



Vermont State Workforce Development Board

Youth Committee - Meeting Minutes

May 10th, 2022

10:00 am – 11:00 am

Committee Members in Attendance: Caelan Keenan, Nicole Miller, Laurel Butler, Elizabeth Frascoia, Loretta Stalnaker

Guests in Attendance: Victoria Biondolillo, Abby Rhim

Executive Director Victoria Biondolillo began the meeting at 10:03 am. She shared that the purpose of today's meeting was to identify short and long term goals of the committee. Additionally, she wanted the group to identify next steps. She then shared her whiteboard screen and asked the group what the most meaningful areas are as it pertains to kids and careers.

Elizabeth Frascoia stated the need to address access for folks who don't have opportunities financially.

Laurel Butler noted the identification of resources. She worries that people don't know where to go to access all of the great resources available.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed, noting a de-mystifying of programs.

Laurel Butler added that appropriate programs must be suggested to the right people, almost like a clearing house.

Elizabeth Frascoia mentioned the lack of transportation. Folks are not always able to be in the physical spaces where opportunities are.

Victoria Biondolillo added that the overall issue of barriers to enrollment must be highlighted. This might include transportation, financial support, social stigma, etc.

Nicole Miller added that we need transportation access all over the state, not just large, geographic hubs.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed, stating that we can't just focus on Chittenden or Washington County.

Caelan Keenan suggested that we make the expectation that all students partake in an internship or work based learning opportunity. Instead of just the kids that express interest, it needs to be directed at all kids. She added that this should begin in middle school.

Laurel Butler then returned to transportation, adding that bringing guest speakers to communities and adding to school curriculums allows opportunities to come to kids. This is one way to tackle the transportation issue.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed. She noted that she feels very passionate about exposing young Vermonters to role models who have similar backgrounds in order to help them understand what is possible. With this exposure, earlier is better.

Nicole Miller stressed the power of role models. She then added that role models must be diverse and represent the entire spectrum including gender, age, etc.

Laurel Butler then referenced “Linking Learning to Life”, a successful program that traveled to schools and hosted various workshops for kids. As a teacher, she found it to be very engaging and productive for students. She recommended that a program like this be brought to life again once more.

Victoria Biondolillo highlighted the importance of representation in any program or idea the committee creates. She noted in order to be effective, representation must be considered. She also noted supporting the refugee population and identifying ways we can support new Vermonters towards careers.

Elizabeth Frascoia noted that she has been wrestling with the idea of accessing kids who don’t necessarily have role models or folks at home pushing them towards opportunities. Not everyone will have the confidence to strike out and seek opportunities, so how do we then tap into those kids who won’t advance on their own and don’t have role models guiding them either?

Caelan Keenan agreed with Elizabeth. She wondered how we can support kids to break out of the cultural norm and pursue opportunities, even if they don’t have support from home, school, etc.

Elizabeth Frascoia added that even if opportunities are provided, how do kids break out of social barriers? We must make sure that if an opportunity, like work-based learning, is outside of the norm, we acknowledge that folks might need extra social support to validate their choices.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed. She noted that the kids who have support or modeling from their parents or adults in their lives are going to engage regardless. However, how do we break down the culture piece in order to tap into kids who might not engage, even if opportunities are prevalent, because they are uncomfortable?

Caelan Keenan noted pay. She shared that if we could find a way to compensate youth, through money or other ways, that would add value. She shared that when she looks back at herself in high school, she didn’t understand the value of getting college credits. While adults, parents and teachers understand that monetary value, she is unsure if high school students understand. She suggested something like a personal finance lesson to understand that credit is essentially equivalent to monetary compensation. Regardless of compensation, there needs to be an understanding of motivation to engage kids.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed. She then suggested a communications strategy. If we are going to market programs, we need to learn best ways to reach kids from where they are, not just via teachers.

Elizabeth Frascoia then asked Victoria how she sees this committee’s goals fitting into the larger workforce issue.

Victoria Biondolillo noted sector-based committees fixing immediate problems and creating sustainable pipelines. She shared that for the Youth Committee, she hopes the group can put forth policy suggestions for the entire Board and Governor. Additionally, she wants the group to come up with non-

policy solutions that can be implemented for more immediate change. She then suggested the group look at the generated list on the whiteboard and start sorting ideas into buckets. This would include communications, experiences/programming, etc.

Laurel Butler then suggested one more idea. She shared that most kids get excited when they have something that they have produced. This tends to boost self-esteem. She suggested that if we had locations around the state where we could showcase products or accomplishments of students' works, it would provide some motivation.

Victoria Biondolillo suggested individual municipalities or heavily trafficked places, outside of schools. If we could showcase things students are doing, it would promote a sense of motivation and accomplishment.

Laurel Butler added that it could promote a sense of collaboration and inspiration among teachers and educators.

Elizabeth Frascoia suggested linkages to Regional Development Corporations (RDC) or Rotary Clubs and local schools. There are people in every town that are thinking about these ideas. How do we make it a state and local collaboration?

Victoria Biondolillo agreed with the idea of community buy-in. If we can engage business owners, RDCs and local chambers, that would likely result in greater retention of youths within communities.

Elizabeth Frascoia added that while people have different ideas of how to develop their communities, all can agree that they want to live in vibrant communities that continue to progress.

Victoria Biondolillo agreed, adding that most people acknowledge that we need to be assisting kids in our communities. This can then serve as a unifier. She then returned to the buckets including communications, experiences/programming and systems. She placed each long-term goal into their respective bucket. She then asked the group for ideas on short-term projects or goals that the committee could work on.

Nicole Miller noted that Vermont Afterschool is working with the Governor's office, schools across agencies and HireAbility to form a subcommittee focused on youth employability. This includes a rework of a page created last summer that highlighted their "Summer Matters" campaign which provided career exploration opportunities to youth while engaging business owners. She asked if the SWDB staff could spread the word on the website, working to connect youths with potential career exploration opportunities via businesses.

<https://vermontafterschool.org/jobs-for-youth/>

Victoria Biondolillo confirmed that she could help connect Nicole with businesses. She then suggested creating an informal document that consists of, geographically and statewide, the different programs and services available for students both in and outside of the classroom. She then suggested using that to identify weak points in the system. She then asked the group if they had any questions.

Elizabeth Frascoia asked if there was a list that currently exists of economic development committees throughout the state. With this identification, we can then see if there are any geographical areas lacking support.

Victoria Biondolillo said that we could include that research in an informal document.

Elizabeth Frascoia added that we could then identify holes in the system that are possibly geographical, once we identify partners.

Victoria Biondolillo added that we can include different workforce board members and committee members in each area as well. She then thanked everyone for participating in today's meeting.

Meeting adjourned at 10:42 am.

Respectfully submitted by Abby Rhim.

Abby Rhim, Executive Assistant

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