

Berks County Workforce Development Board

Annual Report for Calendar Year 2025

This year's report highlights activities undertaken and lessons learned by the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) throughout calendar year 2025.

I. Top Three Accomplishments for 2025

A. Disconnected Young Adult Job Fair - 2021 research, conducted as follow up to a prior Disconnected Youth in Berks County study, revealed that the number of disconnected young adults (those neither employed nor engaged in education attainment endeavors) had, in fact, increased in the intervening four years between studies. As an initiative to reverse this trend, the Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) supported an “undecided” high school senior career fair for those students who didn’t have an identified post-graduation plan. This event was held at Albright College in partnership with the Berks County Intermediate Unit (BCIU), Berks Business Education Coalition (BBEC) and the Title I Youth provider at the PA CareerLink® Berks County. Berks County school districts were invited to bring high school seniors to meet with employers and training providers that were in attendance. This was the second year an event was held, with ten out of our eighteen school districts transporting a total of fifty-four students. The Berks WDB hopes to hold an annual event to help provide resources to undecided high school seniors.

B. Berks County WDB/Berks Latino Workforce Development Corp. (BCLWDC) Partnership – The Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) issued a request for proposals for career-related training opportunities with a focus tied to our priority industry sectors of manufacturing, healthcare, construction, and agriculture/food production. BCLWDC successfully submitted a proposal to provide Allied Health training resulting in industry-recognized credentials to underrepresented populations. This partnership has allowed individuals who were waiting for training opportunities in Certified Nurse Aide (CNA) and Phlebotomy due to open enrollment capacity issues, to join in structured cohorts for the receipt of guidance, preparation, instruction, and employment placement assistance. The Berks WDB has welcomed this partnership with BCLWDC and looks forward to the potential extension of this collaboration should the anticipated statement of work outcomes be realized.

C. Thomas P. Miller Associates “Berks Workforce 2030” Study - The Berks County Workforce Development Board (WDB) leads long-term planning, oversees federal and state workforce funds, and coordinates system partners through PA CareerLink® Berks County. To support that mission, the WDB engaged Thomas P Miller Associates (TPMA) to complete a countywide workforce study that will guide decisions through 2030.

This study examines post-pandemic labor market and demographic trends in the Reading metropolitan area with a primary focus on adults ages 25 to 64 and a complementary look at emerging talent ages 18 to 24. It identifies risks and opportunities and translates them into actions that align education and training to employer demand, reduce barriers to work, and to strengthen retention.

This study’s resultant report provides a comprehensive picture of Berks County’s current workforce landscape and future outlook through 2035. Drawing on quantitative data, employer surveys, and interviews with educators, community leaders, and businesses, it identifies the demographic, economic, and structural forces shaping local talent supply and demand including comprehensive assessments for improvement in the following areas of impact:

- Population Trends

- Labor Force Participation
- Education, Numeracy & Literacy
- Mobility & Commuting Trends
- Remote Work
- Housing Market & Attainability

Most prominently, the study identifies recommendations in which the Berks County WDB can play a catalytic role by connecting employers, educators, and community partners around five priorities:

1. Expand participation by engaging underutilized talent groups—parents, veterans, older workers, and immigrant professionals.
2. Strengthen early-career and credential pipelines to ensure younger workers transition smoothly from education to employment.
3. Invest in job quality and retention by supporting employers in developing career ladders, flexible scheduling, and inclusive cultures.
4. Integrate literacy, numeracy, and digital readiness into all workforce training to close foundational skill gaps.
5. Align workforce, housing, and transportation systems to remove barriers that keep residents from fully participating in the labor market.

II. Top Three Stories/Testimonials

A. Jesus - Jesus came to PA CareerLink® Berks County in search of assistance with training funds to obtain his Class A Commercial Driver’s License (CDL-A). As an individual between the ages of seventeen and twenty-four interested in training funds, Jesus is dual enrolled with Workforce Innovation & Opportunity Act (WIOA) Young Adult and Career Services. Jesus was enrolled with the Young Adult program on March 25, 2025, and with the Career Services program on March 31, 2025. After completing the required tasks to acquire the training funds, Jesus started his CDL-A training in the beginning of May. He successfully completed training and obtained his CDL-A on July 22, 2025. Finding a job driving truck for someone at the age of twenty, Jesus’ age, is extremely difficult. Jesus was aware of that, so he looked for a job someplace with an employer pathway in which he could advance into driving truck. In August, he started working as a package handler for FedEx with the goal of driving truck for them once he turns twenty-one. September 23, Jesus was exited from the PA CareerLink® programs maintaining his employment at FedEx and, at that time, he had been promoted from package handler to yard spotter. This new position consists of moving trailers around the yard at FedEx, which is one step closer to his goal of driving truck for them!

B. Yanirra - Yanirra enrolled in the Employment Advancement and Retention Network (EARN) Program on April 14, 2025. As a single mother facing financial strain, she came to orientation with an urgent need for stable employment. She was behind on car payments and needed repairs to keep her vehicle reliable. The PA CareerLink® Berks County EARN team built a plan that included updating her résumé, practicing interviews, and providing regular mentoring. She was also connected with the Family Advocate for stress-management support through individual sessions and group meetings. Her long-term goal was to work as a full-time Behavioral Interventionist with opportunities for advancement. During her application process, she learned she needed FBI fingerprint clearance and renewal of her Child Development Associates Credential (CDA). EARN Career Development Specialists submitted both requests to the County Assistance Office, and they

were approved May 30, 2025. The team also worked with her to overcome her transportation barriers, which she resolved by June 12, 2025. With those challenges behind her, she was ready to move forward.

Around that time, program contractor EDSI announced an Employer Outreach Specialist position in Berks County. Recognizing her strengths, positive energy, and strong communication skills, the EARN team encouraged her to apply. Even though this role wasn't part of her original career plan, she leaned into the opportunity, submitted her letter of interest, and excelled throughout the interview process. On July 14, 2025, she began her new career path with the PA CareerLink® Berks County Business Services Team. Timing was ideal because, as of August 28, 2025, her Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) benefits had closed. Since joining the team, Yanirra has continued to grow. She tackles challenges with determination, collaborates closely with colleagues, and builds strong relationships with employers and partners. Recently, she reconnected with a local partner who had mentored her as a student, sharing her gratitude and her desire to support others the same way she was supported. In her weekly check-ins, she speaks with pride about her work, her team, and the chance to make a difference in the community.

Yanirra shared this message about her experience: "I can advocate for the EARN program because I'm proof that it works. I started as a participant, and this program gave me the skills, support, and opportunity I needed to succeed. Today, I stand before you as someone who can tell you firsthand that when you partner with the EARN program, you're not only filling a position, but you're investing in people. And that investment can change lives, just like it changed mine. A job can fill a role, but an opportunity can fill a heart. Your investment in me didn't just open a door, it truly changed my life." We are proud of everything she has accomplished and grateful to have her on our team!

- C. **Cyrus** - When Cyrus first came to the WIOA program, he brought with him strong determination as well as several barriers from his past, including a criminal background and reliance on Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, which had made securing stable employment challenging. Despite these obstacles, Cyrus was ready for change.

After attending Welcome Orientation at PA CareerLink® Berks County, Cyrus completed the pre-application for the WIOA Title I Adult/Dislocated Worker (A/DW) Program to receive Comprehensive Services. On April 10, 2025, he was deemed eligible for Adult Priority services. With guidance and encouragement of the WIOA team, Cyrus was fully committed to the process and began charting a new path for his future.

Throughout the program, Cyrus remained focused on achieving his goals. He successfully completed four days of Success Starts Here workshop along with all required assessments. He was provided with detailed information about SkillUp, On-the-Job training opportunities for which he may qualify, and the Individual Training Account (ITA) process. After careful consideration, Cyrus chose to enroll in the Commercial Driver's License (CDL-A) training program at Berks Technical Institute (BTI), motivated by his desire to create a better life for himself and his children.

Balancing training, being employed and family responsibilities was no easy task. There were many long days and late nights, but through perseverance, commitment, and hard work, Cyrus successfully completed the CDL-A program within a single month of the training start date. Shortly after earning his CDL-A credential, Cyrus secured employment with Western Express Trucking, officially launching a new chapter in his career. Today, Cyrus is proudly employed in

the trucking industry, using his new career to better support his family, a goal that has driven him since the beginning of his journey. In sharing his sincere gratitude for the WIOA A/DW program and the continued support he received throughout the process, Cyrus' story is a powerful reminder of the resilience required to overcome obstacles and the life-changing outcomes that are possible with determination and support. We are so proud of his accomplishments and the bright future he is building for himself and his family!

III. Challenges

A. TANF Youth Funding – Historically, the Berks County WDB annually received sufficient TANF Youth Funding from the Pennsylvania Department of Human Services (DHS) to competitively procure two separate contracts for In-School Youth (ISY) work experience – (1) a larger year-round contract for low-income youth and a (2) a smaller summer work experience contract for high school students with disabilities. Unfortunately, due to substantial reductions in our TANF Youth funding over the past few years, the WDB is no longer able to support both programs. As a result, we were forced to end funding the summer work experience contract for high school students with disabilities in Summer 2024. Given the ongoing increased costs per individual participant, unless we receive increased TANF Youth funding going forward, we will see a continued erosion in the number of deserving youths served by our one remaining year-round employment program for low-income youth.

IV. Promising Practices

A. Monthly Subcontractor Financial Status Report (FSR) Reviews – The Berks County WDB implemented a new subcontractor financial status report (FSR) review process. Subcontractors are required to provide supporting documentation for all monthly FSR expenses by the 15th of each month. A cover sheet is produced by the subcontractor for each line item of the FSR followed by the invoices and supporting documentation. The invoices and supporting documentation are then reviewed to ensure correct amounts are being charged on the FSR and for compliance with all applicable policies and procedures. Any discrepancies are emailed to the subcontractor to provide missing supporting documentation or make required corrections on the next FSR submission. Since implementing this process, the WDB has seen less errors on a monthly basis and less findings or concerns on the annual fiscal monitoring.

V. Request for Additional State Guidance

No Additional State Guidance is requested at this time.