

Series: 2001-2002

Circular Letter: C-16

TO: Superintendents of Schools
Chair, Local Boards of Education

FROM: Theodore S. Sergi, Commissioner of Education

DATE: February 19, 2002

SUBJECT: Federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA)

On March 23, 2000, I wrote to you regarding your role in supporting the efforts of Regional Workforce Development Boards (now known as Workforce Investment Boards or WIBs), local One-Stops and Youth Councils established under the federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA). A copy of that correspondence is enclosed for your reference. I congratulate superintendents and local school districts that have partnered with the WIBs that serve your community, and encourage those who have not to do so immediately.

Various pieces of federal and state legislation reinforce the expectation that as a result of public K-12 education, students will be able to meet the entry-level expectations of the workforce. This expectation is also expressed in the Connecticut Common Core of Learning and The Connecticut Framework: K-12 Curricular Goals and Standards. The Workforce Investment Act (1998) requires all WIBs to partner with public schools to bring additional services to in-school and out-of-school youths who may have certain risk factors, including: poverty, teen pregnancy or parenthood, academic failure and special needs. Given that such students are represented in every school district, each school district is required to be involved. This expectation is further integrated into Carl D. Perkins grant guidance, state and federal School-to-Career participation requirements and IDEA transition guidelines.

Educator representation is required on each regional workforce board. I have included a listing of WIBs, as they are currently constituted, with the name and phone number of each WIB Chairperson and Executive Director, the Youth Council Chairs and each board's educator representative(s). Given the vast territory covered by each regional workforce investment board, the likelihood is that you may not know its educator representative; please call the board chairperson and the educational representative to make yourself known to them and to learn how the regional program requires your school system's participation. Each board's local priorities, strategies and resources are different; don't assume that what is asked in a neighboring LEA is what will be expected of you. It is also important that you understand the importance of the local Youth Councils (described in the attached "Frequently Asked Questions"); there are important opportunities for educational representation and input on these key local bodies.

Since my memo of March 23, 2000, some superintendents have called the department with specific questions. Attached is a "Frequently Asked Questions" booklet that shares our response to the most frequently asked questions. The responses reflect the shared understanding of the Office for Workforce Competitiveness and the SDE of the federal legislation and the Connecticut response to that legislation as reflected in Connecticut's five-year WIA plan. These responses reflect state policy or state/federal law, not specific regional implementation practices.

Through meaningful collaboration between WIBs and schools, we can enable more youth to experience school and workplace success.

Attachments

Workforce Investment Act



Frequently Asked Questions

State of Connecticut
Departments of Education and Labor
2002



WHAT IS WIA?

The Workforce Investment Act (WIA) was signed into law by President Clinton in 1998, replacing the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA). The new law took effect on July 1, 2000, and was the first major change in federal employment and training legislation in nearly two decades. WIA reflects several significant changes in approach. Among them are increased authority at the local level on the part of Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs) and local elected officials; a greatly increased emphasis on performance accountability; more individual choice by training customers; and a vastly intensified focus on youth. Youth services constitute one of three major funding streams under WIA; the others are services to adults and dislocated workers.

WHAT AGENCY MANAGES THE PROGRAM FOR CONNECTICUT?

The Connecticut Department of Labor (CTDOL) has been designated by the Governor as the administrative entity for Title I of WIA, which includes youth services in that capacity, CTDOL has responsibility for administering WIA youth expenditures for the state.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNIFICANT CHANGES IN THE WIA LEGISLATION REGARDING YOUTH PROGRAMS?

The change in emphasis on youth programs under WIA is captured in the language of the regulations supporting the Act:

The regulations for youth activities reflect the intent of the legislation by moving away from one-time, short-term interventions and toward a systematic approach that offers youth a broad range of coordinated services. This includes opportunities for assistance in academic and occupational learning; development of leadership skills; and preparation for further education, additional training, and eventual employment. Rather than . . . separate, categorical programs, . . . youth activities . . . facilitate the provision of a menu of varied services that may be provided in combination or alone at different times during a youth's development . . .

Overall, the WIA difference can be described as a comprehensive, long-term approach (not just a summer jobs program) aimed at:

- ✧ preparing youth for success in the labor market;
- ✧ improving educational achievement levels;
- ✧ providing a sustained support system; and
- ✧ providing leadership and citizenship development.

WHAT ARE REGIONAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARDS?

Workforce Investment Boards (WIBs, as they are called under WIA), grew out of Workforce Development Boards, which in turn grew out of the former Private Industry Councils under JTPA. WIBs have responsibility under WIA for managing and coordinating workforce investment activities at the regional level, working in close collaboration with local elected officials. These boards must have private-sector business representatives as a majority of their membership. Other representatives come from education (both elementary/secondary and postsecondary), organized labor, community-based organizations, economic development agencies, and One-Stop partner organizations.

IS WIA A JOBS PROGRAM OR AN EDUCATIONAL PROGRAM?

Services for youth under WIA reflect a youth development focus that is specifically geared to helping low-income youths to overcome the personal barriers they have to becoming gainfully employed or self-sufficient. Education is typically among the greatest barriers. For those who are of school age (14-21), WIA includes supports for both in-school and out-of-school young people that increase their academic skills. Reading and mathematics are priority academic skills that are measured. Other barriers include English proficiency, special needs or handicapping conditions, and single parenting or pregnancy.

Preparing for a job or actually obtaining a job are among the important client outcomes. WIA acknowledges that many youths may not currently be prepared to take or maintain a job. The Act requires the careful assessment of each young person's needs and the development of an individual plan to address those needs. Each Board and its service providers are responsible for the measured progress of each participating youth.

There is good reason for WIA's increased focus on young people, as reflected in the following information, much of it provided by the Sar Levitan Center for Social Policy Studies at Johns Hopkins University.

Some Hard Facts

Demographic data tell us that nationally, after reaching a low of 24.9 million in 1995, the number of 18- to 24-year-olds is growing again, and will be over 30 million by 2010. Of these, a majority will be Hispanic or nonwhite. An increasing number of them will be immigrants. Consider these points:

- ◇ youth without educational credentials face tough times in the job market;
- ◇ there is fierce competition for lower-skill jobs. This is particularly true for young men. Welfare-to-work has pushed a large number of women into the labor market, putting low-skilled male job-seekers at even more of a disadvantage; and
- ◇ we are now seeing the results of decades of disinvestment in youth.

Against this demographic backdrop, some disturbing facts need to be acknowledged:

- ◇ job prospects for young people with low skills are grim;
- ◇ young people have 2 1/2 times more labor market problems than adults; and
- ◇ weekly wages of young people have been dropping for more than 25 years. Between 1973 and 1999, real weekly earnings of young adults (adjusted for inflation) decreased by 26 percent for young men and more than 11 percent for young women.

Past government programs for young people emphasized quick fixes that didn't work, leading to the incorrect conclusion that nothing works in terms of youth programming. However, we know from research and experience that several program principles do work for young people. These are:

- ◇ continuity of contact with caring adults committed to their labor market success;
- ◇ the centrality of work and connections to employers;
- ◇ a variety of options for improving educational and skill competencies;
- ◇ hands-on experiential training in community rebuilding and areas of labor market growth;
- ◇ ongoing support through the first jobs, coupled with sustained efforts to improve skills;
- ◇ incentives to improve and recognition of achievement;
- ◇ opportunities for leadership development, self-governance, community service and decision making; and
- ◇ linking young people with sources of external supports (housing, health care, food and clothing).

WIA stresses a youth development approach:

- ✧ Focuses on the assets of the young person (rather than on problems that need to be fixed);
- ✧ Communicates high expectations;
- ✧ Provides opportunities for leadership; and
- ✧ Encourages a sense of personal identity.

The following are required WIA program elements (these services do not all have to be offered by each provider, but local WIBs must ensure that the full spectrum of services is available to each youth, from one source or another):

- ✧ tutoring and study skills training;
- ✧ alternative secondary school services;
- ✧ summer employment opportunities that are directly linked to academic and occupational learning;
- ✧ paid and unpaid work experiences;
- ✧ occupational skill training;
- ✧ leadership development;
- ✧ supportive services;
- ✧ adult mentoring;
- ✧ follow-up services at least 12 months and
- ✧ comprehensive guidance and counseling.

Funds for WIA youth services flow from the State Department of Labor (according to a formula based on unemployment rates and relative numbers of disadvantaged youth) to local WIBs, which contract for youth services with local providers. In addition to youth service funds, WIBs also receive funding for services to adults and dislocated workers.

Other new aspects of WIA by comparison with JTPA include:

- ✧ long-term intensive services;
- ✧ greater emphasis on out-of-school youth;
- ✧ 12 months of follow-up services required;
- ✧ different outcomes for different age groups (14-18, 19-21);
- ✧ work-based learning;
- ✧ adult mentoring; and
- ✧ youth development activities.

There is also a greatly increased emphasis on performance accountability, and a focus on results:

- ⇒ Have young people's skills improved?
- ⇒ Are more of them in jobs, in college, or the military?
- ⇒ Are they on the path to high-wage jobs?
- ⇒ Are risk-taking behaviors reduced?

Connecticut has taken specific steps to reflect the increased emphasis on youth

- ✧ One important step was the establishment of a separate Youth Committee as one of three standing committees of the Connecticut Employment and Training Commission (CETC), the state Workforce Investment Board
- ✧ Another was the decision by the Office for Workforce Competitiveness (OWC) to contract with Connecticut Voices for Children, a widely respected statewide youth advocacy organization, to staff the CETC Youth Committee, thereby increasing the capacity to support a youth focus
- ✧ A third step was the use by OWC of funds from the Governor's Program Initiatives (non-WIA funding) to support pilot youth programs that train at-risk youth in starting and running their own businesses, as well as academic and employability skills.

The primary focus of the CETC Youth Committee is based on implementation of the youth portion of the state's WIA five-year plan, and includes:

- ✧ a general responsibility to guide planning and implementation efforts statewide for youth-related requirements under state and federal law, and to promote strategies to meet CETC's youth-related goals and objectives, including implementation of a comprehensive employment-related youth services strategy; and
- ✧ use of local Youth Councils as community collaboratives for leadership, working to develop effective communication linkages with Councils, identifying technical assistance needed by Councils and developing strategies for getting it to them, and reporting to CETC on the state's employment-related youth services system.

WHAT OPPORTUNITIES EXIST FOR LEAs WITHIN THE WIA SYSTEM?

WIA mandates the creation of local Youth Councils, which did not exist under JTPA.

These councils have the following features:

- ✧ they are created by the Act as standing committees of local WIBs, with significant power—for example, Youth Councils recommend to WIBs which service providers should receive funding;
- ✧ they are responsible for overall coordination of a local area's youth activities; and
- ✧ they involve major community stakeholders committed to successful outcomes for young people—employers, schools, parents, community-based organizations, juvenile justice, law enforcement, housing, Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, health programs, youth programs, the faith

community, and young people themselves.

WHO REPRESENTS EDUCATION ON EACH REGIONAL BOARD?

Membership and organizational representation vary in Connecticut. See the attached list.

WHAT ARE ONE-STOPS?

One-Stop Delivery Centers are the primary mechanisms for service delivery at the local level. Each region must have at least one full-service center. Each WIB provides for management of the One-Stops by designating a One-Stop operator, which may be a single entity or a consortium of organizations.

WHO IS ELIGIBLE FOR WIA?

To be eligible for WIA-funded services, a young person must be 14 to 21 years old, must be low-income, and must be one or more of the following: deficient in basic literacy skills; a school dropout; homeless, a runaway, or a foster child; pregnant or a parent; an offender; or an individual who requires additional assistance to complete an educational program, or to secure and hold employment.

HOW MANY STUDENTS ARE EXPECTED TO BE SERVED?

2001-2002 PROJECTED YOUTH SERVICE LEVELS (unaudited)					
	YY Served	OY Served	Total	Total Dropouts OY & YY	YY Dropouts
Bridgeport	75	175	250	131	8
Mid-Connecticut	105	30	135	20	0
Danbury/Torrington	18	40	58	6	1
Danielson/Windham	90	30	120	30	15
Hartford	200	100	300	120	40
New Haven	210	70	280	82	22
Waterbury	153	66	219	25	5
New London/Norwich	40	30	70	15	9
	891	541	1432	429	100

YY = Youth 14-18
OY = Youth 19-21

HOW IS THE LOCAL SCHOOL SYSTEM EXPECTED TO BE INVOLVED?

WIA identifies public schools as a mandated partner in service delivery. Local education agency (LEA) services (testing, career centers, tutoring, ESL, adult education, parenting education, special education, vocational education, School-To-Career, early childhood education and childcare, etc.) are among the local school system's resources that may be coordinated on behalf of in-school and out-of-school youths.

Administrative policy from CTDOL for WIA identifies specific standardized tests, including the Grade 8 Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and the Connecticut Competency System (CCS), to be the academic assessment tools and processes for the assessing academic skills of in-school and out-of-school youths for the purpose of participation in WIA-funded services and the measurement of performance under WIA. The CMT must be administered by LEA personnel. WIBs will require the cooperation of LEAs to provide test scores, with appropriate consent, in a timely manner. WIBs may also require the assistance of LEAs in setting student academic goals and measuring student progress.

As Connecticut intensifies its efforts to serve young people under WIA and invest in their futures, school officials can help by:

- ◇ encouraging flexible learning options;
- ◇ expanding dropout prevention efforts;
- ◇ establishing high expectations;
- ◇ extending School-to-Career partnerships to include out-of-school youth; and
- ◇ connecting with the postsecondary education system.

Each superintendent of schools, and WIB director and One-Stop operator should establish the most effective way to keep each other informed about local WIA performance and the status of students for whom they collaborate in providing services.

WHAT OTHER EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS ARE INVOLVED?

Other educational systems or entities that may be involved are private vendors which provide various arrays of services to clients, including many of those LEAs may provide. The WIB contracts with these vendors.

Higher education—especially Connecticut's community college system—is also involved in the regional delivery of WIA services.

HOW DOES THE WIA RELATE TO THE SCHOOL-TO-CAREER PROGRAM?

School-To-Career (STC) programs are available to all students to prepare them for the world of work. Students must be eligible for and selected to participate in the WIA program. WIA services are not intended to replace STC services for in-school youths. For WIA participants who are still in school, STC services should complement WIA services offered through the WIB. A recommended goal for in-school WIA should be that they graduate with a Connecticut Career Certificate (CCC) issued by the LEA, if possible.

HOW DOES THIS PROGRAM RELATE TO THE PERKINS PROGRAM IN COMPREHENSIVE HIGH SCHOOLS?

WIA requires collaboration with the federal Carl D. Perkins program. LEAs and WIA administrators should collaborate in providing Perkins benefits to in-school youth, including LEA-sponsored, occupation-oriented curriculums. Out-of-school youths may need access to school-sponsored basic adult education, ESL and citizenship education funded through the Perkins grant. SDE requires that a Perkins-supported adult education coordinator from a school district within the region be represented on each WIB.

HOW MUCH MONEY IS AVAILABLE FOR THIS PROGRAM?

Nationally, WIA funding for Program Year 2001-02 is a little over \$3.6 billion. Of that amount, approximately \$1.1 billion is for youth services. Connecticut's total WIA allotment for the same year is approximately \$23.7 million, with a little over \$9.5 million allotted for youth services.

WILL GRANTS BE MADE AVAILABLE TO SCHOOLS FOR THE SERVICES THEY PROVIDE?

No. The coordination of existing programs, services and resources, including those in schools, is essential for the WIA program to work. Under certain circumstances a RESC could be a service provider, entitling it to contract funding for the services it provides. However, individual school districts will not be funded under WIA for services to which the student is otherwise entitled.

As noted in the March 23, 2000, letter from Commissioner Theodore S. Sergi and described in the Memorandum of Agreement subsequently circulated to LEAs and WIBs, those two entities should negotiate regarding the sharing of any substantial costs incurred in order to conduct testing and report results for in-school students.

WHO AT THE STATE LEVEL CAN PROVIDE ADDITIONAL INFORMATION REGARDING THIS PROGRAM?

Concerning the federal Act and the Connecticut WIA design, contact:

Jon Swift
Office for Workforce Competitiveness
805 Brook Street
Rocky Hill, CT 06067
Tel: (860) 258-4302

Concerning the requirements of schools, contact:

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25 Industrial Park Road
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