Minutes
Twin Districts Workforce Development Area
Local Workforce Development Board

Thursday, July 23, 2026
914 Sullivan Drive, Hattiesburg, MS

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD PRESENT:

Lindsay Brown, Wayne Buffington, Perry Duckworth, Rebecca Ellis, Sedgie Foxworth, Lillie Graves, Ricky Harrison, Newt Ishee, Brian Johnson, Julia Lindsey, Calvin Newson, Tiffany Parrish, David Stephens, Lucretia Williams.

LOCAL WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT BOARD ABSENT:

Millie Bordelon, Danny Box (proxy), Grant Crowder, Lucy Lamberth (proxy), Laura Lewis, Tom Miles, Jermaine Simmons, April Stennett, and Marshall Wood.

STAFF:

Allison Hawkins, Patricia Morrison, Marvin Dickey, Shari White, Elena Borel, and Grant Wesley.

CALL TO ORDER AND COMMENTS:

Mr. David Stephens called the meeting to order and greeted everyone in attendance. Mr. Stephens also provided highlights from Mississippi Business Alliance conference.

APPROVAL OF AGENDA:

Mr. Stephens called for a motion to approve the agenda.

ACTION: Mr. Wayne Buffington motioned to approve the agenda; Mr. Perry Duckworth seconded. Motion carried.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES:

Mr. Stephens called for a motion to approve the minutes from the last meeting (April 29, 2026).

ACTION: Mr. Calvin Newsom motioned to approve the minutes; Ms. Lillie Graves seconded. Motion carried.

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LEO BOARD UPDATE:

Mr. Stephens called on Mr. Calvin Newsom to present the LEO Board update. Mr. Newsom reported that the LEO Board approved several items during their meeting and deferred to Mrs. Allison Hawkins for further details in her report.

TWIN DISTRICTS UPDATE:

Mr. Stephens called on Ms. Allison Hawkins to present the Twin Districts update. Ms. Hawkins began by stating that June 30 marked the end of the previous Program Year, and much of the staff's time since the last Board meeting has been spent preparing subawards for the new Program Year (PY26). All of these subawards have been executed, with the exception of MDES, which will be completed soon.

Ms. Hawkins then announced that the Laurel WIN Job Center officially closed on June 30, 2026. Its closure was approved at the last Board meeting, and we've received little pushback on the decision so far. On a positive note, Laurel will be one of the first locations to receive the virtual MDES Navigator system, which Mr. Brian Johnson and other MDES staff present will demo during his WIN Job Center report. Jasper and Jefferson Davis Counties will also be getting Navigators, and Leake County has showed strong interest as well.

MDES is also bringing their mobile WIN Center bus, "Winnie," to today's meeting, and will have it open for LEO and Board members to tour.

Hood Industries is closing their plywood production facility in Wiggins, which is also the largest employer in Stone County. The company cited damage from recent Tropical Storm Arthur and overall age of the site structures being too costly to repair and maintain. Around 260 employees will be affected. However, MDES and SMPDD staff are actually at the facility today (July 23, 2026) for a Rapid Response/Layoff Aversion event, led by Ms. Stephanie Walters. Staff will be assisting the affected employees with re-employment services, Unemployment Insurance enrollment, and training opportunities to help them get back in the workforce as soon and as smoothly as possible.

The PY24 Mississippi WIOA Annual Report booklet is now available, and MDES brought copies to today's meeting for anyone to take with them.

This year's TDWDA Annual Meeting was set to be hosted in Meridian on October 14-15. However, several LEO members noted that this would conflict with the MAS Tupelo Fall meeting. Another date will be determined, possible in early December to avoid other conflicts in November.

Ms. Hawkins concluded her report.

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TWIN DISTRICTS FINANCIAL REPORT:

Mr. Stephens called on Ms. Shari White to present the Financial Report. She began her report with the Program Year 2025 (PY25) Funding Overview. PY25 ended on June 30, 2026. There have been no changes since last meeting, the PY25 funding remains at $9,131,695.12.

Ms. White continued with the Obligations and Expenditure Summary. The Obligations for all PY25 funds is now 100%.

Ms. White then summarized the expenditures through June 30, 2026: Adult was 71%, Dislocated Worker 53%, Youth 81%, and Rapid Response/Layoff Aversion was 56% expended. Overall, TDWDA has expended 67% of its PY25 Obligations, equaling $6,146,551.04. Please note that the PY25 Youth Work Experience Rate is at currently at 36.02%.

Ms. White added that Sub-recipient closeouts are due to SMPDD no later than July 31, 2026. At that time, sub-recipients will report their final PY25 expenditures, so these figures will change slightly. The final PY25 expenditure totals will be provided at the next TDWDA Board meeting.

Next, Ms. White went over the Unobligated Remaining Funds. The remaining unliquidated obligations rolled forward into PY26 and were re-obligated through new PY26 sub-awards.

Ms. White continued with the Expenditure by Quarter Report. Expenditures are as follows: 1st Quarter expended $1,280,944.45; 2nd Quarter $1,426,300.37; 3rd Quarter $1,536,000.30; and 4th Quarter $1,903,305.92, with additional closeout costs to be added at a later date.

Ms. White also stated that TDWDA's Program Year 2026 allocations were reduced by approximately 10%. At the next TDWDA Board meeting, we will be able to provide the total funds available, which will include both the PY25 carryover and the PY26 allocation.

Ms. White concluded her report.

WIN JOB CENTER REPORT:

Mr. Stephens called on Mr. Brian Johnson to present the WIN Job Center report.
Mr. Johnson began his report by confirming that the Laurel WIN Job Center has been closed as of June 30, 2026. Ms. Sherry Rutledge, the former manager of the Laurel WIN Center, is now the new manager of the Hattiesburg WIN Center. Mr. Jerry Holifield is now working with Outreach at MDES. Both are present at today’s meeting. The new Meridian WIN Job Center site is now fully operational, and Mr. Johnson encouraged all the Board members to see it for themselves.

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Mr. Johnson also introduced Mr. Jason Pope, the new Deputy Executive Director of MDES; and Ms. Daphne James, Director of Workforce Services.

Mr. Johnson then went into more detail on the Mobile WIN Job Center bus, or "Winnie." Everything normally done at a brick-and-mortar WIN Center can be done from the bus. It is equipped with Starlink internet, so it's not reliant on cell service and can be deployed to disaster areas. The bus is also a good option for Rapid Response events in areas that do not have a WIN Center nearby.

Mr. Johnson then asked Ms. Darby Lowery, Navigator Coordinator, and Mr. Leigh Weems, OTSI, to come up and demonstrate the Navigator system to the Board. Ms. Lowery explained that the Navigator provides virtual employment services, and can be placed in WIN Job Centers, libraries, community colleges, and any other location where those services are needed.

The Navigator system itself is relatively simple, with a single large touchscreen. The user can login into their MS Works profile to search job openings, or they can connect directly to a MDES agent, who can help with job searches, updating resumes, interview preparation, updating the user's MS Works profile, and other tasks.

The Navigator is also not permanently placed, so it can be moved around to best suit the needs of the location and the community. Mr. Weems added that the system only needs WiFi and power to function, and can even use a phone's hotspot connection if needed.

Mr. Weems explained that the overall initial cost for one system is around $5,000, which includes the equipment and licenses. The annual cost for the license is $300. The operating hours for the Navigator and call center is similar to the WIN Job Centers, 8:30am to 4:30pm.

Mr. Johnson added that one Navigator was recently deployed to Meridian to help supplement the WIN Center there, which at the time was short staffed. Feedback from the participants that used it was very positive.

Ms. Hawkins added that One-Stop Subaward budget for this year allocated for a Navigator in Jones, Jasper, and Jefferson Davis Counties. Carthage (Leake County) also has one approved.

Mr. Johnson concluded his report.

ONE-STOP COMMITTEE REPORT:

Mr. Stephens called on Ms. Rebecca Ellis to present the One-Stop Committee Report. Ms. Ellis reported that as of the last Board meeting (April 29, 2026), all One-Stop Certifications were completed, with the lone exception of the Forest WIN Job Center.

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TDWDA Executive Committee met on June 18, 2026, and voted to approve the Forest One-Stop Certification. Ms. Ellis motioned to ratify the Executive Committee's approval.

ACTION: Ms. Rebecca Ellis motioned to ratify the Executive Committee's approval of the Forest WIN Job Center One-Stop Certificaiton through June 30, 2028; Mr. Sedgie Foxworth seconded. Motion carried.

Ms. Ellis then asked for the Board's approval of the One-Stop Committee's recommendation to designate $150,000 of PY26 Adult funds for Incumbent Worker training. Incumbent Worker Funds go into the existing workforce for upskilling, reskilling, and other training to keep them competitive in the workforce. Ms. Ellis made the motion to approve.

ACTION: Ms. Ellis motioned to designate $150,000 from PY26 for Incumbent Worker training; Mr. Sedgie Foxworth seconded. Motion carried.

Ms. Ellis continued with a brief overview of the recently announced Workforce Pell Grants. Traditional pell grants are a source of financial aid for credit-based, academic coursework. The idea behind the Workforce Pell Grants was for them to be used by individuals for skill-based training (truck driving, welding, healthcare, etc.). However, none of the 15 community colleges in Mississippi currently have programs that would meet the narrow requirements to qualify for Workforce Pell, and modifying existing programs would be counterproductive to student/participants that are, or will be, enrolled.

Ms. Ellis added that the community colleges are actively working on setting up programs that could operate with Workforce Pell Grants, but they would need to be active for at least one year, and would then need to submit performance reports, which would require another year.

The Workforce Pell is largely a positive development, however. The State, community colleges, and other workforce agencies are now "speaking the same language" when it comes to workforce development, and the foundations are being laid to implement the Workforce Pell and other programs throughout the State. To sum up, "it's complicated," but we should have more updates from the State Workforce Investment Board (SWIB) and AccelerateMS as we get closer to the end of the calendar year.

Ms. Ellis concluded her report.

INDUSTRY ADVISORY COUNCIL

Mr. Stephens called on Mr. Maury Hull to present the Industry Advisory Council report. Mr. Hull began by stating that from an employer's perspective, AccelerateMS is accomplishing exactly what the Governor's office and the State Legislature has tasked them with: streamlining workforce training across the State, aligning training goals with

the needs of employees and employers, and increasing accountability for the federal/state funds used.

The Legislature also passed an update to the Comprehensive Workforce Training and Education Consolidation Act of 2004, further unifying the training programs and aligning them with current workforce needs. In addition, the Legislature passed a new law, the Mississippi Office of Apprenticeship Act, which will connect High School student seniors to workforce programs and training more quickly and effectively. Historically, Mississippi has kept registered apprenticeships at arm's length, but the new program is closely modeled after the Federal program, and is optional for employers.

Workforce Pell is also shaping up to be an excellent opportunity for workers and employers. The costs normally incurred while training new employees will be offset, and allow employers to expand their reach to new hires.

The Recovery-to-Work Act was also passed, which directs Opioid Settlement funds towards workforce and rehabilitation initiatives to assist those directly or indirectly affected by the Opioid Crisis, and help them return to the workforce.

AccelerateMS has expanded the High School Career Coach program with more funds allocated from the Legislature. Mr. Hull stated that the Career Coach program is one of the best workforce initiatives in the State, and the new funds have expanded the number of coaches in Mississippi to 200. Ms. Hawkins added that SMPDD has added five more coaches, bringing our total to 47.

The State Legislature also passed a Governor-led initiative to form the Mississippi Post-Secondary Achievement Council (MPAC). Mr. Hull announced that he is on that council. One of the common issues in workforce training is the misalignment between certificates, credentials, and college credits between different schools and different industries. This new Council will streamline this process, and allow the training to more closely align with employer needs. It will also work to make local Mississippi employers more competitive with larger, national companies in relation to training and wages. MPAC is chaired entirely by business and industry leaders, which have more direct influence workforce training initiatives.

Over the next decade, 68% of the 70,000 jobs available in the State will require some form of certificate, credential, or college degree. Mr. Hull said the overall goal of MPAC is to better align and streamline those credential and education needs with what the employers in the State require. He ended by saying that Mississippi is on the right track to meet those employment and training goals. Mr. Hull concluded his report. Mr. Stephens called for a motion to accept all given reports.

ACTION: Mr. Calvin Newsom motioned to accept all given reports; Mr. Perry Duckworth seconded. Motion carried.

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NEW BUSINESS:

Mr. Stephens called on Ms. Hawkins to go over new policies and current policy revisions. The first one is the updated Conflict of Interest Policy. This policy establishes mandatory standards of conduct to ensure integrity, impartiality, and full compliance with all applicable federal and state conflict of interest (COI) requirements for the TDWDA. Unlike some other policy updates, this one strengthens our local procedures. The underlying ethics laws have not changed, but the policy expands disclosure requirements, organizational conflict (OCI) standards, procurement safeguards, monitoring, and documentation to improve compliance and transparency. Mr. Stephens called for a motion to approve the updated Conflict of Interest Policy.

ACTION: Mr. Wayne Buffington motioned to approve the updated Conflict of Interest Policy; Mr. Sedgie Foxworth seconded. Motion carried.

Mr. Stephens then called on Ms. Patricia Morrison to go over the new Standards for IEP/ISS, Documentation, and Measurable Skill Gains Policy. The purpose of this policy is to establish detailed standards and requirements for the development, implementation, and ongoing maintenance of Individual Employment Plans (IEPs), Individual Service Strategies (ISS), objective assessments, case documentation, and the accurate reporting and validation of Measurable Skill Gains (MSGs) for participants enrolled in WIOA Title I programs.

The intent of this policy is to ensure that all workforce services delivered within the Twin Districts Workforce Development Area (TDWDA) are consistent, participant-centered, fully documented, and compliant with federal WIOA regulations and Mississippi Department of Employment Security (MDES) WIOA Policy 42.

This is an entirely new policy that establishes consistent standards for how individualized career services are delivered throughout the TDWDA. Although the document is lengthy, much of it consists of the operating procedures, forms, and implementation tools staff use every day. The Board is adopting both the policy framework and the administrative guidance needed for consistent implementation. Mr. Stephens called for a motion to approve the new policy.

ACTION: Mr. Wayne Buffington motioned to approve the Standards for IEP/ISS, Documentation, and Measurable Skill Gains Policy; Ms. Lillie Graves seconded. Motion carried.

Ms. Morrison then went over the updated Certificate and Credential Attainment Policy. The purpose of this policy is to establish requirements for the validation, documentation, tracking, and reporting of certificates and credentials for participants enrolled in WIOA Title I-B Adult, Dislocated Worker, and Youth programs. This policy ensures compliance with federal and state regulations governing the Credential Attainment performance indicator.

This policy modernizes our existing Credential Policy. The underlying WIOA requirements have not changed, but the policy has been updated to reflect current guidance, expanded to include Youth programs, and strengthened with clearer procedures, documentation requirements, and implementation tools. Mr. Stephens called for a motion.

ACTION: Mr. Sedgie Foxworth motioned to approve the updated Certificate and Credential Attainment Policy; Mr. Ricky Harrison seconded. Motion carried.

ADJOURNMENT:

With no further business to discuss, Mr. Stephens adjourned the meeting.

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