

Workforce Readiness Taskforce Meeting Minutes

December 4, 2025

Open Meeting

1. Welcome & Attendance (Education & Industry Consortium Members)
2. Introduction of Guest Panelists - Healthcare Sector - Christina Coble
3. Labor Market Information - Healthcare Sector - Christina Coble
4. Discussion of Talent Pipeline in Healthcare - WRT Members and Guest Panelists
5. Master Credentials List Update - Christina Coble

Sector Updates: Open to the Floor

Adjournment - Next Meeting March 5, 2026

Consortium Members Participating In-Person:

Linda Fitzpatrick Karen Giovengo

Consortium Members Participating by Teleconference:

Aliesha Seitz Christi Shields Lana Barros

Consortium Members Excused:

Eric Swiechowski Bill Wilcox

Administrative Staff Present/Teleconference:

Christina Coble	Jennifer Eimann	Brian Bauer
Tracey McMorris	Mitch Kloorfain	Kurt Hawker
Dawn Riccardi	Lisa Deligatti	Rona Brighthaupt

Public Present/Teleconference:

Jim Brann	Deb Frazier	Lorna Landher
Alisha Seitz	Victoria McMillan	Ann Hubbard
Angela Browning	Leslie Haviland	Michael Atkins
Cindy Aptheker	Maureen Harry	Ashley Cummings
Joan Greenburg		

Call to Order:

Christina Coble, Business Services Manager, called the meeting to order at 8:08 a.m. The attendance roster was completed.

Agenda Item 2 - Introduction of Guest Panelists - Healthcare Sector - Christina Coble: Christina Coble, Business Services Manager, explained that following the recent pattern of focusing on targeted industry sectors, this meeting will center on healthcare—one of the largest employment sectors in the tri-county area. Labor market data presented during the meeting demonstrates the significance of healthcare to the local economy.

The panel brought together representatives from both the education and employment sides of healthcare and were welcomed to discuss workforce development challenges and opportunities in the healthcare sector.

Panelists:

- Lorna Lander - Director of HR Services, Cleveland Clinic Indian River Hospital
- Leslie Haviland - Project Manager, Cleveland Clinic Center for Workforce Development
- Ann Hubbard - Dean of Health Science, Indian River State College
- Dr. Maureen Harry - BSN Nursing Program Director, Kaiser University
- Ashley Cummings - Executive Director, The Cabana at Jensen Dunes
- Victoria McMillan - HR Manager, The Cabana at Jensen Dunes

Agenda Item 3 - Labor Market Information (LMI) – Healthcare Sector:

Christina Coble, Business Services Manager, explained that the Jobs EQ comprehensive labor market report examines the Healthcare and Social Assistance sector across our three-county region. As one of the largest and fastest-growing employment sectors in our area, healthcare represents a critical component of both our workforce and economic development. This analysis provides essential insights for workforce planning, career counseling, economic development initiatives, and strategic planning for healthcare organizations and educational institutions.

Employment Scale & Economic Impact

The Healthcare and Social Assistance sector employs over 44,000 individuals across St. Lucie, Martin, and Indian River counties, making it one of the region's largest employment sectors. This substantial workforce represents 17.3% of total regional employment, significantly exceeding the national benchmark of 15.3%. This 2-percentage-point difference indicates that healthcare plays a more prominent role in our local economy compared to the broader U.S. employment landscape.

A comprehensive understanding of healthcare sector occupations reveals significant diversity beyond traditional clinical roles. While this analysis confirms that healthcare practitioners and clinical support staff comprise approximately 60% of the workforce, the remaining 40% represents substantial opportunities in supporting roles that are equally essential to healthcare delivery.

Compensation Analysis

Average annual wages within the sector exceed \$64,000, positioning healthcare among the higher-paying industries in our region. This competitive compensation level makes healthcare careers particularly attractive for workforce development initiatives and career pathway programs. These wages support strong economic multiplier effects throughout the region, as healthcare workers contribute significantly to local consumer spending and economic vitality.

Growth Trajectory

The sector demonstrates robust average annual employment change that outpaces national growth rates. This accelerated growth pattern reflects several factors: our region's aging population demographics, expansion of healthcare facilities and services, increasing demand for healthcare services, and the sector's resilience during economic fluctuations. The sustained growth trajectory suggests continued employment opportunities and career stability for individuals entering or advancing within the healthcare field.

County-Level Employment Analysis

Healthcare employment shows remarkable balance across our three-county region, with each county serving as a significant healthcare employment center:

- **St. Lucie County:** With over 16,000 healthcare employees, St. Lucie County hosts major healthcare facilities and serves as a regional healthcare hub. The county's larger population base supports diverse healthcare services including acute care hospitals, specialty medical practices, rehabilitation facilities, mental health services, and long-term care facilities.
- **Martin County:** Also employing over 16,000 healthcare workers, Martin County demonstrates healthcare employment levels comparable to St. Lucie County despite its smaller population. This suggests a higher concentration of healthcare services relative to population size, potentially indicating the county's role as a destination for healthcare services drawing patients from surrounding areas.
- **Indian River County:** With approximately 12,000 healthcare employees, Indian River County maintains substantial healthcare employment that supports its population and contributes significantly to the local economy. The county's healthcare sector likely includes a mix of hospital systems, physician practices, home healthcare agencies, and senior living facilities.

Agenda Item 4 - Discussion of Talent Pipeline in Healthcare - WRT Members and Guest Panelists:

Christina Coble, Business Services Manager, explained that the Workforce Readiness Taskforce meeting brought together education providers, business owners, and economic development leaders to further discuss healthcare career pathway programs, training initiatives for high-demand occupations, and recruitment efforts targeting diverse populations.

Ms. Coble opened the conversation by asking about the key challenges and solutions in workforce hiring/retention. Below is a summary of the main points presented by the panel:

Critical Staffing Needs Beyond High-Volume Roles

The panel emphasized that workforce analysis must consider both supply and demand ratios, not just overall staffing numbers. Several specialized healthcare positions face severe shortages despite lower visibility in traditional staffing reports:

- **Medical Laboratory Technicians:** Only 15 graduates annually in the region despite multiple openings
- **Respiratory Therapists:** Identified as one of the hardest positions to recruit nationally
- **Radiographers:** Limited by small cohort sizes even with program expansions
- **Dental Hygienists:** 10 graduates serving approximately 200 dentists
- **Speech-Language Pathologists and Occupational Therapists:** Nearest training programs located in Orlando and St. Augustine, creating pipeline challenges

These foundational roles are essential for clinical operations, as nurses and other providers cannot function effectively without this support infrastructure.

The Critical Thinking and Soft Skills Gap

Healthcare organizations report that new graduates are increasingly struggling with real-world application despite academic preparation. Key concerns include:

- **Clinical Freeze Response:** Some new graduates experience paralysis when facing actual patient situations versus simulated environments
- **Professionalism Deficits:** Basic workplace behaviors previously considered inherent now require explicit instruction
- **Social Skills Decline:** COVID-19's lasting impact on interpersonal development and emotional regulation

Proposed Solutions: Establishing closer collaboration between academia and clinical settings through faculty shadowing, participation in hospital huddles, exposure to new technologies, and real-life patient scenario training.

Workforce Readiness and Early Exposure

The challenge extends beyond higher education into K-12 preparation. Current initiatives include:

- **Summer Internship Program:** 51 high school students placed in 25 local businesses for hands-on experience
- **Eighth Grade Career Exploration:** Recent event featuring major healthcare systems providing direct student engagement
- **Identified Need:** Scaling from 100 students to 500+ to match graduating class sizes

The consensus recognizes this as both an educational and home environment issue requiring long-term, multi-stakeholder solutions.

Innovative Talent Development Strategies

Educational Access

Indian River State College Promise Program: Provides tuition-free two-year degrees to qualifying high school graduates in the four-county area, successfully producing 19-year-old respiratory therapy graduates and expanding the career pipeline.

Primary Departure Factors

- **Burnout:** Insufficient emotional regulation tools and coping mechanisms for traumatic or stressful situations
- **Administrative Burden:** System inefficiencies that detract from patient care
- **Generational Shifts:** Younger workforce prioritizes rapid advancement and career mobility over long-term loyalty
- **Economic Pressures:** Housing costs, interest rates, and cost of living challenge even seemingly adequate salaries
- **Management Quality:** Easy job mobility enables quick exits from poor leadership situations

Innovative Retention Approach

One private care organization achieved higher retention by applying the same core values internally that they expect caregivers to provide externally, treating staff as clients rather than just employees.

Technology and Future Trends

While AI was acknowledged as a hot topic, the discussion focused primarily on immediate workforce challenges. The consensus recognizes that technological advancement must be balanced with human workforce development, particularly as demographics shift toward an aging population requiring more healthcare services alongside an aging clinical workforce.

Strategic Implications

- **For Workforce Development:** This data supports healthcare career pathway programs, training initiatives for high-demand occupations, and recruitment efforts targeting diverse populations.
- **For Education:** Institutions can use this information for program planning, curriculum development, and career services aligned with regional employment needs.
- **For Economic Development:** The sector's strength and growth trajectory inform business attraction, retention strategies, and infrastructure planning.
- **For Healthcare Employers:** Labor market intelligence supports workforce planning, competitive analysis, and talent development strategies.

Next Steps and Opportunities

Committee Leadership

The Education and Industry Consortium seeks a new chairperson following Dr. Pilly's departure. The role involves minimal administrative burden (handled by staff) and focuses on meeting facilitation and leadership.

Cross-Industry Learning

Attendees encouraged participation from all sectors, as workforce challenges transcend individual industries. Common themes around retention, skills gaps, and talent development benefit from diverse perspectives.

Collaboration Imperative

Success requires partnerships across healthcare organizations, educational institutions, workforce development agencies, and community stakeholders. No single entity can solve these complex, interconnected challenges independently.

Adjournment:

With no further items to discuss, Christina Coble adjourned the meeting at 9:03 p.m.

BOARD STAFF CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that these minutes reflect the proceedings of the Workforce Readiness Taskforce.

Christina Coble
Board Staff

Date

Primary Workforce Challenges in Manufacturing

The panel discussed that the industry faces two critical staffing issues that create ongoing operational difficulties.

- Challenges in finding and retaining skilled workers in manufacturing.
- The impact of local economic conditions on workforce readiness and employment opportunities.

Talent Acquisition and Retention Strategies

Shannon Armstrong raised the challenge of enhancing talent acquisition in different regions. Jamie Duplantis shared insights from his diverse industry experience, advocating for early engagement through initiatives like summer internships and stressing the importance of leadership development for employee retention. Enrico Mattiazzi added that their current challenge lies in defining talent, focusing on soft skills and the desire for growth rather than just technical competencies.

Updates on Internship Programs and Student Opportunities

Aliesha Seitz provided an overview of the Career Technical Education programs in St. Lucie Public Schools, emphasizing the diverse opportunities available for students, including pre-apprenticeships and dual enrollment programs. She shared the success story of a student who is now pursuing a degree in mechanical engineering and is seeking internship opportunities, underscoring the importance of community involvement in these initiatives.

Workforce Challenges and Training Initiatives

Al Guzman shared his experiences as a Training and Development Manager at Piper Aircraft, noting the difficulties in attracting and retaining skilled workers. He pointed out that many applicants are unprepared for manufacturing jobs' physically demanding and compliance-heavy nature. Additionally, he mentioned the impact of housing and transportation challenges on employee attendance and job retention.

Internships and Workforce Challenges

Shannon Armstrong shared insights on the internship program at Pursuit, noting that each intern posting attracted over 150 applicants. While she expressed excitement about hiring local talent, she also pointed out the considerable time and effort needed to train interns, which can be a burden on current employees. Additionally, she mentioned the difficulty in convincing business unit leaders to take on apprentices due to their existing workload.

Addressing Life Skills and Workforce Readiness

Shannon Armstrong emphasized the lack of life skills among new entrants to the workforce, attributing part of the issue to the impact of COVID-19 on education.

Christina Coble mentioned that local school districts are making efforts to incorporate soft skills into their curricula, although the results will not be immediate.

Lana Barros raised questions about the transferability of skills taught to interns and the need for better connections between industry and educational programs. She stated that Career and Technical education leaders recognize a critical disconnect between student preparation and industry expectations.

Career and Technical education programs need direct industry input to incorporate both technical skills and workplace behavioral expectations into curricula, ensuring graduates understand "real-world" professional standards before entering the workforce.

Summer Internship Program and Community Collaboration

Jamie Duplantis pointed out the need for collaboration among HR representatives and community partners to enhance workforce readiness.

Anita Fischer provided an overview of a summer internship program involving nearly 30 employers and 51 high school students, noting the unique support of personal career coaches for each student. She also mentioned the engagement of parents to foster a supportive environment at home and how important the role of internships and partnerships between businesses and educational institutions are.

There are promising solutions and partnerships. Several strategic approaches show potential for addressing these retention challenges. The partnership between the Economic Development Council (EDC) and the Boys and Girls Club for summer internships represents a proactive investment in future workforce development. While current regulations prevent hiring 16–17-year-olds immediately, early exposure to manufacturing careers could yield substantial returns by building local talent pipelines and community connections that encourage workers to remain in the area long-term.

Workforce Readiness and Perceptions of Manufacturing Careers

Enrico Mattiazzi highlighted the need for industries to attract young talent by demonstrating that manufacturing careers can be rewarding and engaging. He pointed out that the modern manufacturing environment vastly differs from previous decades.

Al Guzman shared his observations that young workers often come in with high expectations shaped by social media, only to find the reality of the job less glamorous than anticipated, leading to frustration and a desire to leave.

Workforce Development Initiatives and Community Engagement

Aliesha Seitz discussed the growth and opportunities in workforce readiness, urging businesses to engage with students to overcome misconceptions. Career and Technical education programs need direct industry input to incorporate both technical skills and workplace behavioral expectations into curricula, ensuring graduates understand "real-world" professional standards before entering the workforce.

Christina Coble discussed the manufacturing boot camp in Indian River County, where high school students are learning employability skills and touring local manufacturers. Both speakers stressed the importance of building connections between businesses and educational programs.

Manufacturing Workforce Challenges: A Comprehensive View from Piper Aircraft:

Al Guzman shared the following workforce development perspective. Drawing from military aviation experience, Piper Aircraft has developed insights into the complex, interconnected nature of manufacturing workforce challenges. Despite successfully transitioning skilled military personnel into aircraft manufacturing roles, the company faces significant obstacles in developing local talent pipelines.

Expectation Misalignment and Geographic Barriers

New manufacturing workers often arrive unprepared for the industry's demanding realities. Many lack exposure to manufacturing's fast-paced, compliance-heavy environment and underestimate the physical demands. This expectation gap creates immediate retention challenges, compounded by practical barriers including housing affordability and transportation limitations. Employees commute from as far as Stuart and Melbourne to Vero Beach, creating financial strain that contradicts their income expectations and impacts attendance reliability.

Training Program Development and Career vs. Job Mentality

Piper has invested in comprehensive training programs that convert unskilled local workers into aircraft manufacturing specialists, leveraging military training expertise. However, success requires shifting the worker's mindset from job-seeking to career-building. The company emphasizes that while jobs are plentiful, careers require mutual investment between employer and employee.

Leadership Development as Retention Strategy Summary

Beyond technical training, organizations must prioritize developing leadership, supervisory, and management skills. This addresses both the second shift staffing challenges and broader retention issues. Effective employee engagement requires more than competitive compensation—workers need strong leadership, peer support, and clear career development paths. Companies must model the behaviors they expect and create environments where employees have compelling reasons to stay beyond financial incentives.

The key insight is that retention strategies must combine early community engagement, comprehensive leadership development, and workplace cultures that provide meaningful career progression opportunities rather than relying solely on competitive compensation packages.

Adjournment:

With no further items to discuss, Christina Coble adjourned the meeting at 9:06 a.m.

BOARD STAFF CERTIFICATION

I hereby certify that these minutes reflect the proceedings of the Workforce Readiness Taskforce.

Christina Coble
Board Staff

Date

