century School programs can partner with in-demand fields of the local workforce or build career competencies and career readiness. This funding may provide workforce development boards with additional opportunities to collaborate and leverage resources for in-school youth services.

Continued coordination with these programs will help to unify CSDE guidance.

**STATE OF CONNECTICUT WORKFORCE INNOVATION AND OPPORTUNITY ACT  
- Unified State Plan 2020 - 2023 (July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2023) – 2 Year Modification**

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## V. COMMON ASSURANCES (for all WIOA core programs)

1	The State of Connecticut has established a policy identifying circumstances that may present a conflict of interest for a Governor's Workforce Council or local board member, or the entity or class of officials that the member represents, and procedures to resolve such conflicts;
2	State has established a policy to provide to the public (including individuals with disabilities) access to meetings of State Boards and local boards, and information regarding activities of the Governor's Workforce Council and local boards, such as data on board membership and minutes;
3	Lead State agencies with responsibility for administration of core programs reviewed and commented on appropriate operational planning elements of Unified State Plan, and approved the elements as serving the needs of populations served by such programs;
4	(a) State obtained input into development of Unified State Plan and provided an opportunity for comment on the plan by representatives of local boards and chief elected officials, businesses, labor organizations, institutions of higher education, the entities responsible for planning or administrating the core programs and the other Combined Plan programs (if included in the State Plan), other primary stakeholders, and general public, and that Unified State Plan is available and accessible to general public; SRC helps to develop the State Plan and will co-host the public meetings with ADS to review the State Plan (b) State provided an opportunity for review and comment on the plan by the Governor's Workforce Council, including State agency official(s) for Unemployment Insurance Agency if such official(s) is an Office of Workforce Strategy staff member;
5	The State has established, in accordance with WIOA section 116(i), fiscal control and fund accounting procedures that may be necessary to ensure the proper disbursement of, and accounting for, funds paid to the State through allotments made for the core programs to carry out workforce development activities;
6	The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with uniform administrative requirements in this Act, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the uniform administrative requirements under WIOA section 184(a)(3);
7	State has taken appropriate action to comply with WIOA section 188, as applicable; Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;
8	State has established the Federal funds received to carry out a core program will not be expended for any purpose other than for activities authorized with respect to such funds under that core program;
9	State will pay an appropriate share (as defined by the Governor's Workforce Council) of the costs of carrying out section 116, from funds made available through each of the core programs;
10	State has a One-Stop certification policy that ensures the physical and programmatic accessibility of all One-Stop centers with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA);
11	Service providers have a referral process in place for directing Veterans with Significant Barriers to Employment (SBE) to DVOP services, when appropriate;
12	Priority of service for veterans and eligible spouses is provided in accordance with 38 USC 4215 in all workforce preparation, development or delivery of programs or services funded directly, in whole or in part, by the Department of Labor

## VI. PROGRAM-SPECIFIC REQUIREMENTS FOR CORE PROGRAMS

### (a) General Requirements

*Regions and Local Workforce Development Areas.*

*Identify the regions and the local workforce development areas designated in the State.*

*Describe the process used for designating local areas, including procedures for determining whether the local area met the criteria for “performed successfully” and “sustained fiscal integrity” in accordance with 106(b)(2) and (3) of WIOA. Describe the process used for identifying regions and planning regions under section 106(a) of WIOA. This must include a description of how the State consulted with the local boards and chief elected officials in identifying the regions.*

*Provide the appeals process referred to in section 106(b)(5) of WIOA relating to designation of local areas.*

*Provide the appeals process referred to in section 121(h)(2)(E) of WIOA relating to determinations for infrastructure funding.*

*Statewide Activities.*

*Provide State policies or guidance for the statewide workforce development system and for use of State funds for workforce investment activities.*

*Describe how the State intends to use Governor’s set aside funding. Describe how the State will utilize Rapid Response funds to respond to layoffs and plant closings and coordinate services to quickly aid companies and their affected workers. States also should describe any layoff aversion strategies they have implemented to address at risk companies and workers.*

Governor’s Set Aside Funding: USDOL Training and Employment Guidance Letters issue allocations for WIOA funding each year including the percentages and mandatory activities under the Governor’s Reserve. The current set-aside is 15% of Connecticut’s funding, while for Rapid Response activities, it is 25% of the total allocation. The CTDOL uses these funds to support Central Office staff that administer, manage and oversee the program, contracts, performance management and finances for Connecticut’s WIOA program. On a statewide basis other uses of these funds have included support of One-Stop Center operations, technical assistance to Workforce Development Boards and for staff capacity building which has included providing front line staff with the Certified Employment Interviewer Professional certification.

Once the PY allocations are determined, the Governor’s Workforce Council approves the plan. If funding allows, CTDOL also provides flexible grants to the Workforce Development Boards to conduct experimental pilot programs that meet the regional needs of employers and the workforce. For example, such funds have been used to provide additional services to ex-offenders; for transportation subsidies; and Emergency NEG-like services.

Rapid Response: Connecticut’s Rapid Response Team (RRT), headed by the State Department of Labor’s Rapid Response Unit (RRU), exists to ease the impact of layoffs and to assure that workers are offered a full range of benefits and services. RRU staff, located in the DOL Central Office in Wethersfield, coordinates all Rapid Response activities in the State.

The Team is made up of representative from the RRU, Labor Department field offices, the local workforce development board and/or American Job Center staff contracted by the local workforce development board to provide WIOA services. Representatives of other state, federal and municipal agencies such as the US DOL Employee Benefits Security Administration, Access Health CT (Connecticut’s health insurance marketplace), the Department of Social Services, as well as elected officials, AFL-CIO, and community service organizations may be added to the team as needed. The

RRT also works with the Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD) in cases where there may be a chance of preventing imminent or future layoffs. DECD and the RRT also share news of yet-to-be announced layoffs or business expansions where Dislocated Workers could potentially be placed.

The goal of the RRT is to provide employers, workers, and unions with information up-front on the many local, state, and federal programs that are available to potentially prevent layoffs or, if layoffs cannot be averted, assist in making the transition to new employment as quick and as easy as possible for workers.

Once the RRU learns of a possible downsizing event, the employer is immediately contacted by phone, email, social media or all of the above to offer assistance. If layoffs cannot be avoided, the RRT offers to provide an in-person or virtual “Early Intervention” session where employees can learn about unemployment benefits, job search assistance, and training opportunities. Information is also made available on health insurance options, community services, and local agencies that provide help, advocacy, and support to dislocated workers and their families. Additional job search, financial planning, health insurance, supportive services workshops and customized job fairs can also be arranged.

**Layoff Aversion Strategies:** The RRT will suggest various layoff aversion strategies (Shared Work, state incentive programs, etc.) when companies are contacted regarding potential layoffs. When layoffs cannot be avoided, RRT Business Services staff will reach out to their employer network to market Dislocated Workers who are being served by the RRU. The goal is to make connections between to-be-displaced workers and businesses that are looking for help therefore minimizing the duration of unemployment.

Once a month the RRU receives a spreadsheet from the Department’s Unemployment Division of workers who filed new lack of work unemployment claims the previous month. The spreadsheet identifies workers according to employer. The RRU reaches out to both employers and impacted workers where seven or more non-seasonal/non-temporary workers have filed claims and no prior contact was made by the RRU. Employers are contacted to investigate the reason for layoffs, to provide information on layoff aversion strategies, and to provide information on Rapid Response services should additional layoffs be planned. Workers from these companies are e-mailed outreach letters which invite workers to attend a virtual Early Intervention session.

RRU staff also contact non-seasonal employers who file new applications for the Department’s Shared Work program to check in with the employer to see if business is improving. If business is not improving, RRU staff will ask if the employer would like to be contacted by a Business Services Representative to explore other resources that may be able to assist to help them return to profitability. If the business indicates that layoffs will likely be coming, then RRU will pitch RR services.

In an attempt to help Dislocated Workers who are not part of large layoffs return to work quickly, every week the RRU emails an invitation to attend a 30-minute WIOA/training webinar to workers who, based on an IT query, have met the definition of a WIOA Dislocated Worker. Webinar attendees who wish to pursue the additional assistance afforded under WIOA are referred through the CTHires system to the appropriate WIOA provider.

RRU staff also participate in regularly scheduled regional business services meetings where information on local business engagement activities is shared by WIOA partners as well as local chambers and other business organizations.

Additional layoff aversion strategies such as the ones listed below will be explored in the near future.

Providing funds to cover the cost of purchasing remote access (ex. computers, printers, etc.) equipment to allow employees to work remotely from home versus being laid off.

Providing funds to cover the cost of purchasing software or programs that an employee would need to use from home;

Providing funds to cover the costs of cleaning/sanitizing supplies and/or services that will allow a small business to maintain an onsite workforce as a result of exposure reduction through frequent deep cleaning;

Paying for liability insurance for restaurants that convert to delivery while under emergency circumstances;

Providing funds for training or professional development opportunities for employees to avoid layoffs; and

Adopting other creative approaches and strategies to reduce or eliminate the need for layoffs in the small business community. Providing funds to cover the cost of purchasing remote access (ex. computers, printers, etc.) equipment to allow employees to work remotely from home versus being laid off.

*In addition, describe the State policies and procedures to provide Rapid Responses in cases of natural disasters including coordination with FEMA and other entities.*

In cases involving natural disasters, rapid response activities are coordinated with CT's Department of Emergency Services and Public Protection and the local Workforce Development Boards and other state and community agencies.

In CT response to natural disasters has been led by DESPP - through its Department of Emergency Management and Homeland Security (DEMHS) - and CTDOL is engaged through that lead - this includes the Rapid Response Unit. Additionally, CT's provision of Rapid Response as it relates to natural disasters is the same as the described in policy found in the WIOA policy manual and includes the coordinating efforts of DESPP with FEMA.

*Describe how the State provides early intervention (e.g., Rapid Response) to worker groups on whose behalf a Trade Adjustment Assistance (TAA) petition has been filed.*

In Connecticut, most TAA petitions are generated by the Trade Act Petition Coordinator based on information provided by Rapid Response Unit staff. In such cases, Rapid Response staff has contacted the company regarding all reemployment and supportive services, including TAA. In most of these cases, the Rapid Response Team provides Early Intervention services at the employment site or through virtual means prior to layoff. Early intervention services include an overview of unemployment, job search assistance, health insurance options and possible training and employment services through both WIOA and TAA. If Early Intervention sessions are provided prior to a company becoming TAA certified, workers are given an overview of the possible benefits that may become available should the company and/or unit of the company become certified. Workers are also advised as to how they would be notified of their eligibility under TAA once a decision is rendered.

In cases where a TAA petition has been filed without prior Rapid Response knowledge, Rapid Response staff will contact the employer officials listed on the TAA petition to offer Rapid Response Early Intervention services. If the workers have already separated from employment, staff will request a list of potential TAA-impacted workers' names and addresses. Provided the employer supplies such a list, Rapid Response staff will send an Early Intervention packet accompanied by a TAA outreach letter to the potentially impacted workers. The outreach letter advises workers that a TAA petition has been filed, provides the US DOL TAA website where additional information on the program can be found, and describes the re-employment services that are available through our American Job Centers. The outreach letter also invites workers to sign up for a virtual Rapid Response Early Intervention session so that they can learn more about services and ask questions.

If an employer declines Rapid response services or does not respond to a request for worker information, Rapid Response staff will query the Unemployment system to identify potentially impacted workers and subsequently email a Rapid Response Early Intervention packet with the TAA outreach letter to those individuals.

When a company becomes TAA-certified, the Rapid Response Team's Early Intervention packet is emailed by TAA staff to all adversely affected workers identified by the employer to further ensure that all workers are provided with Rapid Response Team information as some workers may not have been identified earlier by the means described above. Furthermore, when the adversely impacted TAA workers are notified of their TAA eligibility, they are invited to attend a Trade Act orientation where, in addition to learning more specifics about the TAA program, workers are encouraged to attend a Rapid Response Early Intervention webinar if they did not attend a session previously.

## **(b) Adult and Dislocated Worker Program Requirements**

*Work-Based Training Models.*

*Registered Apprenticeship.*

*Training Provider Eligibility Procedure.*

Entities interested in applying for initial WIOA ETPL eligibility must submit a completed “Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Eligible Training Provider (ETP) Application,” available on CTDOL’s website at [http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa\\_trngproviderapps.htm](http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/wioa_trngproviderapps.htm), to the workforce development board (WDB) for the area in which the applying entity’s headquarters (or, as applicable, main campus) is located (this WDB is then the “lead” board for the entity). In addition to applying to the lead board, the entity must submit a full copy of their ETPL initial eligibility application to each WDB in which any of the applying entity’s training sites for program offerings are located. Secondary boards review the application and advise the lead board as to whether the application is approved or not for that area. Once the lead board and all applicable secondary boards have reached a decision to approve the application, the lead board advises CTDOL and requests a state level review (such reviews are on a rolling basis). CTDOL then conduct a review of the entity’s status with OSHA, UI Tax, and Wage and Workplace Standards. If approved, CTDOL will inform the lead board which will then add the provider and program(s) to the ETPL (CTHires). If an OSHA, UI Tax or Wage matter prevents CTDOL from issuing approval, the entity will have the opportunity to resolve the issue(s).

Following one year of initial eligibility, ETPL providers must submit an application to be considered for continued eligibility. Prior to the expiration date of a provider’s initial eligibility, the lead WDB will notify the provider that it may apply for continued eligibility. The lead WDB will also prepare a list of the provider’s expiring programs so the provider may include them in the “CTDOL WIOA ETP Continued Eligibility Application” that the provider must submit to the lead WDB (and any secondary boards). The continued eligibility review process, both locally and by CTDOL, follows the same steps as described above for initial eligibility. Upon approval of continued eligibility by CTDOL, the lead board will update CTHires to indicate continued eligibility has been approved and will enter the new, two-year expiration date in CTHires. Additional ETPL procedures and ETPL policy are detailed in CTDOL’s WIOA Policy Manual at <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOAPolicyManual.pdf>.

To be considered for listing on the ETPL, an entity and its program offerings must meet WIOA requirements which are described in detail in CTDOL’s WIOA Policy Manual. For example, “What is an eligible training provider (ETP)?” provides an explanation, based on the ETPL sections of the Code of Federal Regulations, as to the type of entity that may receive funding for training services, for specific participant categories (for example, Adult, Dislocated Worker), via an individual training account (ITA). The following types of entities are included:

- Institutions of higher education that provide a program which leads to a recognized postsecondary credential (see “Definition of a Recognized Postsecondary Credential”);
- Entities that carry out programs registered under the National Apprenticeship Act (29 U.S.C. 50 et seq.); or

Other public or private providers of training services, which may include:

- Community-based organizations;
- Joint labor-management organizations; and
- Eligible providers of adult education and literacy activities under Title II of WIOA if such activities are provided in combination with training services described at 20 CFR 680.350.

The policy also explains that, “According to 20 CFR 680.200, which details training services for adults and dislocated workers, the following are types of training services listed in §680.200 (a) through (k) and in WIOA sec. 134(c)(3)(D). This list is not all-inclusive and additional training services may be provided.”

- Occupational skills training, including training for nontraditional employment;
- On-the-job training (OJT) (pursuant to §§ 680.700, 680.710, 680.720, and 680.730);
- Incumbent worker training, in accordance with WIOA sec. 134(d)(4) and §§ 680.780, 680.790, 680.800, 680.810, and 680.820;
- Programs that combine workplace training with related instruction, which may include cooperative education programs;
- Training programs operated by the private sector;
- Skills upgrading and retraining;
- Entrepreneurial training;
- Transitional jobs in accordance with WIOA sec 134(d)(5) and §§ 680.190 and 680.195;
- Job readiness training provided in combination with services listed in paragraphs (a) through (h) of this section;
- Adult education and literacy activities, including activities of English language acquisition and integrated education and training programs, provided concurrently or in combination with training services listed in paragraphs (a) through (g) of this section; and
- Customized training conducted with a commitment by an employer or group of employers to employ an individual upon successful completion of the training (pursuant to §§ 680.760 and 680.770).

State policy also explains that a program of training services, pursuant to 20 CFR 680.420, is one or more courses or classes, or a structured regimen, that provides the services in § 680.200 (see above) and leads to:

- An industry-recognized certificate or certification, a certificate of completion of a registered apprenticeship, a license recognized by the State involved or the Federal government, an associate or baccalaureate degree;
- Consistent with § 680.350, a secondary school diploma or its equivalent;
- Employment; or
- Measurable skill gains (as defined in federal guidance, including TEGL 10-16, Change 1) toward a credential described in paragraph (a) or (b) of this section or employment.

In addition to the above-referenced eligibility criteria, applying entities must meet Eligibility Factors which are described in the ETPL application and in state policy as follows:

The Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) includes certain criteria that must be met in order ensure that a provider of programs offers the highest quality training services and is responsive to in-demand and emerging industries by providing training services for those industries (WIOA §122(b)(4)(A)). The applying entity shall describe each program of training services to be offered and

provide verifiable program-specific performance information based on criteria established by the state (WIOA §122(b)(4)(C)) to support the entity's ability to serve program participants. Pursuant to WIOA §122(b)(4)(D)(i-iv), an entity seeking initial eligibility as a provider of training services must meet the following criteria:

A factor related to indicators of performance as described in WIOA §116(b)(2)(A)(i)(I-IV) and 20 CFR 680.460(g)(1), as set by Connecticut Department of Labor ETPL policy. For PY2015 an entity's initial eligibility under WIOA (first year), the entity must document that it meets at least one of the following by submitting performance data:

- Median Earnings (Quarterly basis) - \$3,459.00
- Average Wage at Placement - \$9,344.00
- Attainment of a Post-Secondary Credential - 60%
- Completion Rate - 60%
- Employment Rate - 65%
- Training-related Employment Rate - 65%

For each program to be offered on the ETPL, documentation must include the program name and the most recent annual data that is available for ALL individuals enrolled in the program for at least one of the factors above. The timeframe that the data is from must be stated on the documentation. If the program is new to the entity and historical data are not available, data must be tracked upon ETP approval and submitted in accordance with the requirements described at Reporting Performance Indicators.”

- A factor concerning whether the provider is in a partnership with business. Consideration for satisfying this factor will include active involvement (not just membership) in: a local Chamber of Commerce, the Connecticut Business and Industry Association (CBIA) or other local business association, Connecticut Workforce Development Board, Advisory Boards (colleges/universities), clinical partnership agreements, internships/externships with businesses, and affiliations with business associations. Submit a list of partnerships and describe the nature of the partnership.
- Other factors that indicate high-quality training services. If the applying entity or its programs are required by Connecticut statute to be approved by the Connecticut Office of Higher Education, State Department of Education, Department of Consumer Protection, or Department of Public Health to offer training, this Eligibility Factor will be deemed as met. For other entities, high quality may be demonstrated by providing information to show that the training services lead to any one of the outcomes listed at Program of Training Services ((a) –(d)).
- A factor concerning alignment of the training services with in-demand industry sectors and occupations. To satisfy this factor, review the in-demand occupations listed on CTDOL's website, <http://www1.ctdol.state.ct.us/lmi/projections.asp>, and provide documentation from the site to verify the training service is specifically related to an in-demand industry sector or occupation. Otherwise, provide information and documentation to show the extent to which the training service(s) aligns with the in-demand industry sectors and occupations displayed on this CTDOL website. In-demand occupations may vary at the local level; applying providers may consult with the lead WDB.

Connecticut's WIOA Policy Manual was updated in January 2022 in regard to assessing continued eligibility which includes a process to allow for providers to offer information related to any undue burden in reporting performance information.

An application-type document is used to gather info from sponsors who want to be listed on the ETPL in order for system-required and other basic fields to be completed in the system regarding the

apprenticeship and boards must verify the state's determination as to the sponsors by checking the CTDOL Apprenticeship site for the sponsors list.

The following is contained within the WIOA Policy Manual:

### ***Apprenticeship and the ETPL***

Pursuant to section 122(a)(3) of the WIOA, apprenticeship programs registered with the Connecticut Department of Labor, Apprenticeship Division are automatically eligible to be included on the ETPL.

Although registered apprenticeship programs are automatically eligible, the program will not be included on the ETPL unless the program provider notifies the Apprenticeship Division of its intention to be included on the ETPL.

The Apprenticeship Division will notify every apprenticeship program, registered as of the date of enactment of these procedures, to determine whether the program provider wants to be included on the ETPL.

New apprenticeship programs that want to be included on the ETPL shall indicate this intention on the provider section of the CTHires application.

If the program is already approved as a sponsor or related instruction provider through the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training the program will be added to the ETPL list in CTHires by the local Workforce Development Board in the region where the program/sponsor is located.

If the program is not an approved sponsor or related instruction provider they must first contact the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training to seek approval.

Once an apprenticeship program is registered on the ETPL, the program will remain on the ETPL until the program is no longer registered with the Connecticut Department of Labor Office of Apprenticeship Training or until the provider notifies the Apprenticeship Division, in writing, of the intention to be removed from the list.

Registered apprenticeship programs are not required to submit initial or continued eligibility applications under these procedures. Registered apprenticeship programs are required to comply with all laws and rules regarding apprenticeship programs and labor laws in the State of Connecticut.

Per 20 CFR 680.480(b) all approved sponsors and related instructions providers will be notified in writing or electronically bi-annually to reaffirm their request to remain on the ETPL list.

Note: Registered apprenticeship programs, which are not required to apply for the WIOA ETPL, are subject only to certain reporting requirements as set forth in TEGL 41-14, applicable regulation, or other guidance.

*Describe how the State will implement and monitor the priority for public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, and individuals who are basic skills deficient in accordance with the requirements of WIOA sec. 134(c)(3)(E), which applies to individualized career services and training services funded by the Adult Formula program.*

All related WIOA policy memos including those specific to serving priority populations have been combined into a unified policy manual which is continuously updated for accuracy and content. The updated manual can be found at: <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOAPolicyManual.pdf>.

Several methods are used to comprehensively implement and monitor priority of service to priority populations including public assistance recipients, other low-income individuals, or individuals who are basic skills deficient. These methods include program compliance monitoring, case file review and electronic case management systems. CT DOL uses the CT HIRES automated case management system which includes a database with fields to identify individuals who may be designated basic skills deficient, a recipient of public assistance, or to meet the definition of low income.

CTDOL, along with its workforce partners, continues to pursue the most effective and efficient use of its data capturing capabilities in order to determine the characteristics of the individuals being served through the workforce development system. The goal of these efforts is to better identify those individuals from priority populations who are seeking assistance in order to coordinate the most appropriate mix of programs and services through both required and non-required partner program agencies and organizations.

In Connecticut, the Department of Social Services determines which TFA recipients are mandated to participate in employment services. Those clients that are determined mandatory are referred to the Jobs First Employment Services (JFES) program administered by the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) in partnership with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the 5 Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). When clients are first referred to the JFES program, they are assessed by their case managers to determine whether they are basic skills deficient or not. For many years, the assessment tool used to determine their reading and math levels was the CASAS. The CTDOL JFES and WIOA units have been collaborating on a new policy that will change the way that JFES clients are assessed. That policy has been developed in partnership with all 5 WDBs, along with the management teams of the CTDOL JFES and WIOA units. While the framework of the new policy is well developed, it has not been made public as of yet, as some fine tuning of the language is still required.

Approximately 90% of our JFES clients are basic skills deficient in either math or reading. Our JFES case managers are encouraged to co-enroll JFES participants into WIOA whenever they think it would benefit the participant. The receipt of Temporary Family Assistance automatically makes a participant eligible for WIOA as a low-income adult. In some regions, like the Eastern region, almost all of the JFES participants who attend vocational training in a given year do so using WIOA funds. JFES program funding is also available to provide case management services, job search assistance, employment readiness workshops, vocational training, Subsidized Employment opportunities, community service opportunities and other special benefits including child care subsidies through the Care4Kids program, where JFES participants are given priority for application review and childcare access, and transportation assistance including bus passes, mileage reimbursement and the use of Uber and Lyft ride sharing services to assist clients who don't have easy access to public transportation.

As funding for the JFES program has been reduced by 31% over the past 4 years, we have found more and more value in leveraging the resources of both programs.

In addition, the CTDOL JFES and WIOA units work closely in conducting financial monitoring of the 5 WDBs for both programs. The CTDOL JFES Unit scrutinizes JFES contracts for any financial concerns related to the JFES contracts which are then passed along to the WIOA staff who conduct on- site financial monitoring at the WDB locations. This enables the JFES and WIOA programs to compare notes and ensure that expenditures are properly accounted for across the two programs.

The JFES and WIOA units have also collaborated on some training initiatives for staff in both programs. We conducted a 3 day Business Engagement Training for all JFES and WIOA case managers around the state in the Fall of 2018.

In July 2019, the CTDOL JFES and WIOA units implemented a joint plan to have every JFES and WIOA case manager in the state of Connecticut achieve the Certified Employment Interview Professional Certification (CEIP) credential. This nationally recognized credential gives every single JFES and WIOA case manager the knowledge to provide high quality guidance to job seekers on all aspects of the art of job interviewing. This plan involved training all of these case managers in 4 separate cohorts. Each cohort began with a "Kick -off" event at the DOL Central Office which reviewed the entire process with the participating staff and set expectations for the group. Representatives from PARW flew from Florida to Connecticut in order to observe the "Kick-off" event process for themselves.

This is the first mass certification process in the country for this credential and the Professional Association of Resume Writers viewed these “Kick - off “ events as a best practice that could be replicated around the country.

CT will update its policy manual to reflect the specific method of monitoring to ensure the priority for public assistance recipients and other low-income individuals etc. which will include – authorizing local WDBs to develop their own priority of service delivery to targeted populations. CTDOL plans to establish target goals for service delivery to priority populations and through program monitoring will assess each local WDBs progress in meeting those goals.

CT maintains a flexible policy in determining basic skills deficiency at eligibility. WDB’s are directed to maintain a local policy regarding testing which aligns with state and federal requirements as follows:

- Standardized
- Reliable
- Formalized
- Fair
- Cost Effective
- Easy to administer and interpret results

Individuals tested for measurable skills gains under a documented achievement of at least one functional level must be tested utilizing National Reporting System-approved Connecticut Competency System (CCS) CASAS (Goals) testing. Administered tests must include an Appraisal placement test, math and reading tests and posttests. Accommodations are available for learners who have a documented disability.

*Describe the State’s criteria regarding local area transfer of funds between the adult and dislocated worker programs.*

Under WIOA 100% of funds for a fiscal year may be transferred between adult employment and training activities and dislocated worker employment and training activities, if approved by the Governor. Connecticut’s policy and criteria for transferring funds can be found in the current WIOA manual at: <http://www.ctdol.state.ct.us/wia/WIOAPolicyManual.pdf>.

### **(c) Youth Program Requirements.**

*Identify the State-developed criteria to be used by local boards in awarding grants or contracts for youth workforce investment activities and describe how the local boards will take into consideration the ability of the providers to meet performance accountability measures based on primary indicators of performance for the youth program as described in section 116(b)(2)(A)(ii) of WIOA in awarding such grants or contracts.*

Out of School Youth ages 16 to 24 and In School Youth 14-21 that meet specific eligibility requirements, may qualify for the following Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act services.

Tutoring, study skills training and instruction leading to secondary school completion, including

- dropout prevention strategies;
- Alternative secondary school offerings;
- Paid and unpaid work experiences that have academic and occupational education as a component of the work experience;
- Summer employment opportunities and other employment opportunities available throughout the school year;
- Pre-apprenticeship programs;
- Internships as defined in § 680.170 of the regulations and job shadowing; and

- On-the-job training opportunities;
- Occupational skill training with priority consideration for training programs that lead to recognized post-secondary credentials that align with in-demand industry sectors or occupations;
- Education offered concurrently with and in the same context as workforce preparation activities and training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster;
- Leadership development opportunities, including community service and peer-centered activities encouraging responsibility and other positive social and civic behaviors; Supportive services;
- Adult mentoring for the duration of at least 12 months that may occur both during and after program participation;
- Follow-up services for not less than 12 months after the completion of participation;
- Comprehensive guidance and counseling, including drug and alcohol abuse counseling, as well as referrals to counseling, as appropriate to the needs of the individual youth;
- Financial literacy education; Entrepreneurial skills training;
- Services that provide labor market and employment information about in-demand industry sectors or occupations available in the local area\*, such as career awareness, career counseling, and career exploration services; and
- Activities that help youth prepare for and transition to post-secondary education and training.

CT DOL has issued a policy which incorporates US DOL's guidance regarding administrative procurement procedures and the extent to which providers of youth services, such as the program design framework component, the ten program elements, and youth services delivered in a One-Stop setting, must be selected. The State of Connecticut adopted all such guidance and directed each area comply with these policies.

The five workforce development boards understand Job Corps to be a viable option and include it on the roster of service providers to whom they refer young people. In addition, nearby American Job Centers provide workshops for Job Corps student employees, introducing them to a variety of job search resources and other services. In addition, state monitoring, file review and data validation evaluate local area youth policy comprehensively. Following program monitoring, best practices and areas for corrective action are identified. CT DOL will also offer technical assistance to the WDBs to assist them in meeting youth performance measures. Related youth policies can be found in the CTDOL WIOA Policy Manual.

*Describe the strategies the State will use to achieve improved outcomes for out-of-school youth as described in 129(a)(1)(B), including how it will leverage and align the core programs, any Combined State Plan partner programs included in this Plan, required and optional one-stop partner programs, and any other resources available.*

Connecticut proposes to develop and emphasize career pathways by emphasizing the connection to career ladders as part of an Out of School Youth's individual service strategy -- an educational path along with occupational training for high-demand jobs, as defined by LMI and the LWDB.

For Out of School Youth, the removal of barriers that prevent successful transition to career pathways will be key to successful engagement. CTDOL will encourage the WDB's to pay special attention to identifying and engaging individuals who experience the following barriers:

- English language learners (working closely with Adult Education/ESL partners and contextualized learning opportunities including Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education [IELCE] and Integrated Education and Training [IET] models)
- Youth involved with the justice system (working closely with Court Support Services Division and community partners to support reduced recidivism and improved outcomes for such youth)

- Homeless, pregnant or parenting or youth (linking youth with housing and child care as available in the community, to stabilize pathways to self-sufficiency)
- Youth with disabilities (working closely with Vocational Rehabilitation partners to serve these youth in more seamless ways)

In the fall of 2017 CTDOL conducted a Youth Summit to explore ways of outreaching disconnected youth with barriers. Attendance included a wide range of state agencies, local workforce development boards and their providers, private non-profit agencies, philanthropic organizations and youth.

Presentations regarding each of the WIOA identified barriers were explored and a blueprint for moving forward was developed. CTDOL will continue to support and engage the WDB's in developing programs which seek to remove the barrier s which preclude Youth from successful participation in training programs and impair the ability for youth to reach the goals necessary for job-readiness. In August of 2019 CTDOL sponsored a Youth Mental Health First Aide Training Program geared at providing partner staff and their youth providers with the tools necessary to identify and engage individuals who present with mental health issues.

Performance Indicators for OSY effective July, 2019:

- Placement in Employment/Education 2nd Qtr. after exit
- Placement in Employment/Education 4th Qtr. after exit
- Median Earnings 2nd Qtr. after exit
- Credential Attainment (up to 1 year after exit)
- Measurable Skills Gains
- Effectiveness in Serving Employers

Connecticut seeks to define measurable skill gains in terms of gains on standardized tests for reading, math and listening assessments; completing part or all of a GED course; earning GED credential; completion of one or more developmental education courses, passing a credit bearing; completing a designated number of higher education credits; objective demonstration of competencies related to work-based training. Again these indicators will be designed to emphasize career pathways.

A high-quality, comprehensive career pathway system will be developed and implemented that includes multiple entry and exit points that meets learners where they are, provides education, training and support services needed for career advancement, and ensures a skilled workforce that meets Connecticut's talent needs.

*Describe how the state will ensure that all 14 program elements described in WIOA section 129(c)(2) are made available and effectively implemented, including quality pre-apprenticeship programs under the work experience program element.*

CT DOL ensures that youth services for both out of school and in-school youth are effectively implemented through contract management and oversight, administrative policy, data validation and monitoring and technical assistance, Youth related policies contained in CTDOL's WIOA policy manual prioritize out of school youth, drop out recovery and post-secondary credentials. Yearly monitoring includes a complete review of local youth services and providers to ensure federal law, policy and regulations are implemented. Monitoring includes interviews with staff and participants to ensure quality youth programming is provided.

During the pandemic CTDOL provided additional opportunities to Youth for remote work experiences utilizing CARES-Act funding focused on Health Care and other pandemic related career paths. Activities included job shadowing, leadership development, entrepreneurial skills training, and activities which encourage post-secondary education and transition, pre-apprenticeships, and classroom training.

CTDOL WIOA works closely with the CTDOL Office of Apprenticeship Training (OAT) in regard to Registered Apprenticeship programming including ensuring the offering of pre-apprenticeship programs to youth. Since 2016, CTDOL OAT has partnered with all 5 WDBs to create and certify a number of traditional and non-traditional pre-apprenticeship programs.

Over recent decades a heavy focus on post-secondary education has disheartened people on their journey to the labor force with the myth that they could not become successful without a college degree or needed to forfeit pursuing professional credentialing to get one. This left employers with a shortage of skilled workers and jobseekers with degrees & skillsets misaligned with the jobs they desired, along with crippling student loan debt. In response CTDOL/OAT, has formalized the Apprenticeship/Education pathway to move individuals from multiple entry points through their educational and apprenticeships programs and culminating in a credentialed, stable career and a degree, if desired.

### **Pre-Apprenticeship**

In addition to Registered Apprenticeship programs, quality pre-apprenticeship programs are an integral piece of the pathway for many people young and old alike. Pre-apprenticeship offers a starting point toward a successful career path and a model for employers and students that otherwise may not be aware of this approach.

A student may earn additional on-the-job credits toward a registered apprenticeship if employed, on a part time basis, after school or as part of a Work Based Learning release program that may be established by the school and an apprenticeship employer sponsor that is approved by CTDOL/OAT.

Pre-apprentices can carry up to 2,000 hours of on-the-job experience into their registered apprenticeship program upon graduation similar to how an Advanced Placement (AP) program is designed and recognized.

There are increasing amounts of careers that do not require a college degree yet require a certificate or credential inclusive or exclusive of post-secondary education. Career Technical Education (CTE), enhanced in high schools with industry recognized credentials, has recently been utilized as a workforce development pipeline.

CTDOL/OAT has partnered with the State Department of Education (SDE), to begin statewide strategic planning for CTE Perkins V programming implementation. Various plans will encompass policy considerations and creation of Industry Councils at the local school district level for CTE credentialing, career exploration, career pathway development, business and industry led curricula alignment, Work Based Learning (WBL) partnerships and articulation agreements with post-secondary institutions for college credits. Through this partnership, CTDOL/OAT has expanded CTE under Perkins V, thus increasing Perkins V Pre-apprenticeship and Apprenticeship opportunities. These include work-based learning and the development of industry recognized credentials. OAT has partnered with nearly 30 high schools & community colleges in CT to credential their CTE courses and link them to the pre-apprenticeship program array. Students enrolled at those schools now have the ability to enhance their theoretical knowledge with hands-on skill development. Additionally, through relationships built at these schools, OAT has been able to present the benefit of these credentials to school boards and encourage stable funding for Career Technical Education moving forward. Some new, exciting pre-apprenticeships include but not limited to:

Goodwin College Insurance Pre-apprenticeship: creates a talent pipeline for insurance distributors in CT. Students obtain an Insurance Sales and Service Certificate, sit for licensing, and enter paid pre-apprenticeship. After completing the 150 hours of pre-apprenticeship, they move into their full-time job as an apprentice.

Women Can Weld - The North Central Region Jobs Funnel Program partnered with the Ironworkers Local 15 Apprenticeship Training Program to conduct a pre-apprenticeship program targeted specifically

for women participants to get an introduction into welding

Future Bankers' Apprenticeship Program - pairs instruction to pre-apprentices at Crosby High School with on-the-job training in local banks

Youth Manufacturing Pipeline Initiative (YMPI) - focuses on high school students in addressing the hiring needs of Electric Boat, members of the East Advanced Manufacturing Alliance (EAMA), and other manufacturers.

*Provide the language contained in the State policy for "requiring additional assistance to enter or complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment" criterion for out-of-school youth specified in WIOA section 129(a)(1)(B)(iii)(VIII) and for "requiring additional assistance to complete an education program, or to secure and hold employment" criterion for in-school youth specified in WIOA section 129(a)(1)(C)(iv)(VII). If the state does not have a policy, describe how the state will ensure that local areas will have a policy for these criteria.*

For youth who require additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment, additional assistance may be defined to include youth who are/have:

- Emancipated
- Aged out of foster care
- Previous dropouts or have been suspended five or more times or have been expelled
- Court/agency referrals mandating school attendance
- At risk of dropping out of school by a school official
- Never held a job
- Been fired from a job within the twelve months prior to application (applies to out of school youth); and
- Never held a full-time job for more than thirteen consecutive weeks (applies to out of school youth).
- Migrant Youth
- Incarcerated Parent/Guardian
- Behavior Problems at School
- Serious emotional, medical or psychological problems
- Chronic Health Conditions including addictions
- Family Literacy Problems
- Domestic, Sexual Violence or other Trauma Survivor or reside in abusive environment
- One or more grade levels below appropriate for age
- Repeated at least one secondary grade level
- Core grade point average of less than 1.5
- For each year of secondary education, are at least two semester credits behind the rate required to graduate from high school
- Cultural barriers that may be a hindrance to employment
- American Indian, Alaska Native or Native Hawaiian
- Refugee
- Homeless
- Eligible to receive free or reduced price lunch

- A foster child on behalf of whom State or local government payments are made
- Locally defined “additional assistance”

Under WIOA, local areas may define additional criterion for a youth who “requires additional assistance to complete an educational program or to secure and hold employment” however under WIOA local areas may no longer define local barriers.

Include the State definition, as defined in law, for not attending school and attending school as specified in WIOA Section 129(a)(1)(B)(i) and Section 129(a)(1)(C)(i). If State law does not define “not attending school” or “attending school,” indicate that is the case and provide the state policy for determining whether a youth is attending or not attending school.

Connecticut’s policies on youth are complicated by discrepancies between the state education statutes and WIOA. In Connecticut General Statutes, Sec. 10-67 “Adult” means any person seventeen years of age or older who is not enrolled in a public elementary or secondary school program or a student enrolled in school who was assigned to an adult class pursuant to subsection (d) of section 10-233d or section 10-73d; WIOA defines “out of school” is whether the youth/family has officially withdrawn in writing or not. Further, Connecticut youth must be 17 or older to withdraw and it requires parent or guardian’s permission. (At the time of written withdrawal, parents/guardians/students MUST be apprised of adult education and other educational options for child).

Accordingly, under the IDEA, children with disabilities remain eligible to receive a free appropriate public education until they reach the age of 22. CSDE provides transition and supportive services for students with special needs up to age 22. At 18 a student doesn’t need to officially withdraw in writing, but it is the policy of the CSDE to encourage 18 year olds to get a signed withdrawal form. (This is because it forces the system to apprise the family that if they have an IEP and withdraw, they lose all entitlements to IEP services. 17 year olds can return to school, and reinstate IEP within 90 days. Those who withdraw from school in writing and enroll in adult education are only eligible for services under ADA, not other special education services. There are exceptions to this policy for certain students).

For purposes of Workforce Policy CT DOL has adopted the following definitions: "School" means an established institution of vocational, academic or technical instruction or education, other than a college or university. "Regularly enrolled student" means an individual who has completed all forms and processes required to attend a school, college or university and who will attend prescribed classes at the times they are offered.

*If using the basic skills deficient definition contained in WIOA Section 3(5)(B), include the State definition which must further define how to determine if an individual is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society. If not using the portion of the definition contained in WIOA Section 3(5)(B), indicate that is the case.*

Basic Skills Deficiency per WIOA Policy As used in § 681.210(c)(3), a youth is “basic skills deficient” if he or she:

Has English reading, writing, or computing skills at or below the 8th grade level on a generally accepted standardized test; or Are unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society.

An adult is considered basic skills deficient, who is unable to compute or solve problems, or read, write, or speak English, at a level necessary to function on the job, in the individual’s family, or in society. In using only National Reporting System approved Connecticut Competency System (CCS) test tools and based on the CASAS NRS Educational Functioning Level, CT has determined that a score of below 239 on Reading GOALS or below 236 on Math GOALS is considered to meet the criteria of basic skills deficiency.

CT maintains a flexible policy in determining basic skills deficiency at eligibility. WDB's are directed to maintain a local policy regarding testing which aligns with state and federal requirements as follows:

Standardized

Reliable

Formalized

Fair

Cost Effective

Easy to administer and interpret results

Individuals tested for measurable skills gains under a documented achievement of at least one functional level must be tested utilizing National Reporting System-approved Connecticut Competency System (CCS) CASAS (Goals) testing. Administered tests must include an Appraisal placement test, math and reading tests and posttests. Accommodations are available for learners who have a documented disability.

#### **(d) Single-area state requirements**

Connecticut is not a single-area state.

#### **(e) Waiver Requests (optional)**

1	The State has implemented a policy to ensure Adult program funds provide a priority in the delivery of career and training services to individuals who are low income, public assistance recipients or basic skills deficient;
2	The State has implemented a policy to ensure local areas have a process in place for referring veterans with significant barriers to employment to career services provided by the JVSG program's Disabled Veterans' Outreach Program (DVOP) specialist;
3	State established a written policy and procedure that set forth criteria to be used by chief elected officials for appointment of local workforce investment board members;
4	The State established written policy and procedures to ensure local workforce investment boards are certified by the governor every two years in accordance with WIOA section 107(c)(2);
5	Where an alternative entity takes the place of a State Board, the State has written policy and procedures to ensure the alternative entity meets the definition under WIOA section 101(e) and the legal requirements for membership;
6	The State established a written policy and procedure for how the individuals and entities represented on the State Workforce Development Board help to determine the methods and factors of distribution, and how the State consults with chief elected officials in local areas throughout the State in determining the distributions;
7	The State will not use funds received under WIOA Title I to assist, promote, or deter union organizing in accordance with WIOA section 181(b)(7);
8	The State distributes adult and youth funds received under WIOA equitably throughout the State, and no local area suffers significant shifts in funding from year-to-year during the period covered by this plan;

9	If a State Workforce Development Board, department, or agency administers State laws for vocational rehabilitation of persons with disabilities, that board, department, or agency cooperates with the agency that administers Wagner-Peyser services, Adult and Dislocated Worker programs and Youth Programs under Title I;
10	Priority of Service for covered persons is provided for each of the Title I programs; and;
11	The State agrees to report on the impact and outcomes of its approved waivers in its WIOA Annual Report;
12	The State has taken appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance at 2 CFR 200 and 2 CFR 2900, including that the State will annually monitor local areas to ensure compliance and otherwise take appropriate action to secure compliance with the Uniform Guidance under section WIOA 184(a)(3).

## VII. WAGNER-PEYSER ACT PROGRAM (Employment Service)

### (a) Employment Service Staff.

*Describe how the State will staff the provision of labor exchange services under the Wagner-Peyser Act, such as through State employees, including but not limited to state merit staff employees, staff of a subrecipient, or some combination thereof.*

*Describe how the State will utilize professional development activities for Employment Service staff to ensure staff is able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.*

As funding allows, the Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) will continue to promote the professional development of its staff, leveraging state, agency, and, as applicable, federal grant funds to enhance the skills of its workforce. CTDOL will continue to pursue professional résumé writer certification for all appropriate American Job Center staff utilizing agency staff for training and test preparation. Associate Community Service Representatives on the career path to Career Development Specialist will be afforded the opportunity to obtain the credentials required for promotion to this classification. Employment Service Staff, including Business Services staff, will continue to have the opportunity to attend workforce development events such as the Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities as well as any other relevant training, in an effort to enhance their skills. To build capacity, CTDOL will train American Job Center staff to facilitate a variety of standardized employment readiness workshops. In addition, in-service training courses offered each fall and spring by the Department of Administrative Services may be made available to Employment Service staff to enhance computer, communication, writing, public speaking, presentation and supervisory skills.

The responsibilities of Employment Services staff in the American Job Centers include: assessing customer needs, addressing potential barriers to employment, assisting customers in the development of a work search plan, conducting employment workshops, one-on-one résumé critiques and career counseling and providing appropriate referral to employment services to facilitate a customer's return to work. These tasks require staff to have well developed presentation skills for the delivery of workshops, written communications skills to document case management activities and advanced resume writing skills to deliver high quality resume critiques. Employment Services staff serving the employer community must assess training needs, analyze labor market information, identify desired skills and abilities and address the recruitment needs of employers. They must possess knowledge of the Connecticut Department of Labor's (CTDOL) programs and services for employers, as well as those offered by other agencies and organizations in order to seamlessly cross market to employers all available options throughout the entire workforce system.

*Describe strategies developed to support training and awareness across core programs and the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training provided for Employment Service and WIOA staff on identification of UI eligibility issues and referral to UI staff for adjudication.*

The agency will continue to provide training consistent with Connecticut's coordinated workforce system efforts to ensure all staff is aware of programs and services available throughout the workforce system and AJC customers are properly referred to appropriate programs and services. AJCs will continue the practice of holding regional partner meetings where information is shared regarding the core programs. AJCs will also continue to host a separate regional meeting specifically for front line Business Services Specialists representing all core WIOA partners. This fosters a coordinated service delivery approach to serving employers and gives staff an opportunity to share information regarding new programs and initiatives in their region.

The UI Training Coordinator as well as staff in CTDOL's Legal Unit have provided UI training to AJC staff and will continue to serve as a resource on UI matters. In the event a UI eligibility issue is detected, AJC staff will refer claimants to the UI expert in the AJC or Adjudications Unit using the UC-129 Route Slip to document the potential issue and provide adjudications staff with a mechanism for communicating the results of the referral back to Employment Services staff.

The Employment Services Operations Unit routinely collaborates with the UI Division on matters relating to the RESEA program. ES and UI staff work jointly to develop CTDOL's RESEA Grant proposal, RESEA procedural memos and training for new AJC staff, as well as refresher training for existing staff. ES Operations and UI Adjudications staff work in teams to conduct formal RESEA monitoring reviews and desk audits. The results of both RESEA and Wagner-Peyser monitoring reviews are shared with AJC staff and are used to provide technical assistance and additional formal training in groups or individually to address any deficiencies or areas of concerns.

In addition, all new hires in the AJC's receive 2-3 weeks of UI training conducted by our Agency's designated trainer. Specifically, staff are trained in the unemployment claims taking process. This includes the following: learning the initial application; issue identification that leads to the Adjudications process; reviewing a claimant's benefit payment history and releasing payments when appropriate. It should also be noted that our UI Division has also been conducting high level IBM (mainframe) training to veteran WIOA staff. This training will give our WIOA employees more UI knowledge when answering basic phone calls and inquiries from our customers. The UI Division will continue to cross train AJC and WIOA staff in the future with the goal of expediting a customer's UI question and reducing handoffs.

- (b) Explain how the State will provide information and meaningful assistance to individuals requesting assistance in filing a claim for unemployment compensation through one-stop centers, as required by WIOA as a career service.**
- (c) Describe the State's strategy for providing reemployment assistance to UI claimants and other unemployed individuals.**
- (d) Describe how the State will use Wagner-Peyser Act funds to support UI claimants, and the communication between the Employment Service and UI, as appropriate including the following:**

*Coordination of and provision of labor exchange services for UI claimants as required by the Wagner-Peyser Act;*

*Registration of UI claimants with the State's employment service if required by State law;*

*Administration of the work test for the State unemployment compensation system, including making eligibility assessments (for referral to UI adjudication, if needed), and providing job finding and placement services for UI claimants; and*

*Provision of referrals to and application assistance for training and education programs and resources.*

CTDOL emails a Claimant's Guide to Unemployment Benefits to all initial unemployment claim filers. A hard copy of this guide can be printed upon request. This guide contains all necessary information related to a person's eligibility for unemployment benefits as well as a listing of the American Job Centers throughout Connecticut and information about the employment services they provide to job seekers. As a result of filing for Unemployment Insurance, UI claimants are registered with the State's employment service in the form of a registration in CTHires, the state's web-based workforce development system that provides case management and labor exchange services and the state job bank. Claimants will receive a welcome email from CTHires after filing, which explains the services available and encourages them to utilize CTHires for their job search.

CTDOL administers the work test for UI claimants through the UIRESEA program. All claimants selected to participate will have a review of their UI eligibility and efforts to find work. Any claimant determined to have an eligibility issue or insufficient work search efforts will have a stop entered on his or her unemployment claim and the eligibility issue is referred to the UI expert in the AJC for review and potential referral to the Adjudications Unit. All claimants who attend the Initial RESEA appointment will receive a customized reemployment plan, jointly developed with the RESEA representative, and be required to participate in at least one additional mandatory employment service activity. Services include referrals to employment readiness workshops, résumé critiques, career counseling, WIOA orientation sessions, or any other service available in the American Job Center.

State agency merit-based staff will continue to provide Wagner-Peyser Act funded labor exchange activities. These services include job readiness workshops on topics such as Successful Job Search Strategies, Fundamentals of Résumé Writing and Interviewing Strategies and Techniques; one-on-one career counseling, résumé critiques; employer recruitments; job readiness assessments; and Career Center services. In the Career Centers located in the American Job Centers, job seekers will be able to work on their résumés and cover letters, complete online job applications, research companies, review job postings and conduct any other business related to their job search. They will have access to copy machines, fax machines, free postage for mailing résumés and applications to employers and most importantly, in-person support from CTDOL and Workforce Development Board contractor staff that provide whatever guidance and support might be needed. Career Center customers with disabilities will have access to accessible technology, such as large screen computer monitors and visual magnifiers, screen reader software, adjustable workstations, computer keyboards with visually enhanced lettering, sign language interpreters and any other reasonable accommodation the customer might need. All American Job Centers will have a process in place that allows staff to refer customers to education and training programs as well as other resources and supportive services. Some referrals will be made "in house" to other partner agencies under the roof of the American Job Center while others may be to organizations that are located in separate venues. Trade Act clients will be co-enrolled into WIOA as a standard operating procedure. CTDOL will continue to deploy a team of Business Services Specialists across Connecticut whose sole focus is working with employers. Business Services Specialists identify employers interested in scheduling recruitment events in the American Job Centers and coordinate those events around the state. Some offices strategically conduct multi-employer recruitments in the AJC on the same day as Initial RESEA appointments. This allows RESEA participants to connect in-person with hiring employers at the conclusion of their Initial RESEA appointment. Employers with scheduled recruitments are required to post their job listings in CTHires to make their employment opportunities available to all job seekers including UI claimants. Business Services Specialists also provide in-person business consultations to identify a company's needs, promote Work Opportunity Tax Credits, and provide customized labor market information, unemployment compensation information as well as information and referral to CTDOL's Apprenticeship program.

#### **(e) Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP)**

*Assessment of Need.*

*Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers in the area based on past and projected agricultural and farmworker activity in the State. Such needs may include but are not limited to: employment, training, and housing.*

*Assessment of the agricultural activity in the State*

- 1) identify the top five labor-intensive crops, the months of heavy activity, and the geographic area of prime activity;*
- 2) Summarize the agricultural employers' needs in the State (i.e. are they predominantly hiring local or foreign workers, are they expressing that there is a scarcity in the agricultural workforce); and 3) Identify any economic, natural, or other factors that are affecting agriculture in the State or any projected factors that will affect agriculture in the State.*

The US Department of Agriculture's (USDA) most recent Census of Agriculture for 2017, released April 11, 2019, reflects a decrease in Connecticut farm operations from 5,977 to 5,521 and an increase from \$550 to \$580 million in revenue since the 2012 Census. Farms and crops are spread and vary throughout the state, save for one crop. Tobacco growers are predominantly found along the Connecticut River Valley, long known to provide the fertile soil and temperate climate preferred by the tobacco plants. In terms of production, the nursery and greenhouse sector is currently responsible for over 50% of Connecticut's output. The top five labor-intensive crops, months of heavy activity, and area of prime activity are indicated in the following chart:

Crop / Commodity Groups	Period of Heavy Activity	Primary Region
Nursery, greenhouse, floriculture, and sod	February—August	Statewide
Vegetables, melons, potatoes, and sweet potatoes	March—October	Statewide
Broadleaf and Shade Tobacco	May—October	Connecticut River Valley
Fruit, tree nuts, and berries	June—October	Statewide
Christmas trees and short rotation woody crops	April—December	Statewide

Connecticut Department of Labor's (CTDOL) Foreign Labor Certification Unit has seen a steady increase in the number of employers utilizing the H-2A Program, from 33 in PY 2016 to 52 in PY 2020, with a substantial increase in the number of workers requested, from 398 in PY 2016 to 1470 in PY 2020. During this time, CTDOL has not recorded a single employer utilizing the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS) exclusively. All agricultural job orders submitted to CTDOL were in relation to H-2A visa workers. These numbers, despite the overall decrease in number of farm operations, reflect the difficulty Connecticut farms are having in hiring local workers and the resulting increase in demand for foreign workers. In CTDOL's outreach experience, many employers have lost part of their local workforce to better opportunities, so a continued increase in employers and workers requested through the H-2A Program is expected.

As mentioned in the previous AOP, and as it continues to be demonstrated by the latest Agricultural Census data from 2017, it is important to note that, across the US, the share of crop workers not legally authorized to work in the country has grown from about 15% in 1989-91 to about 48% in 2014-16. The same survey previously indicated that about three quarters of all hired crop farmworkers are considered settled. Of the remaining 25%, about half are "shuttlers", meaning they work at a single location more than 75 miles from home, and may cross an international border to get there. The once more common migrant farmworker that moved from state to state working on different crops as the seasons advance, is now a relative rarity. This shift in migration patterns and demographics is significant to say the least.

Given that immigration policies have not changed since the last AOP, farmworkers in Connecticut that lack employment authorization will continue to be hard to reach through CTDOL's outreach efforts, as both employers and farmworkers are reluctant to interact with any state or government employees, let alone seek employment and training services.

Two additional factors not mentioned in the prior plan that can affect Connecticut's agriculture going forward are climate and health. In terms of climate, a number of Connecticut farms have lost crops in recent seasons due to changing and/or more extreme weather patterns. Farmers have had to contend with hail storms, flooding, and irregular temperatures during the winter seasons. It is likely more farms will experience these same losses in the future unless there's a positive change in our climate conditions. In terms of health, the last two seasons have been like no other in recent history, as evidenced by the COVID-19 pandemic. Many of Connecticut's farms saw an increase in demand for their crops during these last two seasons, some due to an increase in consumer gardening while others due to an increase in demand for locally grown food. As the world continues to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic, the outlook for Connecticut agriculture appears positive based on the first two seasons.

*Assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers*

*Provide an assessment of the unique needs of farmworkers by summarizing Migrant and Seasonal Farm Worker (MSFW) characteristics (including if they are predominantly from certain countries, what language(s) they speak, the approximate number of MSFWs in the State during peak season and during low season, and whether they tend to be migrant, seasonal, or year-round farmworkers). This information must take into account data supplied by WIOA Section 167 National Farmworker Jobs Program (NFJP) grantees, other MSFW organizations, employer organizations, and State and/or Federal agency data sources such as the U.S. Department of Agriculture and the U.S. Department of Labor (DOL) Employment and Training Administration.*

CTDOL continues to ensure that the employment and training services provided to the MSFW population are qualitatively equivalent, and quantitatively proportional, to the employment and training services provided to other jobseekers. Pursuant to TEN 13-19, CTDOL is not currently seeking to utilize the Wagner-Peyser Act Staffing Flexibility final rule to its (PY) 2020-2023 WIOA State Plan in delivering these services to our MSFW and FLC customers. We will continue to utilize state merit staff employees to provide services to our MSFW and FLC customers.

The majority of Connecticut's approximately 6900 (peak season) local and migrant agricultural workers have origins in Mexico, Central America, Jamaica, Haiti, and Puerto Rico. Employers that utilize the H-2A program request workers from Mexico, Central America, Jamaica, and South Africa. The predominant language is Spanish for the majority that originated or travel from Spanish-speaking countries. (Although it cannot be assumed that someone from a "Spanish-speaking" country speaks Spanish due to the existence of other native languages in said countries)

Agricultural workers contacted through CTDOL's outreach efforts continue to experience vulnerabilities and barriers due to language, literacy, education, immigration status, and access to healthcare. Those without legal status are even more susceptible to exploitation and retaliation. It is important to remember how large a percentage of the farmworker population does not have work authorization, and that this population has not and will not, generally speaking, seek employment and training services through CTDOL's outreach efforts or at one of Connecticut's AJCs. A change to the legal status of these workers would likely increase the number of participants for employment and training services, but more importantly, would lessen the exploitation and retaliation against workers.

The last two seasons have also proved particularly challenging due to the COVID-19 pandemic. CTDOL has and will continue to collaborate with agencies and healthcare providers such as the Connecticut River Valley Farm Worker Health Program (CRVFHP) and associated public health providers in providing outreach, education, and Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) to as many MSFWs as possible. In CTDOL's outreach experience, MSFWs would have benefited greatly from regulatory changes to

COVID-19 protocols, as not all employers follow guidance provided by the CDC, therefore subjecting their workers to much greater risks in contracting and spreading communicable disease.

*Outreach Activities.*

*The local offices outreach activities must be designed to meet the needs of MSFWs in the State and to locate and contact MSFWs who are not being reached through normal intake activities. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for: Contacting farmworkers who are not being reached by the normal intake activities conducted by the employment service offices.*

All outreach efforts and activities to MSFWs are performed by the Outreach Worker and the State Monitor Advocate. (SMA) CTDOL's Outreach Worker carries out his responsibilities, throughout the state, in a full-time capacity during periods of the highest MSFW activity, between March and November, and in part-time capacity the remainder of the time. CTDOL's outreach efforts are not limited to take place during business hours only. Workers can be visited after hours or during weekends, often in coordination with other agencies or service providers, such as the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program (CRVFHP) or the New England Farm Workers Council. (NEFWC).

*Providing technical assistance to outreach staff. Technical assistance must include trainings, conferences, additional resources, and increased collaboration with other organizations on topics such as one-stop center services (i.e. availability of referrals to training, supportive services, and career services, as well as specific employment opportunities), the Employment Service and Employment-Related Law Complaint System ("Complaint System" described at 20 CFR 658 Subpart E), information on the other organizations serving MSFWs in the area, and a basic summary of farmworker rights, including their rights with respect to the terms and conditions of employment.*

Connecticut's SMA attends all required conferences and/or training sessions, and strives to involve the Outreach Worker in as many activities as possible. Resource material, technical assistance, and best practices attained at these events are passed down to the Outreach Worker, as well as all AJC staff. Said staff is put through periodic MSFW Program and Job Service Complaint System training to refresh their MSFW and Job Service Complaint System knowledge.

*Increasing outreach staff training and awareness across core programs including the Unemployment Insurance (UI) program and the training on identification of UI eligibility issues.*

Connecticut's Outreach Worker and SMA have extensive knowledge and experience with Unemployment Insurance. Both have spent the early part of their career taking and processing claims as well as identifying and resolving issues for claimants in both English and Spanish. In addition, they are familiar with job seeker services and are in contact with both WP and WIOA staff in each American Job Center Office across the state.

*Providing outreach staff professional development activities to ensure they are able to provide high quality services to both jobseekers and employers.*

Connecticut Department of Labor offers professional development to all staff. Both our SMA and Outreach Representative have attended local, regional as well as national sessions to enhance skills to support both farmworkers and growers. They are both well versed in job seeker and employer rights and responsibilities as well as complaint system. Both the SMA and Outreach Representative work in labor exchange activities for MSFW and H2A populations.

*Coordinating outreach efforts with NFJP grantees as well as with public and private community service agencies and MSFW groups.*

The SMA and Outreach Worker will continue to coordinate outreach visits to farms with CTDOL's NFJP grantee, the New England Farm Workers' Council (NEFWC), the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program (CRVFHP) and area Community Health Centers, and the US DOL Wage and Hour Division. The coordination with the CRVFHP and their associated Community Health Centers during

this pandemic, and going forward, has been crucial in keeping Connecticut's farmworkers healthy. Coordination with NEFWC will continue as per the Memorandum of Understanding in place, and CTDOL also looks forward to reintroducing NFJP staff to all AJCs once pandemic restrictions ease down.

The Outreach Worker and SMA will also look to maintain and expand on other established relationships, such as ones with the Statewide Legal Services of Connecticut, and the Massachusetts Migrant Educational Program. Both the Outreach Worker and SMA are active in coordinating events and participating in joint meeting with various entities. Often, they hold joint sessions at farms.

*Services provided to farmworkers and agricultural employers through the one-stop delivery system. Describe the State agency's proposed strategies for:*

*Providing the full range of employment and training services to the agricultural community, both farmworkers and agricultural employers, through the one-stop delivery system. This includes:*

*How career and training services required under WIOA Title I will be provided to MSFWs through the one-stop centers;*

*How the State serves agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such services.*

Agricultural workers, job seekers, and employers have access to the same employment services available in each of Connecticut's American Job Centers (AJCs) that are available to non-agricultural workers, job seekers, and employers. The network consists of 5 comprehensive centers and an additional 13 partner staffed centers. (With partial SWA staffing) CTDOL outreach staff encourages workers and job seekers to visit the AJCs to take advantage of the below services:

- Computer labs with internet access, including access to CTDOL's newly implemented self-service operating system/database for job seekers, employers, and partner agencies—CTHires
- Reemployment workshops and services
- Career planning and counseling
- Access to labor market information
- Recruitment assistance
- Veteran employment and training services
- Adult, Dislocated, and Youth Worker activities under WIOA
- Adult Education under Connecticut State Department of Education
- Apprenticeship Training information
- Vocational Rehabilitation Training under DORS (Department of Rehabilitation Services) and BESB (Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind)
- Unemployment Insurance assistance
- Jobs First Employment Services
- Referrals to supportive services
- Complaint handling

Staff in the American Job Centers is put through periodic MSFW Program and Job Service Complaint System training to refresh their MSFW and Job Service Complaint System knowledge. The SMA will continue on-site monitoring of the AJCs to ensure compliance with the Job Service regulations, offering technical assistance as needed.

Marketing the Complaint System to farmworkers and other farmworker advocacy groups.

The Employment Service Complaint System information is provided during outreach visits and presentations to farmworkers and advocacy groups. Constant interaction with these other agencies allows for the ease of complaint or inquiry referrals, which CTDOL has often received through third parties.

Marketing the Agricultural Recruitment System for U.S. Workers (ARS) to agricultural employers and how it intends to improve such publicity.

In CTDOL's outreach experience, and as supported by job order data, employers in Connecticut have relied on H-2A related job orders for quite some time now, mainly due to the shortage of US workers. The ARS is continued to be presented to employers, but those conversations typically shift to a shortage of US workers and a discussion regarding H-2A workers. The Outreach Worker and SMA look to continue collaborating with CTDOL's Business Services Representatives to better serve the needs of these agricultural employers. Other employer services available to agricultural employers include:

- Assistance with the placement of job orders
- Assistance with the recruitment of qualified workers
- Mediation and interpretation assistance
- Complaint assistance
- Technical assistance on compliance with employment related Federal and State regulations.

*Other Requirements.*

*Collaboration.*

*Describe any collaborative agreements the state workforce agency (SWA) has with other MSFW service providers including NFJP grantees and other service providers. Describe how the SWA intends to build upon/increase collaboration with existing partners and in establishing new partners over the next four years (including any approximate timelines for establishing agreements or building upon existing agreements).*

CTDOL and NEFWC, the NFJP grantee, have an ongoing Memorandum of Understanding regarding collaboration and exchange of referrals that will continue for the foreseeable future. If the pandemic effects and restrictions finally ease, the Outreach Worker and SMA hope to increase NEFWC's presence and collaboration with staff at all the state's American Job Centers.

*Review and Public Comment.*

*In developing the AOP, the SWA must solicit information and suggestions from NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other interested organizations. In addition, at least 45 calendar days before submitting its final AOP, the SWA must provide a proposed plan to NFJP grantees, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations, and other organizations expressing an interest and allow at least 30 days for review and comment. The SWA must: 1) Consider any comments received in formulating its final proposed AOP; 2) Inform all commenting parties in writing whether their comments have been incorporated and, if not, the reasons therefore; and 3) Transmit the comments and recommendations received and its responses with the submission of the AOP.*

*i. The AOP must include a statement confirming NFJP grantees, other appropriate MSFW groups, public agencies, agricultural employer organizations and other interested employer organizations have been given an opportunity to comment on the AOP. Include the list of organizations from which information and suggestions were solicited, any comments received, and responses to those comments.*

The WIOA Section 167 NFJP Grantee, the New England Farm Worker's Council, has been afforded the opportunity to review and comment on CTDOL's Agricultural Outreach Plan. No comments or additional recommendations were received.

*Data Assessment.*

*Review the previous four years Wagner-Peyser data reports on performance. Note whether the State has been meeting its goals to provide MSFWs quantitatively proportionate services as compared to non-MSFWs. If it has not*

*met these goals, explain why the State believes such goals were not met and how the State intends to improve its provision of services in order to meet such goals.*

Analysis of Connecticut's WP performance data may show that certain indicators were not met at all times during this past four year period. However, CTDOL does not feel the data is commensurate with its efforts to meet the performance goals. Agricultural workers are continuously encouraged to seek better opportunities through employment and training programs at the AJCs, but certain factors, such as legal status, may be preventing part of the population from taking advantage of these services. This leaves us with a much smaller pool of measurable MSFWs, of which some may actually take advantage of the offered services, but not all, in which case the state ends up failing certain indicators. Another factor affecting this last four-year period was the COVID-19 pandemic. CTDOL will continue to provide the state's MSFWs with quantitatively proportionate, and qualitatively equivalent, services as compared to non-MSFWs, offering all its services along with availability of job referrals. It will also continue to encourage agricultural workers to seek better opportunities through employment services and training.

*Assessment of progress.*

*The plan must include an explanation of what was achieved based on the previous AOP, what was not achieved and an explanation as to why the State believes the goals were not achieved, and how the State intends to remedy the gaps of achievement in the coming year.*

State Monitor Advocate Annual Summary of Services to Migrant and Seasonal

Farmworkers (MSFWs) Outline of Contents

20 CFR 653.108(s)

The State Monitor Advocate (SMA) must prepare for the State Administrator, the Regional Monitor Advocate, and the National Monitor Advocate, an Annual Summary describing how the State provided employment services to MSFWs within the State based on statistical data, reviews, and other activities as required in this chapter. The summary must include:

(1) A description of the activities undertaken during the program year by the SMA pertaining to his/her responsibilities set forth in this section and other applicable regulations in this chapter.

Review of the Previous Year's Agricultural Activity in the State.

In 2020, based on USDA/NASS data, there was an estimated 5,500 farm operations in Connecticut on about 380,000 acres. Based on CTDOL's Labor Market Information, we estimate a fluctuating number of 4,800 to 5,300 people employed in agriculture during this time. The number of employers submitting H-2A related job orders has increased from 51 to 52 employers, during PY 2020, totaling 100 job orders and 1470 workers requested. Even though there has been an upward trend in the increase of employers and job orders these last few years, PY 2019 did experience a drop in the number of workers requested due to COVID-19. The number has not only recovered for PY 2020, it has doubled. This major increase in labor demand maybe short-term and related to some industry trends as a result of COVID-19. The rest of agricultural employers continue to recruit on their own.

CTDOL's Foreign Labor Certification Specialist, along with the State Monitor Advocate (SMA) and Outreach Worker, have continued to assist in screening job seekers inquiring about the posted job orders, ensuring that qualified prospects, understood the terms and conditions of each job before being referred to a job opening.

Outreach

For PY 2020, CTDOL reinstated its Outreach Worker fully to all activities and responsibilities in the Fall of 2020, at about the same time Connecticut AJCs started reopening to the public. There was a total of 1562 outreach contacts for PY 2020.

Outreach activities between July 1 and October 1, 2020 were carried out strictly by Connecticut's SMA, during which time he assisted in the emergency response to a COVID-19 outbreak at a worker housing facility with workers from three different farms. The SMA assisted in connecting health care responders to public health officials, and tried to minimize the negative stigma and language being directed towards farmworkers. The SMA also tried to make public healthcare officials aware that CDC Guidelines were not necessarily being followed by all agricultural employers, and suggested amendments to the Governor's Executive Orders would have a greater impact on how some farmers would adjust their practices to mitigate the effects of the spread of COVID-19. The SMA continued to work very closely with the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program (CRVFHP), Community Health Services, Community Health Centers Inc, and Generations Family Health Centers to coordinate the distribution of COVID-19 education, assistance with planning, and personal protective equipment to the farmworkers and growers in Connecticut. The Outreach Worker also resumed his coordination with the CRVFHP and its partners in October of 2020.

Despite COVID-19, the SMA has continued to maintain and strengthen existing partnerships with various organizations, developing additional partnerships with other stakeholders whenever possible. These partnerships provide the MSFW SWA staff with the opportunity to share their knowledge of farm worker needs, characteristics, and concerns, and to work to develop solutions to deficiencies in service delivery to MSFWs. CTDOL staff continue to promote the integrated, and universally accessible, employment services that are offered to all customers, including MSFWs, in each of Connecticut's American Job Centers. (AJC)

MSFWs have access to the following services through a single delivery system: Wagner-Peyser labor exchange services such as Career Counseling, Veterans Employment and Training, Professional Résumé Critiquing/Resumé Writing, Job Search Assistance, Reemployment Workshops and Job Referrals. Other employment and training services include Adult, Dislocated Worker and Youth under WIOA; Adult Education, Apprenticeship Training, Vocational Rehabilitation Training under Department of Aging and Disability Services; and BESB (Board of Education and Services for the Blind), Unemployment Insurance, Jobs First Employment Services, and Referral to Supportive Services. This universal access to core services guarantees barrier-free admission to all seekers of employment and training services, including individuals with disabilities. If an MSFW cannot, or does not wish, to visit an AJC to seek these services, assistance to access to these services is provided by the outreach worker.

Staff encouraged non-English-speaking customers to take advantage of the free English as a Second Language (ESL) classes offered through Adult Education or CTDOL's WIOA Section 167 Grantee, the New England Farm Worker's Council. (NEFWC) This is a critical component of promoting lifelong learning and developing the basic skills needed to secure employment and pursue career growth.

Availability of the above services was very limited when the AJCs closed down for COVID-19, since the majority of CTDOL staff was directed to assist with UI and the CARES Act. The services resumed on October 19, 2020 when Connecticut's AJCs reopened at limited capacity, with services offered in person and virtually through appointments. MSFWs regained access to these services at that point, while they have continued to be assisted with UI, the Job Service Complaint System, and healthcare referrals throughout this entire time.

#### Affirmative Action Plans

Regulations require SMA participation in Affirmative Action Planning only as it relates to MSFWs. Connecticut has no significant offices and therefore is not required to submit an MSFW Affirmative Action Plan. CTDOL's Affirmative Action Plan relates only to its own employees and their hiring.

#### Monitoring

In PY 2019 monitoring was to take place immediately following the completion of MSFW Identification training for staff, SWA and partners, at all of Connecticut's American Job Centers. The SMA and OW

had conducted training to about 80% of all AJC staff when the COVID-19 pandemic began, at which point AJCs were closed down. Training to the remainder 20% of AJC staff was completed between April and June of 2021. Monitoring has now resumed in the beginning of July 2021, starting with the Northwest region AJCs. Completion of this monitoring and its associated reports will be part of PY 2021.

(2) An assurance that the SMA has direct, personal access, whenever he/she finds it necessary, to the State Administrator and that the SMA has status and compensation approved by the civil service classification system, and is comparable to other State positions assigned similar levels of tasks, complexity, and responsibility.

The State Monitor Advocate (SMA) position is a federally mandated position, required under 20 CFR §653.108. This individual monitors the agency for compliance with federal regulations concerning services and protections to Migrant and Seasonal Farmworkers (MSFWs). The individual also advocates on behalf of the MSFW population to improve services within CT DOL, and other government and non-government agencies. The SMA is also responsible for investigating and processing MSFW complaints and the overall monitoring of the JS Complaint system within CT DOL. When necessary, he acts as a mediator between employers and farmworkers; offers technical advice to agency officials, employers and other interested parties; and serves as an MSFW representative on boards and committees of community organizations. Yu-mon Luis Chang has been designated as the Connecticut SMA by the State Administrator. In this role, Luis has access as needed to the administrator within the CT Department of Labor.

(3) An assurance the SMA devotes all of his/her time to Monitor Advocate functions. Or, if the SWA proposed the SMA conducts his/her functions on a part-time basis, an explanation of how the SMA functions are effectively performed with part-time

staffing.

In Connecticut, the State Monitor Advocate is a full-time position to ensure SMA functions are effectively performed. The CT SMA is part of the Performance & Accountability unit within the CT DOL.

(4) A summary of the monitoring reviews conducted by the SMA, including:

a. A description of any problems, deficiencies, or improper practices the SMA identified in the delivery of services;

The SMA and OW, as previously mentioned, had conducted MSFW Identification Training to about 80% of all AJC staff when the COVID-19 pandemic began. The SMA had planned on conducting monitoring after completion of these training sessions. Upon return to his duties on July 1, 2020, the SMA focused his efforts on outreach and coordination with healthcare providers for provision of education and personal protected equipment. The SMA and OW finalized training to the remainder 20% of all AJC staff on June 22, 2021. The SMA has just recently completed monitoring of the Northwest region AJCs between July and August of 2021.

b. A summary of the actions taken by the State Workforce Agency (SWA) to resolve the problems, deficiencies, or improper practices described in its service delivery; and

Monitoring for PY 2019 was delayed due to COVID-19, but has now resumed.

c. A summary of any technical assistance the SMA provided for the SWA and the Employment Service (ES) offices.

MSFW Identification Training was conducted to about 80% of all of Connecticut's AJC staff before interrupted by the closure of offices and lockdown due to COVID-19. The training also included

reintroducing New England Farm Workers Council, CTDOL's NFJP grantee, and its MSFW services to staff at AJCs. Training to the remainder 20% of AJC staff was completed on June 22, 2021.

(5) A summary of the outreach efforts undertaken by all significant and non-significant MSFW ES offices.

Connecticut is not a significant MSFW state, nor does it have any significant MSFW ES offices. Outreach efforts originate from CTDOL's Central Office, typically performed by the MSFW Outreach Worker and SMA. Below is a summary of the outreach log for PY 2020, during which all outreach was performed by the SMA between July 1 and October 1. After October 1, 2020 the OW resumed his full schedule.

Date	Farm	Contacts	Field Check or Visit	Notes
07/10/20	Scott's Orchard & Nursery	3	FV	Outreach to H-2A workers, warned them to keep being safe re: COVID-19
07/10/20	Gotta's Farm	8		Outreach to H-2A workers, warned them to keep being safe re: COVID-19
07/10/20	Bussa Orchards	2		Outreach to H-2A workers, warned them to keep being safe re: COVID-19
07/10/20	Dondero Orchards	2	FV	Outreach to H-2A workers, warned them to keep being safe re: COVID-19
07/14/20	Bussa Orchards	2		Outreach to 2 new H-2A workers, brought them PPE from CRVFHP
07/14/20	Fair Weather Growers	7		Outreach to 3 H-2A & 4 seasonal workers, brought some PPE but need to go back, they have about 30 seasonal workers
07/16/20	OJ Thrall	28	FV	Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers, spoke to them regarding other employment and reminded them to keep being safe re: COVID-19. Advised manager on toilet facilities.
07/16/20	McLaughlin Tobacco (Mulnite Housing)	16		Outreach to H-2A workers, warned them to keep being safe re: COVID-19
07/16/20	Groszyk Farms (Mulnite Housing)	16		Outreach to H-2A workers, warned them to keep being safe re: COVID-19
07/21/20	Fair Weather Growers	25	FV	Outreach to 1 H-2A and 24 seasonal workers, spoke to them regarding SMA role and svcs avail thru DOL, provided PPE and reminded them to keep being safe re: COVID-19.
07/22/20	Ag Installers	14	FV	Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/ MSFW Info & WHD H-2A Worker Rights cards, offered help as resource that can take complaints, talked about GFHC, reminded them to continue safe practices

07/26/20	Jarmoc Farms	15		Outreach to H-2A workers during CHC Inc Health Clinic, delivered phone cards to Joelle, provided workers w/ MSFW Info cards & WHD H-2A Worker Rights cards, advised them to be careful when shopping/doing laundry & errands.
07/27/20	Lyman Orchards	18		Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards and PPE from CRVFHP, advised them to continue to be careful when shopping or anything else in public.
07/27/20	Rogers Orchards	15	FV	Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards and PPE from CRVFHP, advised them to continue to be careful when shopping or anything else in public.
07/31/20	Markowski Farms	24	FV	Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW Info cards, advised them to continue to be careful when shopping or anything else in public.
08/07/20	Jarmoc Farms	11	FV	Outreach to seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards and PPE from CRVFHP, advised them to continue to be careful when out and about regarding COVID-19.
08/11/20	Groszyk/McLaughlin/Cohen	64		Outreach to H-2A workers at Mulnite Camp due to one worker showing COVID-19 symptoms and awaiting test results. Workers were congregating in groups without social distancing or wearing masks. Distributed PPE and spoke to them regarding guidelines and recommendations.
08/12/20	Casertanos	108		Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW Info cards, advised them to continue to be careful when shopping or anything else in public.
08/12/20	CK Greenhouses	24		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/ MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards, reminded them to continue to be careful in public spaces re: COVID-19
09/08/20	Lindy Farms	26		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/ MSFW Info & WHD H-2A Worker Rights cards, offered help as resource that can take complaints, talked about healthcare, reminded them to continue safe practices
09/11/20	Botticello's	8		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/ MSFW Info & WHD H-2A Worker Rights cards, offered help as resource that can take complaints, talked about healthcare, reminded them to continue safe practices
09/14/20	Jarmoc Farms	25	FC	Outreach to H-2A and migrant workers, provided them w/ MSFW Info cards, reminded them to continue to be safe and cautious at camp and when out in public.
09/16/20	Woodstock Orchards	6		Outreach to H-2A workers w/Debbie, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards and reminded workers to continue to be cautious and safe re: COVID-19

09/16/20	Buels Orchard	8		Outreach to H-2A workers w/Debbie, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards and some PPE and reminded workers to continue to be cautious and safe re: COVID-20
10/07/20	OJ Thrall	26	FV	Outreach to H-2A and seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards, answered UI questions.
10/08/20	Northern Nurseries	3		Outreach visit w/NEFWC to farm outside farmworker program, spoke to one worker and provided him some basic DOL information to also pass onto his two co-workers
10/08/20	OJ Thrall	0		Follow-up visit w/NEFWC to speak to one worker with housing needs
10/14/20	Nowak Farms	7		Visited H-2A worker that had leg amputated in July, interviewed coworkers as well regarding housing standards and answered labor related questions
10/20/20	Blue Jay Orchards	2		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards, PPE, and delivered medication from CHS
10/20/20	March Farms	5		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards, PPE.
10/22/20	Markowski Farms	25	FV	Outreach to H2A and seasonal workers, provided them w/MSFW Info & WHD Farmworker Rights cards, answered questions.
10/27/20	Hartikka	1		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/ MSFW info; reminded them to continue to be safe during COVID
10/27/20	Hart's	6		Outreach to H-2A workers, provided them w/ MSFW info; reminded them to continue to be safe during COVID
10/28/20	Botticello's	8		Outreach visit to collect contact info of workers, to be passed onto tax preparer helping them with taxes.
11/04/20	Woodbury Sugar Shed	1		Outreach to H-2A worker, was working for different CT farm for years prior to this season
02/10/21	Hart's Greenhouse Preston	7	FV	Outreach visit to H-2A workers and dropped off PPE
02/10/21	Hart's Greenhouse Canterbury	3	FV	Outreach visit to H-2A workers and dropped off PPE (add'l 2 workers were quarantining)
04/01/21	Clinton Nursery	1		Spoke with manager and gave them my card for H2A Program
04/06/21	Canterbury Horticulture	20		Provided outreach along side with NEFWC
04/06/21	The Plant Group	4		Spoke with manager Mark to set up outreach. Spoke with 4 workers while there

04/06/21	Woodstock Orchards	4		Provided outreach to workers who arrived from Jamaica.
04/12/21	Kogut Nurseries	9	FV	Outreach visit to H-2A workers along w/ Pat M (CHS) and Debbie H (Jamaican Consul)
04/12/21	Johnny's Roadside Market	3	FV	Outreach visit to H-2A workers along w/ Pat M (CHS) and Debbie H (Jamaican Consul)
04/12/21	Holmberg Orchards	3		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Mexico
04/13/21	Harts Greenhouse	14		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Jamaica; still deciding on vaccine
04/14/21	Casertanos Greenhouse	128		Provided outreach to H2A and local workers with NEFWC
04/14/21	CK Greenhouses	98		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Mexico
04/15/21	Grower Direct	59		Provided outreach to H2A and local workers with NEFWC (39 H2A, 20 local)
04/19/21	Hartikka	1		Provided outreach to H2A worker; he is fully vaccinated
04/20/21	Bonnie Plants	21		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Mexico, they are working with Generations on vaccinations
04/21/21	Clinton Nursery	65		Provided outreach to local workers with NEFWC; pending meeting with owners for participation in the program next year
04/22/21	Gottas	5		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Jamaica. Vaccinated already
04/22/21	Scotts Orchard and Nursery	4		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Jamaica. Vaccinated already
04/25/21	Kogut Nurseries	16		Outreach visit to H-2A workers along w/ Debbie H's official orientation for all workers--only saw 9 in first visit
04/27/21	J.W. Anderson Farm	2		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Jamaica. Vaccinated already
04/28/21	Judges	8		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Mexico, Vaccinated already
04/29/21	Fair Weather Growers	6		Provided outreach to H2A workers from South Africa; don't want to get vaccinated
04/29/21	Dondero	2		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Jamaica
04/30/21	Prides Corner (Lebanon)	31		Provided outreach to H2A and local workers with NEFWC
04/30/21	Winding Brook Turf Farm	9		Provided outreach to H2A workers, vaccinated with first shots
05/03/21	Maple Row	3		Provided outreach to H2A workers from Mexico, don't want the vaccine

05/04/21	Markowski	15		Provided outreach to H2A and local workers; vaccinated with first shots
05/04/21	Vincent Farm	10		Provided outreach to H2A workers; vaccinated with first shots
05/07/21	March Farm	4		Provided outreach to H2A workers; vaccinated with first shots
05/07/21	Woodbury Sugar Shed	2		Provided outreach to H2A workers; vaccinated with first shots
05/10/21	Blue Hills Orchard	3		Provided outreach to H2A workers; vaccinated with first shots
05/11/21	Clark Farms	1		Provided outreach to H2A; does not wish to get the vaccine
05/12/21	Roger's Orchards	3		Outreach visit to H-2A workers, provided MSFW Contact Cards. All have 1st of 2 vaccinations
05/14/21	The Plant Group	62		Provided outreach to all local workers with NEFWC
05/17/21	Lyman Orchards	7		Provided out reach to 4 H2A workers all vaccinated; other 3 were local female workers not interested in vaccine.
05/17/21	Anderson Farm	2		Provided outreach to all H2A workers; vaccinated with first shots
05/18/21	Ultimate Professionals	16		Provided outreach to H2A workers; contacted Joelle so they can set up a vaccine clinic for the men
05/18/21	Lindy Farms	22		Provided outreach to H2A workers; all received their first dose and awaiting the second
05/18/21	Planter's Choice	8		Outreach visit w/ NEFWC, 7 migrant workers (PR) and 1 seasonal. Answered Qs, assisting 2 with UI issues
05/19/21	Jarmoc Farms	35	FV	Provided outreach to H2A and local workers from Springfield, received their 1st shots already
05/19/21	Boticello Farms	8		Provided outreach to H2A workers; connected with Joelle so the workers can get their vaccine
05/24/21	White Gate Farm	3		Provided outreach to H2A workers, brought Vlad from Generations for registration and vaccination appts
05/26/21	Prides Corner (Lebanon)	81	FC	Provided outreach to H2A and local workers with NEFWC; 93% of workers vaccinated per HR
05/27/21	Holcomb Farm	2		Provided outreach to H2A workers and connected them with Pat Miles for vaccinations
05/27/21	Miller Farms	9		Provided outreach to H2A workers right at CHC in Hartford while they were getting their vaccinations
06/01/21	Nowak	4		Provided outreach to H2A workers; they are thinking about getting the vaccine but not sure
06/01/21	McLaughlin	4		Provided outreach to H2A workers; they are also thinking about the vaccine but not sure
06/04/21	Connecticut Valley Orchards	4		Provided outreach to H2A workers and advised them about the vaccine; they will reach out to Pat about it.

06/07/21	Vicent Farm	13		Provided outreach to H2A workers; they were already at the clinic getting their first shots
06/07/21	Andre Groszyk	14		Provided outreach to H2A workers; men were already receiving their first shot
06/09/21	Horton	3		Provided outreach to H2A workers; men were vaccinated
06/10/21	Buels Orchard	2	FV	Provided outreach to H2A workers; guys need to get vaccinated so Vlad (Generations) was contacted
06/11/21	Oxen Hill	7	FV	Provided outreach to H2A workers; 4 of 7 guys want the vaccine and so Pat was contacted for it
06/14/21	Hindinger	5		Provided outreach to H2A workers and spoke to them of the vaccine; only 2 received it the others are pondering it
06/16/21	Bishops Orchards	7	FV	Provided outreach to H2A workers; guys have all received their first shots
06/18/21	Becket Farms	1		Outreach visit, spoke to one farmworker and delivered medications from CHS
06/21/21	Bussa Orchards	2		Provided outreach to H2A workers; 1st shot already received, waiting on the 2nd
06/22/21	Prides Corner (Cromwell)	16		Provided outreach to H2A workers and locals; all workers are vaccinated; NEFWC was present with me
06/24/21	Winding Brook Turf Farm	1		Provided outreach to last worker who arrived; interested in vaccine so Pat will be reached out to
06/24/21	Markowski	29	FV	Provided outreach to H2A and local workers; vaccinated with first shots; NEFWC present with me
06/24/21	Prides Corner (West Suffield)	31	FV	Provided outreach to H2A and local workers; vaccinated with first shots; NEFWC present with me
06/24/21	Christian Leaf	30	FV	Provided outreach to H2A and local workers; vaccinated with first shots; NEFWC present with me
06/24/21	OJ Thrall	11	FV	Provided outreach to H2A and local workers; vaccinated with first shots; NEFWC present with me

(6) A summary of the State's actions taken under the Complaint System described in part

658, Subpart E of this chapter, identifying any challenges, complaint trends, tracking resolution of complaints, findings from reviews of the Complaint System, trainings offered throughout the year, and steps taken to inform and educate MSFWs, employers, and farmworker advocacy groups about the Complaint System.

During PY 2020, CTDOL continued to promote the availability of the Job Service Complaint system to Migrant and Seasonal Farm Workers. The SMA received copies of the Job Service Complaint and Apparent Violations logs from each local office at the conclusion of each calendar quarter. Although no formal MSFW complaints were filed during PY 2020, the SMA quickly acted upon and resolved informal complaints voiced by farm workers, providing additional information and guidance when needed.

(7) A summary of how the SMA is working with Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) sec. 167 NFJP grantees and other organizations serving farmworkers, employers and employer organizations, in the State, and an assurance that the SMA is meeting at least quarterly with representatives of these organizations. The summary should include whether the SMA has established a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the NFJP grantee or other farmworker organizations in accordance with 20 CFR 653.108 (l).

Activities that took place in PY 2020 that promoted interagency cooperation included, but were not limited to:

Continued cooperation with NEFWC in an effort to coordinate both agencies' employment and training services, but also to avoid duplication of services. As previously mentioned, CTDOL has a statewide MOU with NEFWC, its NJFP grantee, that is reviewed and renewed on an annual basis. The NEFWC director also accompanied the SMA and OW on MSFW Identification Training sessions at AJCs to reintroduce themselves and speak of the services they offer to not only MSFWs, but their family members as well.

Presented information to University of Connecticut students virtually for their History 1570 class on September 30, 2020. The SMA and Outreach Worker provided information on their own job duties as well as the variety of employment and support services available to MSFWs through CTDOL's programs, discussing the many challenges farmworkers face, responding to student's write-ups on the subject, and answering student questions.

Assisted the CRVFHP and area community health centers to coordinate the provision of COVID-19 educational materials, alerting employers of assistance with planning and personal protective equipment availability through the CRVFHP.

Presented the SMA's role and keys to coordination with other agencies to a group of NFJP stakeholders on February 22, 2021.

Advocated for the health and safety of farmworkers during the pandemic, promoting the coordination with healthcare agencies to provide education and personal protective equipment to workers and employers.

Spearheaded effort to introduce the National Center for Farmworker Health and the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program to the National Monitor Advocate office, culminating in a three-part webinar presentation involving all stakeholders and allowing attendees to learn about the programs and people behind them, and making subsequent connections and networking possible, especially between SMAs and the Community Health Centers in their respective areas.

(8) A summary of the statistical and other MSFW-related data and reports gathered by SWAs and ES offices for the year, including an overview of the SMA's involvement in the SWA's reporting systems.

CTDOL has both the SMA and Outreach Workers positions structured within its Performance & Accountability unit, responsible for providing support to CTDOL's Workforce Development Business System, CTHires, as well as generating reports, providing technical support to agency programs and departments, and performing both program and administrative functions for Foreign Labor Certification (FLC), Equal Opportunity (EO) / Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), and the MSFW Program. The SMA is able to source and analyze performance data consistently without issues due to this structure. The SMA and Outreach Worker also continue to review MSFW registrations and correct data on a quarterly basis.

(9) A summary of the training conducted for SWA personnel, including ES office personnel, on techniques for accurately reporting data.

The SMA and OW finished conducting MSFW Identification Training to the remaining 20% of all AJC staff in Connecticut on June 22, 2021. The training also included reintroducing the New England

Farm Worker's Council, CTDOL's NFJP Grantee, to AJC management and staff with presentations on the services they're able to provide MSFWs and their families.

(10) A summary of activities related to the Agricultural Outreach Plan (AOP) and an explanation of how those activities helped the State reach the goals and objectives described in the AOP. At the end of the 4-year AOP cycle, the summary must include a synopsis of the SWA's achievements over the previous 4 years to accomplish the goals set forth in the AOP, and a description of the goals which were not achieved and the steps the SWA will take to address those deficiencies.

#### MSFWs

For PY 2020, a lot of the SMA and Outreach Worker efforts have been focused on providing information to workers and employers regarding COVID-19, providing them with personal protective equipment sourced from the CRVFHP, assisting all parties in resolving labor related issues when dealing with an outbreak or any other type of situation, and currently providing information and education surrounding vaccines. Presentations were carried out in English and Spanish at worker's common gathering areas, typically also providing workers with outreach flyers—outlining the services available in Connecticut's American Job Centers, MSFW Informational Cards—containing contact information for the SMA and OW, U.S. Wage & Hour, NEFWC, Statewide Legal Services, and a number of Community Health Centers, amongst others. Some presentations also took place at Community Health Centers or in collaboration with the Liaison Officer for the Jamaican Consulate.

Some recent organizational changes at NEFWC have stalled CTDOL's efforts in reintroducing NEFWC to staff within all of Connecticut's AJCs, but despite the challenge, the SMA and OW have continued to promote NEFWC and its services in their presentations and training sessions, as well as during their conversations with employers and workers. The SMA and Outreach Worker also continued to visit NEFWC several times in the off-season to provide Workforce Information Services, assist workers with questions, and refer workers to the AJC for further services. During the work season, the SMA and OW continued to coordinate outreach visits to workers at participating farms, as well as new ones unfamiliar with our programs.

#### Employers and Others

The Outreach Worker has continued to establish and develop his relationships with participants of the H2-A Program through frequent outreach visits and phone contact, offering the employers assistance with the screening of qualified (when applicable) workers during recruitment, providing technical assistance for compliance with Wagner-Peyser regulations and Federal/State employment laws, and acting as a resource and support system on employment related issues. The SMA and Outreach Worker also reached out to a number of employers not utilizing the Agricultural Recruitment System (ARS), educating them on the State Monitor Advocate System, the services available through the CTDOL, and the services and protections available to MSFWs. On certain occasions the SMA and Outreach Worker were successful in delivering the message, allowing them to speak to MSFWs and provide them with information on available services at American Job Centers, support services, and points of contact should any complaints or issues arise.

CTDOL has also continued to collaborate with the Puerto Rico SWA in the recruitment of job seekers to fill the positions generated by agricultural employers in Connecticut. In cases where a worker from Puerto Rico completed his/her employment contract and the employer was pleased with their performance, CTDOL and local DOL offices in Puerto Rico made note of the successful match and attempted to recruit that same individual for the same employer in the following year, thus reducing the burden of constantly retraining individuals and alleviating some of the stress that workers experience in unfamiliar working and living environments.

Primary focus and efforts during PY 2020 have centered around the healthcare, safety, and advocacy of Connecticut's farmworkers. The SMA worked closely with the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker

Health Program to distribute personal protective equipment and COVID-19 educational information to farmworkers and employers while also advocating for the workers being disparaged by the local media and municipalities. These efforts helped state health officials understand and become more sensitive to situations that can negatively affect our farmworkers, and developing a working relationship with the CRVFHP.

Other activities in PY 2020 included introducing the SMA network, at a national level, to the National Center for Farmworker Health members and partners through the organization of a three-part webinar series, which allowed each group to learn about each other and allowed Connecticut's SMA to demonstrate and share success stories about his collaboration with the CRVFHP. The SMA and OW continue to be members of the Connecticut River Valley Farmworker Health Program Advisory Board. The SMA and OW have also continued to educate University of Connecticut students about farmworkers and their plight when invited to speak to their History 1570 class. The class presentations typically are followed up with an in-person visit to the farms by the students. These visits are currently postponed due to the pandemic.

***State Monitor Advocate***

*The plan must contain a statement confirming the State Monitor Advocate has reviewed and approved the AOP.*

Connecticut's SMA has reviewed and approved CTDOL's Agricultural Outreach Plan.

## **VIII. Adult Education and Family Literacy Act Program**

### **(a) Aligning of Content Standards**

Describe how the eligible agency will, by July 1, 2016, align its content standards for adult education with state-adopted challenging academic content standards, as adopted under section 1111(b)(1) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, as amended (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(1)).

With adoption of the Connecticut Core Standards (CCS), the new GED test, and the new Web-based National External Diploma Program (NEDP), the CSDE recognized the need to support a set of standards relevant to adult learners. Connecticut adopted the College and Career Readiness Standards (CCRS) for Adult Education released by the United States Department of Education Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). These content standards align closely with the CCS. In December 2014, Connecticut applied to the OCTAE and was selected for participation in the CCRS-in-Action project. Trainers participated in two workshops in Washington, DC, to be trained in the statewide implementation of standards. Connecticut has a policy that all adult education providers have their Adult Basic Education (ABE)/General Educational Development (GED) and Credit Diploma subject teachers trained in using the CCRS in their curriculum. Full implementation began July 1, 2017.

Connecticut has committed to use of the CCRS in all adult education classes. Since the submission of the State Plan in 2016, over 800 teachers completed the English Language Arts series and over 300 teachers completed the Math series. We continue to make training available for newly hired teachers and to provide training for lead teachers in alignment of resources and lesson review to the CCRS. Technical assistance is ongoing for this effort. Beginning in 2020, online courses with videos have been developed to ensure all teachers can access training.

Released October, 2016, the English Language Proficiency Standards (ELP Standards) are intended to address the urgent need for educational equity, access and rigor for adult English language learners (ELLs). The standards are essential to ensuring adult ELLs receive the focused and effective instruction they need to access states' academic content standards for college and career readiness. To that end, the ELP standards emphasize the academic language needed by adult ELLs to engage with and meet state-

adopted content standards. When the language demands inherent in state-adopted academic content standards are better understood, we can deliver more effective instruction to our adult ELLs. The ELPS were identified to help ensure that all adult ELLs can obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and self-sufficiency. Connecticut now requires ESL curriculum and instruction to be aligned with the ELP standards, which are derived from the CCRS.

Training in the English Language Proficiency Standards has been ongoing for English language teachers since 2017. Multiple sessions have been held to introduce ESL instructors to the standards. In 2020, ELP Standards sessions were recorded and are available to all Connecticut teachers virtually, in addition to regular training sessions in standards implementation. In 2021, eight Connecticut ESL teachers participated in a multi-week Standards-in-Action 2.0 “Implementing Standards-Based Instruction for English Learners” training sponsored by OCTAE. Beginning March 2022, six Math teachers and seven English Language Arts teachers will participate in Standards-in-Action 2.0 “State Based Curriculum Review” training.

### **(b) Local Activities**

Describe how the state will, using the considerations specified in Section 231(e) of the Workforce Investment Opportunity Act (WIOA), fund each eligible provider to establish or operate programs that provide any of the following adult education and literacy activities identified in Section 203 of the WIOA, including programs that provide such activities concurrently. The Unified or Combined State Plan must include at a minimum the scope, content, and organization of these local activities.

#### **Adult Education and Literacy Activities (Section 203 of the WIOA)**

- Adult education;
- Literacy;
- Workplace adult education and literacy activities;
- Family literacy activities;
- English language acquisition activities;
- Integrated English literacy and civics education;
- Workforce preparation activities; or
- Integrated education and training that
  - Provides adult education and literacy activities, concurrently and contextually with both workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.
  - Is for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

The State of Connecticut will award multi-year grants to eligible providers through a Request for Proposals (RFP) process to enable providers to develop, implement and improve adult education and literacy activities. To ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers, the CSDE will publish a Notice of Availability in all major newspapers throughout the state and post the notice on the Web page of the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE), as well as the Web page of our core partners, the Connecticut Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), and the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL). The RFP will be e-mailed to all local education agencies (LEAs), higher education institutions, and to current and past providers included on a master list, which includes: community-based organizations; regional educational service centers (RESCs); housing authorities; volunteer organizations; the Connecticut Department of Corrections (DOC); other correctional facilities and institutions; and to all providers and Workforce Development Boards (WDBs). A bidders’ conference will be publicly advertised

with the Notice of Availability and will be held at a central location to provide answers to questions regarding appropriateness of proposed projects and application procedures.

Agencies that are eligible for funding through the CSDE, provided they have demonstrated effectiveness, may include: LEAs; community-based organizations or faith-based organizations; volunteer literacy organizations; institutions of higher education; public or private nonprofit agencies; libraries; public housing authorities; other nonprofit institutions that have the ability to provide adult education and literacy activities to eligible individuals; a consortium or coalition of the agencies, organizations, institutions, libraries or authorities described above; and a partnership between an employer and an entity described above.

Grants will be awarded to agencies that have demonstrated effectiveness in providing adult education and literacy activities to individuals who: have attained 17 years of age, are not enrolled or required to be enrolled in a secondary school under Connecticut state law; and who are basic skills deficient, do not have a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent, and have not achieved an equivalent level of education; or are an English language learner (ELL).

Local grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the requirements of the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) purposes outlined in the WIOA and have demonstrated effectiveness in: (1) assisting adults to become literate and obtain the knowledge and skills necessary for employment and economic self-sufficiency; (2) assisting adults who are parents or family members to becoming a full partner in the educational development of their children; (3) assisting adults in completing high school; (4) promoting transitions from adult education to postsecondary education and training through career pathways; (5) assisting immigrants and ELLs to improve reading, writing, math, speaking, and comprehensive skills in the English language; and acquiring an understanding of American government, individual freedom and responsibilities of citizenship.

The CSDE will make funding available to eligible providers in each of the five Service Delivery Areas (SDA) in Connecticut. The Department, in conjunction with each WDB, will assess SDA needs and WDB goals. Eligible providers will select the appropriate priority area when drafting and submitting the RFP to the CSDE. The RFP will be published for at least six-weeks to allow sufficient time between RFP distribution and proposal submission to the CSDE. RFPs will be evaluated by a review team comprised of interagency staff and experts in each priority area. Interagency participants will include representatives of the CSDE, the WDB, One-Stop partners, and Vocational Rehabilitation partners. The review team will evaluate each proposal using a standardized evaluation form based on required federal, state and regional criteria published in the RFP (including the considerations listed in the WIOA, Title II, Section 231). An internal edit check will be conducted by CSDE staff to ensure compliance with the requirements of Title II of the WIOA, all applicable laws and RFP criteria.

The CSDE will use the following process to distribute funds to approved applicants: not less than 82.5 percent of the grant funds shall be used to award grants and contracts under Section 231 of the WIOA and to carry out Section 225 of the WIOA (Programs for Corrections Education and Other Institutionalized Individuals); not more than 20 percent of such amount shall be available to carry out Section 225; not more than 12.5 percent of the grant funds shall be used to carry out State Leadership activities under Section 223 of the WIOA; and not more than 5 percent of the grant funds, or \$85,000, whichever is greater, shall be used for administrative expenses of the eligible agency. Using the evaluation criteria published in the RFP, proposal reviews will involve a standardized evaluation process which includes the following items: the eligible provider's response to RFP requirements; the accuracy of the itemized budget in meeting line-item limits and definitions; and the considerations listed in the WIOA, Title II, Section 231. The weight of each consideration in the evaluation process will be defined in the RFP. Evidence required to support each consideration listed below must be addressed.

All allowable costs for the federally funded Adult Basic Education program are defined in the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) Circular A-87. This document will be used to determine reasonableness, allowability and allocability of costs. All costs must be supported by source documentation.

Using the evaluation criteria published in the RFP, proposal reviews will involve a standardized evaluation process, which includes the following items: the eligible provider's response to RFP requirements; the accuracy of the itemized budget in meeting line item limits and definitions; the provision of adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities; workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster; and the considerations listed in the WIOA, Title II, Section 231(e) (listed below).

The weight of each consideration in the evaluation process will be defined in the RFP. Evidence required to support each consideration has been defined and is printed within parentheses with the corresponding consideration. The assessment of each grant application will involve an intense evaluation of the ability of the eligible provider to meet the literacy needs of the area and to comply with the expectations and statutes described within the WIOA. The review process and scoring rubric will consider the following 13 considerations:

1. The degree to which the eligible provider would be responsive to:
  - regional needs as identified in the local plan under the WIOA, Title II, Section 108 (as evidenced by a description of regional needs and how the applicant will be responsive to those needs); and
  - serving individuals in the community who were identified as most in need of adult education and literacy activities, including individuals with low literacy skills or who are ELLs (as evidenced by an objective statement of need accompanied by a recruitment and retention plan which targets these individuals).
2. The ability of the eligible provider to serve eligible individuals with disabilities, including eligible individuals with learning disabilities (as evidenced by an objective statement of need accompanied by a recruitment and retention plan which targets these individuals).
3. Past effectiveness of the eligible provider in improving the literacy of eligible individuals to meet state-adjusted levels of performance for the primary indicators of performance described in the WIOA, Title II, Section 116, especially with respect to eligible individuals with low literacy (as evidenced by meeting or exceeding performance measures based on documentation from the Connecticut Adult Reporting System (CARS) and annual reviews for previously funded providers, and as evidenced by comparable objective performance measures which demonstrate successful student outcomes for new eligible providers).
4. The extent to which the eligible provider demonstrates alignment between proposed activities and services and the strategy and goals of the local plan under the WIOA, Title II, Section 108, as well as the activities and services of the One-Stop partners (as evidenced by description of proposed activities and strategies and goals and how the provider plans to align them).
5. Whether the eligible provider's program is of sufficient intensity and quality; based on the most rigorous research available so that participants achieve substantial learning gains; and uses instructional practices that include the essential components of reading instruction (as evidenced by a program design suitable to achieve applicable performance measures—appropriateness of program design may be demonstrated by past performance of successful outcomes or documentation of a similar program design and associated outcomes).
6. Whether the eligible provider's activities, including whether reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, and English language acquisition instruction delivered by the eligible provider are based on best practices derived from the most rigorous research available and appropriate, including scientifically valid research and effective educational practice (as evidenced by program design and/or curriculum).

7. Whether the eligible provider's activities effectively use technology, services and delivery systems, including distance education in a manner sufficient to increase the amount and quality of learning and how such technology, services and systems lead to improved performance (as evidenced by program design and/or curriculum and the accessibility of hardware and software applications as appropriate).
8. Whether the eligible provider's activities provide learning in context, including through integrated education and training, so that an individual acquires the skills needed to transition to and complete postsecondary education and training programs, obtain and advance in employment leading to economic self-sufficiency, and to exercise the rights and responsibilities of citizenship (as evidenced by program design and/or curriculum which focus on skills needed for postsecondary education and training, the workplace and citizenship).
9. Whether the eligible provider's activities are delivered by well-trained instructors, counselors, and administrators who meet any minimum qualifications established by the state, where applicable, and who have access to high-quality professional development, including through electronic means (as evidenced by appropriate degrees, certifications and trainings).
10. Whether the eligible provider's activities coordinate with other available education, training and social service resources in the community, such as by establishing strong links with elementary schools and secondary schools, postsecondary educational institutions, institutions of higher education, local WDBs, One-Stop Centers, job training programs, social service agencies, business, industry, labor organizations, community-based organizations, nonprofit organizations, and intermediaries, for the development of career pathways (as evidenced by formal collaborations and the commitment of the provider to assess and address the literacy and non-literacy support services of participants).
11. Whether the eligible provider's activities offer flexible schedules and coordination with federal, state, and local support services (such as child care, transportation, mental health services and career planning) that are necessary to enable individuals, including individuals with disabilities or other special needs, to attend and complete programs (as evidenced by program schedules and documentation of support services available).
12. Whether the eligible provider maintains a high-quality information management system that has the capacity to report measurable participant outcomes (consistent with the WIOA, Title II, Section 116) and to monitor program performance (as evidenced by prior participation in or a commitment to participate in the eligible agency's Connecticut Competency System and Connecticut Adult Reporting System and to submit comprehensive, timely and accurate data).
13. Whether the local areas in which the eligible provider is located have a demonstrated need for additional English language acquisition programs and civics education programs (as evidenced by area demographic data) and Section 203 of the WIOA (the Adult Education and Literacy Activities).

The CSDE will require eligible providers receiving grant funding to carry out corrections education or education for other institutionalized individuals and use the grant funds to operate the following adult education programs/activities: ABE instruction is designed for adults seeking a high school diploma who are functioning below the secondary school level and lack the basic reading, writing and numeracy skills necessary to function effectively as workers, parents and citizens. Instruction can be individualized or offered in a classroom or a learning lab. Persons completing ABE are prepared to benefit from secondary level instruction.

ABE educational functioning levels are as follows:

- ABE Level 1
- ABE Level 2
- ABE Level 3

- ABE Level 4

**Adult Secondary Education (ASE)** Connecticut Adult Education offers three distinct pathways for adults to attain a high school diploma:

**1. Adult High School Credit Diploma (AHSCD):** The AHSCD program is a prescribed plan, process and structure for earning a required number of academic and elective credits. The provider must be an LEA or RESC. Credits toward a local diploma must be obtained through a prescribed plan. Each provider/town can enhance the basic AHSCD program but must adhere to the minimum state requirements: 1) use certified teachers and counselors; 2) adhere to CSDE requirements regarding assessment, enrollment, accountability and reporting; 3) meet required credit standards; and 4) ensure that a one credit course offers a minimum of 48 instructional hours. An adult who successfully completes the required credits of the AHSCD program is awarded a high school diploma by the providing LEA or RESC.

**2. General Educational Development (GED):** Adults who have not completed high school must demonstrate, through an examination, the attainment of academic skills and concepts normally acquired through completion of a high school program. Applicants for this examination must be at least 17 years of age and officially withdrawn from school for at least six months. Individuals who pass the GED Tests are awarded a Connecticut State High School Diploma. GED instructional programs, provided throughout the state in local school districts and a variety of other instructional sites, help individuals to prepare for this rigorous examination.

**3. National External Diploma Program (NEDP):** This program provides a secondary school credential designed for adults who have gained skills through life experiences and demonstrated competence in a particular job, talent or academic area. The NEDP is an online portfolio assessment program that offers no classroom instruction. An adult who successfully completes the portfolio assessment, as required, is awarded a high school diploma by the providing LEA or RESC.

Adult Secondary Education (ASE) programs must integrate functional life and employability skills into the curriculum, incorporate technology into the instructional process, and provide comprehensive counseling, transition and support services in collaboration with other community or human services organizations.

ASE educational functioning levels are as follows:

- ABE Level 5
- ABE Level 6

## **Workplace Adult Education and Literacy Activities**

Workforce Education Services Programs will provide workforce preparation skills, including literacy instruction, employability skills, career exploration and development, and links to employment, employment services and other options in order to respond to the evolving needs of the business community and promote individual self-sufficiency. Workforce readiness programs offer instruction to support transition to work, entry-level employment, and reentry into the workforce for unemployed individuals.

**Family Literacy Activities:** Family literacy activities are services that make sustainable improvements in the economic prospects for a family and better enable parents or family members to support their children's learning needs. Activities include the following: parent or family adult education and literacy activities that lead to readiness for postsecondary education or training, career advancement and economic self-sufficiency; interactive literacy activities between parents or family members and their children; training for parents or family members regarding how to be the primary teacher for their children and full

partners in the education of their children; parent literacy training that leads to economic self-sufficiency; and age-appropriate education to prepare children for success in school and life experiences. Family Literacy Services are to benefit the child, the parent and the community. Program services will focus on enabling parents to become full partners in the education of their children and provide workforce preparation. Services will be of sufficient intensity and duration to make sustainable changes in the family.

**English Language Acquisition Activities:** English language acquisition activities include programs of instruction that are designed to help eligible individuals who are English language learners achieve competence in reading, writing, speaking, and comprehension of the English language; and that lead to (1) the attainment of a secondary school diploma or its recognized equivalent and (2) transition to postsecondary education and training or employment.

Americanization/Citizenship programs include instruction designed for foreign-born adults who wish to become United States citizens. Persons completing this program are prepared to pursue citizenship through the prescribed process of the United States Citizenship and Immigration Services.

**English as a Second Language (ESL):** ESL instruction is designed for adults who have limited proficiency in the English language or whose native language is not English. ESL programs assist individuals to improve their English skills in listening, speaking, reading and writing in order to find or maintain employment, attain citizenship, become more involved with their children's schooling and make greater use of community resources. Instruction is provided in English as a unifying means of serving the broad ethnic diversity of limited English-speaking adults.

**Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE):** The term "integrated English literacy and civics education": means education services provided to ELLs who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation and may include workforce training.

IELCE programs must contain the following: contextualized instruction in literacy and English language acquisition, the rights and responsibilities of citizenship, naturalization procedures, civic participation and U.S. history and government; program design and goals that focus on preparing adults for employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency; curriculum focus on skills that will provide information and support in the skills necessary for the workplace; coordination with the local workforce system and activities provided in combination with integrated education/training (IET) activities; improvement of literacy skills including speaking, reading, writing and numeracy in order to provide learners with the skills to apply English and mathematics accurately and appropriately in a variety of home, community, workplace and academic settings; opportunities for experiential learning in which participants are actively engaged in community pursuits are included in the program design; utilization of research-based instructional models that have proven effective in teaching individuals to read, write and speak English effectively; collaboration with community agencies that offer services to limited English proficient populations; and embedding technology literacy into the core curriculum. Additional program activities directly related to the use of these funds include: participation in career pathways exploration and distance-learning activities that impact competence in the workplace; integration of various hand-held technologies into classroom work, including tablets and smart phones; creation of video oral histories; exposure to basic math vocabulary and interpretation of charts, tables and graphs; knowledge of the American education system with special focus on addressing the needs of families new to the U.S. school system; and cross-cultural perspectives, civic responsibility, democracy topics and independent projects.

Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education also provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce preparation activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster for the purpose of educational and career advancement.

Workforce Preparation Activities or Integrated Education and Training - The CSDE will continue to assist the DOL with expanding the development and implementation of the IET delivery model offering industry-recognized credentials. Adult Education programs will work with WDB areas to provide IET training to Jobs First Employment Service (JFES) clients who receive Temporary Family Assistance (TFA). Programs must demonstrate a commitment to provide appropriate support services to students enrolled in the integrated pathway program. These services may include, but are not limited to, tutoring or other academic supports, college navigation support, career planning, transportation assistance, and/or childcare.

Once grants are awarded, mid-year and year-end evaluative reports will require that program providers submit a current program profile, which will ensure that all projects have met the standards established by the eligible entity (CSDE) and that all goals have been achieved. Projects not meeting the established standards will be identified for the CSDE's intervention, which may include onsite technical assistance, a decrease in funding or the elimination of funding.

### **Special Rule**

Each eligible agency awarding a grant or contract under this section shall not use any funds made available under this title for adult education and literacy activities for the purpose of supporting or providing programs, services, or activities for individuals who are under the age of 16 (17 in Connecticut) and are enrolled or required to be enrolled in secondary school under State law, except that such agency may use such funds for such purpose if such programs, services, or activities are related to family literacy activities. In providing family literacy activities under this title, an eligible provider shall attempt to coordinate with programs and services that are not assisted under this title prior to using funds for adult education and literacy activities under this title for activities other than activities for eligible individuals

### **(c) Correctional Education and other Education of Institutionalized Individuals**

Describe how the state will establish and operate programs under Section 225 of the WIOA for correctional education and education of other institutionalized individuals, including how it will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, any of the following academic programs for:

- Adult education and literacy activities;
- Special education, as determined by the eligible agency;
- Secondary school credit;
- Integrated education and training;
- Career pathways;
- Concurrent enrollment;
- Peer tutoring; and
- Transition to re-entry initiatives and other post release services with the goal of reducing recidivism.

Each eligible agency using funds provided under programs for correctional education and other institutionalized individuals to carry out a program for criminal offenders within a correctional institution must give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.

The CSDE will reserve no more than 20 percent of its federal grant received under the WIOA to provide programs for correctional education and education for other institutionalized individuals as described in Section 225 of the Act. Funding under Section 225 will include the following correctional institutionalized settings: prisons, jail reformatories, detention centers, halfway houses, community-based rehabilitation centers or other similar institutions designed for the confinement or rehabilitation of criminal offenders. The CSDE shall also require that each eligible provider using grant funds under Section 225 to carry out a program for criminal offenders in a correctional institution shall give priority to serving individuals who are likely to leave the correctional institution within five years of participation in the program.

The CSDE shall require that each eligible provider use the grant funds to operate education programs as follows: Adult Basic Education (ABE); English Literacy Acquisition; and secondary school completion (Adult High School Diploma).

### **Corrections Education and other Institutionalized Individuals or Special Populations**

In addition to the institutionalized population, grantees may include programs for individuals with mental illness and referrals from the BRS, nontraditional populations impacted by incarceration, disabilities and homelessness. Projects not meeting the established standards will be identified for the CSDE's intervention, which may include onsite technical assistance, a decrease in funding or the elimination of funding.

#### **(d) Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education Program**

*Describe how the state will establish and operate Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education program under Section 243 of WIOA, for ELLs who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries.*

The CSDE will establish and operate IELCE programs as a part of its adult education program. The term "Integrated English literacy and civics education" means education services provided to ELLs who are adults, including professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers, and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction in literacy and English language acquisition and instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation, and may include workforce training.

Since the WIOA requires an intentional connection to the workplace, to careers and to the workforce system (employers, WDB, Chambers of Commerce, etc.) for IELCE programs, the CSDE will work with the DOL to expand its Integrated Education and Training (IET) model offering industry-recognized credentials to Integrated IELCE programs. Adult Education programs will work with WDBs in local workforce areas to provide assistance to local programs. The CSDE will hold meetings with grantees regarding the requirements of the program and provide mandatory professional development sessions for IELCE instructors and staff on integrating career awareness, workforce skills and career pathways. Eligible providers will design programs that deliver the activities under the WIOA including the integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers. Eligible providers must demonstrate their ability to prepare ELLs for unsubsidized employment in in-demand industries and occupations that lead to economic self-sufficiency, and how they will integrate the program with the local workforce development system to carry out the activities of the program.

*Describe how the state will fund, in accordance with the requirements of title II, subtitle C, an Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education (IELCE) program and how the funds will be used for the program.*

CSDE will issue an RFP for Integrated English Literacy and Civics Education. The RFP requires the following for funded programs: education services provided to ELLs who are adults, including

professionals with degrees and credentials in their native countries that enables such adults to achieve competency in the English language and acquire the basic and more advanced skills needed to function effectively as parents, workers and citizens in the United States. Such services shall include instruction on the rights and responsibilities of citizenship and civic participation and may include workforce training. For the purpose of educational and career advancement, IELCE also provides adult education and literacy activities concurrently and contextually with workforce readiness activities and workforce training for a specific occupation or occupational cluster.

IELCE programs must offer contextualized instruction in literacy and English language acquisition; the rights and responsibilities of citizenship; naturalization procedures; civic participation and U.S. history and government as essential components of the program and in addition, must address the following: program design and goals that focus on preparing adults for employment in in-demand industries and occupations that leads to economic self-sufficiency; curriculum focus that will provide information and support in the skills necessary for the workplace; coordination with the local workforce system and activities provided in combination with IET activities; improvement of literacy skills including speaking, reading, writing and numeracy in order to provide learners with the skills to apply English and mathematics accurately and appropriately in a variety of home, community, workplace and academic settings; and opportunities for experiential learning in which participants are actively engaged in community projects.

To ensure direct and equitable access for all eligible providers, the CSDE will publish a Notice of Availability in all major Connecticut newspapers and post the notice on the CSDE's web page as well as our partners' web pages. The RFP will be mailed to all current grant-funded providers and WDBs. A bidders' conference will be publicly advertised with the Notice of Availability and will be held at a central location to provide answers to questions regarding appropriateness of proposed projects and application procedures.

Local grants will be distributed based on the ability to meet the requirements of AEFLA Purposes outlined in the WIOA Section 243. The CSDE will make funding available to each of Connecticut's five designated local workforce areas. In conjunction with each WDB, the CSDE will help to assess local area needs and WDB goals.

The RFP will establish a minimum six-week turnaround time between RFP distribution and proposal submission to the CSDE. A review team comprised of interagency staff and experts in each priority area will evaluate proposals responding to the RFP. Interagency participants will include representatives of the CSDE, the WDB and One-Stop partners. The review team will evaluate each proposal using a standardized evaluation form based on required federal, state and regional criteria published in the RFP (including the considerations listed in Section 231 (e). Eligible providers must demonstrate in their application for funds the manner in which the program will be delivered in combination with integrated education and training activities. These activities can be provided directly or through collaboration with the WIOA or other community partners.

Once grants are awarded, mid-year and year-end evaluative reports will require that program providers submit a current program profile and appropriate National Reporting System tables of outcomes, which will ensure that all projects have met the standards established by the eligible entity (CSDE) and that all goals have been achieved. Projects not meeting the established standards will be identified for the CSDE's intervention, which may include on-site technical assistance, a decrease in funding or the elimination of funding.

### **(e) State Leadership**

*Describe how the state will use the funds to carry out the required State Leadership activities under Section 223 of the WIOA.*

*Description of Required Activities:*

1. The CSDE will work with other core programs and One-Stop partners to ensure that adult education and literacy activities are in alignment and to develop career pathways which provide access to employment and training services for individuals in adult education and literacy activities. The CSDE will collaborate with the DOL to assist local providers in partnering with One-Stop Centers to develop career pathways and provide access to employment and training services. Professional development will be provided to local programs, including orientation to adult education programs and services for One-Stop partners and other agencies.

The CSDE will ensure that training and technical assistance will address meeting regional needs and demonstrating alignment between proposed activities and services with core partners. It will also assist local programs in becoming familiar with the regional/state plan to determine how it affects their programs. The CSDE will also work with local programs to establish stronger linkages with partners such as local schools, WDBs, One Stop centers, and job training programs.

2. Connecticut has instituted high quality professional development programs to improve instruction. Training will be provided related to the specific needs of adult learners and information about models and promising practices will be disseminated.

To enhance program quality and ensure continued progress in meeting the Core and Additional Indicators of Performance, the CSDE shall award one or more grants to eligible providers to deliver State Leadership activities, primarily professional development activities, with funds made available under this subtitle. In order to meet the various needs of our state, the CSDE may enter into partnerships with other states and/or the federal government in order to collaboratively fund projects that will meet individual needs and accomplish common goals. The CSDE shall not use more than 12.5 percent of the funds awarded under this subtitle for State Leadership activities. The CSDE will deliver a majority of its State Leadership and professional development services through the Adult Training and Development Network (ATDN). The CSDE's professional development model supports the implementation of the goals of Connecticut's Adult Education State Plan and consists of professional development basics and activities related to the implementation of career pathways.

3. The CSDE will provide technical assistance to local grantees in: the development and dissemination of instructional and programmatic practices based on scientifically valid research, available and appropriate, in reading, writing, speaking, mathematics, English language acquisition, distance education, staff training and content standards; the role of eligible providers as a one-stop partner to provide access to employment, education, and training services; and assistance in the use of technology, including staff training, to eligible providers, especially the use of technology to improve system efficiencies. Although providers find serving students with low literacy skills, who are ELL, or individuals with disabilities, including learning disabilities, as their strength, providers need assistance with curriculum materials and teaching strategies/best practices for students who are non-literate in their native language and with developing a scope and sequence curriculum for low level literacy skills and individuals with disabilities.

In addition to providing more resources for math instruction, the CSDE will also provide technical assistance in serving adults with special learning needs and disabilities, including disability awareness sessions, resource and instructional materials, accommodation and instruction planning workshops, train-the-trainer sessions, referral information, and telephone consultation concerning program issues.

4. The CSDE will conduct program monitoring and evaluation to ensure compliance with federal and state funding requirements and to determine the effectiveness of programs in meeting the needs of the adult population and will disseminate information about models and proven or promising practices within the state. The CSDE has in place a data reporting system for each local provider, LACES. The LACES system can measure performance outcomes. The CSDE has developed a formalized follow-up and reporting process to report on the core indicators of obtaining or retaining employment and entering postsecondary education according to the National Reporting System requirements. The follow-up and reporting process includes data sharing with other state agencies, including the DOL wage information

system. The CSDE will participate in the statewide data system, which will assist the CSDE in working seamlessly with other partners while protecting the privacy rights of individuals. To provide the core service of performance and cost information for the WIOA, Title II, Section 231 providers to the One-Stop system, the eligible agency will develop a report which includes each program's success in meeting the state-adjusted levels of performance. This data will assist potential clients in identifying an appropriate adult education or literacy program in the local area.

*Description of Permissible Activities:*

1. The CSDE will provide training and technical assistance to local programs in technology applications, translation technology and distance education, including professional development to support the use of instructional technology. Training and technology assistance to local programs in technology applications, especially in the area of Web-based communication (social media, phone apps, etc.) will be provided, as well as assistance in finding access to computers.
2. The CSDE will develop and disseminate curricula, including literacy curricula combined with the College and Career Readiness Standards where reading comprehension is tied to prior knowledge and is a critical component in the classroom and workplace. The dimensions prioritize cultivating students' knowledge base through reading and writing about content-rich material.
3. The CSDE will develop content and models for integrated education and training and career pathways. Connecticut Competency System (CCS) training sessions will be offered to both adult education and the workforce development community. The CCS is an integral part of the CSDE's career pathways, standards-based framework utilizing the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment Systems (CASAS) to connect curriculum, assessment, and instruction that is able to capture progress made by adult education learners.
4. The CSDE will provide assistance to eligible providers in developing and implementing programs that achieve the objectives of this title, including meeting the state-adjusted levels of performance. The CSDE will provide technical assistance in implementing the CCS for appraisal, instruction and assessment in a life-skills and an employability context, including new teacher training, CCS Facilitator training, and One-Stop partner staff training, as well as the ordering and dissemination of CASAS curricula materials used in conjunction with the Connecticut Competency System. The LACES system will collect student demographic, attendance, assessment and outcome information for each student in the adult education program. The LACES system generates statewide and local demographic and performance assessment reports used for program planning, management and accountability. Data from the system allows the State to assess the effectiveness of local programs by measuring performance outcomes.
5. The CSDE will continue to partner with community colleges and other institutions of higher learning to assist adults to transition to postsecondary education and training. Training and technical assistance will be provided on effective methods of transitioning students. The CSDE will ensure that training and technical assistance will be provided, especially in areas such as employer engagement, the institution of career counselor position, and/or enhanced job responsibilities for current staff emphasizing transitions. The CSDE will also provide assistance in the implementation of training programs that assist adults in obtaining economic self-sufficiency.
6. The CSDE will work with the DOL to expand its I-BEST delivery model offering industry-recognized credentials to IELCE programs. Training and technical assistance will be provided to local grantees for the integration of literacy and English language instruction. CSDE will provide activities for the integration of literacy and English language instruction with occupational skill training, including promoting linkages with employers. The CSDE will assist local programs by sharing effective models, assisting local programs in engaging employers, and how to partner successfully with other agencies to place students in employment.

7. The CSDE will provide technical assistance and training to promote workplace adult education and literacy activities by identifying curriculum frameworks and aligning rigorous content standards that specify what adult learners should know and be able to do in the areas of reading and language arts, mathematics, and English language acquisition; and taking into consideration the following: 1. State-adopted academic standards. 2. The current adult skills and literacy assessments used in the state or outlying area. 3. The primary indicators of performance described in the WIOA, Title II, Section 116. 4. Standards and academic requirements for enrollment in non-remedial, for-credit courses in postsecondary educational institutions or institutions of higher education supported by the state.

CCRS have been incorporated into all workshops in math, reading and writing. Working with ELA students in the area of workplace training is still needed. The CSDE will work with local programs to identify a variety of curricula for workplace training.

8. The CSDE will develop and pilot strategies for improving teacher quality and retention. Training staff will provide sessions on learning styles and needs, facilitating adult learning, planning for instruction, and monitoring student progress.

9. The CSDE will assist in the development and implementation of programs and services to meet the needs of adult learners – English learners and those with learning disabilities. Connecticut will continue to be a member of the New England Literacy Resource Center, part of World Education. The membership provides professional development for teachers and administrators on evidence-based practices; on college and career readiness, ESL instruction, learner persistence, using curriculum standards, integrating technology in instruction, program design and management.

#### **(f) Assessing Quality**

*Describe how the eligible agency will assess the quality of providers of adult education and literacy activities under title II and take actions to improve such quality, including providing the activities described in section 223(a)(1)(B) of the WIOA.*

Targets: Each fiscal year, the CSDE negotiates proposed target percentages for each of the core indicators of performance with the U.S. Department of Education Office of Career, Technical and Adult Education (OCTAE). Each local eligible program is responsible for meeting or exceeding the negotiated performance targets. Each program shall analyze progress towards meeting the targets on an ongoing basis. Each program must utilize the approved standardized assessments that provide the framework needed to measure program effectiveness.

Central to the evaluation process is an assessment of performance measures established by CSDE to focus on continual progress, successful completion of the program area, and successful transition to a next step of employment, postsecondary education, or occupational training. For example, CSDE's performance measures for secondary completion programs focus on interim student progress by requiring providers to report on the number of students who pass one or more subsections of the GED practice test, earn one or more credits toward an adult high school diploma, or complete four or more competency areas of the NEDP and requiring them to report on the number of students who earn a diploma or its recognized equivalent. Incorporating this performance measure into the evaluation process will ensure that the eligible agency and local provider assess each student's progress toward program completion and analyze significant changes indicated by this interim progress indicator.

The CSDE has also developed four Additional Indicators of Program Performance that require providers to address all aspects of program operation: recruitment, curriculum and instruction, support services and professional development. These additional indicators ensure that programs will focus on long-term planning for program development and community responsiveness rather than focusing solely on current year issues and achievements. These indicators also ensure that adult education providers develop learner and community-responsive programs and curricula so they can become an integral part of the local education system as it works toward lifelong learning and self-sufficiency for all community members,

especially those most in need of literacy services. Core and additional Indicators of Performance will become a focal point for annual and onsite monitoring reviews and the basis for formative evaluation.

## **Monitoring and Evaluation**

To improve the quality and effectiveness of adult education programs, the CSDE will conduct two evaluation processes: an annual desk audit for all providers, and an onsite monitoring evaluation for selected providers.

### **Onsite Monitoring**

Each year, an onsite monitoring evaluation will be conducted for a minimum of 25 percent of federally funded adult education programs to determine the effectiveness of adult education and literacy programs and activities. All newly funded programs will be monitored, as will all programs that had noncompliance or RFP requirement issues during the previous year's monitoring. These

evaluations shall, at a minimum, consist of assessing the following areas: a) Compliance with all applicable laws and RFP guidelines, including ADA 504 and Section 427 GEPA; b) Program management and operations, including scheduling and locations, as well as staff credentials; c) Outreach, recruitment and retention practices, including individuals with multiple barriers to education; d) Curriculum and instruction and use of technology; e) Support services including counseling and transition services; f) Professional development opportunities; g) Student intake, assessment and documentation procedures; h) Documentation of the program's ability to assist adults in gaining employment, achieving self-sufficiency, and/or developing family literacy practices; i) Documentation of the program's progress in meeting the performance measures set for each applicable Core Indicator of Performance; j) Documentation of the program's ability to meet the Additional Indicators of Program Quality.

Written reports of the onsite monitoring will be given to programs monitored. During the visit, local programs will have to submit a corrective action plan for any deficiencies noted. The CSDE will observe classes and talk with teachers and program staff to determine if ideas from professional development are being implemented.

### **Desk Monitoring**

For the annual desk audit review, each provider will submit an assessment of Performance Measures and individual program goals, as well as an annual expenditure report including all relevant fiscal records to facilitate an effective audit. Each program will also be required to submit data containing all program and student information stored in CARS, including demographic, assessment and outcome data for each student enrolled. If a local program does not meet its outcome measures, it must complete a corrective action plan outlining how to make necessary improvements.

### **Professional Development**

The CSDE will provide professional development to local programs to improve program quality. Instruction will be designed to (1) improve instruction in the essential components of reading instruction; (2) instruction related to the specific needs of adult learners; (3) instruction provided by volunteers or paid personnel; and (4) dissemination of information about models and promising practices. Participants will be asked to evaluate the training sessions to determine if the sessions fit their needs. Changes are made to future workshops based on those evaluations. Onsite monitoring and evaluation of local instructional practices will be completed to determine if professional development is being implemented.

The CSDE will provide performance outcome targets and meet the expected levels of performance demonstrated by Measurable Skill Gains (MSG) for adult education and literacy activities authorized under Title II for the period of July 1, 2020, through June 30, 2024. The CSDE will meet the U.S.

Department of Education proposed target percentages for each given year to reflect programs' progress toward continuous improvement in performance.

## Racial Equity in Adult Education

The events surrounding the death of George Floyd coupled with the disproportionate effect of the COVID 19 pandemic on immigrant and communities of color made it imperative for adult education to address racial equity. ESL students represent slightly more than 50% of Connecticut's adult education population, with 56% Hispanic/Latino and 17% Black students also represented). To address that, the CSDE formed a Racial Equity Taskforce in the fall of 2020. The Taskforce meets regularly to discuss topics to be shared with adult education directors.

The vision of the Racial Equity Taskforce is that:

- all adult education staff will engage in self-examination and concrete actions to reduce bias in their organizations as a demonstration of their commitment to and recognition of the work we all need to do on the journey to racial equity and justice
- adult education programs will strive to eliminate racial bias and promote social justice within their programs.
- The work of the Racial Equity Taskforce is to:
- guide all adult education staff members in reflection about what they have been taught to believe about the world and their own race.
- begin the process of self-examination by all adult education leaders, teachers, and support staff in order to recognize the work that needs to be done on the journey to racial equity and social justice.
- provide activities and discussions that lead to concrete actions which reduce bias and inequities in adult education organizations, including but not limited to changes in both curriculum, materials and discussions with students at each program level.

To reach these goals and objectives, the Racial Equity Taskforce meets on a regular basis to discuss and plan activities for the monthly directors' meetings. Directors meet each month to discuss progress with incorporating the work in their programs, learn more about the effect of racism and receive support, share resources and work to further the stated goals and objectives and have done so since November of 2020. The Racial Equity Taskforce is currently planning for summer activities. This work will be ongoing.

## IX. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Specific Requirements (General)

### (a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council (General)

*All agencies, except for those that are independent consumer-controlled commissions, must describe the following:*

*Input provided by the State Rehabilitation Council, including input and recommendations on the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, recommendations from the Council's report, the review and analysis of consumer satisfaction, and other Council reports that may have been developed as part of the Council's functions; (General)*

The mission of the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) is to provide assessment, advice and recommendations to the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS or the Bureau) and others regarding coordination and effectiveness of programs and strategies that promote community-based competitive employment for persons with disabilities. The SRC maintains an ongoing collaboration with BRS. The SRC is comprised of volunteers, many of whom are current or former vocational rehabilitation (VR) consumers or family members of VR consumers. They are appointed by the Governor to review and assess the effectiveness and delivery of vocational rehabilitation services provided for individuals with disabilities who are seeking employment.

The SRC has participated in the following endeavors:

- Development of the BRS State Plan updates.
- National Council of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) Teleconferences;
- SRC Meetings (six per year);
- Reviewed the 722 Report regarding Administrative Hearing Outcomes;
- Participated in the 2018 Public Meeting;
- Revised Consumer Manual;
- Participated in the CSNA process;

### ***WIOA***

In July 2014, Congress passed the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) to unify the state programs that provide employment services. This bill established some significant changes to the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program. BRS Director David Doukas continues to inform the SRC of program changes and implementation of various requirements of the WIOA regulations. The SRC has worked to better understand WIOA requirements and has offered feedback related to changes being proposed and implemented upon employment services for people with disabilities. The SRC also began to contribute to the development of new policies, both as they relate to new WIOA requirements, and changes in the delivery of certain services. David continues to be transparent to the SRC on all aspects of VR and has a strong relationship with the SRC.

### ***BRS Public Meetings***

BRS and the SRC hosted a public meeting in September 2018 to review VR implementation of Order of Selection and also to review the updated VR Policy Manual. Consumers, their families, community rehabilitation providers and others interested in the VR program were invited to review the draft of Order of Selection criteria and the Policy Manual.

### ***SRC Recommendations to BRS***

**Recommendation 1:** The SRC recommends BRS strengthen communication between counselors and consumers, particularly with Pre-ETS (Level Up), transferring to an adult counselor. In addition, the SRC would like to see expectations of staff regarding response time to consumer follow up. The SRC is interested in reviewing outlines and procedures to determine how consumer cases are transferred to new counselors and consumer follow up.

The SRC would like the following information:

- A. What is the process and protocol for procedures related to Pre-ETS (Level Up)?
- B. What is the timeline for follow up once a referral for services has been made?
- C. What is the process for transferring to adult VR services and what is the transition process? What is the impact on the age change from 21 to 22?

**Recommendation 2:** The SRC has a continued interest in the progress and outcomes of BRS multi state agency collaborative agreements including: The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), the Department of Developmental Services (DDS)/ American Job Centers (AJC) and Department of Labor (DOL) collaborative outcomes.

**Recommendation 3:** The SRC would like semi-annual updates on the effectiveness of Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP) to determine if the number of vendors and scope of existing contracts results in an effective service delivery model. Specific information outlining services provided for consumers with communication barriers is requested. Continue to ensure that CRP's have the capacity to support the consumers they serve such as with communication barriers.

**Recommendation 4:** Pre-ETS (Level Up), report on the implementation of Level up including the current status of the program and any future adjustment planned to better serve the community.

The SRC also requests semi-annual updates on the production and outcomes of the Level Up program.

**Recommendation 5:** The SRC requests information on the Order of Selection and asks to be included in discussions in the continuation of and/or the removal of this.

**Recommendation 6:** The SRC recommends that BRS expand the number of Industry Specific Training Programs that will result in the recruitment and employment of more VR consumers. The SRC also recommends that the Bureau's relationship with ISTP host employers be leveraged to provide work-based learning opportunities within those industries. The SRC contends that this will provide Pre-ETS (Level Up) students exposure to a pathway for training and employment post-graduation.

**Recommendation 7:** The SRC would like to encourage BRS to contract with Community Rehabilitation Provider's to perform outreach activities with the goal of expanding the VR program's referral base of consumers. It is recommended that this can be accomplished by offering a competitive rate structure to perform any applicable new services required.

**Recommendation 8:** The SRC recommends that BRS continue to provide in-person client services to the amount needed to meet the individual needs of its consumers.

**Recommendation 9:** The SRC recommends that BRS continue to utilize and expand upon its remote service capabilities. Remote services should continue to be offered whenever appropriate, based upon on the consumers preference, goals or needs.

*The Designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; (General)*

Outlined below is the designated state unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations.

BRS Response 1: BRS agrees with these recommendations and is willing to provide written policies and procedures pertaining to the Level Up program to the SRC. We would also welcome the opportunity to present these policies and procedures at a future SRC meeting.

See below for additional responses:

- Students potentially eligible for Vocational Rehabilitation Services ages 16-21 who currently have an IEP, 504 Plan or documented disability and are connected to a secondary or post-secondary education program may participate in Pre-ETS (Level Up) services. To get started, interested students can speak to their designated high school personnel or contact the Level Up Supervisor to get more information and connect to a counselor. The best time to connect to services is two years prior to high school graduation. Level Up Counselors can consult on cases that are not open if special circumstances are present.
- Level Up services are provided directly by Level Up Counselors or through contracted community rehabilitation providers. These services can take place on and off school grounds and during, or after school hours. When a student enters their final year of high school, the Level Up Counselor will speak to the student to determine if they are interested in applying for Vocational Rehabilitation Services. If the student is interested, the Level Up Counselor will assist the student with the application process.
- Level Up staff follow the agency guidance on getting back to consumers within 48-72 hours unless counselors are out of the office on vacation or unexpectedly out of the office in which case the counselor will notify their supervisor for required follow-up.
- The transfer process has been moved up this year. Level Up (LU) Cases are already in process of moving to adult services. Typically, all LU VRCs have a conversation with LU consumers and their families (if they are involved) and talk about adult services-- specifically how to apply, the eligibility criteria and what services the program offers. If a LU Consumer is interested in applying, then the case is transferred to an adult counselor. Cases are assigned to the office of the consumer's choice and based on caseload size, adult school liaisons list and counselor availability.

BRS Response 2: BRS continues to maintain Memoranda of Understanding/Agreement (MOU/A) and active, robust partnerships with various state agencies. We are committed to routinely sharing information about these collaborations and will continue to do so.

BRS Response 3: BRS routinely analyzes this information and is willing to provide it as requested.

BRS Response 4: BRS agrees to provide semi-annual status updates concerning the Level Up program. There are several changes planned for FFY 20 and this will be communicated to the SRC.

BRS Response 5: As discussed in subsequent sections of this State Plan it is the Bureau's intention to remove Order of Selection effective July 1, 2020. The SRC has already been notified of this change and will be included in future planning.

BRS Response 6: BRS continues to remain committed to engaging with businesses. The Connect-Ability Staffing Solutions (CASS) responsible for business outreach and development throughout Connecticut has expanded their capacity. We are hopeful that more business connections and more employment opportunities will be achieved for VR consumers. We agree with the SRC recommendation to approach ITSP host employers to facilitate work-based learning opportunities for Pre-ETS (Level Up) consumers.

BRS Response 7: BRS agrees to pursue contracting with CRPs to perform outreach activities with the goal of expanding its referral base of consumers. It is agreed that a competitive rate structure will be necessary for CRPs to engage in providing this service in a sustainable manner.

BRS Response 8: BRS agrees to continue to provide in-person client services to the amount needed to meet the individual needs of its consumers.

BRS Response 9: BRS agrees to continue to provide remote services whenever appropriate, based upon on the consumers preference, goals or needs.

*2. The Designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations. (General)*

The Designated State unit did not reject any of the Council's input or recommendations.

**(b) Request for Waiver of State wideness**

*When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the Designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:*

*A local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;*

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is not requesting a Waiver of Statewideness.

*The Designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and*

Not applicable.

*All State plan requirements will apply*

*Requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.*

Not applicable.

**(c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System.**

*Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:*

*Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;*

BRS has Memoranda of Agreement (MOA) and Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the following entities:

- Social Security Administration: Information Exchange Agreement to receive data regarding consumers' work history.
- The Connecticut Department of Veterans' Affairs MOU enables collaboration of services for veterans.
- The Charter Oak MOA enables BRS to continue to host and offer the Connect-Ability Distance Learning Initiative (DLI) which provides over 50 free online e-learning modules for job seekers with disabilities, employers, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRP), vocational rehabilitation staff and others. One module is specific to Career Counseling for sub-minimum wage employees in Connecticut. Modules are accessible and some are available in Spanish and/or American Sign Language. BRS also uses the DLI as a training registration platform for VR staff trainings.
- The Department of Social Services (DSS) MOA enables ADS/BRS to receive select administrative supports and access to information systems, applications and networks from DSS.
- The Mashantucket Pequot Tribal Nation (MPTN) MOU enables collaboration and coordination of vocational rehabilitation services with the 121 program.
- Through the Secure Jobs Connecticut Pilot, a Letter of Agreement enables BRS and the Departments of Education (SDE), Housing (DOH), Labor (DOL), and Social Services (DSS) to collaborate with the Community Foundation for Greater New Haven, the Connecticut Coalition to End Homelessness, the Connecticut Women's Education and Legal Fund, Fairfield County's Community Foundation, the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, the Liberty Bank Foundation, the Melville Charitable Trust, the Office of Early Childhood, the Partnership for Strong Communities, the United Way of Greater New Haven, and the United Way of CT to end

homelessness by 2015 for Veterans, 2016 for those experiencing chronic homelessness, and by 2022 for families with children and youth.

- BRS executes Student Internship Agreements with colleges and universities to train students in various aspects of vocational rehabilitation and closely related fields. Current universities under such agreements include: Central Connecticut State University, University of Maine-Farmington, and University of North Carolina-Charlotte. BRS has recently sunset an existing agreement with the University of Alabama.
- BRS has executed an MOU with the Department of Labor (DOL) which enables the exchange of client information for the purposes of federal reporting and performance accountability under WIOA Legislation. BRS client records are matched to DOL's Unemployment Compensation Database enabling BRS to report on consumers employed during the 2nd and 4th quarters post exit, as well as the median earnings in the 2nd quarter post exit. In addition, this MOU enables the exchange of information related to program involvement among all participating WIOA partners, and a centralized location for the development of WIOA Unique ID's.
- BRS has executed a 3-way MOU with the Department of Social Services (DSS) and the Department of Labor (DOL) for the exchange of client records necessary for BRS to process cost reimbursement cases with the Social Security Administration (SSA). Under this agreement, BRS is able to run a batch file process with DSS. A resultant file is generated by DSS using DOL Unemployment Compensation data to assist BRS with identifying cases that qualify for cost reimbursement through The Social Security Administration (SSA).
- The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) MOU enables coordinated vocational employment services for people with intellectual disabilities to minimize overlap of resources.
- The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) MOA enables BRS to partially fund a shared position to improve service delivery and collaboration for consumers of both programs.
- Customized Employment (CE) Services are in response to the requirements of the Federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) and will necessitate an MOU with the Department of Developmental Services, the Connecticut State Department of Education. Customized Employment comprises a set of services designed to ensure that the employment seeker is the primary driver of the outcome received. CE is best used to meet the needs of employment seekers with disabilities who have not been or are unlikely to be successful with traditional, demand-side employment.
- BRS and the Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) are finalizing a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) to facilitate their shared commitment to the coordination and timely provision of necessary transition services for youth with disabilities in Connecticut. SDE, in collaboration with the State Educational Resource Centers (SERC) will assist in the provision and coordination of required Pre-ETS (Level Up) to improve post-school outcomes of students with disabilities ages 16 to 22, in the areas of competitive employment, postsecondary education and independent living skills through the provision of statewide services. This MOA ended in February 2021.
- BRS and the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) are completing an MOU that will facilitate the electronic provision of data to assist in determining eligibility of businesses who have applied for the Work Opportunity Tax Credit (WOTC) Program and have hired individual consumers of BRS services. The federal WOTC Program, administered by DOL, is designed to encourage employers to hire individuals who have consistently had the most difficulty in securing employment by giving federal tax credits to employers.
- BRS entered into an MOU with Central Connecticut State University to develop a comprehensive needs assessment in 2020, which will be completed in 2022. BRS is awaiting results.

- BRS has an executed MOU with the State Department of Education (SDE) to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from the receipt of educational services in school to the receipt of vocational rehabilitation (VR) services, including Pre-ETS (Level Up). The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Rehabilitation Act of 1973 as amended by the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) require interagency cooperation for accomplishing transition preparation, planning, and implementation relating to coordination of special services to children and youth.

*State programs carried out under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998;*

The Bureau of Rehabilitation Services is the “lead agency” for the Connecticut Assistive Technology (AT) Act Program, therefore a MOA is not needed. The Program Director for the AT Act program serves in the role of AT Consultant to the VR program and a strong relationship exists. The AT Act program operates an AT device lending service specifically for VR consumers. The Program Director provides AT demonstrations when needed and assists VR consumers in participating in reuse activities. Additionally, VR consumers are able to utilize the alternate financing program operated by the AT Act program to assist in paying for needed devices that the VR program may not be able to provide, such as vehicles, which can then be modified by the VR program.

The following are formal agreements that have been established to provide activities under Section 4 of the AT Act:

- The State Education Resource Center (SERC) MOU enables SERC to provide Assistive Technology device demonstrations and loans primarily to educators, other school personnel, family members and students.
- The Southern Connecticut State University MOA enables laptops and iPads with specific software to be loaned to CT K–12 schools for up to four months to allow students to try devices before they are purchased.
- Department of Labor MOA allowed us to establish Assistive Technology device demonstration centers at two American Job Centers (AJC) in CT, allowing AJC customers to borrow the devices while they participate in AJC services, as well as allow employers to borrow the devices for their employees with disabilities.

*Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the United States Department of Agriculture;*

None.

*Noneducational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and*

None.

*State use contracting programs.*

The Office of the Attorney General MOA enables review and approval of Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) contracts and legal representation at Administrative Hearings for consumers.

The Office of the State Comptroller MOU provides approval and processing of expenses for consumers and staff.

The Department of DMHAS – provides access to central contracting unit which aids the program for developing and implementing all contracts.

#### **(d) Coordination with Education Officials**

*Describe:*

*Designated State Unit's plans*

*The Designated State Unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including Pre-ETS (Level Up), as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of Individualized Plans for Employment (IPE'S) for the students.*

BRS continues to collaborate with the State Department of Education (SDE) and a number of entities to implement pre-employment transition services including the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice, the Northeast Transition Group, Transition Task Force, and CT-AHEAD/Higher Education Schools.

BRS collaborates with education administrators to sign a referral protocol yearly. With implementation of WIOA, 10 VR pre-employment transition service Pre-ETS (Level Up) counselors were assigned to provide Pre-ETS (Level Up) exclusively with students with disabilities.

SDE and BRS have staff that serve on each other's advisory committees (Transition Task Force and Level Up Committee). Program staff attends common training regarding the Individualized Education Plan (IEP), secondary transition services and WIOA. SDE and BRS collaborated to develop a statewide CT Transition Community of Practice (COP) with a broad stakeholder base as a single portal for transition resource development, professional development, and interagency collaboration. SDE and BRS initiated statewide strategic planning with agencies, school districts, families and other stakeholders.

Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State Department of Education (SDE) includes the following:

- BRS has expanded focus to include both Level Up Committee and Transition Committee to focus on service delivery for students enrolled in high school and also collaborated with the State Department of Education (SDE) and a number of entities to implement pre-employment transition services including the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice, Transition Task Force, and CT-AHEAD/Higher Education Schools.

*Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:*

The responsibilities of BRS under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

- Collaborate with the SDE in coordinating, providing, and documenting the provision of Pre-ETS (Level Up) to students with disabilities;
- Provide vocational rehabilitation services to students and youth who meet the eligibility criteria of BRS;
- Work with the Local Education Authorities (LEA) to make the best effort to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) for each student eligible for adult VR services before the student leaves the school setting;
- Provide consultation and technical assistance to aid LEA in planning for the transition of eligible students;
- Coordinate with the SDE for training and technical assistance regarding transitioning youth with disabilities and interagency service linkages, including but not limited to, presenting at statewide events and supporting the statewide transition website of the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice (COP);
- Satisfy the documentation requirements of section 511 of WIOA and 34 C.F.R. 397 for students with disabilities who seek subminimum wage from employers who hold special wage certificates under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 214 (c), including the provision of documentation of notice that Pre-ETS (Level Up) were available to that individual under 34 C.F.R. 361.48, documentation of an application for vocational rehabilitation services and the result thereof, and,

if the individual was found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services, documentation that the individual had an IPE, was unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the IPE, and had a closed case record meeting the requirements of 34 C.F.R. 361.47;

- Collaborate with the SDE to provide trainings to schools about Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) careers and Customized Employment for youth with disabilities;
- Provide a VR staff member to participate on or support the SDE Transition Taskforce, the Connecticut Transition COP; the BRS Level Up meetings, and
- Satisfy the career counseling and information and referral requirements of WIOA, including its documentation requirements, for each youth with a disability who seeks, or obtains, subminimum wage employment.

The responsibilities of SDE under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

- Provide general supervision of the implementation of the IDEA's requirements for special education and related services to ensure a free appropriate public education for children and youth with disabilities;
- Collaborate with BRS to coordinate, provide, and document the provision of Pre-ETS (Level Up) to students with disabilities;
- Facilitate partnerships between BRS and LEA, including the identification of a contact person in each organization, as mutually identified by the parties, to facilitate communication;
- Collaborate with BRS and LEA to develop new Pre-ETS (Level Up) services;
- Assist BRS with training schools about STEM careers and customized employment for youth with disabilities;
- Assure that IEPs developed by LEA for youth with disabilities aged 16 or over include plans for the provision of educationally-related "transition services" as defined in 34 C.F.R. 361.22(b)(4) and 34 C.F.R. 300.43. Educationally-related transition services shall also include such activities identified by the LEA as are based on the child's needs, consider the child's preferences, and are designed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including employment;
- For each student with a disability with an IEP or Section 504 Accommodation Plan that the LEA has reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE shall assure that LEA document the provision of transition services in accordance with the documentation requirements of 34 C.F.R. 397.30(b)(1), including, at a minimum, the child's name, a description of the service or activity completed, the dated signature of the responsible educational official documenting the completion of the required service or activity, and the dated signature of the responsible educational official who transmits the documentation of the provision of transition services to BRS upon the request of BRS;
- For each student with a disability that the LEA has reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE shall assure that LEA transmit documentation of the provision of educationally related transition services to BRS by June 15 of the year in which the youth exits the school system. Such transmission of documentation to BRS shall include a cover sheet identifying the transmitted documentation that has been provided and shall be made in a manner that ensures confidentiality in accordance with the requirements of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act;
- Collaborate with BRS to disseminate information about and train school personnel on how to coordinate services for students with disabilities as they transition to life after high school, including those students interested in supported, subminimum wage, or other employment in compliance with WIOA;

- Coordinate with BRS to distribute information for LEA to provide to students referred to BRS beginning at age 16;
- Provide information about BRS and related services on the SDE Secondary Transition and other relevant website pages;
- Facilitate the provision of transition services through LEA, based on funding responsibilities identified in IDEA and WIOA;
- Provide an SDE staff member to actively participate on and support or co-chair the BRS Transition Committee, SDE Transition Taskforce and the Connecticut Transition COP; and
- Assure that neither the SDE nor the LEA will enter into a contract with an entity for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

*Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;*

Through an MOU between BRS and the State Department of Education (SDE), BRS consults with SDE by:

- Coordinating, providing, and documenting the provision of Pre-ETS (Level Up) to students with disabilities; and
- Coordinating training and technical assistance regarding transitioning students with disabilities and interagency linkages, including, but not limited to, presenting at statewide events and supporting the statewide transition website of the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice (COP).

*Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;*

The responsibilities of BRS under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

- Assist the LEA in providing transition planning for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their individual educational programs (IEPs) under section 614(d) of the IDEA;

The responsibilities of SDE under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

- Coordinate with BRS to provide training and technical assistance regarding the IDEA, transition and Individualized Education Program (IEP) requirements for special educators and vocational rehabilitation counselors, including but not limited to presenting at statewide events and supporting the statewide transition website of the Connecticut Transition COP;

*Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;*

The responsibilities of BRS and SDE for Financial responsibility and dispute resolution under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

- BRS and the SDE agree to maintain independent financial responsibility for the services they are mandated to provide under applicable federal and state laws and regulations;
- SDE shall ensure that the LEA meet their obligations under the IDEA to provide or pay for transition services that are also considered special education or related services and that are necessary for ensuring a Free Appropriate Public Education (FAPE) to children with disabilities. BRS will fund pre-employment transition services under WIOA; and

- In the event BRS or an LEA provide or pay for transition services to a youth or students with disabilities and such Party believes that the services should have been provided or paid for by the other Party, that Party shall seek reimbursement from the other Party in writing along with evidence that the services in question were in fact provided, and the legal basis for such claim. In the event the other Party disputes the claim for reimbursement and the Parties cannot resolve the dispute themselves, the agency representatives shall consult with the Office of the Attorney General for a legal opinion or interpretation, if necessary

*Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.*

The responsibilities of BRS under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

Assist Local Education Authorities (LEA) in providing outreach and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of transition services to be provided by the LEA and pre-employment transition services to be provided by BRS;

The responsibilities of SDE under the formal interagency agreement are as follows:

Coordinate with BRS in disseminating information to LEA regarding effective, results-based practices for preparing students with disabilities for postsecondary education, vocational training, competitive employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation;

#### **(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

*Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private nonprofit VR service providers.*

Cooperative agreements with CRPs, American Job Centers and Independent Living Centers (ILCs) allow for employment supports through the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus program.

#### **(f) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

*Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements with other State agencies and other appropriate entities, in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.*

The Bureau provides supported employment and extended services to consumers with significant disabilities, as appropriate. Vocational Rehabilitation counselors work with each individual consumer to identify necessary services. In the process of developing an Individual Plan for Employment (IEP), the counselor and consumer make decisions about the need for supported employment or extended services. When the services are deemed necessary, the counselor and consumer identify a source of long-term funding and meet with a representative case manager, if appropriate. Once long-term supports are obtained, the plan can be executed. Supported employment and extended services are provided in partnership with our statewide network of Community Rehabilitation Programs (CRP's). These arrangements are based on fee-for-service contracts. We use a series of strategies to accomplish the goals of supported or extended employment, including the following:

- The statewide Ongoing Employment Supports Committee is for CRPs, Employment Networks, and VR identifying supported employment funding opportunities on a case by case basis. It is an opportunity to communicate about how things are working, new strategies for providing supported employment, discuss issues and generate ideas for addressing issues.

- Cooperative agreements with CRPs, American Job Centers and Independent Living Centers (ILCs) allow for additional employment supports through the Ticket to Work Partnership Plus program; and
- The Interagency Employment Practice Improvement Collaborative for staff in BRS, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS), and CRPs is designed to increase successful employment outcomes for an underserved target population.

### **(g) Coordination with Employers**

*Describe how the Designated State Unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:*

*VR services; and*

BRS employs a Business Services Unit, Connect-Ability Staffing Solutions (CASS). CASS Employment Consultants are responsible for employer outreach efforts across Connecticut. The CASS Employment Consultants build relationships with employers to identify their workforce development needs. Through these mutually beneficial relationships, CA Staffing Solutions offers business services such as disability awareness trainings, candidate pre-screening, working interviews, on-the-job trainings and industry specific training and placement programs. In turn, the CASS Employment Consultants obtain real-time labor market information that is shared with VR Counselors and participants of the vocational rehabilitation program as part of their career path exploration and decision-making process. This dual-customer approach allows BRS to prepare VR consumers for long-term, sustained employment in a constantly evolving labor market.

BRS is exploring the viability of alternative approaches to the above structure for employer engagement. Reallocating resources to emphasize market based training opportunities and leveraging partnerships with Community-Based Rehabilitation providers are two potential strategies being considered.

*Transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.*

BRS procured transition services for students with disabilities that included placement with employers to participate in work-based learning experiences and workplace readiness training, as defined in WIOA. The scope of services includes social skill development, independent living and instruction in self-advocacy, peer mentoring, and assistive technology. Upon graduation, youth will benefit from transition services to prepare for, seek and maintain employment and secure supports needed to be successful.

BRS has executed contracts with the five Workforce Development Boards (WDB) that provide Work Based Learning Experience (WBLE) services. This educational approach or instructional methodology uses work experience to provide students with the knowledge and skills that will help them connect school experiences to work experience and future career opportunities. WBLE services provide school age students (age 16-22) with exposure to the WDBs. Facilitated through the WDB contractor's partnerships with local businesses and municipalities, WBLE provides opportunities for students to acquire work experience, build employability and occupational skills, and learn about the training and education required to succeed in specific careers

### **(h) Interagency Cooperation**

*Describe how the Designated State Unit will collaborate with the State Agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:*

*The State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;*

The State Medicaid plan under Title XIX of the Social Security Act is a program operated by the Department of Social Services (DSS). For over 20 years until 2014, BRS functioned as a Designated State

Unit with DSS serving as its Designated State Agency. As a result of this long-term relationship, BRS has a close working relationship with DSS programs such as TANF, the Medicaid Buy-In, and Money Follows the Person. We offer technical assistance through our Vocational Rehabilitation and Benefits Counseling programs. BRS intends to work with DSS to develop an agreement that formalizes these referral and service processes.

*The State Agency responsible for providing services to individuals with developmental disabilities; and  
State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;*

The Department of Developmental Services (DDS) MOU enables coordinated vocational employment services for people with intellectual disabilities to minimize overlap of resources.

An additional MOU is in development between DDS, SDE and ADS related specifically to the provision of Customized Employment services and is expected to be executed before or during PY 2022.

*The State Agency responsible for providing mental health services.*

The Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS) MOA enables BRS to partially fund a shared position to improve service delivery and collaboration for consumers of both programs.

**(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

*Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified state rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the Designated State Unit, including the following:*

*Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development*

*Qualified Personnel Needs.*

*Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:*

*The number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;*

BRS maintains a computerized record system for personnel needs, resources, and training. In addition to this information, the Bureau annually uses a caseload management program and results of ongoing needs assessments to analyze personnel needs.

BRS assisted 5,063 consumers in Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021. With 53 VR counselors, the ratio of VR counselors to all consumers is 1:96; the ratio of VR supervisors to consumers is 1:723. The ratio of all staff to consumers is 1:47. Of the 5,063 total annual consumers, 1,298 developed an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE). Based on the same number of VR counselors, the ratio of staff to all consumers with an IPE is 1:24; VR supervisors to consumers with an IPE is 1:85; and all staff to consumers with an IPE is 1:120. These ratios represent a significant departure from historical norms and are expected to markedly increase as BRS' consumer base rebounds from the prolonged public health crisis and returns to pre-pandemic levels.

***Personnel Category Total Positions:***

Support (Administrative Assistant, Fiscal, Secretary) 29

Central Office Consultants 8.5

District Directors 3

Managers 2

VR Supervisors 10

## VR Counselors 71

*The number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category;*

### **Personnel Category Current Vacancies:**

Support (Administrative Assistant, Fiscal, Secretary) 4

Central Office Consultants 3

District Directors 0

Managers 0

VR Supervisors 3

VR Counselors 18

*Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors*

### **Personnel Category Projected Vacancies Over the Next 5 Years:**

Support (Administrative Assistant, Fiscal, Secretary) 10

Central Office Consultants 2

District Directors 2

Managers 0

VR Supervisors 6

VR Counselors 20

### *Personnel Development*

*Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:*

*list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;*

We analyze the graduate information from the regional Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – accredited universities to find schools that offer required courses or graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. We also check with local CACREP schools for the availability of distance learning opportunities for the required CSPD courses. In the state of Connecticut, there is one CACREP-accredited institution of higher education that is preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals: Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). All rehabilitation counseling graduates from this college will be eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) exam.

*The number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and*

Currently, there are 94 students enrolled in the CCSU Vocational Rehabilitation Program.

*The number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.*

Last year, there were 19 graduates from the CCSU program. This year, the total number of expected graduates is 21. All are eligible to sit for the CRC exam.

*Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel*

BRS sends announcements for Counselor positions to all regional CORE-accredited institutions of higher education that train VR Counselors. We have initiated contacts with these universities so that we can continue to find well-qualified staff for the vacancies we anticipate in the future. In addition to the Connecticut-based CORE institution listed above, we are in close contact with the regional institutions from which we have traditionally found Counselor applicants (Assumption and Springfield College in MA, and Salve Regina in RI); we have staff that serve on advisory boards or teach at these institutions.

The Bureau currently holds Internship Affiliation Agreements with the following universities:

- Central Connecticut State University
- University of Maine at Farmington
- University of North Carolina- Charlotte

In addition to the above, for recruitment of Managerial or other higher-level administration or specialized positions the Bureau works with the Council of State Administrators in Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR) to announce vacancies by dissemination of postings through this organization's e-mail distribution list.

The Bureau acknowledges an absence of diversity in leadership positions within the agency related to race and ethnicity. In recent years we have successfully recruited minority staff into leadership positions using the methods implemented in the last plan.

BRS continues to uphold these approaches as critical to staff retention, but as evidenced over recent years our approach must evolve relative to the times.

Ensure that staff have input into the work of the Bureau. The Bureau is encouraging staff at all levels to have representation on committees that offer opportunities for leadership experiences that will help them prepare for other positions in BRS.

Input to Counselor performance evaluation methodology. The Bureau understands the importance of a fair, valid and reliable approach to evaluating performance within a system now driven by compliance with the WIOA.

Implementation of improved post-inductive training with clear expectations communicated concerning developmental milestones for new Counselors to surpass over their first year.

Ensuring connectivity of administrative support staff to the goals, mission and priorities of the program through requiring their attendance at Regional and Statewide staff meetings.

Continued efforts to identify and address potential for the presence of institutional racial, ethnic or disability-related bias that may exist within the Bureau. To this end, the Bureau is researching and attempting to contract with subject matter experts who could consult on this matter and assist in the remediation of any barriers impeding the hiring or promotion of minorities that may exist.

The Bureau has continued to recruit qualified staff representative of the population of Connecticut: the 37% diversity of our staff exceeds the 19% diversity of our state. We have recruited 11% of our staff from individuals that have disabilities. Our primary challenge has been finding Master's level counselors who are proficient with Spanish or American Sign Language (ASL). We will continue the following steps to ensure there is a sufficient pool of qualified counselors for future openings:

- Increase our on-campus and virtual college recruitments;
- Increase recruitment and continue online recruitment.

- Increase undergraduate internships.

In Connecticut, there are several factors that assist with the mitigation of attrition levels of staff. BRS attributes the following reasons as aiding in retention:

- BRS recruits staff committed to the importance of VR work;
- In-service training is available to staff at all levels;
- Staff may give input into decisions that affect the way they work and how their performance is evaluated; and
- Staff can participate in ongoing committees related to: Regional Training, Community Rehabilitation Providers, Transition, Autism Spectrum, and the BRS Annual Meeting.

The committees ensure that staff have input into the work of the Bureau. The committees also give staff opportunities for leadership experiences that will help them prepare for other positions in BRS.

BRS offers staff an opportunity to create Individual Staff Development Plans (ISDP) to identify areas of an employee's current job that need further development, areas that could be developed to prepare for a future job in the agency, and training needed for either. ISDPs encourage staff to pursue areas of their strength and interest. This activity helps to identify staff training needs and prepares staff for growth needed to meet future succession challenges.

***Personnel Standards***

*Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) and 34 CFR 361.18(c) to ensure that Designated State Unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:*

*Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and*

The current requirements for CSPD are based on the national standards for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC). The National Standard is determined by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC). BRS hires counselors that meet CRCC criteria.

Even though BRS bases its educational standards for VR Counselors on the national standards for Certified Rehabilitation Counselors (CRC), it does not require counselors to have CRC certification. However, applicants with a CACREP-accredited rehabilitation Master's degree should be able to sit for the CRC exam.

BRS employees interested in CRC Certification are encouraged to contact the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification at the following website: <http://www.crccertification.com/> for more specific information on their credentials and experience. BRS does not guarantee that the above criteria will entitle a counselor to sit for the CRC exam. The Bureau provides training at no cost, and offers Continuing Education Units (CEU's), which will count toward the ongoing training requirements by CRC.

*The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.*

BRS will pay for and require the following graduate courses for new counselors in permanent positions with a Master's in Counseling as described in (a) above. The number of additional required courses will depend on the previous education of the new employee as well as total months of vocational rehabilitation counseling experience. The Bureau's definition of education, course curriculum, and experience is based on current standards for the national Certified Rehabilitation Counselor certification:

60 months of vocational counseling experience accepted by the Credentialing Committee – no additional courses are required. CSPD requirements are met.

Individuals with less than 60 months of vocational counseling experience will be required to take up to nine additional courses, based on a review of the graduate transcript. These specific required courses are determined by CRCC as Theories of Counseling, Techniques of Counseling, Foundations of Rehabilitation Counseling, Assessment, Occupational Information or Job Placement, Medical Aspects of Disability, Psychosocial Aspects of Disability, Multicultural Issues, and Case Management and Rehabilitation Services.

In addition to education requirements, BRS encourages staff to pursue certification in their field. The Bureau embraces the CSPD process to ensure a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities; continuous organizational development, and, continuous improvement of the competencies of all staff. The Bureau participates and contributes to collaborative conferences and enables staff attendance that focus on the Connecticut labor and education initiatives under W.I.O.A. in order to maintain and increase VR Staff's understanding of current trends and emerging practices related to federal initiatives

BRS also seeks continuous improvements in service delivery, the continuation of a professional level VR staff that can consistently achieve quality employment outcomes as specified in the Rehabilitation Act and promised in the Americans with Disabilities Act.

In addition, we continually seek ways to meet the needs of our consumers and deliver a complete array of services based on the goals of employment, community participation, and informed consumer choice. The Bureau has hired a qualified, diverse, flexible and progressive rehabilitation staff to serve our current and future consumers. BRS strives toward the continuous development of desired consumer outcomes: sustained jobs, jobs with future growth, and jobs with sufficient earnings.

*Staff Development.*

*Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:*

*System of staff development*

*A system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the Designated State Unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under Section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and*

BRS systematically provides adequate and ongoing training to staff. In-service training addresses assessment, vocational counseling, and job placement. All staff development activities support the Bureau's mission to increase the quality of services and the number and quality of employment outcomes for people with disabilities. In-service training is available to all staff. The Bureau bases its plan for staff development on a multi-faceted comprehensive needs survey. BRS uses all available information for ongoing analysis of training needs including the following:

- Public Meetings
- Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment results;
- Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA) 107 Review;
- Key training personnel collaboration with New England Training Directors
- Management reports; and
- Manager, District Director, Consultant, and Supervisor feedback.

In addition to ensuring that staff meets CSPD requirements, BRS provides Foundations of CT VR, a year-long series of in-service training that is mandatory for new staff and available for staff that need refresher training. This includes a broad array of topics pertaining to VR such as: core BRS policies and practices, trainings on the specific populations, independent living, transition, and community rehabilitation services. A variety of training methods are utilized to assure that training activities are diverse enough to address individual learning styles.

BRS has identified key areas of competency for new VR Counseling staff during the first year of employment and trainings, supervisory sessions and webinars are provided to help new VR Counselors become proficient in the identified areas.

The Connecticut Tech Act Project Director provides training and consultation for BRS staff. Other in-service trainings on specific disability populations contain information on technological solutions for consumers.

The biannual statewide Assistive Technology Conference hosted by the Connecticut Tech Act Project (entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998) specifically offers content and training sessions for vocational rehabilitation counselors and several BRS staff participate in this conference.

The bureau has facilitated extensive training and workshops for staff, including but not limited to, the following:

Cultural Competency Training	Accessibility of Documents Training	Providing VR Services Remotely
Digital Transformation with YesLMS	Labor Market Data Tools	EAP Solutions- Dealing with Coronavirus Stress
Employment Success for Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorder	Procedural Guidance Document Management and Release of Information Training	VR Foundations Training

*Acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge (General)*

*Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to Designated State Unit professionals and paraprofessionals:*

BRS continually analyzes all consumer data to identify areas where it needs to increase training or vary approaches. Acquired updated information and research is disseminated to all BRS staff by Central Office staff. In addition, shared Network drives and folders are utilized for storage and reference of training, policy and procedural information.

The Bureau has experienced rapid growth in its ability to leverage technology solutions to improve access to information integral to the management and delivery of the VR program. Staff has become accustomed to using Microsoft Office 365 applications for both internal and external collaboration. Staff has been trained on MS Teams and Zoom and is now proficiently utilizing these tools while performing their day-to-day tasks, including direct remote service provision to consumers. Future goals in this area are to ensure staff proficiency in all aspects of the Microsoft Office suite, (e.g. Word, Excel, Powerpoint, Outlook) and to leverage Teams and related applications to improve project management. Ongoing advancements are also being made related to document management and our utilization of internal network drives to provide single source access to most recent versions of policy, procedure, guidance and other reference materials.

BRS also works closely with national technical assistance provided by WINTAC in order to communicate and disseminate federal regulation and procedural information on current VR practices and policies

*Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs*

*Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who can communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability:*

BRS addresses individual communication needs of applicants for, and recipients of, vocational rehabilitation through the services of others able to communicate in alternate languages, appropriate modes, or in native languages. The Bureau employs staff who are fluent in Spanish, American Sign Language, and other languages. The Bureau is organized into three regions that geographically divide the state. The list below indicates the languages fluently spoken/used by current staff and the regions in which they work:

- American Sign Language (ASL): Northern, Southern, Western, and Central Office
- Jamaican Patois (English Creole): North
- Malayalam: North
- French Italian: Southern
- Polish: Northern
- Spanish: Northern, Southern, Western, and Central Office

Each region has one (1) or more Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD) on staff to work with individuals who are Deaf and fluent in ASL and has access to a videophone, Zoom, text, and FaceTime. Each region also has one (1) or more Bilingual Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors who is fluent in Spanish and one or more Spanish language interpreter clerks.

BRS employs an Interpreter Coordinator who coordinates all the agency's American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting services, acts as the agency's lead ASL interpreter, supervises one (1) full time agency staff interpreter and one (1) part time agency staff interpreter, and contracts in person and remote ASL interpreter services as necessary. The interpreter coordinator and staff interpreters all have video phone access and can interpret remotely through TEAMS, Zoom, FaceTime, or videophone.

When needed, BRS can hire a spoken language interpreter in almost any language and can access spoken language interpreter services over the phone for all languages. BRS has also provided training to staff on how to use voice to text translation software available in our new hardware (Office 365) for quick translations.

While all contracted services are accessible in a consumer's primary language using interpreters provided by our vendors, the Bureau also provides Communication Barrier Mitigation services with Community Rehabilitation Providers for consumers whose primary language is ASL or Spanish. Communication Barrier Mitigation services that are available are: Competitive Placement Opportunity- Onboarding Supports, Trial Work Experience On-Site Evaluation, Job Coaching, Communication Assessment Service, Communication Support, and Long-Term Employment Supports. All direct supports must be provided by staff who meet the Bureau's fluency criteria to work with consumers in ASL and Spanish.

The Bureau does not serve many consumers who use Braille since there is a public Vocational Rehabilitation program through the Connecticut Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) that serves most consumers who have visual disabilities. When needed, BRS can provide Braille materials for consumers or staff. The Bureau's goal is to provide any communication support necessary for staff or consumers with disabilities.

*As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the Designated State Unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.*

BRS collaborates with an Education Consultant at the Connecticut State Department of Education's Bureau of Special Education who has been active in the Department of Education's Comprehensive System of Personnel Development Council. The Bureau plans training with input from the Consultant. This Consultant provides annual training for all Bureau professional staff on transition and other provisions of the IDEA. This collaboration allows for coordination of the Bureau's human resource plan and personnel development under the IDEA.

### **(j) Statewide Assessment**

*Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the state, particularly the VR services needs of those:*

Please note: We must continue to rely upon our most recent Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) completed during FY 2017. Due to delays that resulted from the pandemic, the BRS effort to refresh is presently in its final stages, with an expected completion date of April 2022. For the purposes of this State Plan modification, results and recommendations generated by the 2017 CSNA will be utilized.

*With the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;*

In FFY 2017, BRS, under the advisement of the State Rehabilitation Council, commissioned San Diego State University (SDSU) to conduct a Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment (CSNA) to examine the needs of individuals with the most significant disabilities including their need for supported employment and to assist the Bureau with establishing goals and priorities. BRS continues to use this information as it is preparing for the new needs assessment to be developed. Relevant excerpts from the CSNA report as issued by SDSU appear below.

The CSNA identified the following Barriers to Employment, Barriers to Services and Agency Performance:

#### ***Barriers to employment***

Key informants agreed that barriers to employment are heightened for individuals with most significant disabilities because they have greater needs and often multiple diagnoses, requiring more support in the community, service network and workplace. In particular, their employment is likely to require long-term workplace supports which are costly or scarce.

Forty-four per cent of all BRS applicants receive Social Security benefits, providing a measure of the segment of this population who may settle for working below their full potential because they fear that full time work will jeopardize their benefits.

Over 3,500 individuals in Connecticut are earning less than minimum wage. This was attributed to the state's historically high utilization of "group employment" (sheltered workshops) for many individuals with intellectual and developmental disabilities who receive services from the Department of Developmental Services. Key informants identified this as a barrier to competitive, integrated employment, but acknowledged that measures are under way to begin to limit this option, pursuant to the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA).

#### ***Barriers to services***

Both the quantitative and qualitative data show that the delivery system's capacity to serve individuals with most significant disabilities is extremely limited. This is especially true where Supported Employment is concerned, and even more so for Customized Employment which is virtually non-existent in Connecticut. There was agreement that the causes include insufficient funding, inconsistent policy and programming across state agencies and limited staff proficiency.

These same factors play into BRS' own challenges in serving individuals with most significant disabilities. Dedicated BRS funding for Supported Employment is in fact limited, as are system resources for long-term supports. A financial literacy pilot program for SI/SSDI recipients ended in December 2016. BRS has yet to expand customized employment training but is working actively with system partners to improve services for this population going forward, consistent with the WIOA requirements.

### ***Agency Performance***

The disability types likely to be classified as most significantly disabled and require long- term supports (communications, Intellectual Disabilities/Developmental Disabilities and mental health impairments) represented 80% of BRS consumers in 2016. The disability type comprising the largest proportion served by BRS was mental health impairment, and yet the agency's rehabilitation rate for individuals with mental health impairments was by far lowest of all disability categories.

Individuals with most significant disabilities represented 56% of BRS consumers in 2016, a slight decline from 60% in the two previous years. Transition-age youth made up 70% of BRS consumers with most significant disabilities.

Eighty-one individuals with most significant disabilities received Supported Employment services from BRS in 2016, down 39% since 2014. It was unclear from data and key informant feedback what types of services were provided to the balance (1,783) of consumers with most significant disabilities. The rehabilitation rate for individuals receiving Supported Employment services declined slightly from 51% to 47%. VR Supported Employment Foundations Training was expanded to two days to increase staff capacity to deliver this service.

To comply with WIOA requirements pertaining to individuals earning subminimum wage, BRS and partners are holding regional information fairs. It was too early to measure the outcomes of this strategy, but most observers gave it mixed reviews.

Performance data available for this report are not current enough to reflect BRS' recent efforts to address the new WIOA requirements pertaining to Supported or Customized Employment and employment outcomes for individuals with most significant disabilities.

#### ***Who are minorities;***

The 2017 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified the following Barriers and Agency Performance relative to minorities:

### ***Barriers***

Key informants were in general agreement that the barriers to both employment and services for individuals who are ethnic and racial minorities are of the same nature as for the general population of individuals with disabilities but are even more challenging, due in part to language and cultural issues. Next most frequently identified as barriers were BRS operational and programmatic issues (slow service delivery, not meeting with consumers in the community, difficulties with or inadequate services) as well as geographic access.

### ***Agency Performance***

Race/Ethnicity- While close to two-thirds of White and Asian cases were closed rehabilitated in 2016, Black and Hispanic cases were lower by 21 and 14 percentage points respectively, which could be an indicator of cultural and language barriers to services for these populations.

Overall assessment- Most key informants indicated that the list has not changed significantly in the last ten years, and that despite the state's efforts to serve these populations, their employment outcomes continue to lag behind those of other target groups. They considered BRS' strategies with these

populations to be a good effort given the resources at their disposal and the new regulations under WIOA but encouraged the agency to continue to seek creative and collaborative solutions.

*Who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;*

The 2017 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified the following Barriers and Agency Performance relative to unserved or underserved individuals with disabilities:

**Barriers**

Key informants were in general agreement that the barriers to both employment and services for individuals who are from unserved and underserved populations, are of the same nature as for the general population of individuals with disabilities but are even more challenging, due in part to the lack of specialization in the service provider community to address their employment-related needs. Next most frequently identified as barriers were BRS operational and programmatic issues (slow service delivery, not meeting with consumers in the community, difficulties with or inadequate services) as well as geographic access.

**Agency Performance**

Individuals most frequently identified as unserved or underserved by BRS include individuals with psychiatric and developmental/ intellectual disabilities, those with autism spectrum disorder and those transitioning from school to post-secondary education or work. (These groups of individuals are in addition to individuals from minority backgrounds, whom BRS identifies as an underserved population, that are discussed in Section 1. B. above.)

Overall assessment- Most key informants indicated that the list has not changed significantly in the last ten years, and that despite the state's efforts to serve these populations, their employment outcomes continue to lag behind those of other target groups. They considered BRS' strategies with these populations to be a good effort given the resources at their disposal and the new regulations under WIOA but encouraged the agency to continue to seek creative and collaborative solutions.

*Who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system;*

The 2017 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified the following Barriers and Agency Performance relative to the needs of individuals who are served through other components of the statewide workforce investment system:

**Barriers**

While there is generally little quantitative data on individuals with disabilities served by AJCs, it is widely acknowledged that AJC utilization and successful results are limited unless staffs are collocated, or programs are jointly sponsored with VR. This tends to be due to inconsistent policy and programming across state agencies, inadequate staff training and accessibility issues. Quantitative and qualitative data analyzed in this study suggest that Connecticut is no exception. Key informants indicated that where there is co-location, there is better integration and greater likelihood of successful outcomes; otherwise they do not typically find AJCs to be user-friendly for individuals with disabilities who they said feel overwhelmed with paperwork and processes.

**Agency Performance**

BRS staff participating in interviews indicated that they do make referrals to CT Works, but the agency recorded a total of only 37 referrals from AJCs over the entire three-year period under review, 17 of those occurring in 2016. Twenty-two per cent of consumers surveyed indicated that they had tried to access CT Works services. At the systems level, BRS is collaborating in statewide efforts to fulfill the WIOA mandate for an integrated workforce system. In addition to participating in state level planning and

implementation, this includes regional and local partnerships, involvement on the state and local Workforce Development Boards (WDBs) and multiple examples of staff co-location.

*Who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services?*

The 2017 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment identified the following Barriers to Employment, Barriers to Services and Agency Performance relative to the needs of youth with disabilities and students with disabilities:

### ***Barriers to employment***

Survey participants ranked lack of job preparedness as the top barrier to employment for youth in transition, followed by challenges with basic needs, including geographic access to jobs. Staff added that lack of family supports is a third factor. These barriers are even more of a challenge for youth than in the general population because so many have never ventured outside the home and school safety net, most have never worked, and schools typically do not expose them to realistic work and life experiences.

### ***Barriers to services***

Staff and partner survey respondents had shared perceptions of the primary barriers to services for youth, ranking difficulty with or inadequacy of BRS programs, and BRS operational issues, as the top two, followed by lack of family supports and low expectations.

Key informants identified lack of continuity among the 169 school districts, coupled with the changes in design and implementation of BRS' Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) program, Level Up, as barriers to service delivery. Observers did find that the strategy had given greater visibility to the need for strong, reality-based transition programming. Respondents all agreed that the dramatic reduction in work-based experiences was the most regrettable casualty of the reversal.

### ***Agency Performance***

**Increased efficiencies-** BRS significantly increased the number of transition Plans developed (+87%) over the three-year period. This corresponded to a 47% decrease in the average number of days from eligibility to Plan (compared to a 38% decrease agency-wide) and a simultaneous increase in the proportion of agency Plans accounted for by youth cases, from 18% to 25%.

**Outcomes and Expenditures-** The increased efficiencies did not translate to improved outcomes or expenditures over this same period. BRS' rehabilitation rate for transition cases decreased from 50% to 42%, with a 32% increase in cost per case. Likewise, the cost for transition cases closed unsuccessfully increased by 35%, in contrast to a 7% agency-wide decrease in that same time.

*Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State; and*

The CSNA assessed the need to improve Community Rehabilitation Programs within the state. To complete the CSNA, Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs), BRS counselors, consumers and key informants were surveyed. The results indicated that only about 2/3 of respondents felt CRPs meet the employment needs of individuals with disabilities. In 2017 BRS issued a new procurement process, based on recommendations from the previous CSNA, aimed at improving the quality of services through CRPs while decreasing the cost to the Bureau. These new contracts and services will begin in 2018, so the results cannot be assessed yet.

After the procurement process was completed BRS contracted with 13 CRP's statewide. Each CRP stated their certifications and credentials for staff and address the communication barriers. Although the cost savings has been favorable other issues including capacity and capability handling communication barriers has been a challenge.

A lot has been learned since the CRP contracts have been implemented and best practices and revising procedures are on-going. Stronger protocol and clearer communication with CRP's will be in process and adhere to during 2020.

Training modules are being developed to help with the training and specifics of VR expectations for CRP's. These modules are necessary to as CRP staff changes and will ensure that all staff working with VR consumers will have the same training.

*Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.*

In response to WIOA requirements and input from stakeholders including youth with disabilities, BRS developed and implemented the Level Up program (pre-employment transition services). This includes designated BRS counselors in the high schools, and pre-employment transition services developed and provided by both CRPs and BRS staff.

*Annual Estimates (Formerly known as Attachment 4.11(b)). Describe:*

*The number of individuals in the state who are eligible for services;*

According to the most recent US Census Bureau American Community Survey, Connecticut had 3,541,763 residents who were non-institutionalized in 2017. There were 2,225,763 persons between 18-64 years of age. 8.4% or 186,958 of these individuals had a disability (+/- 0.3 margin of error). Census data from 2017 also shows that Connecticut had 389,368 non-institutionalized persons with disabilities ages 16 and over, and of that number 24.3% were employed. The remaining 75.7% were unemployed.

These statistics reveal that a considerable number of persons with disabilities in the State of Connecticut are not working. A measurable number of these individuals may be transition-aged youth. In addition, a portion of 24.3% of persons with disabilities who are employed may be underemployed. Some of the individuals may also require services to attain or retain employment consistent with their strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice.

These statistics make it difficult to accurately estimate the number of potentially eligible consumers of VR services. That number is many times more than BRS has historically served or has the resources to serve.

### **(k) Annual Estimates**

*The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:*

*The VR Program;*

For Federal Fiscal Year (FFY) 2021, the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS) served 3,914 eligible consumers in Individual Plans for Employment (IPEs) under general VR funds. This represents a 12% decrease from FFY 2020, when 4,444 consumers received services in IPEs under general VR funds. The number of consumers served is an expected decline from FFY 2020 and is even more substantial as compared to FFY 2019.

Over the past three years there have been a number of factors contributing to a decline in service provision. Going back to FFY 2018, BRS had a projected \$2M budget shortfall which necessitated an Order of Selection beginning in FFY 2019. Under this Order of Selection, BRS designated that services would be provided to individuals identified as Priority 1 MSD, as well as individuals with disabilities that required vocational rehabilitation services to maintain employment regardless of his/her priority designation. As expenditure patterns quickly stabilized, BRS only remained in this higher Order of Selection through the July of 2020. While this Order of Selection helped BRS to manage projected

budgetary deficits, the secondary impact was lowered expectations of our community partners and a corresponding decline in BRS consumers being referred.

As indicated previously in the Bureau's State Plan, FFY 2018 and early into FFY 2019, BRS was challenged with a substantial level of counselor attrition. An abnormally high vacancy rate threatened BRS' ability to meet consumer needs. BRS engaged in an aggressive effort in FFY 2019 to refill positions hiring more than 14 new counselors. While this hiring had a positive impact, the gains from these refills were not immediate as training and development was necessary to onboard and prepare new staff for their respective roles.

Through the first two quarters of FFY 2021, BRS had realized increases in services to consumers. Applications were up 5% YTD in quarter two compared to that same time frame in FFY 2019. Plan development also improved by more than 30%. Agency resources were well aligned at this time to achieve even greater momentum through the second half of FFY 2021, when the Covid 19 Pandemic began. In Connecticut, the labor market went into a widespread shutdown. Many consumers suspended their engagement in VR services. Most of our Community Rehabilitation Providers suspended their efforts and BRS faced insurmountable disruptions to the vocational rehabilitation program. BRS made substantial efforts to pivot the VR program in FFY 2020 and FFY 2021 by implementing advances in technology, adding new services and restructuring existing services. This better positioned supports to meet the changing needs of our consumers and the labor market within Connecticut.

As BRS progresses through FFY 2022 and into FFY 2023, it is anticipated that substantial rebounding will occur, including the expansion of the Bureau's consumer base and resultant service provision. Into the second quarter of FFY 2022, the impact of the pandemic is lessening. The CT Labor market continues to yield an abundance of opportunities and BRS is aggressively working to shift services and supports to best align our consumers to take advantage of this rapid evolution of labor market realities. In addition, BRS has launched a comprehensive outreach campaign with a dedicated focus on building back its consumer base. With this, BRS anticipates that 4,539 consumers will be served in Individual Employment Plans (IPEs) under general VR funds in FFY 2023. This represents a 15% increase over FFY 2021 and brings BRS back to pre-pandemic benchmarks for service provision.

In addition to the adult VR services forecasted to be provided to individuals in IPEs, the Bureau expects to provide Pre-Employment Transition Services to 1,600 students that are either eligible or potentially eligible for vocational rehabilitation. It is estimated that 1,150 students will receive paid services and the remaining 450 students will receive services provided directly by VR staff. This number represents a 25% increase over FFY2021.

*The Supported Employment Program;*

During FFY 2021, BRS purchased services for 32 consumers eligible for Supported Employment funding utilizing \$55,572. This expenditure represents more than a 50% increase as compared to FFY 2020 and is more in-line over historic comparisons. As mentioned in previous State Plans, reductions in the Bureau's overall consumer base combined with obligations under WIOA to set aside 50% of Supported Employment funding for youth, makes full liquidation of this funding difficult.

Based on current patterns and projected growth in the overall consumer base, BRS is forecasting that 30 consumers will be served under Supported Employment funds in FFY 2022 expending \$52,000. With the rebuilding of the Bureau's general consumer base, this number increases to 40 consumers in FFY 2023 with an estimated expenditure of \$69,465. In combination with the 4,500 individuals projected to receive services under general VR funds, the total number of individuals who could be served in IPE's for FFY 2023 is 4,540.

*Each priority category, if under an Order of Selection;*

Since July 2020 and in FFY 2023, BRS does not anticipate employing an Order of Selection.

*The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an Order of Selection; and*

Zero. As of 7/1/2020, BRS is not in an Order of Selection.

*The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an Order of Selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.*

Total VR program purchase of services (POS) costs for all consumers in FFY 2021 was \$7M. This figure represents a \$115K decrease as compared to FFY 2020 expenditures and a \$1.2M decrease when compared to FFY 2019. The Bureau has undoubtedly been challenged to maintain normal spending patterns over the past two fiscal years. Since the onset of the Pandemic, BRS has been faced with disruptions to Connecticut's labor market, reductions in consumer engagement and temporary suspension of services from many of our community rehabilitation providers. During FFY 2020 and FFY 2021, BRS made every effort to keep consumers engaged in services and their pursuit of employment. This included the conversion of multiple services into virtual formats.

Thus far in FFY 2022, the Bureau has expended \$2.2M through the first quarter. Applications for services have increased in the first quarter and are 55% greater than the first quarter of FFY2021. While still below the pre-pandemic norms, it is believed the BRS will continue to see increased consumer engagement moving through the remainder to this year. BRS is also actively engaged in efforts to bring additional CRPs on contract for general service provision. Combining both of these factors, BRS projects FFY 2022 final expenditures of \$8.5M for all POS.

For FFY 2023 the Bureau forecasts a POS expenditure of \$9.5M in general VR services, with an additional expenditure of \$2.5M in Pre-Employment Transition POS for a total cost of services of \$12M. These projected increases are based on the Bureau's efforts to aggressively expand our consumer base and an overall re-engagement in service provision post-pandemic. In relation to the Pre-Employment Transition POS, BRS's new agreement with the Workforce Development Boards assisting with the development of Summer Work Based Learning Experiences will bring many more opportunities to potentially eligible students with disabilities.

Category	Title I or Title VI	Estimated Funds	Estimated Number to be Served	Average Cost of Services
OOS Priority Category 1	Title I	\$6,460,000	3,087	\$2,092
OOS Priority Category 2	Title I	\$2,470,000	1,180	\$2,092
OOS Priority Category 3	Title I	\$570,000	272	\$2,092
Pre-Employment Transition Services	Title I	\$2,500,000	1,150	\$2,173

Supported Employment	Title VI	\$69,465	40	\$1,737
				—
				—
				—
				—
				—
Totals		\$12,067,465	5,729	\$2,106

## **(I) State Goals and Priorities**

*The designated State unit must:*

*Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed (General)*

*Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR Agency and the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions.*

The Bureau, in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), conducted a comprehensive statewide assessment of the rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities and identified four major goal areas. The goals and priorities listed in section L.2, below are derived from this assessment and will be used to carry out the Supported Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation programs. The SRC jointly agrees with BRS on these goals and priorities for the coming year.

*Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs.*

The Bureau, in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), identified four major goal areas. These goals and priorities will be used to carry out the Supported Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation programs.

Each of the goal areas contains a set of priority areas that the Bureau could address in the coming year. We cannot address every issue identified as a need but attempted to build goals broad enough to address the major themes. Four priority areas were chosen based on their frequency of occurrence in the assessment. One additional goal was developed to address implementation of WIOA.

### **Goal 1: To implement the provisions of WIOA specific to the VR program.**

#### ***Priority areas:***

Pre-employment transition services

Employer services

Service delivery

Performance accountability measures

Customized Employment

Subminimum wage

### **Goal 2: To improve the quality of vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities.**

***Priority areas:***

Customer service and provision of information

Ongoing skill development

Use of social media

Provision of information on resources, labor market information and training/education programs

**Goal 3: To increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those individuals from unserved or underserved populations.**

***Priority areas:***

Individuals from minority backgrounds

Young adults with disabilities

Individuals with psychiatric disabilities

Individuals with autism spectrum disorders (ASD)

**Goal 4: To increase access to services for all individuals with disabilities.**

***Priority areas:***

Services for individuals who are Deaf/Hard of Hearing

Services for individuals whose primary language is Spanish

Cultural competencies for staff

**Goal 5: To create effective partnerships designed to advance employment for Connecticut citizens with disabilities.**

***Priority areas:***

Businesses

Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs)

State Agencies with a specific emphasis on core WIOA partners

These broad goals are intended to be five-year goals, with the priority areas being flexible enough to change from year to year if necessary.

*Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:*

*The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates:*

The Bureau, in collaboration with the State Rehabilitation Council (SRC), conducted a comprehensive statewide assessment of the rehabilitation needs of people with disabilities and identified four major goal areas. The goals and priorities listed in section L.2. above are derived from this assessment and will be used to carry out the Supported Employment and Vocational Rehabilitation programs. BRS and the SRC are jointly in process of developing a new needs assessment that will identify statewide barriers. The next CSNA will take place in 2020 and new goals and priorities will be based on the results of that assessment.

In addition to the CSNA BRS has identified other priorities, based on SRC, staff and consumer input on which it has acted. These include improving services to consumers who speak Spanish, streamlining all aspects of the field staff work to increase capacity and improve overall quality of services, and developing a customized employment model in partnership with three other state agencies (Departments of Labor, Developmental Services, and Education).

***The State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and***

The Department continues early assessments of performance accountability data collected under section 116 of WIOA. The Department is also working on matching data in our system to the RSA quarterly dashboards for the purposes of better understanding and controlling performance measures. BRS expects to begin the process of establishing expected levels of performance with RSA in PY 2020 and 2021.

*Other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107.*

BRS continues to focus on maintaining its ability to develop an Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) for transition students within the 90-day deadline set by the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA).

**(m) Order of Selection**

*Describe:*

*Whether the designated State unit will implement an Order of Selection. If so, describe: (General)*

*The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services.*

Whether in an Order of Selection or not, The Bureau has assigned all applicants to an OOS category as a means of determining the distribution of the programs' collective caseload across priority categories of disabilities. The priority categories assigned are based on level of significance of disability. "Level of significance of disability" means one of the following: Priority Category 1, "Most Significant Disability"; Priority Category 2, "Significant Disability"; or Priority Category 3, "disabled" as set forth below. Individuals with disabilities shall be served first, based on significance of disability and second, by date of eligibility in the following priority order:

Priority Category 1: "Most Significant Disability" means an eligible individual who meets the following criteria:

Meets criteria for "Significant Disability" as defined below; and

A severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits four or more functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome. Functional capacity areas are: mobility, work tolerance, communication, self-care, interpersonal skills, self-direction, or work skills;

Priority Category 2: "Significant Disability" means an eligible individual who meets the following criteria:

A severe physical or mental impairment that seriously limits one or more functional capacity areas in terms of an employment outcome. Functional capacity areas are: mobility, work tolerance, communication, self-care, interpersonal skills, self-direction, or work skills;

Vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require multiple vocational rehabilitation services;

Vocational rehabilitation can be expected to require services over an extended period of time; and

Who has one or more physical or mental disabilities determined on the basis of an assessment for determining eligibility, and vocational rehabilitation needs to cause substantial functional limitation?

Priority Category 3: "individual with a disability" means an eligible individual.

Eligible individuals, who do not meet the Order of Selection category currently being served, will have access to services through information and referral. Individuals will be appropriately referred to other programs, including those of other core WIOA partners.

After determining eligibility, counselors must assign a priority category and follow the Order of Selection set forth above for the provision of services. Individuals determined eligible, and with an approved Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) prior to the date of implementation of the Order of Selection will continue to receive services. The Bureau will notify all eligible individuals of the priority categories in the Order of Selection. Eligible individuals in priority categories not being served will be notified in writing of their assignment to a particular category and advised of their right to appeal their category assignment.

If services cannot be provided to all eligible individuals who apply, the Director of BRS will implement an Order of Selection (OOS) as set forth in this Section.

Based upon financial and staffing capacity projections BRS intends to remove the current Order of Selection effective upon implementation of this plan on July 1, 2020. Eligible applicants in all Priority categories will be served.

*The justification for the order.*

BRS is not in an Order of Selection and does not anticipate implementation through FFY 2023.

*The service and outcome goals.*

The projected overall numbers of clients to be served under an IPE in FFY 2023 is 4,540. The proposed case service budget is \$9,500,000. The expected services provision by priority category is as follows:

OOS Category 1: 68% or \$6,460,000

OOS Category 2: 26% or \$2,470,000

OOS Category 3: 6% or \$570,000

CT BRS projects employment closures for FFY 2023 as follows:

OOS Category 1: 68% or 748

OOS Category 2: 26% or 286

OOS Category 3: 6% or 66

Total Projected Successful Outcomes: 1,100

*The time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order.*

Effective July 1, 2020, all eligible applicants in all OOS Categories were offered the opportunity to develop an Individualized Plan of Employment and receive vocational rehabilitation services.

*How individuals with Most Significant Disabilities (MSD) are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities:*

BRS is not in an Order of Selection

*If the Designated State Unit has elected to serve individuals regardless of any established Order of Selection, who require specific or equipment to maintain employment*

BRS is not in an Order of Selection

**(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of Title VI Funds.**

*Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under Section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services.*

If Supported Employment funding is exhausted future obligations for ongoing supports for this population will be encumbered against General VR funds from that point forward.

*Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to Section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:*

The funds will be utilized in accordance with federal regulations and limited to on the job supports for individuals with the most significant disabilities.

Supported Employment funding will be used for extended services for youth until it is exhausted.

*How the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.*

### ***Extended Services***

Services can be provided for a period up to, but not to exceed four years to youth or until a youth turns 25 with the most significant disabilities expending Supported Employment funds.

Prior to WIOA, funding for these services were not permitted for youth with disabilities.

### ***Transition to Extended Services***

All Bureau services are authorized and provided based on the individual needs of the consumer. BRS will work with relevant state agencies, private non-profit organizations and our other partners to transition consumers from Supported Employment funding to the identified provider of the extended services as soon as the funding is available, and transition is appropriate.

### ***Coordination and Collaboration***

BRS oversees one of the three state-funded extended services programs. The Bureau is engaged in facilitating systemic changes in how supported employment services are delivered in the community. The Bureau works with relevant State Agencies, private non-profit organizations and other partners to transition consumers from the Supported Employment funding to an appropriate extended services program. These efforts have led to internal and external improvements in our state system and have built a foundation for a strong Supported Employment service program in this state.

### ***(o) State's Strategies***

*Describe the required strategies, and how the Agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and Section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)).*

*The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities.*

BRS will use the following objectives to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities:

- Work with WIOA core partners to ensure that individuals with disabilities are effectively supported in the newly designed state employment system.
- Continue to evolve its strategic plan for delivering Pre-Employment Transition Services by entering into a MOA with the State Department of Education (SDE) to facilitate the coordination and provision of transition services for students with disabilities.
- Focus on timely progress through each step of the case management process.
- Continue to maintain dedicated staff resources to manage the BRS training program and maintain a separate line item within the Bureau's budget to offer necessary training.

- Continue to use social media to connect job seekers with opportunities to pursue jobs with employers.
- Develop materials on resources, labor market information and training/education programs for distribution to consumers.
- Continue to dedicate a specific unit of VR staff to support employers as dual customers to create more business partnerships and more employment opportunities through direct job placement, the use of On-The-Job (OJT) Trainings and Industry Specific Training Program (ISTPs).
- Participate in cross agency trainings through the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) to strengthen state agency partnerships.
- Continue to develop and disseminate Distance Learning Modules for staff, CRP's and consumer use.
- Continue to develop Customized Employment Services to improve employment outcomes.

BRS will begin working with a marketing firm in early 2022 to establish a marketing plan for outreach to individuals with disabilities in CT, as well as employers and potential funding sources. The marketing plan will include a clear message and will include outreach activities in multi-faceted ways to include social media, digital and print to be able to reach a wider range of individuals with the goal of increasing the number of individuals applying for BRS services.

*How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis.*

BRS makes Assistive Technology (AT) available to individuals with disabilities through collaboration with the Connecticut Tech Act Project (Connecticut's statewide assistive technology program) throughout the rehabilitation process across the state in the following ways:

- VR counselors may solicit the Bureau's Assistive Technology Consultant for guidance and assistance to ensure that AT devices and services are considered throughout the consumer's vocational rehabilitation process as appropriate.
- The AT consultant can conduct and/or facilitate comprehensive AT evaluations with consumers and can provide training in the use of newly-acquired AT, as needed.
- Through the Assistive Technology Device Loan Program at BRS, and network of CT Tech Act Project partners, VR consumers and employers may borrow and try out devices to help them make informed decisions as whether the AT device is appropriate and if it will remove or reduce barriers, as expected. The inventory for this program includes a wide range of devices across the AT continuum from low to high tech, across disability categories (i.e.: hearing, vision, mobility, computer access, cognitive, communication, etc.), and across potential work environments.
- VR Counselors and the AT Consultant collaborate with other entities such as school systems, colleges/universities, employers, independent living centers, state Medicaid waiver programs, and health insurance plans to facilitate the provision of AT devices and services via comparable benefits.
- The AT consultant issues an electronic newsletter, maintains a website and utilizes social media to provide information about AT trends for anyone interested in AT.

The Connecticut Tech Act Project hosts a bi-annual full day Assistive Technology Conference with a focus on AT for employment, community living and education. There are generally 12 to 15 sessions, up to 30 exhibitors and approximately 200 – 300 participants.

*The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the*

*VR program.*

BRS has targeted several ways to better serve minority and unserved/underserved consumers:

- The Bureau is in the process of launching Customized Employment services in collaboration with the Department of Developmental Services and the State Department of Education. This service will be accessible in ASL and Spanish and is designed to be available for consumers who do not benefit from traditional vocational rehabilitation services and/or whom who have been unserved or underserved by the Bureau. The Bureau also provides Customized Employment Training for staff who will be providing the service to consumers and oversees the State's Customized Employment Staff Registry to ensure all staff providing this service are certified.
- Employ at least one (1) Rehabilitation Counselor for the Deaf (RCD) and one (1) Bilingual Counselor (Spanish) per region dedicated to working with the monolingual ASL and Spanish consumers. Both the RCDs and the Latino Counselors have their own Committee within the Bureau which they're encouraged to attend and work in collaboration with their team on projects that address the need specific to their populations. The RCD Committee is overseen by the Bureau's State Coordinator for the Deaf who is actively involved with the CSAVR's Deaf Professional network and well versed in the Model State Plan.
- Work with the Bureau's Central Office Latino Consultant and Latino Committee to develop effective approaches to working with consumers who are monolingual Spanish speaking. Members of the Latino Committee and the Employment Consultants will continue to consult with each other and outreach to employers on improving employment outcomes to those who communicate in Spanish.
- Work with the Bureau's State Coordinator for the Deaf (SCD) and Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf (RCD) to develop effective approaches to working with Deaf consumers whose primary language is American Sign Language. Members of the RCD Committee and the Employment Consultants will continue to consult with each other and outreach to employers on improving employment outcomes to those who communicate in ASL. The Bureau also has a Human Service Advocate for the Deaf, Deaf Blind, and Hard of Hearing available to assist consumers and RCDs with educating employers and any entity on accessibility measures.
- Work with both the Latino Counselors and RCDs to ensure all pre-employment transition services are accessible to consumers whose primary language is Spanish or ASL
- All forms and new publications are available in Spanish
- Continue to partner with Local Mental Health Authorities and the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services to increase the number of employment outcomes and amount of earnings for individuals with psychiatric disabilities
- Continue to hold monthly Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Committee meetings to share existing and develop new employment resources for individuals with autism spectrum disorders.
- Provide ongoing opportunities and workshops to strengthen cultural competencies for staff.
- The Bureau has entered into an agreement with the University of Connecticut to assess the needs of individuals from LatinX backgrounds, study the resources present in high-incidence Hispanic population centers in CT and make recommendations on improving access to services for these individuals. This work is expected to be completed during PY2022.

*The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services).*

BRS uses the following methods to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities:

- Align existing VR services with Pre-Employment Transition Services as defined in WIOA 2014.
- Serve students with disabilities ages 16–21 enrolled in high school by providing pre-employment transition services from existing community rehabilitation providers, companies, community agencies, education entities, colleges and universities statewide.
- Assign 11 vocational rehabilitation (VR) counselors to school systems statewide to serve students enrolled in high school.
- Improve partnerships with school systems by providing transition services to students.
- Participate in, and plan for, the delivery of customized employment services through the interagency collaboration of team members from the State Department of Education, Regional Educational Resource Centers, and the State Department of Developmental Services.
- Strengthen partnerships with State Department of Education, local school systems, community providers, higher education entities, other state agencies, and employers.
- Create and disseminate effective marketing and messaging to target school systems, students and their families, to educate and inform them about the BRS shift in service delivery to students as outlined in WIOA regulations.
- Continue to strengthen and broaden collaboration resources with employers, two- and four-year colleges and universities, WDBs/American Job Centers and DOL grant training programs for students, youth, and young adults with disabilities.
- Partner with SDE to increase capacity to work with VR counselors in supporting students enrolled in high school

*If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving Community Rehabilitation Programs within the State.*

BRS will develop the capacity of Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) to meet the needs of VR consumers in the following ways:

- Continue to conduct annual performance reviews on all CRPs to ensure quality service delivery.
- Develop and implement service models designed to provide flexibility to CRP's in developing job sites and in providing services specific to client needs.
- Meet quarterly with CRPs in each district.
- Provide opportunities for CRPs to meet statewide, both in targeted committee meetings and at an annual forum.
- Develop a Customized Employment provider curriculum and statewide method for ongoing training delivery.
- Participate in the Job Development Leadership Network.
- Continue to disseminate Distance Learning Modules focused on service delivery and fiscal process for CRPs to interact with BRS.
- Implement minimum training requirements for frontline CRP staff.
- Increase the number of providers who will serve underserved populations, including Deaf and Hard of Hearing and Monolingual Spanish.
- Explore procurement opportunities for specialized services.
- Consider implementation of the innovative services as recommended by the SRC related to consumer outreach.

*Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under*

**Section 116 of WIOA.**

BRS will continue work with the larger workforce investment system to set thresholds for the new WIOA performance accountability measures.

BRS has launched a quality assurance process which involves targeted compliance reviews that are short, focused case reviews on a specific topic or data set that help the agency analyze data and identify training needs related to a particular topic or WIOA compliance area. Once data is analyzed, a team reviews and updates agency procedural guidance and training materials which are then provided to supervisory and VR staff for improvement.

*Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities.*

BRS VR staff's expertise on disability related topics, including how adaptive technology can be utilized to make core services of the American Job Centers and training programs accessible is offered to the partner programs. The BRS VR counselors offer recommendations on how to make information and training materials accessible to job seekers who have disabilities. Additionally, BRS VR counselors provide in-service training to staff of partner programs on effective approaches to utilize when working with and assisting individuals who have disabilities. BRS VR staff are an active and ongoing resource to partner program staff in this area.

*How the Agency's strategies will be used to:*

*Achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;*

The strategies mentioned above align with the Bureau's goals and will be employed to address barriers to employment and services, as well as to improve general Bureau performance, relative to equitable access to VR services.

*Support Innovation and Expansion activities; and*

BRS anticipates using innovation and expansion (I&E) funds to support the activities and recommendations of the State Rehabilitation Council. Other proposals will be assessed upon submission and considered based on the alignment with the State's goals and priorities.

*Overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.*

The strategies mentioned above align with the Bureau's goals and barriers identified in the CSNA surrounding barriers to equitable access to VR services. Equal access to services will remain a consideration in the employment of all strategies contained within the plan.

**(p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals**

*Describe:*

*An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must: (*

*Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*

**Goal 1: To improve the quality of vocational rehabilitation services for individuals with disabilities.**

Priority areas:

- Customer Service and Provision of Information

- The state of Connecticut implemented in 2021 a new portal platform, which facilitates the availability of an ADS/BRS website. Information pertaining to VR services is available via this website.
- Consumer Requests – During FFY 2021, BRS responded to over 300 inquiries for information through the BRS e-mail submissions.
- Ongoing Skill Development we have identified two major goals:
  - Goal I: To improve the skills of all BRS staff by providing training and development in vocational rehabilitation service provision, responsiveness to consumers, Bureau mission and programs, awareness of state and community resources.
    - BRS provides Foundations of CT VR, a year-long series of in-service training mandatory for new staff and available to staff for refresher training. This includes a broad array of topics pertaining to VR such as: Foundations of CT VR Training, trainings on specific populations, independent living, transition, and community rehabilitation services. A variety of training methods are utilized to assure that training activities are diverse enough to address individual learning styles.
    - The Bureau developed an integrated program of training, education, and development activities for staff to gain the necessary skills, knowledge, and experiences to improve the quality of services and the number and quality of employment outcomes for people with disabilities.
    - BRS also maintains a dedicated staff resource to manage the Bureau's training program and will maintain a separate training line within the Bureau's budget that equals the level of funds available under WIOA.
  - Goal II: To improve recruitment and retention of BRS staff by providing career development and succession planning activities to assist counselors in defining appropriate career paths and to assist the Bureau to maximize its resources, while continuing to meet CSPD requirements.
    - Utilize marketing plan to outreach and specifically reach underserved and minority populations through micro-targeting activities and efforts.
    - Implementation of 12-month counselor milestones expectations for the working test period.
    - VR Foundations Training is available in both in-person and virtual formats. Topics for the required new counselor training include sessions on:
      - Public VR Overview and Intake
      - Eligibility and Order of Selection
      - IPE- Service Provision and Case Closure
      - Caseload Management and System 7 and Remote Services
      - Additional Trainings Provided during this State Plan period

Name of Training
Supported Employment
Tablet Training
MSG Refresher Training
511 Training

Postsecondary Training- Part 1
Postsecondary Training- VR-21 Part 2
Case Note Guidance
DMHAS/BRS Protocol
Hearing Aids-Part 1
Hearing Aids- Part 2
Ticket and SSA Training
SERC Onboarding
VR Foundations- for Office Assistants
CRP Training- Conover
Teams Overview
H:Drive and ROI Training
PCA Training
Employment Success Autism
Accessible Documents Training
Career Counselor and LMI
IEL-Y-TAC Youth Training
911 Data Refresher/MSG
IEL-Y-TAC Youth Training
Cultural Competency for BRS
VR Foundations for ALL new BRS Staff
Ethics for BRS
EAP-Solutions- Dealing with Coronavirus Stress
Customized Employment Overview
Labor Market Data Tools
Work Based Learning Summer 2021
Home Modification Training
Benefits Counseling Overview
EPICS Training Refresher
WOWI Quick Start
WOWI Level 1
WOWI Level 2
Level Up for Adult VRC's- South
SRC Overview for BRS
VR Foundations- Virtual
Accessible Flyers using PPT

**Goal 2: To increase employment outcomes for individuals with disabilities, particularly those individuals from unserved or underserved populations.**

Priority areas:

- Individuals from minority backgrounds
  - In effort to improve and increase contracted employment services for monolingual Spanish and Deaf consumers who use American Sign Language (ASL), BRS procured employment services through Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs) with emphasis on providing services to these populations using “Communication Mitigation Services”. BRS began these new employment services in October 2018. Under this new contract, several CRPs in each catchment area are required to have staff fluent in American Sign Language and Spanish who can provide two new services created specific to these populations: Communication Assessment Services and Communication Support Services in addition to all the mainstream CRP employment services. CRPs who do not have staff fluent in ASL or Spanish are to provide the mainstream CRP employment services with assistance of a third-party Interpreter or Staff Interpreter.
  - In efforts to increase employment outcomes for Deaf youths, BRS supports three (3) pre-employment transition services specific to Deaf, ASL youths during the summer months: Explore Your Future (EYF) at National Technical Institute for the Deaf, Discover Your Future (DYF) at Gallaudet University, and the National Association for the Deaf’s Youth Leadership Conference.
  - BRS also has available a “Work Readiness Training Program” (WRTP), which is a series of four (4) modules covering preemployment, job development, informational interviewing, and job shadowing. BRS is in the process of finalizing not only the translation of the agency’s four (4) WRTP modules into both ASL and Spanish, but also providing modules with culture related employment references as well.
  - Training: BRS provided the following training opportunities in efforts to improve employment outcomes for unserved or underserved populations:
    - Exploring Bias and Institutional Racism
    - CURRENTS Leadership and Supervisor Training
    - National Deaf Center’s Deaf 101- Required for all staff
    - National Deaf Center’s Attitudes and Biases as Barriers for Deaf People- required for all staff
    - 2022, 2021, and 2022 ADARA Conference
    - CATIE Center at St. Catherine University various interpreting webinars
    - Helen Keller National Center online training webinars
    - 2021 Southeast Regional Institute on Deafness (SERID) Conference
    - VR Development Series Trainings:
    - Ethical Thinking
    - College Transition for Students with Physical Disabilities
    - Students with Physical and Health Disabilities: IL and Executive Function Skills for College Success
    - College Transition for Students with Health Conditions
    - Achievement Through Technology Conference
    - APSE Employment First Conference

- Annual Conference on Serving Adults with Disabilities- had employment related workshops for individuals on the spectrum, with executive functioning deficits, and with mental health.
  - Deaf Culture Training- provided to all BRS staff and American Job Center Partners
  - Deaf Job Seeker Workshop- provided to our Community Rehabilitation Providers (CRPs)
  - Community Rehabilitation Provider Communication Barrier Mitigation Training
  - National Association for the Deaf's Biennial Conference (numerous workshops related to employment)
  - Disclosure and Reasonable Accommodations in the Workplace for Persons with Mental Health Conditions
  - EPIC Assessment tool training (pictorial assessment tool accessible to all consumers)
  - Aspiring Minds Assessment training (Assessments are available Spanish)
  - World of Work Inventory (WOWI) training (Assessments available at different English reading and writing levels)
- As a result of these efforts, BRS assisted 152 Individuals from minority backgrounds achieve successful employment outcomes in FFY 2021.
- The Bureau has entered into an agreement with the University of Connecticut to assess the needs to individuals from LatinX backgrounds, study high-incidence Hispanic population centers and make recommendations on improving services to these individuals. This work is expected to be completed during PY2022.
- Young Adults with Disabilities
  - BRS has met quarterly with SDE and representatives from the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs) to continue providing current transition information. This group now includes the Department of Developmental Services Education Liaisons and Transition Consultants.
  - BRS has met quarterly with SDE and representatives from the Regional Education Service Centers (RESCs), Department of Developmental Services Education Liaisons and Transition Consultants, now called, CT Transition Alliance to continue providing current transition information. BRS, SDE and the CT Community of Practice (CT COP) maintain partnership with the IDEA National Transition Community of Practice. This partnership led to the creation of a state stakeholder run website called CTTransition.Org. The CT COP represents a core team of stakeholders and initial practice groups that include the BRS Transition & Level Up committees and the Transition Task Force. The CT COP continues to uphold the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability (NCWD) Guideposts for Success as a framework for secondary transition activities and information. This is the same framework BRS has used for Transition since 2010.
  - As a result of these efforts, BRS assisted 103 Young Adults with Disabilities achieve successful employment outcomes in FFY 2021.
- Individuals with Psychiatric Disability
  - BRS continues to partner with Local Mental Health Authorities and the State Mental Health agency to increase the number of employment outcomes and amount of earnings for individuals with psychiatric disabilities. As a result of these efforts, BRS assisted 131 Individuals with Psychiatric Disabilities achieve successful employment outcomes in FFY 2021.

- Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders
  - BRS held 10 meetings of the Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) Committee in order to develop more responsive services for individuals with autism spectrum disorders. As a result of these efforts, BRS assisted 69 Individuals with Autism Spectrum Disorders achieve successful employment outcomes in FFY 2021.

### **Goal 3: To increase access to services for all individuals with disabilities**

Priority areas:

- Services for Individuals who are Deaf
  - BRS employs one (1) State Coordinator for the Deaf and three (3) full-time and one (1) part-time Rehabilitation Counselors for the Deaf. BRS also has an Interpreter Coordinator who in addition to coordinating the agency's American Sign Language (ASL) interpreting needs, also supervises one (1) full time staff interpreter and one (1) part time staff interpreter.
- Services for individuals whose primary language is Spanish
  - BRS employs one (1) Central Office Latino Consultant (currently vacant and recruitment underway) and five (5) full time Bilingual (Spanish) Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors (at the time of writing this, one (1) position is currently being refilled. BRS has also hired several clerk typist interpreters who are fluent in Spanish to assist the agency.
- Formal documents that require Spanish translation are handled by a contracted vendor. Informal documents are translated by agency staff.
- Cultural Competencies for Staff
  - BRS is committed to assisting individuals with the most significant disabilities to achieve competitive employment outcomes and improve access to services. A variety of trainings are provided that include training on underserved populations and disability specific issues. Cultural Competency training was provided to VR Staff to deconstruct structural barriers and systems within BRS and educate staff about ways to improve interactions among staff caused by racial inequalities and issues experienced by our consumers.
- Consumers who do not have access to functional technology or wi-fi were provided tablets in order to access VR Services during the remote service delivery period. Tablets can be provided under an IPE in order to engage in meaningful counseling sessions with the VR Counselor and use online employment tools.

### **Goal 4: To create effective partnerships designed to advance employment for Connecticut citizens with disabilities.**

Priority areas:

- Businesses
  - In FFY 2021, BRS negotiated 73 On-the-Job Training (OJTs) opportunities, 84 Competitive Work Opportunities (CPO), 40 Direct Placements. BRS also contracted with the following Industry-Specific Training and Placement Programs (ISTPPs):
    - Southeastern Employment Services/Lowes Distribution Center
    - Viability/Mohegan Sun
    - Viability/Walgreens Retail Stores
    - Viability/Travelers
    - Viability/Walgreens Distribution Center
    - Viability/Advance Auto Distribution Center
    - Ability Beyond/Walgreens Retail Stores

- Ability Beyond/Wyndham
  - Ability Beyond/Planet Fitness
  - Ability Beyond/Maplewood Senior Living
  - Ability Beyond/CVS Pharmacy
  - Ability Beyond/Ethan Allen Inn
- 141 individuals were trained through the ISTPP workforce development partnerships. Additionally, the following Training Programs were recently established:
  - Internship / United Healthcare Group
  - Digital Accessibility Technician / Western Connecticut State University
- Community Rehabilitation Providers
  - The Bureau has updated their CRP Distance Learning Modules created for staff in CRP agencies to understand the core services that BRS contracts with providers. The Bureau has the following modules available to CRP agencies: CRP Services Overview, The CRP Fiscal Process, Trial Work Experience Service, and Work Attachment Services. These modules are effective ways to increase knowledge about BRS services for the CRPs who traditionally have high staff turnover and lack the capacity to train new employees in a timely manner. BRS has the capability of monitoring Bureau participation of staff that enrolls in the training. These tools were developed in conjunction with the CRP agencies through the BRS CRP Committee.
  - As part of the Annual Review Process, each CRP agency reports to BRS on the staff that have taken the Distance Learning Modules as well as staff who have participated in one of three BRS CRP trainings that are offered throughout the year. Four new CRPs were developed during this fiscal year.
- State Agencies With the implementation of WIOA
  - BRS has collaborated with the core partners to unify the job services available for consumers seeking employment opportunities.

*An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:*

*Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals.*

Supported Employment goals were achieved using the following strategies:

VR Supported Employment Foundations Training is provided to new VR Counselors. A recorded training is available for refresher training as needed. Senior VR counselors are also invited to the training to get a refresher on the current SE environment as well as provide technical assistance to the training.

In addition, a BRS and DMHAS protocol document remains in place for both agencies to provide technical assistance on Supported Employment Policy and Procedures for both agencies. Both agencies participated in a combined training for VR staff, mental health staff, CRP staff on an ongoing basis.

Collaborative meetings are held quarterly with partners.

*Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities.*

Impeding Factors for Achieving Goals and Priorities

Consistent policies and practices in and between agencies administering Supported Employment programs continue to be a challenge for all stakeholders, including providers.

Staff turnover is frequent and coordinating collaborative trainings and providing technical assistance is difficult. While this has been a challenging effort, training is still a priority for VR and partner agencies and providers.

*The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA.*

BRS currently has negotiated with RSA a target of 37% for Measurable Skills Gains (MSG). In PY 2020 CT achieved a 51.5% MSG rate and expects similar performance for PY 2021. BRS expects to renegotiate MSG and to negotiate the remaining performance accountability measures during the fourth quarter of PY 2021.

*How the funds reserved for Innovation and Expansion (I&E) activities were utilized*

I&E funds were used in the following area:

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) received funding to support efforts to assist BRS in assessing programs and services provided to vocational rehabilitation consumers. The SRC incurs travel expenses to in-state meetings and sign-language interpreters, when needed. When desired by the Council, I & E funds are utilized to send an SRC delegate to attend out-of-state conferences for the National Coalition of State Rehabilitation Councils (NCSRC) and the Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The SRC is an organizational member of the NEAT Marketplace, a Connecticut facility that provides training and support with assistive technology devices. BRS has supported the SRC's effort to conduct a consumer satisfaction survey

#### **(q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services.**

*Include the following:*

*The quality, scope, and extent of Supported Employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities*

##### ***Supported Employment services***

SE services timeframe up to 24 months; under special circumstances if jointly agreed to by the individual and vocational rehabilitation counselor, the timeframe can exceed the 24 months.

##### ***Extended Services:***

Services can be provided for a period up to, but not to exceed 4 years to youth under the age of 25 with the most significant disabilities expending supported employment funds; and

As the need for SE is established and funding identified for extended services, VR plans can be amended to Supported Employment Plans.

Utilization of short-term plans as a means towards assuring better opportunities for transitioning youth who are expected to be in our system for longer periods of time.

For transition to Extended Services, BRS will work with relevant State Agencies, private non-profit organizations and our other partners to transition consumers from Supported Employment funding to the identified provider of the extended services funding as soon as the funding is available, and transition is appropriate. The timeframe of Supported Employment funding will vary, based on the needs of the individual consumer, but will generally not exceed 24 months in length

*The timing of transition to extended services*

BRS is engaged in facilitating systemic changes in how Supported Employment services are delivered in the community. The Bureau works with relevant state agencies, private non-profit organizations and other partners to transition consumers from Supported Employment funding to an appropriate extended

services program. The Bureau oversees one of the three state-funded extended services programs and spent approximately \$255,500 in serving VR consumers after VR services were completed. These efforts have led to internal and external improvements in our state system and have built a foundation for a strong Supported Employment service program in this state.

## **X. Vocational Rehabilitation Program Specific Requirements (Blind)**

### **(a) Input of State Rehabilitation Council**

The State Rehabilitation Council (SRC) for the Vocational Rehabilitation Program (BESB VR) at the Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind (BESB) continues to be a valuable and active contributing partner to the BESB VR Program and the organization. Over the course of this plan, the SRC members have participated in many activities on behalf of BESB VR, as well as continuing their existing responsibilities as identified in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). The following information summarizes the recommendations and initiatives of the SRC and incorporates BESB VR's response to each item.

#### **Recommendations from Initial Plan**

BESB VR agreed with and responded to each of the recommendations in the initial plan, which included the following:

Recommendation 1: Have the Consumer Satisfaction Survey conducted by an entity experienced in performing consumer-based surveys and statistically analyzing outcome data.

Recommendation 2: Based on the results of the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, implement strategies for improving on the delivery of services for clients of the Program.

Recommendation 3: Include a Vocational Rehabilitation Client Success Story at each meeting of the Council.

Recommendation 4: Support initiatives that develop leadership qualities in transition-age youth who are blind.

Recommendation 5: Identify strategies to address the fiscal constraints of BESB VR.

Recommendation 6: Participate in the development of the BESB VR section of the Unified State Plan, reviewing public comments and approving the final draft for submission to the Rehabilitation Services Administration and the United States Department of Labor.

For the modification period, the SRC offered the following recommendations:

Expected March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022

2. The designated State unit's response to the Council's input and recommendations; and

Expected March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022

3. The designated State unit's explanations for rejecting any of the Council's input or recommendations.

Expected March 4<sup>th</sup>, 2022

### **(b) Request for Waiver of Statewideness**

*When requesting a waiver of the statewideness requirement, the designated State unit must identify the types of services to be provided by the program on a non-statewide basis. The waiver request must also include written assurances that:*

*1. A local public agency will provide the non-Federal share of costs associated with the services to be provided in accordance with the waiver request;*

BESB VR provides the full range of services across the entire state and does not utilize a Waiver of Statewideness.

*2. The designated State unit will approve each proposed service before it is put into effect; and*

Not applicable.

*3. Requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan will apply to the services approved under the waiver.*

Not applicable.

### **(c) Cooperative Agreements with Agencies Not Carrying Out Activities Under the Statewide Workforce Development System**

*Describe interagency cooperation with and utilization of the services and facilities of agencies and programs that are not carrying out activities through the statewide workforce development system with respect to:*

*1. Federal, State, and local agencies and programs;*

BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation program is the designated state unit for individuals who are blind within the Department of Aging and Disability Services, which is the designated state agency. The Commissioner executes cooperative agreements at the designated state agency level on behalf of the Bureau.

Social Security Administration: The Bureau has an active cooperative agreement with the Social Security Administration (SSA) that makes it possible to seek and receive reimbursement for certain costs associated with clients of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program that have achieved earnings at or above substantial gainful levels and have therefore transitioned off of Social Security Disability Insurance (SSDI) or Supplemental Security Income (SSI). The process to seek reimbursement requires a combination of cooperative agreements at the state level. Client benefit status verification is obtained through an agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS). A cooperative agreement with the Connecticut Department of Labor (DOL) makes it possible to review wage records of individuals who are participating in BESB's Vocational Rehabilitation Program to determine if their earnings are above substantial gainful activity (SGA) levels and would therefore qualify the Bureau to request cost reimbursement from SSA. Cost reimbursement would be for the cost of BESB purchased services as well as fees for administrative and tracking costs associated with a client's case.

Native American Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) Program: The Bureau also has an active cooperative agreement with the Native American VR Program in Connecticut. This agreement has been developed to help with both programs coordinate and provide services to individuals who are mutually served by the programs or who could benefit from these services if they were to apply and meet eligibility criteria. To maximize collaboration, a representative of the Native American VR Program has served as an appointed member of the BESB State Rehabilitation Council.

New England VR Programs: The Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the other Vocational Rehabilitation State Units within the New England Region that allows for the provision of services, such as mobility training for clients of the VR Program who are attending training programs in those states.

Connecticut VR-General Program: For individuals who are deaf and blind, BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Connecticut's VR-General Program, for the coordination of services. Through a cooperative agreement, individuals who are deaf and blind can receive coordinated services from both public vocational rehabilitation programs. Through case conferencing, a determination is made as to which program will assume lead case management responsibilities, with the other program providing support services as needed. For clients who are receiving case management services through

BRS, BESB offers vocational consultations, orientation and mobility services, and rehabilitation teaching assistance.

State Medicaid Agency: The Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS) to ensure that recipients of Medicaid are aware of the services that are available through BESB VR, including the provision of information and referral services.

Department of Developmental Services (DDS): For clients who are blind and have developmental disabilities, the Bureau coordinates services with DDS to bring about successful job placements with long-term supports. Each BESB VR Counselor works closely with DDS to establish a strong working relationship and a close collaboration of services with the DDS case manager.

Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS): BESB VR Counselors coordinate services with DMHAS for individuals who are blind and have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, and/or addiction.

Department of Motor Vehicles (DMV): The Bureau has a cooperative agreement with the state DMV that implements a state law requiring the department to report on a quarterly basis to DMV the names of individuals age 16 and older who have been declared legally blind in each preceding fiscal quarter. The DMV uses this information to notify such individuals that their driver's license is no longer

***2. State programs carried out under section 4 of the Through the Assistive Technology Act***

BESB works closely with the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services, the lead agency for the Connecticut Assistive Technology Act program, to provide outreach and referrals of clients who are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the Deafblind Technology Grant can apply for and receive specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication. In addition, a low-interest loan program is available to assist clients who desire to acquire adaptive equipment that is not vocationally related, or who may need a short-term loan to cover the cost of repairs to personally owned devices.

***3. Programs carried out by the Under Secretary for Rural Development of the Department of Agriculture;***

Being a part of the Statewide Workforce Development System, the BESB VR has access to the full range of programs carried out through the Department of Agriculture.

***4. Non-educational agencies serving out-of-school youth; and***

The Bureau has entered into service agreements with the LEAP Program in Vermont for the provision of transition programs for in-school and out-of-school youth. Programs include mentoring, leadership development, independent living skills trainings, and work experiences as camp counselors. During the 2020 COVID pandemic LEAP offered programs virtually on TEAMS in the summer and fall, enabling many students in our Pre-Employment Transition Services program to participate at a minimal cost.

***5. State use contracting programs.***

At the Department level, the agency participates with the Office of the State Comptroller for a Purchase Card program that permits expedited purchasing of goods and services needed by clients to participate in the rehabilitation process. The Department has also established a fee for service contract model with community rehabilitation providers across the state that enables BESB VR to purchase services at consistent pricing levels, making budget forecasting a more consistent and reliable process. The agency also utilizes state use contracts made available through the Department of Administrative Services for services that have been competitively procured for statewide agency use. Examples include interpreting services for individuals who are deaf and deafblind, and braille transcription services to convert books into braille formats.

**(d) Coordination with Education Officials**

**Describe:**

- 1. The designated State unit's plans, policies, and procedures for coordination with education officials to facilitate the transition of students with disabilities from school to the receipt of VR services, including pre-employment transition services, as well as procedures for the timely development and approval of individualized plans for employment for the students*

BESB VR is actively involved in a variety of transition school-to-work initiatives, with extensive collaboration and coordination at the administrative and service delivery levels of the organization. The Department of Aging and Disability Services, in the role of designated state agency, has a formal interagency agreement with the State Department of Education (SDE) that details the roles and responsibilities of Connecticut's VR programs and SDE in the transition process. This formal interagency agreement was enacted on November 17, 2017.

At the direct service level, BESB VR Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings of clients who are in middle school or high school and assist in the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) for students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE) which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. BESB VR Counselor involvement may begin as early as age 14, with referrals to the VR Program to initiate the application for VR services. These referrals are most frequently initiated by Teachers for Students with Visual Impairments, some of whom work for the Bureau and some of whom work directly for school districts. Pre-Employment transition services may be initiated at the age of 16. Pre-Employment transition services clients are assigned to one of the two BESB VR Counselors that are exclusively dedicated to serving this population of eligible or potentially eligible students. Assignments are based on geographic location of the client. The BESB VR Counselors provide and coordinate the full range of pre-employment transition services to enable the students on their caseloads to gain exposure to careers through real work experiences, discussions with mentors who are blind, job shadowing, informational interviews and internships. Exploration of post-secondary programs that can lead to credentialing in careers of interest is also coordinated by the Counselors.

Within higher education, the Department has successfully negotiated with the State University System to establish a cooperative agreement that addresses the services available in the university setting for students with disabilities. This cooperative agreement includes the responsibilities of both of the Department's Vocational Rehabilitation programs and the responsibilities of the universities to ensure that students with disabilities achieve equal access to classroom instruction, internships, and school-sponsored activities.

**2. Information on the formal interagency agreement with the State educational agency with respect to:**

- A. Consultation and technical assistance to assist educational agencies in planning for the transition of students with disabilities from school to post-school activities, including VR services;*

As identified in the formal interagency agreement, BESB VR program staff continue to participate and present information at in-service training programs organized by the Bureau for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. BESB VR staff makes information available on transition initiatives, such as mentoring opportunities, independent living training programs, and work experiences that may be of interest to students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Services Program of the Bureau provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids and adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities, and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB. In 2021, the events were held virtually, with six separate Google Classrooms and 186 participants joining the virtual In-service.

***B. Transition planning by personnel of the designated State agency and educational agency that facilitates the development and implementation of their individualized education programs;***

The BESB VR Educational Projects Coordinator serves on the Statewide Transition Task Force, most recently joining the Steering Committee for this group. The Statewide Transition Task Force supports the Connecticut State Department of Education in its efforts to inform and guide students with disabilities, families, school districts, and community organizations to facilitate the progression from school to post-school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational education, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, independent living, and community participation. The Steering Committee maintains the Mission Statement & Guiding Principles of the task force, develops committee activities and projects, creates and facilitates workgroups, and recommends outside experts to assist with the designated activities and projects.

The Education Projects Coordinator also participates in the Connecticut Secondary Transition Symposium which brings students and their families together with educators and other professionals to improve secondary transition programming and services for students with disabilities. The annual symposium builds the capacity of educators and other professionals, in partnership with middle and high school students with disabilities and their families, to help ensure successful post-school outcomes. Participants learned about a variety of programs and resources to support students who are transitioning to adult life. The symposium includes sessions specifically for students making college and career choices. The two Pre-ETS Counselors presented at this event to a group of parents about BESB VR services, the eligibility process and the five core Pre-ETS transition services

The BESB VR Education Projects Coordinator also participates in the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice. This group brings multiple stakeholders together to collaborate and share ongoing secondary transition information, resources, activities and events in a centralized location that is accessible to all students, families, and statewide transition teams. The resources assist students, families and others in making informed decisions to achieve personal success including education, meaningful employment, self-sufficiency, and community access and involvement.

The agreement with the State Department of Education (SDE) allows staff from SDE to assist staff from BESB VR to connect with the individual Local Education Agencies (LEAs). The intent is to assure that Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) developed by LEAs for youth with disabilities aged 16 or over include plans for the provision of educationally related transition services as defined in 34 C.F.R. 361.22(b)(4) and 34 C.F.R. 300.43. The educationally related transition services include activities identified by the LEAs that are based on the student's needs, consideration of the student's preferences, and are designed to facilitate movement from school to post-secondary activities, including employment. Counselors from BESB VR are active participants in the Planning and Placement Team meetings to assist with the formulation of transition goals and activities. To the maximum extent possible, the BESB VR Counselors also incorporate these transition goals into the IPE of the client to align these transition activities between the LEA and BESB VR.

***C. Roles and responsibilities, including financial responsibilities, of each agency, including provisions for determining State lead agencies and qualified personnel responsible for transition services;***

Through the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with the State Department of Education (SDE), the roles and responsibilities of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program and the public educational system are clearly defined. This includes financial responsibilities as well as coordination of services and staff training. To facilitate this coordination, the Education Projects Coordinator from BESB serves on an interagency Transition Task Force and there is an appointed representative from the State Department of Education serving on the State Rehabilitation Council to BESB.

As detailed in the MOU, at no cost to BESB VR, SDE provides general supervision of the IDEA's requirements for special education and related services to ensure a free appropriate public education for

children and youth with disabilities. SDE coordinates with BESB VR in disseminating information to LEAs regarding effective, results-based practices for preparing students with disabilities for post-secondary education, vocational training, competitive employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. SDE further collaborates with BESB to disseminate information about and train school personnel on how to coordinate services for students with disabilities as they transition to life after high school, including those students interested in supported employment. For each student with a disability with an IEP or Section 504 Plan that the LEAs have reason to believe may pursue subminimum wage employment following their exit from the school system, SDE assures that the LEAs document the provision of transition services in accordance with the documentation requirements of 34 C.F.R. 397.30(b)(1), including, at a minimum, the child's name, a description of the service or activity completed, the dated signature of the responsible educational official documenting the completion of the required service or activity, and the dated signature of the responsible educational official who transmits the documentation of the provision of transition service. SDE further ensures that none of the LEAs enter into contracts with an entity for the purpose of operating a program under which a youth with a disability is engaged in work compensated at a subminimum wage.

The MOU further addresses collaboration between BESB VR and SDE in coordinating, providing, and documenting the provision of pre-employment transition services to students with disabilities. BESB VR provides vocational rehabilitation services to students and youth who meet the eligibility criteria. BESB VR staff assist the LEAs in providing transition planning for students with disabilities that facilitates the development and implementation of their IEPs and also work with the LEAs to develop an Individual Plan for Employment (IPE) for each student eligible for BESB VR services before the student exits high school. BESB staff also provides consultation and technical assistance to assist the LEAs in planning for the transition of eligible students. For students with disabilities who seek subminimum wage from employers who hold special wage certificates under the Fair Labor Standards Act, 29 U.S.C. 214 (c), BESB VR offers pre-employment transition services, and an offer to apply for vocational rehabilitation services. If a student is found eligible for vocational rehabilitation services and has an IPE, but is unable to achieve the employment outcome specified in the IPE, BESB VR can provide documentation of this outcome after obtaining a signed release of information.

***D. Procedures for outreach to and identification of students with disabilities who need transition services.***

Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring students from the BESB Children's Services Program to the BESB VR Program is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for BESB has a built-in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of students who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. This system is unique in that it allows for BESB VR to be aware of and track every child in Connecticut who is legally blind or visually impaired and who is participating in public education.

The BESB VR Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or guardians and the Program's Education Projects Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities, and leadership development programs.

Through the MOU with SDE, staff from that agency assist BESB with the distribution of information for LEAs to provide to students who may benefit from BESB VR services. SDE staff also provides information about the availability of BESB VR services to the LEAs to share with school personnel. SDE further assists the LEAs in providing outreach and identification of students with disabilities who are in need of transition services and pre-employment transition services that can be offered by BESB VR.

**(e) Cooperative Agreements with Private Nonprofit Organizations**

***Describe the manner in which the designated State agency establishes cooperative agreements with private non-***

*profit VR service providers.*

BESB uses a wide range of contractual agreements with accompanying fee schedules that have been established through a competitive bidding process by the Department of Aging and Disability Services, the designated state agency for the Blind and General VR programs. This provides a statewide comprehensive set of program options and services to choose from. Eleven nonprofit community-based rehabilitation programs are available through these contractual agreements for clients to select from. The services that are offered through the community rehabilitation programs in the state include trial work experiences, work readiness training, community placement opportunities and job coaching, among other related services.

BESB staff members conduct training seminars for staff of the community rehabilitation providers on blindness related topics such as orientation and mobility and the use of adaptive technology to ensure that programs and services are safe and accessible.

Additional fee agreements have been established with private non-profit service providers in other states where it is identified that these programs offer specific vocational and independent living services for persons who are blind. These agreements include non-profit rehabilitation providers in Louisiana, Colorado, Maine, Arkansas, Maryland, Minnesota, and Massachusetts.

Through a fee agreement with the National Federation of the Blind, the NFB Newsline is available for clients to access news, career information, and current events. This collaboration includes the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, which provides funding to cover a portion of the overall cost.

#### **(f) Arrangements and Cooperative Agreements for the Provision of Supported Employment Services**

*Describe the designated State agency's efforts to identify and make arrangements, including entering into cooperative agreements, with other State agencies and other appropriate entities in order to provide supported employment services and extended employment services, as applicable, to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities.*

BESB has been actively involved in cooperative working relationships with other public and private agencies for many years with regard to supported employment and extended services. The BESB VR Counselors identify individuals who have a significant disability along with legal blindness who can potentially benefit from long-term supports through supported employment. This process begins as early as middle school and high school for transition-age youth through the Counselor's involvement in the Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings and discussions, but it can also often occur during the adult years of clients in situations where supported employment services may be appropriate and beneficial.

The Bureau utilizes contractual agreements and fee schedules established by the Designated State Agency, the Department of Aging and Disability Services, to work with community providers to purchase supported employment services prior to the transition to the provider of extended services.

BESB continues to have an active working arrangement with the State of Connecticut, Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of DDS as a long-term third-party provider of funding.

In addition to the collaborative relationship with DDS, BESB has developed a working relationship with the State of Connecticut, Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third-party funding.

Beyond the collaborative arrangements for third party funding with other state agencies, BESB VR continues to work with the community rehabilitation providers throughout the state that are contracted by the designated state agency for the provision of these services.

The VR staff are members of the Association of People Supporting Employment First (APSE) and the VR Supervisor is on the Board representing BESB. Staff participate in regular trainings and seminars offered through APSE. This organization links community providers, employers, state agency representatives, and other resources together to exchange information on job placement strategies, funding sources, and employer job leads. BESB VR staff have presented at meetings of this organization on blindness related topics such as adaptive technology so that other providers in attendance would be aware of the options that exist for bringing about a successful job placement when accepting a referral from BESB VR for a client who is seeking a job placement with supported employment services. Since the COVID-19 pandemic the National APSE conferences and Regional Conferences have gone virtual. This has allowed more staff to participate in the conference. Last year eight staff participated in the National Conference and six participated in the Regional Conference.

### **(g) Coordination with Employers**

*Describe how the designated State unit will work with employers to identify competitive integrated employment and career exploration opportunities in order to facilitate the provision of:*

1. VR Services; and

The primary goal of coordinated activities with employers is to bring about long-term partnerships that foster a mutually beneficial relationship for both the employer and the clients served by BESB VR, while at the same time avoiding a duplication of efforts. BESB VR is very aware of and sensitive to the time constraints of employers and seeks to work in collaboration with other partners in the Workforce Development System that also perform employer outreach to reduce the potential for overlap in job development efforts.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Counseling Coordinator serves as the BESB VR team lead for outreach to employers and the gathering of job lead information. This includes establishing relationships with employers, with BESB VR receiving and disseminating job announcements. The BESB VR Counseling Coordinator also serves as the point of contact with the National Employment Team (NET), administered through the Council of State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR). The NET utilizes a business approach to facilitate outreach to larger employers that have a presence across multiple states. The NET is a valuable resource to develop relationships with these national companies. The NET coordinator puts the local human resources representative from a large employer in contact with the Vocational Rehabilitation agency's point of contact. The local staff meet to discuss specific services or recruitment needs at the local level. The needed services can vary from providing job candidates for local job openings or providing in-service training to front line supervisors on disability topics, to offering job retention assistance for workers with disabilities who have requested work site accommodations.

Within the NET, there is an employer database, referred to as the Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), where only job seekers who are receiving services from a public Vocational Rehabilitation agency can access the portal. Employers can search for qualified candidates through this portal as well. This helps the employer recruit pre-screened qualified candidates who have a disability.

BESB VR Counselors are members of the Business Service Teams within each of the five workforce regions, sharing job leads and learning of the employer outreach efforts of other members of these regional teams. Employer outreach activities performed by the BESB VR Counselors are tracked for reporting purposes.

The State of CT has also established three Job Development Networks of professionals that meet quarterly, in the three regions of the state. VR Counselors are represented within each network.

**2. Transition services, including pre-employment transition services, for students and youth with disabilities.**

With the development of employer relationships, even when employers may not be immediately hiring, they can offer other valuable services such as informational interviews, job shadowing opportunities, and work assessment site hosting. Company tours can further be arranged for clients of BESB VR to learn about a wide variety of careers. This is particularly important for transition-age youth served by BESB VR, who may otherwise have very limited exposure to actual job sites during their high school years. Employer sites where current or former clients of the Bureau are employed have proven to be particularly beneficial in these situations. The opportunity for mentoring these young clients helps them to learn directly from another individual who is legally blind about careers in many of the occupations that provide solid earnings and long-term stability.

An example is evident in an initiative launched by a former Chair of the Bureau's State Rehabilitation Council. As an employee of a leading employer in the aerospace industry, she successfully coordinated the startup of an annual mentoring event for transition-age students to spend a day at the company, touring the facility, shadowing employees and gaining inspiration by learning how she successfully navigated and problem-solved questions regarding work site accommodations, transportation, and career development.

BESB's Transition Coordinator and Transition VR Counselors organized three mentor events during PY 20 and 21. Each event was held virtually with four individuals discussing their experience working as an individual who is blind. Some of the mentors had recently graduated from college and discussed that experience as well. The mentees were transition aged youth or individuals reentering a different career.

The Transition staff also organized two virtual sessions on the college application processs and navigating the disability services offered at the colleges. These sessions targeted our transition aged youth and 10 participants attended. Another session is scheduled for this spring. There was a financial literacy training through the University of Connecticut that the Transition Team organized as a virtual event with 22 transition aged youth participating.

**(h) Interagency Cooperation**

*Describe how the designated State unit will collaborate with the State agency responsible for administering each of the following programs to develop opportunities for competitive integrated employment, to the greatest extent practicable:*

**1. The State Medicaid plan under title XIX of the Social Security Act;**

Through a cooperative agreement with the Department of Social Services (DSS), recipients of Medicaid who have disabilities are made aware of the BESB VR program and BESB VR Counselors provide information and referral assistance for clients who express an interest in seeking services from DSS such as Medicaid benefits, and the Home and Community Based Services waivers.

Benefits Counselors from the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services are also available to assist clients of BESB VR with understanding how employment earnings and public assistance benefits interact so that clients can make informed decisions regarding employment. The Benefits Counselors also explore with clients the many options that are available within the state and federal government programs including how to apply for Medicaid and Medicare, as well as health insurance under the Affordable Care Act.

**2. The State agency responsible for providing services for individuals with developmental disabilities; and**

This Bureau has an active agreement with the State Department of Developmental Services (DDS). This cooperative agreement assists in the coordination and identification of training providers that have specific expertise when a client with a developmental disability and legal blindness could benefit from supported employment services. This working relationship also involves the utilization of DDS as a long-term third-party provider of funding. Efforts at coordinating customized employment services are also

underway, with joint development of vendor qualifications for the delivery of the components of customized employment being finalized and readied for full implementation.

**3. The State agency responsible for providing mental health services.**

BESB has developed a working relationship with the State Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services (DMHAS). Through this arrangement, individuals who have a mental health diagnosis, acquired brain injury, or an addiction diagnosis along with legal blindness can access services to assist them in achieving a competitive, integrated employment outcome, including supported employment opportunities, with DMHAS providing the third-party funding.

**(i) Comprehensive System of Personnel Development; Data System on Personnel and Personnel Development**

*Describe the designated State agency's procedures and activities to establish and maintain a comprehensive system of personnel development designed to ensure an adequate supply of qualified State rehabilitation professional and paraprofessional personnel for the designated State unit, including the following:*

*1. System on Personnel and Personnel Development*

*A. Qualified Personnel Needs*

*Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on qualified personnel needs with respect to:*

*i. The number of personnel who are employed by the State agency in the provision of VR services in relation to the number of individuals served, broken down by personnel category;*

The current composition of BESB VR includes one Interim State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor Coordinator, one Quality Control Reviewer, one Educational Projects Coordinator, six full-time Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors, two Vocational Rehabilitation Assistant Counselors, three Rehabilitation Teachers specializing in Rehabilitation Technology), one Administrative Assistant, and one Secretary.

With this staffing level, the staff to client ratio breaks down as follows: Administrative Assistant 1/760; Education Projects Coordinator 1/760; State Director 1/760; Secretary 1/760; Quality Control Reviewer 1/760; Rehabilitation Teachers 1/253 (3 Rehabilitation Teachers); VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor 1/95 (8 Counselors); VR Counselor Coordinator 1/760; and VR Supervisor 1/760.

In terms of years of service, the breakdown for staff is as follows: 1 – 4 years of service 4/18 or 22%; 5 – 9 years of service 4/18 or 22%; 10 – 14 years of service 1/18 or 6%; 15 – 19 years of service 2/18 or 11%; 20 – 29 years of service 6/18 or 33%; over 30 years of service 1 or 6%.

*ii. The number of personnel currently needed by the State agency to provide VR services, broken down by personnel category; and*

BESB service delivery is divided into five regions throughout the state. At least one Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor is assigned to each of the five regions. The state is divided in half for rehabilitation technology services, with one technologist covering each half. The Rehabilitation Technologists each conduct assessments for clients needing adaptive technology to participate in VR services. There is also one Rehabilitation Teacher who serves the entire state.

There is one VR Counselor Coordinator that covers the entire state and works with the VR Counselors on case management strategies. This position also provides coordination of job development activities and employer engagement across the state. The VR Counselor Coordinator also serves a caseload of clients who are enrolled in college. He works closely with the offices of Disability Services at public and private institutions of Higher Education that clients from BESB VR are attending. Through this approach, consistent coordination of support services can be achieved.

The Educational Projects Coordinator serves as the Program's Transition School-to-Work coordinator, overseeing the statewide provision of Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) in collaboration with one VR Counselor whose primary responsibility is to serve a caseload of students with disabilities. The Educational Projects Coordinator also is responsible for the development and implementation of programs that provide students with opportunities to work through summer employment and internships, as well as providing career exposure experiences through job shadowing, employer tours, and mentor activities.

BESB VR also has one Interim State Director, one Vocational Rehabilitation Supervisor, one Quality Control Reviewer and two clerical staff to support the administrative functions of the program.

The staffing composition of BESB VR aligns with the current needs for the delivery of services.

*iii. Projections of the number of personnel, broken down by personnel category, who will be needed by the State agency to provide VR services in 5 years based on projections of the number of individuals to be served, including individuals with significant disabilities, the number of personnel expected to retire or leave the field, and other relevant factors.*

The original five-year projections for this plan anticipated retirements in the categories of State Director, Administrative Assistant, Education Projects Coordinator, Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and Rehabilitation Teacher. Due to changes in Connecticut's state retirement benefits, the anticipated retirements are expected to occur by summer of 2022, with the State Director retirement already occurring. The demographic of this need is illustrated by the following description, listing the job title, current number of positions within that job title, the current number of vacancies in the job category and the projected need over the next five years.

Job Title--Total positions--Current vacancies--Projected vacancies over next 5 years:

Administrative Assistant: 1 -- 0 -- 1

Education Projects Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 0

State Director: 1 -- 1 -- 0

Secretary: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Quality Control Reviewer: 1 -- 0 -- 0

Rehabilitation Teachers: 3 -- 0 --1

VR Counselor/Assistant Counselor: 8 --1-- 1

VR Counselor Coordinator: 1 -- 0 -- 0

VR Supervisor: 1 --0 -- 0

With the intent to refill vacancies, these staffing levels are sufficient to serve the current client population and the anticipated number of new referrals over the next five years. This conclusion is based on a trend analysis of the past 10 years that found an average of 164 new referrals per year and an average of 155 program participants exiting per year.

With the relatively high starting salary for master's level Rehabilitation Counselors compared to the private rehabilitation sector within the state, it is anticipated that recruitment efforts would again result in a sufficient applicant pool of qualified individuals if a VR Counselor vacancy were to occur. BESB VR recruits for individuals who meet the highest standard in the state (CRC eligibility) first. The competitive salary offered by the State of Connecticut for this job classification has resulted in the ability to hire individuals who possess this level of credentialing in most situations. If there are no qualified candidates from those recruitments, then recruitment will be made at the VR Assistant Counselor level.

*B. Personnel Development*

*Describe the development and maintenance of a system for collecting and analyzing on an annual basis data on personnel development with respect to:*

*i. A list of the institutions of higher education in the State that are preparing VR professionals, by type of program;*

We analyze the graduate information from the regional Council for Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) – accredited universities to find schools that offer required courses or graduate degrees in rehabilitation counseling. We also check with local CACREP schools for the availability of distance learning opportunities for the required CSPD courses. In the state of Connecticut, there is one CACREP-accredited institution of higher education that is preparing vocational rehabilitation professionals: Central Connecticut State University (CCSU). All rehabilitation counseling graduates from this college will be eligible to sit for the Certified Rehabilitation Counselor (CRC) exam.

*ii. The number of students enrolled at each of those institutions, broken down by type of program; and*

Currently, there are 94 students enrolled in the CCSU Vocational Rehabilitation Program. This is sufficient to address the projected recruitment needs over the next fiscal year.

*iii. The number of students who graduated during the prior year from each of those institutions with certification or licensure, or with the credentials for certification or licensure, broken down by the personnel category for which they have received, or have the credentials to receive, certification or licensure.*

Last year, there were 19 graduates from the CCSU program. This year, the total number of expected graduates is 21. All are eligible to sit for the CRC exam.

### **2. Plan for Recruitment, Preparation and Retention of Qualified Personnel**

*Describe the development and implementation of a plan to address the current and projected needs for qualified personnel including, the coordination and facilitation of efforts between the designated State unit and institutions of higher education and professional associations to recruit, prepare, and retain personnel who are qualified, including personnel from minority backgrounds and personnel who are individuals with disabilities.*

BESB VR remains in contact with CCSU, the institution of higher education in this state that offers a master's degree program in Rehabilitation Counseling to ensure that an adequate flow of graduates is anticipated for projected vacancies. When positions are available, recruitment efforts are conducted through job announcements that are placed on the Department of Administrative Services web site. BESB VR also distributes the job vacancy announcements to organizations of and for individuals who are blind within the state, as well as advertising nationally through Rehab Net, which is a list-serve that connects all of the state public VR agencies across the country and the island territories. The list-serve for the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB) is also utilized to distribute job announcements to ensure the widest possible distribution. Given the relatively competitive starting salaries for VR Counselors in comparison to the private sector for similar positions, the BESB VR Program is not experiencing a retention issue beyond what is expected through retirements and career advancement decisions. When job openings do occur, the applicant pool is significant and allows for a wide range of potential candidates to be interviewed.

### **3. Personnel Standards**

*Describe the State agency's policies and procedures for the establishment and maintenance of personnel standards consistent with section 101(a)(7)(B) to ensure that designated State unit professional and paraprofessional personnel are adequately trained and prepared, including:*

*A. Standards that are consistent with any national or State-approved or -recognized certification, licensing, registration, or other comparable requirements that apply to the profession or discipline in which such personnel are providing VR services; and*

All staff members working as VR Counselors, the VR Supervisor and the acting BESB VR Director meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements. These staff members meet these requirements by having a master's degree in Rehabilitation Counseling or a closely related field, as

specified by the criteria for certification as a rehabilitation counselor by the Commission on Rehabilitation Counselor Certification (CRCC).

There are two staff members that do not meet the Comprehensive System of Personnel Development requirements of a master's degree in Rehabilitation or a closely related field. As specified in BESB VR policy, the VR Supervisor, who meets this standard, approves all eligibility decisions, Individualized Plans for Employment, and case closures for these two staff who are both in the job title of VR Assistant Counselor.

There is no requirement in the job specification of the VR Assistant Counselor series to advance into the Counselor level. Staff hired into the job title of VR Assistant Counselor may seek continuing education to meet the qualifications of the VR Counselor level, within available funding.

*B. The establishment and maintenance of education and experience requirements, in accordance with section 101(a)(7)(B)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act, to ensure that the personnel have a 21st century understanding of the evolving labor force and the needs of individuals with disabilities.*

Working with the Department of Labor, the One-Stop Centers and their regional partners, BESB VR staff participate in training seminars on the needs of employers within the state. This includes training in the use of occupational outlook data as well as training in high demand jobs and the evolving workforce demographic. Staff has also received training in the use of Career Index Plus through a collaboration with the Job Driven VR Technical Assistance Center.

BESB VR has continued to collaborate with the State Department of Labor to develop training for BESB VR staff in occupational outlook data and labor market projections, which is provided annually. An orientation to the apprenticeship program was also provided to the BESB VR staff. BESB VR staff work closely with the American Job Center partners, participating in regional team meetings with the business consultants from the partner agencies to identify employment opportunities for clients and to be kept current on emerging sector-based training opportunities within their regions of the state.

**4. Staff Development**

*Describe the State agency's policies, procedures, and activities to ensure that, consistent with section 101(a)(7)(C) of the Rehabilitation Act, all personnel employed by the designated State unit receive appropriate and adequate training in terms of:*

*A. A system of staff development for professionals and paraprofessionals within the designated State unit, particularly with respect to assessment, vocational counseling, job placement, and rehabilitation technology, including training implemented in coordination with entities carrying out State programs under section 4 of the Assistive Technology Act of 1998; and*

BESB VR makes available a full range of training programs offered through public and private entities such as the Technical Assistance Centers, Rehabilitation Services Administration, the Council for State Administrators of Vocational Rehabilitation (CSAVR), and the National Council of State Agencies for the Blind (NCSAB). Program staff members are encouraged to identify training areas of particular interest for their individualized professional development in addition to BESB VR identifying programmatic training categories for staff to participate in to remain current in the field of rehabilitation.

VR Counselors work directly with their supervisor to identify areas for professional growth and development each year. Each employee of BESB VR receives at least one written evaluation per year, which is consistent with collective bargaining agreements. The Supervisor of BESB VR meets with staff members regularly to assist with any areas of their job performance that could benefit from further development and to provide feedback on best practices that have proven to be effective in-service delivery. Technical assistance on policies and procedures is also provided during individualized meetings and during staff meetings. If an employee is found to need additional assistance and training in order to meet the job requirements, then a plan for improvement is developed. This may include the use of weekly

reviews, additional written performance evaluations, and increasing the opportunity for the employee to participate in formalized training programs to increase skills and competencies.

Assistive Technology continues to be among the highest training priorities for staff in BESB VR, particularly since adaptive equipment is so often a component of success on the job for clients served by BESB VR. Training opportunities have included an Introduction to Accessible Educational Materials, How to Make Documents Accessible, How to Locate Captioned Videos and Caption Your Own, Ten Tips for Creating Accessible Web Content, Navigating the New Office Ribbon, Legal Requirements for Website Accessibility, Tips and Tricks with One Note, Using Google Docs and Google Chrome, Excel Tasks with JAWS in Excel, Using Fusion with Windows 10, and Navigating the Web with JAWS 2019. In addition, the BESB Rehabilitation Technologists participated in the Microsoft Ability Summit on Technology as well as the Assistive Technology Update: What's New in 2021.

Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many more virtual trainings have become available to staff, increasing the number of opportunities for training and participation in communities of practice. The annual conferences of Council of State Administrators for Vocational Rehabilitation and National Council of State Agencies for the Blind held in the Spring and Fall were held virtually in FY 20 and 21, allowing 10 staff to attend each conference.

The National Employment Team (NET) conference was also held virtually allowing 6 staff members to attend.

Cultural Diversity and sensitivity continue to be high priority topics for VR staff. A comprehensive four-day training was made available to staff, the VR Supervisor participated in the Knowledge Building Session on Cultural Diversity for members of one of the state's workforce boards, and members of the VR staff participated in a Community of Practice.

*B. Procedures for the acquisition and dissemination of significant knowledge from research and other sources to designated State unit professionals and paraprofessionals.*

Information from the RSA supported technical assistance centers is made available to staff and has been utilized to assist with interpreting requirements regarding Pre-Employment Transition Services, as well as for the sharing of information on successful practices. Information from local, regional and national conferences is also shared with coworkers, providing links to web-based literature and research that is made available during the conference presentations. Through regional meetings of the State Directors of Vocational Rehabilitation, research on quality assurance strategies is also made available. The State Director and VR Supervisor have further been engaged in reviewing the available models for delivering customized employment in order to assist the program in finalizing a collaborative approach with other interested state agencies for the provision of this service.

During the COVID-19 pandemic the VR staff have participated in a number of Communities of Practice (COP) offered through the Technical Assistance Centers and CSAVR. The VR Supervisor participated in a quarterly Veteran's Professional Network COP comprised of VR professionals throughout the Country. The VR Supervisor, Transition Coordinator and VR Counselor Coordinator participate in the Pre-ETS Blindness COP that meets quarterly and discusses programs offered to Pre-ETS individuals and best practices throughout the country. The three Rehabilitation Technologists participate in an Assistive Technology COP made up of Technology experts throughout the Country. And four VR Staff participated in a Cultural Competency COP.

*5. Personnel to Address Individual Communication Needs*

*Describe how the designated State unit has personnel or obtains the services of other individuals who are able to communicate in appropriate modes of communication with or in the native language of applicants or eligible individuals who have limited English speaking ability.*

There are two VR Assistant Counselors who are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish, and who serves Spanish-speaking clients throughout the State. BESB VR also provides information to clients in large-print, Braille, electronic, and audio formats to ensure that materials are accessible. BESB VR staff can also utilize contracted translation services to communicate with clients in other languages. Interpreter services for individuals who are deaf are available on a fee-for-service basis, including tactile interpreters for clients who are deaf and blind and whose preferred mode of communication is through sign language.

**6. Coordination of Personnel Development Under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act**

*As appropriate, describe the procedures and activities to coordinate the designated State unit's comprehensive system of personnel development with personnel development under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.*

Collaboration through the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) occurs on a continual basis through joint training programs and initiatives. Staff members from BESB VR participate in transition work groups including the Transition Task Force that is facilitated by staff from the State Department of Education. There is also a Community of Practice group that focuses on best practices and emerging trends in transition services to youth with disabilities. This multi-agency initiative includes representatives from BESB VR as well as the State Department of Education, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, the Department of Developmental Services, and the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services (BRS), Connecticut's General VR Program.

**(j) Statewide Assessment**

*1. Provide an assessment of the rehabilitation needs of individuals with disabilities residing within the State, particularly the VR services needs of those:*

*A. With the most significant disabilities, including their need for supported employment services;*

BESB's State Rehabilitation Council commissioned the Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University to conduct a comprehensive statewide needs assessment (CSNA) in 2020 to assist the SRC and BESB VR with establishing goals and priorities. The full report was issued by CPPSR in December, 2020. This was after the submission of the initial WIOA Plan, and the results are being incorporated into the 2-year plan modification. Among the variables reviewed, CPPSR conducted an analysis of BESB VR services to individuals with the most significant disabilities.

One issue identified in the CSNA was a decrease in the number of individuals on the registry, and a corresponding decrease in the number of new VR clients. BESB has a statutory obligation to maintain a registry of all individuals in Connecticut who are legally blind. After a steady increase from FY 2012 to FY 2015, BESB's registry has shown some evidence of a decline. In FY 2015, 11,854 individuals were listed in the registry, the highest number observed for this assessment and a client increase of 4.3%. The registry in FY 2019 has 9,338 individuals with significant visual impairment, a 16.2% decrease since FY 2015. And as of the writing of this plan modification, there are 8,642 individuals on the registry. The decrease is likely not a result of a decreasing blind population in Connecticut and may instead be attributed to other factors. One such factor could be the lack of referrals from doctors, a point included in CPPSR recommendations. Another is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Council further utilized the findings and recommendations within this report to assist with the development of goals, objectives, strategies, and measures for the state plan. Among its findings, CPPSR noted the following:

Comparing BESB, state and national statistics, CPPSR found that the Bureau's VR program appears to be successful at engaging Connecticut's visually impaired minority community, enrolling clientele who self-identify their ethnicity that reflects both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. CPPSR concludes that BESB is actively engaging blind youth in the State of Connecticut. Regarding BESB's financial situation from the previous CPPSR report, in 2019 and 2020, there have been improvements. In both years, BESB received significant supplemental awards through the federal

reallocation process. Along with savings due to the pandemic, BESB is in a more financially secure position in an uncertain economic climate. As a part of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the Center for Public Policy and Social Research also put forth the following recommendations. These recommendations helped to inform BESB's new goals, which are presented later in the plan.

- Improve Bureau outreach and visibility by sharing client success stories online, as well as continuing to promote BESB VR services to eye doctors.
- Offer new virtual services to encourage clients to utilize VR services.
- Work with community organizations to improve outreach and client engagement.
- Further emphasize online career opportunities for VR clients to broaden employment and internship possibilities.
- Continually refine plans for providing necessary services to vulnerable clients in the event of a pandemic-related lockdown.
- Make additional efforts to equip and train VR clients with technology to prepare them for virtual work and education.
- Look into arranging housing placement for VR clients who struggle with finding secure housing.

***B. Who are minorities;***

Individuals from underserved populations are tracked in BESB VR to ensure that they are engaged in services and fully understand the scope of available services that can be provided. Before any individual from a traditionally underserved population is inactivated from BESB VR with an unsuccessful outcome, a supervisory review process is required. The VR Supervisor confirms that the individual was provided with information in his or her preferred language and accessible format. Additionally, the Supervisor reviews the case record of services to confirm documentation is present, substantiating that the individual was afforded the opportunity to make informed decisions regarding participation in BESB VR.

BESB VR employs two Counselors who are bicultural, one of whom is fluent in Spanish. BESB VR also employs three Counselors who are African-American, two of the Counselors covering a regional caseload and the third covering a Transition caseload. These five staff are available to provide outreach to community-based organizations that can offer linkages to traditionally underserved communities. Outreach to the Hispanic Coalition has brought about opportunities for work evaluations and internships for BESB VR clients. Outreach to the Bridge to Success Community Partnership has led to the initiation of discussions for the provision of work-based learning opportunities for transition-age youth served by BESB-VR.

Working with Latinos who lack English language skills has also been an emphasis of the BESB VR Program. Outreach efforts have occurred with the Center for Latinos Progress, Adult Education, the Hartford Public Library, and Community Colleges in the Hartford area to coordinate English as a Second Language classes or programs for clients to gain the English language skills necessary to be successful in obtaining employment in a wider range of occupations. Additionally, engaging clients who have some basic English language with the American Job Centers to enroll them into classes and or training sessions that assist with resume writing or translating Spanish resumes into English has also been occurring. At the American Job Centers, these clients have also participated in mock interviews, and job seeking skills classes have also been utilized. Clients are also informed about and encouraged to use the basic technology available to them via their IOS devices or Android devices, such as Google Translate and other translators to assist them with travel and communication while on the job or in the community. One of the Assistant VR Counselors is an active participant in the quarterly Hispanic Council in the Southern part of the state.

***C. Who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program;***

Based on the new U.S. census information released in 2021, the majority of Connecticut residents are white, though data shows the state is becoming more diverse, with an increase in the number of Hispanic residents of approximately 30% over the last decade.

The state's Hispanic population increased by 144,206 people from 2010 to 2020, while the white population declined by 377,282. The state's white population dropped from 77.6% in 2010 to 66.4% in 2020, while the Hispanic or Latino population grew from 13.4% to 17.3%. The Black population grew from 10.1% to 10.8% and the Asian population grew from 3.8% to 4.8%. Those figures do not include people of mixed race.

Overall, Bureau clientele enrolled in the VR program who self-identify their ethnicity reasonably reflect both the state and national minority population at approximately 33.5%. Sub-groups are similarly represented. For PY 2021, BESB reported the following VR program enrollment: 25% African American, 18.8% Hispanic/Latino, 3% Asian, and less than 1% Native American/Pacific Islander.

***D. Who have been served through other components of the statewide workforce development system; and***

BESB VR has been actively involved in referring clients to other programs and services available through the statewide workforce development system. The level of commitment to facilitate client engagement in other components of the system is evident in the data that reflects 51 clients who have engaged in Adult Employment and Training Programs, 47 clients engaged in Adult Education Programs, 5 clients engaged in Dislocated Worker Programs, 3 clients engaged in Job Corps, and 103 clients enrolled in Wagner-Peyser during Program Year 2020. BESB VR finds great value in these partnerships. Maximizing the resources and services available through other components of the statewide workforce development system has been a priority for BESB VR.

***E. Who are youth with disabilities and students with disabilities, including, as appropriate, their need for pre-employment transition services or other transition services.***

In addition to a Transition Coordinator, BESB VR has dedicated two VR Counselors to work exclusively with Pre-Employment Transition-Age students. There are currently 119 students who are potential eligible or eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. The VR Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings to address the full range of services that are available. Real work experiences are coordinated in both after-school and summer jobs. Career exploration and job shadowing opportunities are provided to many of these students as well. With the existence of a Children's Services Program at BESB, VR staff have a strong linkage for identifying referrals of new clients who are potentially eligible for Pre-Employment Transition Services. Education Consultants from the Children's Services Program and Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments from the school districts often coordinate with the VR Transition Coordinator to develop expanded core curriculum activities that feature mentoring, career exposure, and independent living skills training for clients served in that program as well as clients that are mutually served by both programs simultaneously.

***2. Identify the need to establish, develop, or improve community rehabilitation programs within the State; and***

BESB VR has identified two areas for improvement: (1) providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related adaptive technology that is commonly utilized for training and employment; and (2) adaptations that are necessary to enable clients to access training materials. BESB VR sponsored a training with staff of the contracted community rehabilitation programs to address these two topic areas. No additional needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified.

Due to the COVID pandemic, two community rehabilitation providers dropped off the contract and are no longer able to provide services. All the providers on contract have suffered financial set backs and loss of staff. They are currently not at full capacity. The provision of services is being looked at with

Connecticut's VR-General program within the Bureau of Rehabilitation Services and regular meetings with the CRP committee occur.

*3. Include an assessment of the needs of individuals with disabilities for transition career services and pre-employment transition services, and the extent to which such services are coordinated with transition services provided under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act*

In recognition of the extensive need for transition-age youth to acquire knowledge of careers in demand, and to learn of the successes of adults who are legally blind, BESB VR organizes and conducts career exposure programs, mentoring programs, college days, and skills acquisition events, seeking out role models who are legally blind and employed or enrolled in higher education to participate in these events and programs. The BESB VR Transition Coordinator and the Pre-Employment Transition Counselors work directly with school district staff to incorporate these activities into the Individualized Education Program (IEP) or service plan of the students to emphasize the inclusion of these career development strategies as a critical component of the overall education process. BESB VR also utilizes job shadowing to expose transition-age youth to actual employment situations. Real work experiences for students with disabilities are crucial for the development of positive worker traits as well as developing self-confidence and money management skills.

## **(k) Annual Estimates**

*Describe:*

*1. The number of individuals in the State who are eligible for services*

BESB VR Update: As of the fourth quarter in Program Year 2020, there are 606 eligible individuals in BESB VR. The Blind Registry for BESB has 8,642 individuals in the state of Connecticut who are legally blind or who have significant vision loss. Connecticut has a state statute that requires eye doctors, physicians, and advanced practice registered nurses to refer to the Department of Aging and Disability Services all individuals whom they have identified to be legally blind.

This represents a continued decrease in the number of individuals on the registry, from a high of 11,854 in FY2015, to 9,338 in FY2019 to the current number of 8,642. There are a combination of factors at play, including a lack of referrals from doctors and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

*2. The number of eligible individuals who will receive services under:*

*A. The VR Program;*

At the onset of FY 2021 there were 587 eligible individuals, 586 of whom had implemented IPEs. The projected number of new IPEs for FY 2021 is approximately 125. Added to the 586 eligible individuals with pending and implemented IPEs at the onset of FY 2021, this would represent approximately 745 eligible individuals that are projected to receive services under an IPE in FY 2021. Projections for FY 2022 closely parallel FY2021 projections, with approximately 750 individuals anticipated to receive services under an IPE in that fiscal year. In FY 2023, anticipated growth in the program, resulting from continued and focused outreach efforts to eye doctors and community-based organizations, is anticipated to yield an increase in the total number of eligible individuals served, potentially reaching 760 eligible individuals.

*B. The Supported Employment Program; and*

In the 2020 program year (PY), 1 new individual was found eligible for supported employment services, bringing the total number of eligible individuals to 16 for that fiscal year. Of that total, 4 individuals were youth with disabilities. In PY 2020 there were 4 individuals who exited BESB VR, 1 of whom achieved employment outcomes, leaving 12 individuals who were eligible for supported employment at the onset of PY 2021.

It is projected that 3 more individuals will become eligible for supported employment services in FY 2020, bringing the total to 26 eligible individuals. It is further anticipated that 2 more individuals will exit BESB VR in FY 2020, resulting in 24 eligible individuals at the onset of FY 2021. In FY 2021, it is projected that 3 new individuals will be found eligible for supported employment services, 1 of whom is likely to be in the category of youth with a disability. This would bring the total number of eligible individuals in FY 2021 to 27. It is further anticipated that through enhanced collaboration with the school districts, over time there will be a gradual increase in the number of students entering into supported employment placements, resulting in approximately 4 individuals who would exit BESB VR through supported employment by the end of FY 2021. This would result in 23 individuals eligible for supported employment at the onset of FY 2022. If a similar trend continues, then FY 2022 could include an additional 5 individuals who would become eligible for supported employment services during that fiscal year.

*C. Each priority category, if under an order of selection.*

Not applicable.

*3. The number of individuals who are eligible for VR services, but are not receiving such services due to an order of selection; and*

Not applicable.

*4. The cost of services for the number of individuals estimated to be eligible for services. If under an order of selection, identify the cost of services for each priority category.*

In FFY 2020, there were 710 eligible individuals with IPEs over the course of the federal fiscal year. BESB VR expended approximately \$3.92 million on combined Program costs, including \$1.04 million to provide purchased services, and \$2.88 million in administrative and operational costs. In FFY 2021, there were 697 eligible individuals with IPEs over the course of the fiscal year. BESB VR expended approximately \$3.94 million on combined Program costs, including \$1.08 million to provide purchased services, and \$2.86 million in administrative and operational costs. For FFY 2022, budget projections indicate that approximately \$4.55 million will be expended on combined Program costs, including an estimated \$1.42 million to provide purchased services to approximately 675 individuals, and \$3.13 million in administrative and operational costs. This estimate includes inflationary adjustments, inclusion of indirect cost charges of 11.95 percent to BESB VR, as well as projected costs to serve transition-age students receiving Pre-Employment Transition Services.

With the availability of \$4.1 million in Title I carry over funds from FFY 2021, in addition to the federal Title I allotment of \$3.35 million (representing 15 percent of the total Title I allotment received by Connecticut), and state matching funds of approximately \$790,000, BESB VR does not anticipate the need to enter into an Order of Selection in FY 2022, FY 2023 or FY 2024.

## **(I) State Goals and Priorities**

*The designated State unit must:*

*1. Identify if the goals and priorities were jointly developed and agreed to by the State VR agency and the State Rehabilitation Council, if the State has a Council, and jointly agreed to any revisions*

The BESB VR goals, objectives, strategies and measures of performance were jointly developed and agreed to by BESB VR and the State Rehabilitation Council.

*2. Identify the goals and priorities in carrying out the VR and Supported Employment programs*

The VR Staff, State Rehabilitation Council and Advisory Board met to develop new goals based on the results of the Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment, the emerging needs from the COVID-19 Pandemic and the current environment.

## **Goal A: Engage employers to increase career opportunities for eligible individuals of BESB VR.**

Objective A1: BESB staff will reach out to employers and partner agencies to collaborate and educate them on BESB services.

Strategy: BESB VR Counselor Coordinator and VR Counselors will meet with and present to employers, partner agencies, and national organizations educating them on BESB services.

Measure: Documentation of 5 presentations annually.

Objective A2: Develop digital BESB marketing materials that can be distributed to employers and partner agencies.

Strategy: Create materials showing success stories and services that BESB offers.

Measure: Documentation of distribution to employers and partner agencies.

Objective A3: Train BESB VR clients how to use CT Hires, Career Index Plus, Talent Acquisition Portal (TAP), Indeed and other accessible job exploration platforms.

Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and VR Counselors will teach no fewer than 10 job seeking clients per year how to navigate and utilize these platforms.

Measure: Documentation of a list of accessible and effective sites and utilization by each client.

Objective A4: VR Counselors will engage clients on their caseloads to participate in job fairs, hiring events and training programs with partner agencies.

Strategy: VR Counselors will share this information with individuals on their caseloads and facilitate attendance at these events.

Measure: Documentation of no fewer than 5 clients per VR Counselor caseload per year attending one of these events and a survey of their experience.

## **Goal B: Provide coordinated services to students with disabilities to prepare for careers and post-secondary education after exit from high school.**

Objective B1: BESB VR will continue to serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.

Strategy: Students will be assigned to a caseload to receive specific, qualifying Pre-ETS services with dedicated Pre-ETS funding.

Measure: Documentation of Pre-ETS services

Objective B2: BESB VR staff will coordinate enrollment and participation for their Pre-ETS eligible students in BESB run events as well as partnership with agencies that promote the development of self-determination, self-advocacy and financial literacy.

Strategy: BESB VR staff working with Pre-ETs eligible students will develop opportunities and distribute information on existing programs. These opportunities will focus on pre-employment activities such as work based learning opportunities, internships, college preparatory programs, life skills programs, and related career development programs.

Measure: Documentation of participation in these events.

Objective B3: BESB VR Staff will develop a mentor program for transition aged students

Strategy: BESB transition aged students will be provided opportunities for group mentoring events, job shadowing and peer-to-peer support networking. Individuals will be matched with a mentor that is blind or visually impaired who is employed within a wide range of careers.

Measure: A list of mentors available for a match with a transition aged student. Documentation of mentor matches and participation at events.

Objective B4: BESB VR and the SRC co-sponsor leadership development activities and camps for groups of Pre-ETS eligible clients.

Strategy: The SRC and BESB VR provide co-sponsorship funding for the leadership events such as the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.

Measure: Documentation of the funds committed.

**Goal C: Use Innovation and Expansion authority to increase access to career information, adaptive technology, self-advocacy and employer awareness of the employment potential of individuals served by BESB.**

Objective C1: BESB VR shall provide funding for electronic access to career and news information.

Strategy: Funding provided to have NFB Newsline available to BESB VR clients.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for NFB Newsline.

Objective C2: Provide access to the latest adaptive technology devices for clients to try out for assessment purposes.

Strategy: Purchase new adaptive technology devices for the BESB Technology Lab and the Technology Lab at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind.

Measure: Documentation of purchases of technology devices.

Objective C3: The SRC will identify a contractor to conduct the annual consumer satisfaction survey and periodic comprehensive needs assessments and use the results to develop continuous improvement initiatives.

Strategy: The SRC selects a vendor, reviews the results of the reports, and works with Program staff to implement strategies that address the results and trends identified in the reports.

Measure: Documentation of purchase of survey and comprehensive needs assessment, Consumer Satisfaction and Comprehensive Needs Assessment reports received and reviewed with Program staff.

Objective C4: SRC representatives participate in state, regional and national conferences and programs that provide opportunities to increase public awareness of the employment capabilities of BESB VR clients, increase the SRC members' knowledge and understanding of the public VR Program, and create opportunities for learning best practices that can develop into new goals and strategies for BESB VR to explore and implement, if applicable.

Strategy: The SRC Chair is provided with information about upcoming conferences, seminars and activities from the BESB Director and designates a SRC member or members to participate and share information with the full membership.

Measure: SRC members attend CSAVR, NCSAB and other national, regional or statewide conferences or seminars that address the components stated in the objective.

Objective C5: Identify a Vendor to create outreach materials for distribution of information on BESB.

Strategy: Rehabilitation Technologists identify accessibility issues with marketing documents and solutions to share with clients of the Bureau.

Measure: Document is posted on agency website, social media platforms and distributed to organizations of and for individuals who are blind and mailed to clients upon request.

Objective C6: Create a tutorial series in an accessible format on the use of the adaptive technology.

Strategy: Rehabilitation Technologists develop a series of tutorials, such as but not limited to working in a remote environment, how to use common assistive technology and other technology for distribution.

Measure: Tutorials posted on agency website and distributed to organizations of and for individuals who are blind and distributed to clients.

*3. Ensure that the goals and priorities are based on an analysis of the following areas:*

*A. The most recent comprehensive statewide assessment, including any updates;*

The comprehensive needs assessment and the consumer satisfaction survey results were utilized by BESB VR and the State Rehabilitation Council in considering and developing the goals as stated in the preceding subsection.

*B. The State's performance under the performance accountability measures of section 116 of WIOA; and*

The Bureau has factored in our role in achieving statewide WIOA performance measures in establishing the goals for the VR program.

*C. Other available information on the operation and effectiveness of the VR program, including any reports received from the State Rehabilitation Council and findings and recommendations from monitoring activities conducted under section 107*

The State Rehabilitation Council has reviewed emerging adaptive technology considerations, in addition to the comprehensive needs assessment, the consumer satisfaction survey results, and trends in outcomes and services provided to address the goals that were developed.

### **(m) Order of Selection**

*Describe:*

*1. Whether the designated State unit will implement an order of selection. If so, describe:*

*A. The order to be followed in selecting eligible individuals to be provided VR services*

BESB VR is not operating under an order of selection and provides services to all eligible individuals.

*B. The justification for the order*

Not applicable.

*C. The service and outcome goals*

Not applicable.

*D. Time within which these goals may be achieved for individuals in each priority category within the order; and*

Not applicable.

*E. How individuals with the most significant disabilities are selected for services before all other individuals with disabilities*

Not applicable.

*2. If the designated State unit has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of any established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment*

In the event that an Order of Selection were to become necessary, BESB VR has elected to serve eligible individuals, regardless of the established order of selection, who require specific services or equipment to maintain employment.

### **(n) Goals and Plans for Distribution of title VI Funds**

**1. Specify the State's goals and priorities for funds received under section 603 of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of supported employment services**

It is the primary goal and priority of BESB VR to consider supported employment as an option in all circumstances where the provision of these services will increase the likelihood of job placement success for people with significant, multiple barriers to employment.

The Vocational Rehabilitation Program has found it challenging to utilize the Title VI funding under the allowable uses that were placed upon these funds in the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act. Under prior regulations, these funds could be utilized to explore vocational opportunities through work assessments, rehabilitation technology assessments, and a host of other support services that were incorporated into each client's IPE. Under current rules, these funds can only be utilized for support after a job hire, primarily in the form of job coaching and extended services. It is a primary goal of the Vocational Rehabilitation Program to identify strategies that will result in a job hire so that greater utilization of these funds can be achieved. This strategy will necessarily rely upon Title I funds to provide for the work assessments, short-term internships with supports, and for the provision of adaptive technology so the individuals can have the opportunity to demonstrate to potential employers their capabilities.

While community rehabilitation providers will continue to be utilized as the providers of extended services when available, greater emphasis on natural supports through the employer will be encouraged as a goal in the future. Where available and feasible, natural supports through a client's family to expand options for the provision of support services will also be encouraged. With the opportunity to offer extended services funding to youth with disabilities to provide for longer-term supports on the job, the Vocational Rehabilitation Program shall also work closely with the Planning and Placement Teams in the school districts to make them aware of these funding options to support clients placed into supported employment.

**2. Describe the activities to be conducted, with funds reserved pursuant to section 603(d), for youth with the most significant disabilities, including:**

**A. The provision of extended services for a period not to exceed 4 years; and**

In order to facilitate the identification of supported employment options for transitioning high school students, the two VR Counselors assigned to work with this specific client population participate in Planning and Placement Team meetings (PPTs) and work in cooperation with the Children's Services Program at BESB. The teams are informed about the scope of vocational rehabilitation services, including the option for providing up to 4 years of extended services for eligible individuals who meet the requirements. Education Consultants from the Bureau's Children's Services Program are also made aware of this provision to assist in facilitating discussions with team members and parents or guardians of these individuals. The Bureau has available funding to support youth with disabilities in extended services and looks forward to entering into such arrangements with school districts, state agencies, private community providers, or directly with employers who can offer natural supports after the period of extended services funding.

**B. How the State will leverage other public and private funds to increase resources for extended services and expanded supported employment opportunities for youth with the most significant disabilities.**

The Bureau works collaboratively with the Department of Developmental Services, the Department of Mental Health and Addiction Services, employers, and community providers to identify and secure alternative sources of long-term funding and support, where available.

**(o) State's Strategies**

**Describe the required strategies and how the agency will use these strategies to achieve its goals and priorities, support innovation and expansion activities, and overcome any barriers to accessing the VR and the Supported**

*Employment programs (See sections 101(a)(15)(D) and (18)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act and section 427 of the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA)):*

*1. The methods to be used to expand and improve services to individuals with disabilities*

Utilizing the results and recommendations from the Comprehensive Needs Assessment, as well as the Consumer Satisfaction Survey, BESB VR, in collaboration with the SRC, has identified several areas that need further expansion and improvement to better serve clients.

From an analysis of the number of new applicants into the VR Program as well as the overall number of new referrals into the Bureau, a longitudinal decline has been noted. Since eye doctors represent the primary source of new referrals into the Bureau, a focused outreach effort was instituted toward the end of FY 2019, continuing into FY 2020. The eye doctor reporting form was updated to add clarity and definitions of both legal blindness and visual impairment. A section was added to allow for the reporting of functional vision for circumstances where consistent results cannot be obtained during eye examinations. This form was posted on the agency website, followed by a mailing of the new form to over 1,100 eye doctors across the state. This outreach effort will be conducted again to ensure that eye doctors are reminded of the statutory reporting requirements and the availability of an improved reporting format. Additionally, each of the VR Counselors will incorporate focused outreach to community-based organizations into their work activities to make these organizations aware of the services that are available through BESB VR.

To add greater clarity to the responsibilities of the VR Program and those of the client, the Client Services Handbook was updated and posted on the agency website. This handbook is available in English, Spanish, Braille, large print, and audio versions and it provides an overview of the available services along with descriptions of the processes for requesting these services. A notification was sent to organizations of and for individuals who are blind informing them of this handbook update. The handbook is also provided to clients at the time of eligibility determination.

Strategies for ensuring adequate caseload coverage when VR Counselor vacancies occur have also been identified. Options such as seeking approval for a retiree to cover a caseload temporarily and seeking existing staff who are available to work additional hours to help maintain caseload coverage until vacant positions are filled shall be fully considered to reduce interruptions to service delivery in the future.

With the recognition that caseload sizes do not make it practical for the VR Counselors to dedicate large amounts of time to assist every individual in job seeking activities, BESB VR Rehabilitation Teachers assist with teaching clients how to register for web-based job search platforms such as the Career Index Plus, Monster, and CT Hires through the DOL to name a few. These web-based products include a vocational interest inventory, economic outlook information, and links to immediate job openings and labor market information searchable by location. VR Counselors are actively encouraging their assigned clients to register for this self-directed service and to report their activities back to their VR Counselor. It is anticipated that this will result in increased access to job opportunities.

Additionally, working in close collaboration with the regional workforce boards, the BESB VR Counselors will continue to participate in business services teams to learn about upcoming job opportunities. Outreach to community colleges to identify certificate program opportunities shall also remain a priority to assist clients with identifying and pursuing careers that are available through these types of initiatives.

*2. How a broad range of assistive technology services and devices will be provided to individuals with disabilities at each stage of the rehabilitation process and on a statewide basis*

BESB VR employs two full time Rehabilitation Teachers in the role of Technologists who are available to provide individualized assessments on adaptive technology options and solutions so that clients can make informed decisions as to the best option for their particular vocational training and employment situations. The Technologists are able to provide these assessments at the employer site, training facility,

or home of the client by utilizing a portable array of technology devices that are maintained by BESB VR. The Technologists are further available to offer short-term training in the use of adaptive technology that is needed for participation in vocational training or employment. A third Rehabilitation Teacher is available to provide training to clients in the use of Career Index Plus with adaptive technology so that clients can be more fully engaged in the career exploration and job seeking process.

Additionally, BESB VR maintains a fully equipped adaptive technology laboratory in Windsor that is available for both assessments and training sessions. These training sessions can be done in person or remotely with the use of tandem training through the internet. In collaboration with the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, an additional technology laboratory is located at their facility in New London.

BESB VR further utilizes fee for service vendors for training in the use of adaptive technology devices in circumstances where training is required over multiple sessions that stretch beyond the capacity of the on-staff Rehabilitation Teachers. Through the Assistive Technology Act, BESB works closely with BRS to provide outreach and referrals of clients who are deaf and blind so that clients who meet the eligibility requirements of the National Deaf Blind Equipment Distribution Program can apply for and receive specialized adaptive equipment to increase their access to communication.

*3. The outreach procedures that will be used to identify and serve individuals with disabilities who are minorities, including those with the most significant disabilities, as well as those who have been unserved or underserved by the VR program*

As part of a new strategy to increase outreach to community-based organizations to make them aware of available services, all of the VR Counselors have an outreach goal incorporated into their work activities. The individualized relationships the Counselors have established thus far with the community-based organizations have strengthened the outreach activities into the local communities, but this was expanded to ensure a wider reach across the entire state. While the demographic data strongly indicates that BESB VR is effectively serving individuals with disabilities who are minorities, the decline in new referrals to BESB VR further suggests that more outreach activity is necessary to ensure that organizations and individuals are made aware of the services that BESB VR can offer.

*4. The methods to be used to improve and expand VR services for students with disabilities, including the coordination of services designed to facilitate the transition of such students from school to postsecondary life (including the receipt of VR services, postsecondary education, employment, and pre-employment transition services)*

The two Pre-Employment Transition Counselors participate in Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings of students with disabilities and assist in the development of Individualized Education Programs (IEP's) for these students. The services that are detailed in the IEP of each student are factored into the development of each client's Individualized Plan for Employment (IPE), which must be developed within ninety (90) days of the determination of eligibility for vocational rehabilitation services, or by the time the client exits high school, whichever comes sooner. VR Counselor involvement can begin as early as age 14, with Pre-Employment Transition Services commencing at age 16. Referrals to BESB VR are most commonly initiated by the Education Consultants of BESB's Children's Services Program or by Teachers of Students with Visual Impairments that work directly for school districts.

Since BESB maintains a registry of all students who are legally blind or visually impaired within Connecticut, the process for identifying and referring clients from Children's Services to BESB VR is streamlined and efficient. The electronic case management system for BESB has a built-in tracking system for identifying clients by age range to further facilitate the referral of students who desire to participate in vocational rehabilitation services. The VR Counselors work with the students, educators, parents or guardians, and the Program's Transition Coordinator to identify careers of interest, develop

career exploration opportunities, work and job shadowing experiences, mentoring activities, and leadership development programs.

In addition to serving on the Statewide Transition Taskforce, BESB VR's Transition Coordinator is also an active member of the Connecticut Transition Community of Practice.

BESB VR continues to conduct career exposure programs for high school students who are visually impaired or legally blind. These programs include opportunities to interact with former recipients of vocational rehabilitation services who are successfully employed in a variety of careers. Some of these programs are held on college campuses, where the students gain a firsthand perspective of campus life in addition to gaining insight into a variety of careers that former clients are now engaged in.

BESB VR staff members continue to participate in and present information at in-service training programs organized by BESB for public school teachers and guidance counselors on issues affecting students who are blind or visually impaired. The Children's Services Program of BESB provides a comprehensive training series every year for school district staff to learn about low vision aids, adaptive technology, braille instruction, expanded core curriculum activities and resources that are available to facilitate the education and transition of students served by BESB.

BESB VR has also established a goal of participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings early in the transition process to identify the need for supported employment services, and to identify providers, both private and public, that may offer services while a student is preparing to transition from public or private education into employment. BESB VR Counselors are also available to provide vocational counseling and coordinate trial work opportunities for students who are considering sub-minimum wage placement options, to ensure that these individuals are fully aware of the opportunities for success in the competitive labor market, with supports, if applicable.

***5. If applicable, plans for establishing, developing, or improving community rehabilitation programs within the State***

Other than providing training to staff of community rehabilitation programs on blindness related technology and adaptations for accessing training and employment, no needs to establish, develop or improve upon these programs have been identified. BESB's VR Supervisor is an active participant on the statewide Community Rehabilitation Providers committee made up of Department of Aging and Disability staff as well as staff from the Community Rehabilitation Providers. This committee meets quarterly to improve collaboration and create efficient, effective processes.

***6. Strategies to improve the performance of the State with respect to the performance accountability measures under section 116 of WIOA***

WIOA provided new opportunities for collaboration, coordination and participation of partners, with a shared goal and vision of connecting job seekers with relevant training and employment. Through these partnerships, BESB VR Counselors are now part of regional business services teams meeting regularly to discuss current employer needs within their regions, and to identify upcoming employment opportunities and skill requirements to be considered as a qualified candidate for these positions. Through the execution of Memorandums of Understanding and accompanying Infrastructure Agreements, the VR Counselors are co-located on a part-time basis at the American Job Centers in all five regions, encouraging clients to register for applicable services available through partner programs. Rehabilitation Technologists offer technical assistance on approaches to increase accessibility of the American Job Centers and partner services.

***7. Strategies for assisting other components of the statewide workforce development system in assisting individuals with disabilities***

BESB VR staff's expertise in blindness related topics, including how adaptive technology can be utilized to make core services of the American Job Centers and training programs accessible, is offered to the partner programs. The Rehabilitation Technologists review testing and training materials, equipment and structural design at the American Job Centers, offering recommendations on how to make information and training materials accessible to job seekers who are blind. Additionally, BESB VR Counselors provide in-service training to staff of partner programs on effective approaches to utilize when working with and assisting individuals who are blind. BESB VR staff are an active and ongoing resource to partner program staff in this area.

***8. How the agency's strategies will be used to:***

***A. Achieve goals and priorities by the State, consistent with the comprehensive needs assessment;***

Providing clients with the skills and training necessary to qualify for occupations that exist in the economy is essential. Partnering with other components of the workforce system is a key factor to achieving this goal. Being a part of regional business services teams ensures that BESB VR Counselors are at the forefront of discussions with employers who are seeking to fill job vacancies as well as those employers who are considering expansion in this state. Dedicating staff resources to offer training to clients in the use of Career Index Plus and other job search engines is an important strategy employed by BESB VR to encourage clients to take a more immersive role in the career exploration and job seeking process. Career Index Plus was developed by a Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and is accessible to individuals that utilize adaptive technology. It contains a vocational interest inventory, economic forecasting by career cluster, and direct links to job openings by region, state and zip code. For BESB VR to be effective in bringing together qualified job seekers with employers, all of these approaches must be utilized to the greatest extent possible.

BESB VR further recognizes the need for greater utilization of supported employment funding to increase employment opportunities for eligible individuals with multiple, significant impediments to employment. With the opportunity to utilize a portion of these funds to support youth with disabilities in extended services, this employment option will be stressed at Planning and Placement Team (PPT) meetings to expand awareness of this approach to employment.

Greater utilization and awareness of adaptive technology has also been identified as a priority to ensure that clients have the tools and training necessary to participate fully in vocational training opportunities and in employment. Guided by this plan, staff from BESB VR created tutorials and guides to assist clients with self-directed training to augment the training services offered by BESB VR.

A coordinated approach to expand the ability of partner programs and community-based organizations to communicate the availability of BESB VR services is an equally important strategy to achieve the overarching goal of employment for clients.

***B. Support innovation and expansion activities; and***

Offering a robust approach to career information and job openings is a key component of the Innovation and Expansion activities that have been established as priorities for BESB VR. In addition to using Career Index Plus as a tool, BESB VR provides access to the National Federation of the Blind's (NFB) Newsline service to provide a lower-tech option through touch tone telephones for clients who may not have internet access or current skills in the use of computers. NFB Newsline also offers a web-based option for clients who have access to the internet.

Programs serving youth, including youth from underserved populations, is another priority that has been identified in the Innovation and Expansion initiatives for BESB VR. VR staff assists in the development of independent living, leadership and career exposure programs and initiatives. The SRC and BESB VR offer co-sponsorship to the Youth Leadership Forum, a proven model for developing leadership skills and community involvement for youth with disabilities.

Expansion of the availability of adaptive technology in training programs, core services, and apprenticeship programs is another category where there is considerable activity. BESB VR staff brings their knowledge of blindness related technology accommodations into discussions with the partners so that solutions can be identified and implemented in the planning stages of new initiatives, ensuring equal access to services. BESB VR also provides support for the adaptive technology laboratory located at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind, making it possible for clients of BESB located in that region to receive local training in the use of adaptive technology.

In response to the changing work environment and increase in remote work options, a BESB Rehabilitation Technologist will create a tutorial series in accessible format on the use of adaptive technology. Examples of tutorials will be working in a remote environment, the use of common assistive technology and other non-adaptive technology. These tutorials will be posted on the website and distributed as needed to clients.

Another identified need is accessible marketing materials that are electronic, a QR code, social media or pamphlets. A vendor will be identified to create outreach materials for distribution of information on BESB

*C. Overcome identified barriers relating to equitable access to and participation of individuals with disabilities in the State VR Services Program and the State Supported Employment Services Program.*

Ensuring that clients from BESB VR have access to accessible training materials from the onset is essential. Remedial provision of such information places the client at a disadvantage and jeopardizes full participation and inclusion in the training program. With institutions of higher education, BESB VR strives to obtain coursework syllabi in advance of the semester to assist with assessing what textbooks can be obtained in web-based or other accessible formats. Where materials need to be converted into Braille, close collaboration with the university or training program's Disability Services Coordinator is critical to ensure that accessible materials are ready for the client on the first day of instruction.

**(p) Evaluation and Reports of Progress: VR and Supported Employment Goals**

*Describe:*

*1. An evaluation of the extent to which the VR program goals described in the approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan for the most recently completed program year were achieved. The evaluation must:*

*A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals*

Connecticut's WIOA State Plan presented a set of overarching goals, which include the following:

Promote Business Growth: Connecticut businesses in key sectors (economic drivers) must have the skilled, talented employees needed to compete effectively, prosper, and create jobs for CT workers.

Strengthen Current Workforce: Workers must have the skills and credentials needed to prosper and advance in careers that support their families.

Develop Future Talent: Connecticut youth must be prepared and ready for career and post-secondary success as productive contributors to a competitive state economy.

System Transformation: Connecticut's multi-faceted workforce system must align and integrate goals, strategies, policies, investments, services, infrastructure, and accountability.

BESB VR was able to contribute to these overarching goals in the following ways:

**Objective 1. Analyze economic conditions, including existing and emerging in-demand industry sectors and occupations.**

Strategy 1.1: Identify employment needs of employers - knowledge, skills, abilities in key industries and occupations.

Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

Strategy 1.2: Analysis of current workforce unemployment data, labor market trends, workforce's educational and skill levels (including individuals with barriers/disabilities).

Measure: Documentation of coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

Strategy 1.3: Analysis (strengths, weaknesses, capacity) of CT's workforce development activities (including education and training), to address identified education/skill needs and employment needs of employers.

Measure: Coordination with CTDOL, Office of Research to obtain data and information.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved for the first two years of the plan based on the identified strategies and work is ongoing.

1.1 Analyze Economic Conditions. Through collaboration with the Department of Labor's Office of Research, a significant amount of economic and occupational outlook data is made available to the BESB VR Counselors, all of whom receive monthly updates on labor market information. The VR Counselors have also participated in training conferences that included presentations on the current labor market and an analysis of the trends looking into the future. Labor market information is also readily available for staff and clients to access online. BESB VR Counselors and clients can review occupations in demand, use a searchable employer database, review education and training programs, re-employment initiatives and the Connecticut Career Resources Network. The information can be narrowed in search criteria to focus on specific regions within the state.

1.2 Analysis of data, trends, skills. CTDOL, Office of Research data showed a 3.6% unemployment rate in September of 2019 as the initial plan was being developed. Economic projections reflected significant anticipated growth over 20% in 19 occupations by 2026, including statisticians, Home Health Aides, CNC Machinists, Research Analysts, Software Developers, Mechanical Drafters, Nurse Practitioners, and Physician's Assistants. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the unemployment rate increased dramatically in 2020 to 8.2 percent in CT. Among the hardest hit industries were Hospitality and Service. As of December 2021 the unemployment rate is decreasing and is at 5.8 percent in CT, with more opportunities in the fields that were hardest hit.

1.3 Analysis of Workforce Development Activities. BESB VR staff continue to actively participate in meetings on both a statewide and regional basis to identify strategies to prepare program participants for the employment opportunities that exist and that will be available into the future. One strategy engages clients with Career Index Plus and other web-based job search engines as a tool for conducting self-directed research individualized to their unique circumstances and interests.

## **Objective 2. Implement strategies for workforce partners to prepare educated/skilled workforce.**

Strategy 2.1: Establish performance accountability measures and align strategies across the workforce programs to support economic growth and self-sufficiency, and how Connecticut will assess workforce system effectiveness.

Measure: Performance measures established with each partner program's anticipated contribution to the measures noted.

BESB VR Update: This objective is in progress.

2.1 Performance Accountability and Alignment. BESB will continue work with the larger workforce investment system to set thresholds for the new WIOA performance accountability measures.

### **Objective 3. Operationalize the Service Delivery System**

Strategy 3.1: Review statewide policies, programs, and recommended actions to support comprehensive streamlined workforce system.

Measure: BESB VR provides policies to workforce partners for review.

Strategy 3.2: Develop/continuously improve workforce system: identify coordination/alignment barriers (avoid duplication); develop career pathways strategies; develop outreach/access strategies for individuals and employers; develop/expand industry/sector partnership strategies; identify regions/designate local areas; develop One-Stop system continuous improvement strategy; develop staff training strategies.

Measure: BESB VR staff participates in regional and statewide workforce meetings that focus on implementation of a coordinated One-Stop service delivery system.

Strategy 3.3: Develop and update comprehensive State performance accountability measures.

Measure: BESB VR provides data on performance in identified accountability categories.

Strategy 3.4: Develop and review statewide policies to coordinate services through One-Stop system: criteria and procedures for Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) to assess effectiveness and continuous improvement; guidance to allocate One-Stop center infrastructure funds; policies on roles/contributions of One-Stop partners.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR staff participation in the review and development of coordination of services to people with significant disabilities with One-Stop center staff and partners.

Strategy 3.5: Develop strategies for technological improvements to One-Stop system to: enhance digital literacy skills; accelerate acquisition of skills and credentials; strengthen staff professional development; ensure accessibility of technology.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR adaptive technology consultations and recommendations for equipment to make the One-Stop Centers accessible to individuals with significant disabilities.

Strategy 3.6: Develop strategies to align technology and data systems across One-Stop partner programs.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR staff participation in statewide meeting regarding the development of a common-front end data collection system.

Strategy 3.7: Develop allocation formulas to distribute funds to local areas for adult and youth programs.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR staff participation in cost allocation formula reviews that follow prescribed federal requirements.

Strategy 3.8: Prepare annual performance reports.

Measure: BESB VR report on performance measures distributed.

Strategy 3.9: Develop statewide workforce and labor market information system.

Measure: BESB VR staff provides data on job placements for clients served by the program.

Strategy 3.10: Develop other policies to promote statewide objectives and enhance system performance.

Measure: Documentation of BESB VR participation in the development of state policies and objectives.

Strategy 3.11: Alignment of funded activities.

Measure: BESB VR clients gain access to core services offered by the One-Stop Centers with information provided in accessible formats by the centers.

Strategy 3.12: Alignment with activities not covered by Plan, to assure coordination, avoid duplication.

Measure: Independent Living services are offered and provided to eligible individuals with disabilities who are being served by the One-Stop centers.

Strategy 3.13: Coordination of activities, comprehensive services, including support services.

Measure: BESB VR staff members participate in regional and statewide planning and implementation meetings to coordinate the provision of vocational rehabilitation services to eligible clients served by the One-Stop delivery system.

Strategy 3.14: Engagement with community colleges, career/technical schools, to leverage resources.

Measure: BESB VR staff becomes participating members in regional teams that develop certificate and training programs at community colleges and career/technical schools to ensure curriculum accessibility for individuals with significant disabilities.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved for the first two years of the plan based on the identified strategies and work is ongoing. The updates are summarized here.

3.1 Statewide policies, programs and actions. The policies for BESB VR have been updated to reflect WIOA changes and the policies have been made available to the partner programs. Collaborative partner meetings provide opportunities to understand program policies and leverage services to meet the needs of Connecticut job seekers.

3.2 Continuous improvement of workforce system. BESB VR Counselors participate in regional business service teams, and designated staff participate in statewide, interagency team meetings. BESB VR Counselors are co-located on a part-time basis at the primary American Job Centers in their assigned territories, arranging for clients to register for services available through partner programs where applicable.

3.3 State Performance Accountability Measures. BESB VR provides data on employer engagement to CT DOL for inclusion into the statewide reporting on that measurement. In Program Year 2021, BESB VR engaged 417 employers to address their recruitment and employee retention needs.

3.4 Statewide Policies. BESB VR has provided technical assistance and recommendations pertaining to accessibility of American Job Centers and training program services, including training material review and recommendations to remediate documents. Through this partnership, job seeking skills class materials are now available in electronic, accessible formats. BESB VR Rehabilitation Technologists have also assisted in the review of computer hardware and software in use at the American Job Centers, providing recommendations for updates and computer settings to optimize accessibility features. BESB VR Counselors regularly meet with staff of the American Job Centers to discuss individual placement strategies, the availability of on-the-job training and internship funding and the wide array of supports that BESB VR can provide to employers.

3.5 Technological Improvements. BESB VR staff were members of the teams that reviewed and completed certification of the American Job Centers, offering recommendations for accessibility enhancements, where applicable.

3.6 Align Technology and Data Systems. BESB VR staff continue to offer accessibility consultations. Rehabilitation Technologists are available to support BESB VR Counselors and partner program staff in assessing job opportunities to determine typical adaptations, recognizing that an individualized assessment for specific job candidates is necessary to finalize the recommendations. Discussions continue on the merits of a “common-front end” data collection system for the partner agencies, but no specific decision has been made due to the uniqueness of each of the partner’s current data collection software and the cost that would be incurred to develop any universal data collection system.

3.7 Allocation Formulas. Cost allocation formulas were finalized and are in use relative to co-location of BESB VR Counselors at the American Job Centers.

3.8 Performance Reports. In Program Year 2020, BESB VR served 672 individuals under an IPE. There were 56 individuals who achieved an employment outcome, with an average hourly wage of \$22.57. Through the Randolph-Sheppard Program, gross sales from the vending facilities were approximately \$770,000.00. There were 25 vending facility operators, who employed an additional 20 workers. Average annual income for the vending facility operators was \$19,437.00, with one location providing income of more than \$60,000.

3.9 Statewide Information System. BESB VR data on services and outcomes is available to partner programs for use in aggregate reporting.

3.10 Other Policies. BESB VR has actively participated in an interagency workgroup that developed and continues to update a reference guide on partner program services to share with employers and community-based organizations in the state. The workgroup developed and delivered two business services conferences in Program Years 2017 and 2018 that brought partner program staff together to learn about best practices, employer perspectives, emerging occupations, and apprenticeship opportunities.

3.11 Alignment of Funded Activities. BESB VR clients have actively engaged in services offered by the American Job Centers with 104 clients enrolled in core services.

3.12 Alignment of Other Activities. The Adult Services Program provides independent living training through orientation and mobility instructors and rehabilitation teachers to BESB VR clients whose Individualized Plans for Employment identify the need for these services as a component to achieve an employment outcome. In Program Year 2020, 48 clients received these disability related skills training services from the Adult Services staff.

3.13 Coordination of Activities and Services. Collaboration with the five Regional Workforce Development Boards has been a strong focus in FY 2021. Prior to the pandemic, Counselors were co-located on a part-time basis at the American Job Centers. After the onset of the pandemic, most activities were shifted to a virtual model and continue to be virtual with only 7 in person appointments occurring. Counselors contact clients remotely, with 1128 contacts regarding AJC activities and 177 clients involved in AJC Services. Counselors participated in virtual business services meetings with American Job Center partners on 74 occasions. 91 clients were assisted with registering for services through the American Job Centers, up from 42 for the previous year. Starting in July, Counselors have been back to co-location in 3 of the 5 sites throughout the state.

3.14 Engagement with Community Colleges and Technical Schools. BESB VR staff have been actively engaged with representatives from the State College and University System to discuss how course curriculum can be made accessible. The BESB VR Rehabilitation Technologists have reviewed website design and electronic media for coursework completion, making recommendations on access and accessibility. BESB VR staff also participated in meetings and tours of certificate and training programs at the community colleges, such as the dental assistant program at Tunxis Community College, as well as working with private institutions of post-secondary education such as the Connecticut Center for Massage Therapy to increase the accessibility of their curriculums.

In addition to the participation of BESB VR in contributing to the aforementioned comprehensive statewide goals for the Workforce system, the following, goals, objectives, strategies and measures specific to BESB VR were developed with the full participation and guidance of the SRC at the onset of the initial plan. Progress on these goals is presented below.

### **Goal A: Increase employment opportunities for eligible individuals of BESB VR.**

Objective A1: BESB will collaborate with BRS and at least one major employer with a statewide presence to implement a Disability Resource Team to assist the employer with job recruitment and retention services.

Strategy: BESB Job Developer will coordinate with BRS Job Development Team to identify and work with employer(s) to implement a Resource Team.

Measure: Team is developed and implements resource meetings with employer(s).

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved and ongoing.

The VR Counselor Coordinator serves as the point of contact with the BRS Job Development Team and regularly attends their monthly meetings. BRS and BESB continue to collaborate by sharing job leads. Additional collaborations have included meeting with staff from the Lowes Distribution Center to identify jobs that would be accessible for individuals that utilize screen reading adaptations, Advanced Auto Distribution Center in Enfield, and Cartus, Inc. in Danbury. In FY 2021 additional collaboration included HRACC (Human Resource Association of Central Connecticut), Amazon, United Heath Group, Bender Consults, Community Renewal Team, and J.Lodge.

Objective A2: BESB VR Counselors join job development teams implemented through the regional workforce boards to gain access to employers within the regions who are seeking job candidates.

Strategy: Counselors contact the Job Developers of the regional One-Stop Center to become part of their employer outreach teams.

Measure: Each counselor serves as part of a regional job development team.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

Counselors participated in virtual business services meetings with American Job Center partners on 74 occasions. 91 clients were assisted with registering for services through the American Job Centers, up from 42 for the previous year.

Objective A3: BESB VR clients obtain proficiency to utilize web-based job search websites.

Strategy: Rehabilitation teachers and/or fee for service vendors teach no less than ten job seeking clients per year how to navigate and utilize at least one job search website on the internet.

Measure: Documentation of utilization by each client.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

In FY 21 the program continued its strong commitment to facilitating active engagement of clients in the career exploration and job seeking process. The BESB VR Program assisted 138 clients to connect with Career Index Plus, a self-directed web-based resource for researching jobs in demand, credentialing requirements and current job openings

Objective A4: Each BESB VR Counselor with job development responsibilities shall engage clients on their caseloads in job fair attendance.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors will share information on job fairs within their regions with job seeking clients on their individual caseloads and facilitate the attendance of clients at job fairs.

Measure: Documentation of no less than five clients per Counselor caseload per year attending a job fair.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

In total, 131 clients of the BESB VR Program attended at least one job fair, 124 of those job fairs were held virtually in FY 21 and 7 were in person. All of the VR Counselors with full-time regional caseload responsibilities for the entire program year had at least 5 clients from their caseload attend job fairs.

**Goal B: Provide coordinated services to students with disabilities to prepare for careers and post-secondary education after exit from high school.**

Objective B1: BESB VR shall designate two full-time Counselors to exclusively serve clients that are in the Pre-Employment Transition Services (Pre-ETS) category.

Strategy: Middle school and high school clients will be assigned to one of the counselor caseloads to receive specific, qualifying Pre-ETS services with dedicated Pre-ETS funding.

Measure: Documentation of caseload assignments.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

There are two Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors assigned to serve students with disabilities, providing Pre-Employment Transition Services. Case assignments are made based on geographical location, with each Counselor covering half of the state.

Objective B2: Pre-ETS eligible students and their parents/guardians shall receive a resource guide that explains all of the BESB VR services that can be provided to prepare for careers and post-secondary education.

Strategy: BESB VR shall develop a transition resource guide to post on the BESB section of the agency website and to distribute to Pre-ETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians in their preferred format.

Measure: Case record documentation that the resource guide has been mailed or delivered to each Pre-ETS eligible client and their parents/guardians.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

The resource guide has been completed and is shared with BESB VR clients, as appropriate. In addition, BESB disseminates a yearly compendium of programs offered in the summer.

Objective B3: Pre-ETS eligible clients are provided timely notice of opportunities from the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and/or the Transition Coordinator to participate in work exposure programs, paid employment, internships, college preparatory programs, technology training programs, life skills programs and related career development camps, seminars and initiatives, both in state and out of state.

Strategy: Vocational Rehabilitation Counselors and the Transition Coordinator working with the Pre-ETS clients provide timely information on available services and programs so that clients and their guardians can make informed decisions on attendance at programs, activities, and related transition experiences of interest.

Measure: Case record documentation of the services being authorized.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

The Transition Coordinator provides information to the VR Counselors on programs and initiatives for transition-age youth with a focus on Pre-Employment Transition Services. For Program Year 2021, this resulted in 41 opportunities that included 17 paid work and internship experiences, independent living residential programs, mentoring experiences, youth leadership camp, and college tours.

Objective B4: BESB VR develops and implements outreach and public education programs for potentially Pre-ETS eligible clients and their parents/guardians.

Strategy: BESB VR Transition Coordinator designs and delivers outreach and public education programs to populations where Pre-ETS eligible clients are likely to be found, such as, but not limited to school districts.

Measure: Documentation of the programs being provided.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved and ongoing.

BESB VR works with several transition-related groups, focusing on outreach and public education for families about Pre-ETS opportunities and initiatives. These groups include the Transition Task Force, the

Pre-ETS program for the General VR agency, Transition Community of Practice, the five Regional Education Service Centers, as well as the American Job Centers and the workforce boards. These collaborations yielded events such as the Transition Symposium, the CT Youth Leadership Forum, multiple Regional Transition Expos, an Adaptive Technology Conference, Disability Mentoring Day, and participation at job fairs. These groups work collaboratively to update educational materials for families and school district staff, specific to Pre-ETS related activities and opportunities for successful transition from school to work or post-secondary education.

Objective B5: BESB VR and the SRC co-sponsor leadership development activities and camps for groups of Pre-ETS eligible clients.

Strategy: The SRC and BESB VR provide co-sponsorship funding for the Youth Leadership Forum, and similar programs if available.

Measure: Documentation of the funds committed.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

The SRC has continued its ongoing co-sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum annually.

**Goal C: Utilize Innovation and Expansion authority to engage in continuous improvement initiatives, to increase access to services and activities that can benefit groups of individuals with visual impairment or legal blindness, to increase access to career information, adaptive technology, self-advocacy, and public awareness of the employment potential of individuals served by BESB VR.**

Objective C1: BESB VR shall provide funding for electronic access to career and news information.

Strategy: Funding provided to have NFB Newsline available to BESB VR clients.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for NFB Newsline.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

In partnership with the National Federation of the Blind of Connecticut, BESB VR has sponsored NFB's Newsline so that clients can access this important service.

Objective C2: Provide access to the latest adaptive technology devices for clients to try out for assessment purposes.

Strategy: Purchase new adaptive technology devices for the BESB Technology Lab and the Technology Lab at the Southeastern Connecticut Community Center of the Blind.

Measure: Documentation of purchase order for technology devices.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

Adaptive technology updates have included an adapted keyboard, talking graph calculator, Zoomtext Fusion, Typing Tutor, and an UltraMag portable magnifier, in order to offer a wide array of adaptive devices and software for evaluations and demonstrations at the labs in Windsor and New London.

Objective C3: The SRC utilizes an entity experienced in administering consumer satisfaction surveys to conduct the fiscal year 2016 Consumer Satisfaction Survey and the results are used to develop continuous improvement initiatives.

Strategy: The SRC selects a vendor, reviews the results of the survey, and works with Program staff to implement strategies that address the results and trends identified in the survey.

Measure: Documentation of purchase of survey, Consumer Satisfaction Report received and reviewed with Program staff.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

The Center for Public Policy and Social Research (CPPSR) at Central Connecticut State University was selected to conduct the Consumer Satisfaction Survey and to analyze the data in comparison to prior years. Results of the survey were utilized to identify areas that needed attention. In conjunction with BESB VR, strategies for improvement in both areas were identified and implemented. CPPSR was also utilized for the program's annual Consumer Satisfaction Surveys.

Objective C4: SRC representatives participate in state, regional, and national conferences and programs that provide opportunities to increase public awareness of the employment capabilities of BESB VR clients, increase the SRC members knowledge and understanding of the public VR Program, and create opportunities for learning best practices that can develop into new goals and strategies for BESB VR to explore and implement, if applicable.

Strategy: The SRC Chair is provided with information about upcoming conferences, seminars, and activities from the BESB Director and designates an SRC member or members to participate and share information with the full membership.

Measure: SRC members attend CSAVR, NCSAB and other national, regional, or statewide conferences or seminars that address the components stated in the objective.

BESB VR Update: This objective was achieved.

The Chair of the SRC attended these conferences, CSAVR and NCSAB, in the spring and fall of 2020 and 2021, both of which were held virtually.

***B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities***

When this plan was initially written, diminishing financial resources significantly impacted BESB VR, requiring a reduction in staffing levels as vacancies occurred, and updating policies to implement cost containment strategies. The SRC worked in collaboration with BESB VR to implement these strategies to reduce administrative and purchased service costs with a goal of continuing to serve all eligible individuals in future years within available funding. With the addition of reallocation dollars, the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, the program is financially stable. BESB VR is looking toward the future for increased innovation and expansion initiatives that will increase the number of clients served. To do this, BESB will need to identify potential candidates for VR services through focused outreach and generate increased opportunities for employment of the clients that are served. At the same time, BESB VR is facing a major retirement wave and will be looking at rebuilding and stabilizing the workforce.

***2. An evaluation of the extent to which the Supported Employment program goals described in the Supported Employment Supplement for the most recent program year were achieved. The evaluation must:***

***A. Identify the strategies that contributed to the achievement of the goals***

With 16 clients of BESB VR eligible for supported employment services, 4 of whom meet the criteria for the definition of "youth with a disability," BESB VR is achieving its goal of identifying situations where supported employment services are beneficial. In particular, by participating in Planning and Placement Team meetings, it allows for opportunities to discuss and consider this option for employment at the earliest stages of the transition process. This participation by BESB VR Counselors expands discussions beyond day program placements to a focus on supported employment enabling students to achieve competitive and integrated employment.

***B. Describe the factors that impeded the achievement of the goals and priorities***

With the narrow allowances for the use of supported employment funds, utilization rates are lower than desired. The requirement that states must expend the matching fund requirement for the placement of a

youth with a disability into supported employment in order to carry forward the unobligated portions of both the youth and the adult portions of the grant award have hampered the availability of these funds. BESB VR is working to identify strategies that tap into the Title I funds for trial work opportunities and other services that can best prepare individuals for job placement success.

**3. The VR program's performance on the performance accountability indicators under section 116 of WIOA**

BESB VR Update: BESB VR is participating in discussions on the implementation of performance measures with the other partners in the workforce system and these accountability measures will be reported upon once established.

**4. How the funds reserved for innovation and expansion (I&E) activities were utilized**

During Program Year 2020, Innovation and Expansion funding was utilized for a number of activities including the following:

- To cover the cost of the NFB Newsline service.
- To cover the cost of the SRC's co-sponsorship of the Youth Leadership Forum. BESB VR was a separate co-sponsor of this leadership development camp on a college campus for transition-age students.
- To secure the Center for Public Policy and Social Research to conduct and analyze the 2020 Comprehensive Statewide Needs Assessment and consumer satisfaction survey and to report their findings to the SRC for use in developing Program goals and priorities.
- To facilitate the participation of the SRC, through its Chair, in national activities at the conferences of the NCSAB and CSAVR.
- To update two adaptive technology laboratories with the provision of hardware and software to enable clients and groups of eligible individuals to have opportunities to try out devices and to obtain training and adaptive technology evaluations.

**(q) Quality, Scope, and Extent of Supported Employment Services**

*Include the following:*

**1. The quality, scope, and extent of supported employment services to be provided to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including youth with the most significant disabilities**

Supported employment services refer to competitive integrated employment, including customized employment in an integrated work setting in which an individual with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, including a youth with a most significant disability, is working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment that is individualized and customized. These services are provided in a manner that is consistent with the unique strengths, abilities, interests, and informed choice of the individual. Supported employment services are available for individuals for whom competitive integrated employment has not historically occurred, or for whom competitive integrated employment has been interrupted or intermittent as a result of a significant disability, and who, because of the nature and severity of their disabilities, need intensive supported employment services and extended services after the transition from support provided by the Bureau, in order to perform this work.

An individual with a most significant disability, whose supported employment in an integrated setting does not satisfy the criteria of competitive integrated employment, is considered to be working on a short-term basis toward competitive integrated employment so long as the individual can reasonably anticipate achieving competitive integrated employment within six months of achieving a supported employment outcome. In limited circumstances, a period not to exceed 12 months from the achievement of the supported employment outcome is permissible if a longer period is necessary based on the needs of the individual and the individual has demonstrated progress toward competitive earnings based on

information contained in the service record. The six-month short-term basis period, and the additional six months that may be available in limited circumstances, begins after an individual has completed up to 24 months of supported employment services (unless a longer period of time is necessary based upon the individual's needs) and the individual has achieved a supported employment outcome. The job placement of the individual must be stable for a minimum period of 90 days following the transition to extended services. At this point, the individual has achieved a supported employment outcome.

Ongoing support services, including customized employment, and other appropriate services needed to support and maintain the client in supported employment are organized and made available, singly or in combination, in such a way as to assist the client to achieve competitive integrated employment, and these services:

- (A) Are based on a determination of the needs of an eligible individual, as specified in an Individualized Plan for Employment;
- (B) Are provided by the Bureau for a period of time not to exceed 24 months, unless under special circumstances the eligible individual and the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor jointly agree to extend the time to achieve the employment outcome identified in the Individualized Plan for Employment; and
- (C) Following transition, as Post-Employment services that are unavailable from an extended services provider and that are necessary to maintain or regain the job placement or advance in employment.

Supported employment services are initiated once the individual is hired and has started to work at the actual job site for the employer. Title 6B Supported Employment funds can only be utilized for this specific service or for extended services for youth with disabilities placed into supported employment. All other services as planned for and detailed in the IPE, including job placement services, can only be paid for using basic Vocational Rehabilitation Title I funds, state matching funds, or program income funds. The most frequent type of supported employment service is job coaching, although on-site evaluators and similar services that provide direct support to the individual at the job site may also be considered for funding through the Title 6B funds.

An Individualized Plan for Employment for an individual with a most significant disability, for whom an employment outcome in a supported employment setting has been determined to be appropriate, must-

Specify the supported employment services to be provided by the Bureau;

Specify the expected extended services needed by the eligible individual, which may include natural supports;

Identify the source of extended services, or to the extent that the source of the extended services cannot be identified at the time of the development of the IPE, include a description of the basis for concluding that there is a reasonable expectation that such a source will become available;

Provide for periodic monitoring to ensure that the individual is making satisfactory progress toward meeting the weekly work requirement established in the Individualized Plan for Employment by the time of transition to extended services;

Provide for the coordination of services provided under an Individualized Plan for Employment with services provided under other individualized plans established under other Federal or State programs;

To the extent that job skills training is provided, identify that the training will be provided on site; and

Include placement in an integrated setting for the maximum number of hours possible based on the unique strengths, resources, priorities, concerns, abilities, capabilities, interests, and informed choice of individuals with the most significant disabilities.

<i>2. The timing of transition to extended services</i>
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Extended services refer to ongoing support services and other appropriate services that are needed to support and maintain an individual with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, including a youth with a most significant disability, in supported employment. Extended services can be made available singly, or in combination, in such a way as to assist an eligible individual in maintaining supported employment. The services are customized and based on the needs of the eligible individual, as specified in their Individualized Plan for Employment. Extended services may be provided by a State agency, a private nonprofit organization, employer, or any other appropriate resource, after an individual has made the transition from supported employment provided by the Bureau. Transition to extended services occurs once the individual has received up to 24 months of supported employment services or the Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor and the individual have determined that an extension of time to provide supported employment services beyond 24 months is necessary to support and maintain the individual in supported employment before the individual transitions to extended services.

For a youth with a most significant disability that includes visual impairment or legal blindness, the Bureau may directly provide or fund extended services for a period not to exceed four years or at such time that a youth reaches age 25, whichever occurs first. The Bureau cannot provide extended services to an individual with a most significant disability who is not a youth with a most significant disability.

### **Vocational Rehabilitation (Blind) Certifications**

States must provide written and signed certifications that:

1. The (enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate,) is authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 (Rehabilitation Act), as amended by WIOA[14], and its supplement under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act[15];

Enter the name of designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate

Department of Aging and Disability Services, Bureau of Education and Services for the Blind, Vocational Rehabilitation Program

2. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act for the provision of VR services, the (enter the name of designated State agency)[16] agrees to operate and administer the State VR Services Program in accordance with the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[17] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[18] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under section 111 of the Rehabilitation Act are used solely for the provision of VR services and the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

Enter the name of designated State agency

Department of Aging and Disability Services

3. As a condition for the receipt of Federal funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act for supported employment services, the designated State agency agrees to operate and administer the State Supported Employment Services Program in accordance with the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan[19] , the Rehabilitation Act, and all applicable regulations[20] , policies, and procedures established by the Secretary of Education. Funds made available under title VI are used solely for the provision of supported employment services and the administration of the supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan;

4. The designated State agency and/or the designated State unit has the authority under State law to perform the functions of the State regarding the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

5. The State legally may carry out each provision of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement.
6. All provisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement are consistent with State law.
7. The (enter the name of authorized representative below) has the authority under State law to receive, hold, and disburse Federal funds made available under the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement;

Enter the name of authorized representative below

Brian S. Sigman

8. The (enter the title of authorized representative below) has the authority to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and the supplement for Supported Employment services;

Enter the title of authorized representative below

Director of Education and Rehabilitation, BESB

9. The agency that submits the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement has adopted or otherwise formally approved the plan and its supplement.

## Footnotes

[14] Public Law 113-128.

[15] Unless otherwise stated, "Rehabilitation Act" means the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by WIOA, signed into law on July 22, 2014.

[16] All references in this plan to "designated State agency" or to "the State agency" relate to the agency identified in this paragraph.

[17] No funds under title I of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 101(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[18] Applicable regulations, in part, include the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR) in 34 CFR parts 76, 77, 79, 81, and 82; 2 CFR

part 200 as adopted by 2 CFR part 3474; and the State VR Services program regulations.

[19] No funds under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act may be awarded without an approved supported employment supplement to the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan in accordance with section 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act.

[20] Applicable regulations, in part, include the citations in footnote 6.

## Certification Signature

Signatory information	Enter Signatory information in this column
Name of Signatory	
Title of Signatory	Director of Education and Rehabilitation, BESB
Date Signed	

## Assurances

The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate and identified in the State certifications included with this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, through signature of the authorized individual, assures the Commissioner of the Rehabilitation Services Administration (RSA), that it will comply with all of the requirements of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement, as set forth in sections 101(a)

and 606 of the Rehabilitation Act. The individual authorized to submit the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement makes the following assurances: The State Plan must provide assurances that:

The State Plan must include	Include
1. Public Comment on Policies and Procedures: The designated State agency assures it will comply with all statutory and regulatory requirements for public participation in the VR Services Portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, as required by section 101(a)(16)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act.	
2. Submission of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and Its Supplement: The designated State unit assures it will comply with all requirements pertaining to the submission and revisions of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan and its supplement for the State Supported Employment Services program, as required by sections 101(a)(1), (22), (23), and 606(a) of the Rehabilitation Act; section 102 of WIOA in the case of the submission of a unified plan; section 103 of WIOA in the case of a submission of a Combined State Plan; 34 CFR 76.140.	
3. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures it will comply with the requirements related to: Administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan:	
3.a. The establishment of the designated State agency and designated State unit, as required by section 101(a)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.b. The establishment of either a State independent commission or State Rehabilitation Council, as required by section 101(a)(21) of the Rehabilitation Act. The designated State agency or designated State unit, as applicable (A or B must be selected):	
3.b.(A) "is an independent State commission" (Yes/No)	No
3.b.(B) "has established a State Rehabilitation Council" (Yes/No)	Yes
3.c. Consultations regarding the administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(16)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.d. The financial participation by the State, or if the State so elects, by the State and local agencies, to provide the amount of the non-Federal share of the cost of carrying out the VR program in accordance with section 101(a)(3)	
3.e. The local administration of the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the local administration of VR funds (Yes/No)	No
3.f. The shared funding and administration of joint programs, in accordance with section 101(a)(2)(A)(ii) of the Rehabilitation Act. Select yes or no, as appropriate, to identify if the designated State agency allows for the shared funding and administration of joint programs (Yes/No)	No
3.g. Statewideness and waivers of statewideness requirements, as set forth in section 101(a)(4) of the Rehabilitation Act. Is the designated State agency requesting or maintaining a waiver of statewideness for one or more services provided under the	No

The State Plan must include	Include
VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan? (Yes/No) See Section 2 of this VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan	
3.h. The descriptions for cooperation, collaboration, and coordination, as required by sections 101(a)(11) and (24)(B); and 606(b) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.i. All required methods of administration, as required by section 101(a)(6) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.j. The requirements for the comprehensive system of personnel development, as set forth in section 101(a)(7) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.k. The compilation and submission to the Commissioner of statewide assessments, estimates, State goals and priorities, strategies, and progress reports, as appropriate, and as required by sections 101(a)(15), 105(c)(2), and 606(b)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
3.l. The reservation and use of a portion of the funds allotted to the State under section 110 of the Rehabilitation Act for the development and implementation of innovative approaches to expand and improve the provision of VR services to individuals with disabilities, particularly individuals with the most significant disabilities	
3.m. The submission of reports as required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4. Administration of the Provision of VR Services: The designated State agency, or designated State unit, as appropriate, assures that it will:	
4.a. Comply with all requirements regarding information and referral services in accordance with sections 101(a)(5)(D) and (20) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.b. Impose no duration of residence requirement as part of determining an individual's eligibility for VR services or that excludes from services under the plan any individual who is present in the State in accordance with section 101(a)(12) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.c. Provide the full range of services listed in section 103(a) of the Rehabilitation Act as appropriate, to all eligible individuals with disabilities in the State who apply for services in accordance with section 101(a)(5) of the Rehabilitation Act? (Yes/No)	Yes
4.d. Determine whether comparable services and benefits are available to the individual in accordance with section 101(a)(8) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.e. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.f. Comply with requirements regarding the provisions of informed choice for all applicants and eligible individuals in accordance with section 102(d) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.g. Provide vocational rehabilitation services to American Indians who are individuals with disabilities residing in the State, in accordance with section 101(a)(13) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.h. Comply with the requirements for the conduct of semiannual or annual reviews, as appropriate, for individuals employed either in an extended employment setting in a community rehabilitation program or any other employment under section 14(c) of	

The State Plan must include	Include
the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938, as required by section 101(a)(14) of the Rehabilitation Act	
4.i. Meet the requirements in sections 101(a)(17) and 103(b)(2) of the Rehabilitation Act if the State elects to construct, under special circumstances, facilities for community rehabilitation programs	
4.j. With respect to students with disabilities, the State,	
4.j.i. Has developed and will implement,	
4.j.i.I. Strategies to address the needs identified in the assessments; and	
4.j.i.II. Strategies to achieve the goals and priorities identified by the State, to improve and expand vocational rehabilitation services for students with disabilities on a statewide basis; and	
4.j.ii. Has developed and will implement strategies to provide pre-employment transition services (sections 101(a)(15) and 101(a)(25))	
<b>5. Program Administration for the Supported Employment Title VI Supplement:</b>	
5.a. The designated State unit assures that it will include in the VR services portion of the Unified or Combined State Plan all information required by section 606 of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.b. The designated State agency assures that it will submit reports in such form and in accordance with such procedures as the Commissioner may require and collects the information required by section 101(a)(10) of the Rehabilitation Act separately for individuals receiving supported employment services under title I and individuals receiving supported employment services under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act	
5.c. The designated state unit will coordinate activities with any other State agency that is functioning as an employment network under the Ticket to Work and Self-Sufficiency program under Section 1148 of the Social Security Act	
<b>6. Financial Administration of the Supported Employment Program:</b>	
6.a. The designated State agency assures that it will expend no more than 2.5 percent of the State's allotment under title VI for administrative costs of carrying out this program; and, the designated State agency or agencies will provide, directly or indirectly through public or private entities, non-Federal contributions in an amount that is not less than 10 percent of the costs of carrying out supported employment services provided to youth with the most significant disabilities with the funds reserved for such purpose under section 603(d) of the Rehabilitation Act, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(G) and (H) of the Rehabilitation Act	
6.b. The designated State agency assures that it will use funds made available under title VI of the Rehabilitation Act only to provide supported employment services to individuals with the most significant disabilities, including extended services to youth with the most significant disabilities, who are eligible to receive such services; and, that such funds are used only to supplement and not supplant the funds provided under Title I of the Rehabilitation Act, when providing supported employment services specified in the individualized plan for employment, in accordance with section 606(b)(7)(A) and (D), of the Rehabilitation Act	
<b>7. Provision of Supported Employment Services:</b>	Yes
7.a. The Designated State Agency Assures That it Will Provide Supported Employment Services as Defined in Section 7(39) of the Rehabilitation Act	

The State Plan must include	Include
7.b. The designated State agency assures that:	
7.b.i. The comprehensive assessment of individuals with significant disabilities conducted under section 102(b)(1) of the Rehabilitation Act and funded under title I of the Rehabilitation Act includes consideration of supported employment as an appropriate employment outcome, in accordance with the requirements of section 606(b)(7)(B) of the Rehabilitation Act	
7.b.ii. An individualized plan for employment that meets the requirements of section 102(b) of the Rehabilitation Act, which is developed and updated with title I funds, in accordance with sections 102(b)(3)(F) and 606(b)(6)(C) and (E) of the Rehabilitation Act	

### **Vocational Rehabilitation Program (Blind) Performance Indicators**

#### Performance Goals for the Core Programs

Each state submitting a Unified or Combined State Plan is required to identify expected levels of performance for each of the primary indicators of performance for the first two years covered by the plan. The state is required to reach agreement with the Secretary of Labor, in conjunction with the Secretary of Education, on state-negotiated levels of performance for the indicators for each of the first two years of the plan.

For Program Year (PY) 2016-2019 plans, the Departments used the transition authority under section 503(a) of WIOA to designate certain primary indicators of performance as “baseline” indicators to ensure an orderly transition from the requirements of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998 to those under WIOA. A “baseline” indicator was one for which states did not propose an expected level of performance and did not come to agreement with the Departments on negotiated levels of performance because sufficient data was not available to establish such performance levels. As a result, “baseline” indicators were not used in the end of the year adjustment of performance levels and were not used to determine failure to meet adjusted levels of performance for purposes of sanctions. The Departments designated indicators as “baseline” based on the likelihood of a State having insufficient data with which to make a reasonable determination of an expected level of performance.

For PYs 2020-2023 Plans, Title I programs (Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth) and the Title II program (Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) will have two full years of data available to make reasonable determinations of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);  
 Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);  
 Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit);  
 Credential Attainment Rate; and

#### Measurable Skill Gains

The Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program, authorized under the Wagner-Peyser Act, as amended by title III of WIOA, will have two full years of data available to make a reasonable determination of expected levels of performance for the following indicators for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);  
 Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit); and  
 Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit)

The Credential Attainment Rate and Measurable Skill Gains indicators do not apply to the Wagner-Peyser Act Employment Service program; therefore, this program will not submit expected levels of performance for these indicators.

For the first two years of PYs 2020-2023 Plans, the Vocational Rehabilitation (VR) program, authorized under title I of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended by title IV of WIOA, will have two full years of data available for the Measurable Skill Gains indicator only. Therefore, the Departments will designate the following indicators as “baseline” for the VR program for PY 2020 and PY 2021:

Employment (Second Quarter after Exit);  
Employment (Fourth Quarter after Exit);  
Median Earnings (Second Quarter after Exit); and  
Credential Attainment Rate

VR agencies must continue to collect and report on all indicators, including those that have been designated as “baseline, pursuant to section 116(d) of WIOA.” The actual performance data reported by these programs for indicators designated as “baseline” for PY 2020 and PY 2021 will serve as baseline data in future years. The Departments will require VR agencies to submit expected levels of performance for these indicators for PY 2022 and PY 2023.

The Departments determined that the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator will be measured as a shared outcome across all six core programs within each state to ensure a holistic approach to serving employers. The Departments will continue piloting approaches for measuring this indicator for the first two years of PY 2020-2023 plans. Therefore, states are not required to submit an expected level of performance for the Effectiveness in Serving Employers indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021. However, core programs are expected to collect data and report on this indicator for PY 2020 and PY 2021 as they did for PYs 2016-2019 plans.

Each core program must submit an expected level of performance for all of the other indicators, as applicable, with the exception of the four indicators designated as “baseline” for the VR program in PY 2020 and PY 2021. The Departments will work with states during the negotiation process to establish negotiated levels of performance for each of the primary indicators for the core programs not listed as “baseline.” Each state must update its plan to include the agreed-upon negotiated levels of performance before the Departments approve a state’s plan.

States may identify additional indicators in the plan, including additional approaches to measuring Effectiveness in Serving Employers, and may establish levels of performance for each of the state indicators. Please identify any such state indicators under Additional Indicators of Performance.

Performance Indicators	PY 2020 Expected Level	PY 2020 Negotiated Level	PY 2021 Expected Level	PY 2021 Negotiated Level
Employment (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Employment (Fourth Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Median Earnings (Second Quarter After Exit)	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Credential Attainment Rate	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline	Baseline
Measurable Skill Gains	29.0	37.0	32.0	42.0

Performance Indicators	PY 2020 Expected Level	PY 2020 Negotiated Level	PY 2021 Expected Level	PY 2021 Negotiated Level
Effectiveness in Serving Employers	Not Applicable <a href="#">1</a>			

1

“Effectiveness in Serving Employers” is still being piloted and this data will not be entered for 2020 State Plans.

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